



This paper is taken from

*Future Citizens in Europe
Proceedings of the fourth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2002

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 356 5

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Killeavy, M. and Clarke, M. (2002) Active learning in citizenship education: pre-service teachers perceptions, in Ross, A. (ed) Future Citizens in Europe. London: CiCe, pp 249 - 255

© CiCe 2002

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- The University of North London (now part of the London Metropolitan University) for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the European Commission Department of Education and Culture for their support and encouragement.

Active learning in citizenship education: pre-service teachers perceptions

Maureen Killeavy and Marie Clarke
University College Dublin, Republic of Ireland

This paper explores the nature of active learning in the context of the citizenship curriculum in the Republic of Ireland. It documents the manner in which active learning is promoted in the Junior Cycle programme that caters for 12-15 year olds and in particular the Civic Social and Political Education (hereafter CSPE) curriculum. Student teachers' views of the curriculum and the manner in which they try to develop active learning within their classrooms are investigated through the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The sample of nine students reported upon in this paper represents 40 per cent of the total number of student teachers specialising in this area. This pilot research focuses on how student teachers plan and develop active learning opportunities within their classes, the strategies they use to realise those opportunities and their reflections on the outcomes within the classroom and school context.

Active citizenship

The European Commission publication *Learning for Active Citizenship* (1998) suggests that placing learners and learning at the centre of education and training methods and processes is not a new idea, but in practice, the established framing of pedagogic practices in most formal contexts has privileged teaching rather than learning. This a marked departure from traditional pedagogic approaches which convey knowledge possessed by the teacher to learners, who subsequently demonstrate what they learn through oral and written work. The innovative practice suggested in *Learning for Active Citizenship* seems much more appropriate to contemporary society, where democratic and participatory pedagogies are very important. Linked to the concept of active citizenship are the rights of children and young people as citizens. Osler (1997) suggests that the approaches taken to the promotion of active citizenship have largely overlooked the issues of children's citizenship rights. She goes on to argue that where children's needs are discussed, the primary focus is on preparing them for future citizenship roles and responsibilities. It seems then that the concept of active citizenship and the rights of children and young people as citizens are closely linked and this linkage is best promoted within the context of active learning methodologies.

Active learning

Denicolo, Entwistle and Hounsell (1989) consider that no hard and fast definition should be applied to active learning. Rather it should take on different meanings and different degrees of emphasis in different subject areas and for different groups of learners. They identify four distinctive features of active learning:

- a search for meaning and understanding;
- greater student responsibility for learning;
- a concern with skills as well as knowledge, and
- an approach to curriculum that looks to career and social settings.

Similarly, Revans (1982) suggests that active learning involves giving students greater responsibility for their own learning, so that they have the fullest opportunities for active involvement – being challenged to think for themselves and to share and discuss ideas with others. It seems therefore that active learning should entail more than the mastery of a body of knowledge and the attitudes and tasks associated with it. It should promote and develop the skills students need to acquire or to refine in order to make use of what they know. This of course is difficult to achieve and one of the major challenges facing teachers as professionals in contemporary education contexts.

Challenges in teacher education

One of the major challenges for the education system is the provision of appropriate learning experiences for pupils that will enable them to cope effectively in contemporary society. This is reflected in policy documents both in individual states in the EU and in a wider context. The Irish White Paper on Education *Charting Our Education Future*, (1995, p.18) suggests:

the state's role in education arises as part of its overall concern to achieve economic prosperity social well-being and a good quality of life within a democratic structured society.

The OECD (1997) suggested that teachers are the final and most important link in the delivery of education to students; they are the interface through which the objectives of the schools and the education system are mediated. Research conducted by Darling-Hammond, 1999, 2000; Ferguson, 1991; Ferguson & Ladd, 1996 reflects this area of concern and identifies the critical importance of teaching quality in education provision to meet the challenges presented by contemporary society (*Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century*, 2002).

Teachers and active learning in citizenship education

Each day in schools teachers struggle to engage adolescent students' attention. Many students find schooling irrelevant to their lives. During the last several decades, curriculum adaptations to social conditions have swung between several orientations: 'academic (development of the mind through subject matter); social meliorist (the use of curriculum to improve society); social efficiency (school as preparation for a job); and student-centred (curriculum that offers students rich experiences)' (McNeill, 1999, pp 53-54).

Killeavy, Collinson and Stephenson (2000) in their research on the professional practices of exemplary second level teachers in the United States, England and the Republic of Ireland, found that in making the curriculum relevant, the teachers in their study appeared to balance the four curriculum orientations. The teachers in this study did however target two main orientations: the development of personal and societal values, and intellectual development. The study also revealed that exemplary teachers attached considerable importance to making the classroom experience of their students relevant to matters of socio-cultural nature, in the context of both global issues such as human rights and the problems of developing countries, and in matters of local, community and personal concern.

