Citizenship Teaching & Learning

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Special Issue:
‘Reconceptualizing and Reimagining Citizenship Education in Light of Youth Led Global Movements’

Abstract submission deadline: 15 June

Full article submission deadline: 15 October

Since the start of 2019, the world has witnessed startling anti-government mass demonstrations. From Sudan, where a dictator ruled the country for over three decades, to Hong Kong, where hundreds of thousands of protestors are demanding democracy and an end to police brutality. The mass movements, which are largely youth-led and involve a wide array of people who might have never been politically engaged before, are taking place in unprecedented numbers in Algeria, Bolivia, Catalonia, Chile, Iraq, Lebanon and more around the world. The protestors from across the globe, in spite of the varied contexts, have common calls and framings: the demonstrations are anti-institution, demanding socio-economic reforms with a clear lens of and for equality and the end of corruption and neo-liberal policies.

This mass mobilization is not only unprecedented in size and spread, but also in its ability to create spaces for expression that know no redlines or limits. From artistic expression – almost depicting events in real-time – to songs, dance and collective discussion where people from all backgrounds have a say. While largely leaderless, anti-institution and horizontal in power distribution, these mass movements have been organized and effective in making significant changes on the level of the people, particularly in their ability to reclaim space and shift narratives that have previously been limited by institutional dominance and official discourse. The change is yet to reach the level of the ruling elites, who devise education strategies, curricula and policies, including citizenship education (CE).

Proliferated globally, CE is taught in the majority of countries yet it does not speak to realities on the ground. The current institutionally led and dominated practices of CE can be critiqued for being depoliticized and nationalist, which often results in the marginalization and acculturation of many groups – primarily refugees and migrants. These groups are absent from the official narrative and are forced to adopt it though it ostracizes them from the ‘imagined community’ portrayed in national citizenship curricula. Being bound to the nation state, CE often adopts the ideology of the ruling party or class, sees through a naive and uncritical lens regarding the examined subjects and steers away from exploring and critiquing various ideologies.

With increasing mobilizations across the world, the state, equipped with water cannons, tear gas, mass arrests and, in some cases, live ammunition, is facing demonstrators. These acts of violence are punishment for practicing citizenship duties, implying that the state condemns such forms of civic participation.

This response raises several questions about CE, including whether the state is really interested in its citizens’ engagement in political life. Are there desired and less desirable forms of active citizenship, and how would youth in countries where mobilization is occurring imagine and envision CE?
Against this background, this special issue of CTL has several aims:

- It will seek to position CE within this fast-changing and highly politicized environment where youth are increasingly playing a major role in current mobilizations, be they socially, politically, economically or environmentally instigated.

- It will seek to initiate a critical conversation between the different manifestations and facets of mass social movements led by youth, and CE.

- It will seek to re-envision the meanings and conceptualizations of CE, inspired by the radical changes happening globally in reclaimed and imagined spaces by young people, as well as the impact of CE on political engagement beyond the traditional confines of nation states and institutions.

- It will seek to understand how youth perceive, formulate and practice active citizenship, and what kind of education young people seek to realize through their mobilization.

- It will seek to understand how young people express notions of citizenship in different modalities of expression, such as art, theatre, music, dance, reclaiming of public spaces, social media, etc.

- It will seek to highlight the perspectives of groups that suffer legal, social, political, economic and cultural violence and marginalization through citizenship education.

We call for contributions based on these six aims, which go beyond the limiting institutional definition and practice of CE within classrooms and schools only, for example, or through institutionally devised curricula that depoliticize and decontextualize CE. We also encourage articles that adopt an intersectional lens when researching youth mobilization. This call is for researchers, educators, activists, artists and other community members who are currently involved in social mobilization around the world.

We welcome two types of contribution in this special issue:

- Academic articles (8,000 words).

- Reflections and opinion pieces written by youth and activists (2,000 words).

Please direct all submissions to the two guest editors’ emails and not through CTL’s standard online submissions system.

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