Citizenship doesn't start at 18: placing education at the centre of inclusive urban policymaking

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Research Focus:
Education Policies & Practices for Inclusive Urban Places & Economies

- Across the globe, there is increasing evidence that cities are looking for new ways of addressing issues of inequality and urban poverty by setting out to build more inclusive economies. An emergent area of interest is the growth in popularity of the social and solidarity urban economy (EESC, 2017; UNRISD, 2016; Vickers et al, 2017).

- Rather than following individualistic, market driven approaches serving private concerns, a SSE approach represents the belief that a change in relationships based on solidarity and co-operation is a fundamental component in developing sustainable and inclusive economic activities and policies in our cities.

- So far, however, there has been little focus on how **education** policies and practices could build stronger relationships with children and young people and help to lay the foundations for more inclusive economies.

So…are we missing the point?

Citizenship doesn't start at 18

- UN Rights of the Child: It is CYP's fundamental right to participate in matters that affect them – but this is often overlooked.

- Active engagement of CYP in local government mitigates the risks of political, economic & social marginalization & gives CYP agency in shaping their lives, societies & economies improves social wellbeing & trust (OECD, 2018)

- Policymakers need to recognise CYP's own actions and their potential to advance innovative developments for an inclusive city (UN, 2020)

- When CYP are engaged and empowered, societies will be more cohesive and resilient and democracies more vibrant (OECD, 2018)

- Agency & co-agency of CYP are essential for the future of individual & collective well-being (OECD Learning Compass 2030)

Placing education at the centre of inclusive urban policymaking

- Current international thinking in the field of social justice and the economy calls for education "to focus on learning environments and on new approaches to learning for greater justice, social equity and global solidarity" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3) - to empower young people to help build flourishing, sustainable and inclusive communities that foster notions of social justice and solidarity (IEA, 2017; OECD, 2018).

- Inclusive cities should provide a context in which such learning environments and approaches can flourish.

- However, at present, urban policy, practice and research provides few opportunities to consider how the lived realities of everyday practices in *education* – and the impact of policy upon these practices - could help or hinder the development of a more inclusive and socially just place.

- **What are the types of relationships, characteristics and power dynamics that are required for an inclusive town or city to flourish?**

Redefining Urban Education Policy: Becoming Relational

- Relational theory provides a helpful way of understanding the relational identities and associated notions of power and positionality that emerge in education contexts (Ralls, 2016, 2017, 2019).

- Research has found that theories of the relational are helpful in supporting the development of policies and institutional structures that promote social justice and solidarity (Burkitt, 2016; Cordelli, 2015; Donati and Archer, 2015).

- Relational theory focuses on how relationships can be constituted to generate the 'relational goods' (such as **interpersonal trust, emotional support, care and social influence**) (Cordelli, 2015) that are required if there is to be a fundamental shift to a more reciprocal relationship between the state, civil society and citizens (Mulgan, 2012).

Core aspects of relational engagement (Warren et al, 2009):

- Set out to bridge gaps in culture and power

- Build relationships for collaborative democratic decision making and leadership opportunities
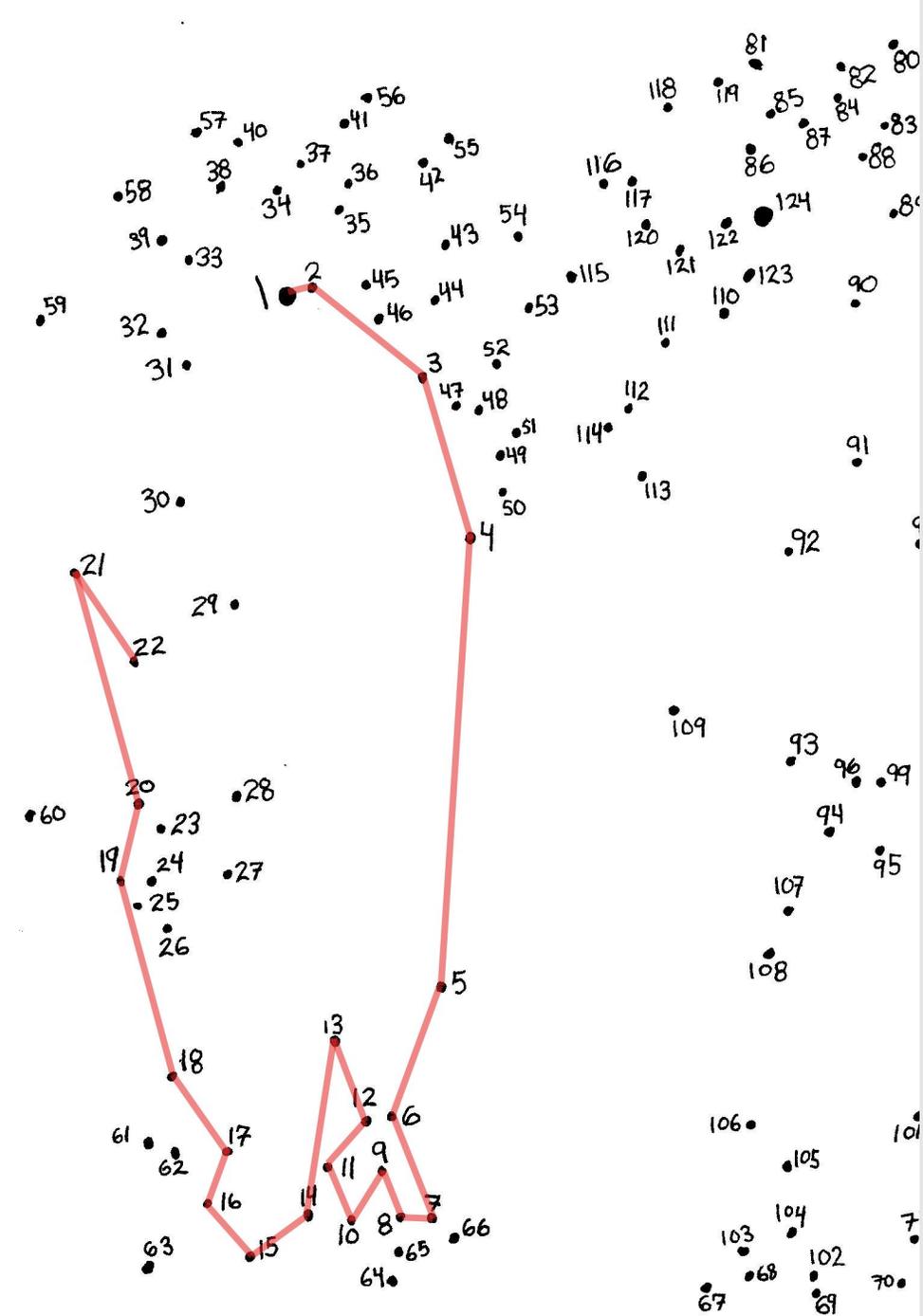
(Re)connect – Join the dots…
We need to think differently about democratic places, economies and education

- Education for an inclusive economy should set out to connect children and young people to the information they need – and the people they need to know – in order to participate in informed democratic decision-making in the place where they live.

- (Re) connecting economic policies with the type of of education theories, policies and practices that can develop the skills characteristics and knowledge needed for a fairer place.

- (Re)connecting communities: Learning spaces = school-community-town-city-beyond!

- **The curriculum of a place:** How can your town/city's curriculum provide children and young people and policymakers/professionals with **ongoing**, collaborative, democratic & reciprocal learning and decision-making opportunities in the places where they live?

Redefining Urban Education Policy
Example 1: Barcelona City Council

Barcelona's approach to urban policymaking is explicitly designed to heighten the visibility of the role of children and young people as citizens with growing capabilities and as agents of change for the city.

Barcelona City Council considers its youngest citizens as key to achieving collective urban improvements in the present and the future.

Three core policy priorities from Barcelona

1. Develop urban policies that set out to generate children and young people's knowledge related to the political agenda and urban decision- making processes.

2. Put into place processes that enable children and young people to share their knowledge and enrich social debates.

3. Design systems so that a wide range of children and young people from all areas can contribute to improving local policies. Barcelona City Council considers its youngest citizens as key to achieving collective urban improvements in the present and the future.
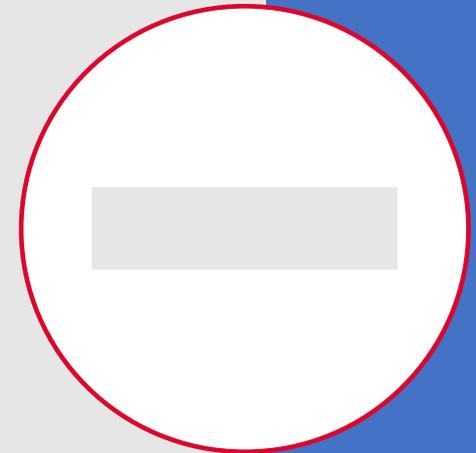
Example 2: UNIperiferias, Rio de Janeiro

UNIperiferias (University of the Peripheries) **challenges a city's traditional way of structuring knowledge and knowledge production.**

It deliberately shifts knowledge production around issues of urban socio-economic disadvantage away from city centre academics in universities to sites of learning situated in the areas themselves, helping to develop the expertise of community members as city change agents for social justice.

Three core policy priorities from UNIperiferias, Rio de Janeiro:

- Redefine education policy to develop collaborative learning networks among children in different urban neighbourhoods – and between children, neighbourhood decision-makers and town/city centre policymakers

- See learning opportunities as situated in and arising from urban communities, rather than prioritizing professional knowledge from town or city centre institutions.

- Change how policymakers learn about the realities of life in areas of socio- economic disadvantage. Invite children and young people from these areas to act as urban experts and educators capable of shaping public policies in their communities and beyond.

UNIPERIFERIAS

Equity & Social Justice, Collaboration & Connectedness

- **Berlin ethos** (about 30 schools): The community school should lead to more equality, opportunities and justice through close cooperation between teachers, school staff, pupils, parents and extracurricular partners, the community school is developing into a democratic learning and living space.

- **NYC ethos**: (267 community schools). A Community School serves as a centre of the neighbourhood. Creating ecosystems of schools & communities – the community network is essential so that families can be empowered and be advocates – 'all in it together'.

Three core priorities from Berlin & NYC:

- Prioritise engagement strategies that build long-term cooperative relationships based on collaboration and connectedness.

- Look at learning beyond the school walls (outward-looking and 'open')

- Reposition teaching and learning as *relational and inextricably linked to place.*

- **NYC The Island School: https://techbrarian.com**

Futureproofing inclusive towns & cities

- If we want inclusive future towns and cities and more equitable urban economies that are based on solidarity and co-operation, urban education policy needs to move beyond a focus on individual academic achievement.

- Towns and cities can redefine approaches to education policy, developing a systematic approach to build stronger, more democratic learning and decision-making relationships with children and young people as *citizens of now* .

- Education for an inclusive urban economy should set out to connect children and young people to the information they need – and the people they need to know – in order to participate in informed democratic decision-making in the place where they live.

- The time is ripe for institutions and governments to enhance trust in young people and strengthen social cohesion among groups and between generations. The future should be co-produced by those who will inhabit it for longest. COVID-19 has shown how much we should be proud of them. They deserve more than 'a voice' (Ralls, 2020).

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