Holden and Clough (1998) suggest that the process of assisting children to become active citizens requires the teacher to keep a delicate balance between providing security and offering challenge. They also argue that education for participation involves reflecting on values, assisting children to acquire the skills necessary for taking action and ultimately providing opportunities for them to become involved as active citizens. Integral to the acquisition of skills is the acquisition of a values base from which to make one's decisions and responses. Such an approach has implications for teachers and others who work with pupils. Osler and Starkey (1996) suggest that if pupils are to be educated to participate, they require a 'range of skills, including social skills, and skills of communication and judgement' and the opportunity to practise and develop these skills. For teachers in the classroom this requires reflection in terms of the values they hold, the freedom and autonomy they give their pupils, and the choices they make within the curriculum (Holden & Clough, 1998).

The Junior Certificate Programme

The Republic of Ireland's White Paper on Education (1995) stated that:

The term 'curriculum' encompasses the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values. It includes specific and implicit elements. The specific elements are those concepts, skills, areas of knowledge and attitudes, which children learn at school as part of their personal and social development. The implicit elements are those factors, which make up the ethos and general environment of the school. The curriculum in schools is concerned, not only with the subjects taught, but also with how and why they are taught and with the outcomes of this activity for the learner. (White Paper on Education, 1995 p.18).

In the Irish education system students in the 12-16 year age range currently follow the three year Junior Certificate Programme. This programme was introduced into the Irish education system in 1989 and was first examined in 1992. In the final phase of compulsory schooling, it is considered essential that every young person should have a wide range of educational experiences based on a number of principles comprising breadth, balance, relevance and quality. This has a particular relevance to the CSPE programme. The official documentation issued by the Department of Education and Science states that students' educational experiences should be provided within a supportive and formative environment, drawing on the aesthetic and creative, the ethical, the linguistic, the mathematical, the physical, the scientific and technological, the social, environmental and political and the spiritual domains (ibid).

Issues in the Junior Certificate Programme

The areas of experience framework continues to be an essential guide for curriculum planning and provision in the junior cycle of post-primary education. In its most recent report the NCCA (2002) discusses the continuing tendency among Irish teachers to equate the areas of experience with particular subjects. This is not surprising, as the vast majority of teachers in post-primary schools are subject specialists. Further, their pre-service training and subsequent in-career development usually focuses on developing and enhancing expertise in the teaching of particular subjects rather than on approaches to the areas of experience. In the Junior Certificate Programme assessment for certification

is currently based on the outcomes of individual subjects rather than on more generic outcomes such as the types of learning or key skills associated with the areas of experience.

Civic Social and Political Education Programme (CSPE)

Since 1997 all post-primary schools offer CSPE to their first year students. Active participatory citizenship is a central aim of CSPE. McCarthy (1998) suggests that the affective and cognitive dimensions of active citizenship are emphasised throughout the syllabus. Active learning is a key aspect of the programme in which student learning is designed to mirror the integrated occurrence of civic, social and political phenomena in society and life (Junior Certificate CSPE Syllabus, 1997). The programme is time-tabled for a total of 70 hours over a three-year period, which translates into one 40-minute class period per week. The programme consists of four units of study: which are

- the Individual and Citizenship,
- the Community,
- the State-Ireland and
- Ireland and the World.

These four units of study are neither discrete nor mutually exclusive. The implementation of the course facilitates the overlapping of topics, ideas and concepts that are common to all units. The course is conducted around seven core concepts: democracy; rights and responsibilities; human dignity; interdependence; development; law and stewardship. The CSPE syllabus, while not denying a place for didactic education, places a greater emphasis on active and co-operatively structured learning situations in the classroom. Throughout their work on this course pupils are given practical experience of research and discovery activities, group work discussion, and simulation exercises (Junior Certificate CSPE Syllabus, 1997). The challenges for any teacher in making these objectives a reality are enormous, particularly in the context of limited time-tabled provision for the subject on a weekly basis. The manner in which student teachers view these challenges in the promotion of active citizenship through active learning is discussed in the next section of this paper.

Students' perceptions of the role of active learning in citizenship education

This section of the paper is concerned with the views of students on aspects of course content and pedagogy and the teaching strategies they consider appropriate in teaching and learning in citizenship education. The data is presented in tabular form indicating students' views on aspects of active learning and citizenship and their assessments of the importance of different teaching strategies in citizenship education. The student sample of nine student teachers, in common with the generality of those taking the CSPE course, were all graduates in Languages, the Humanities or in a combination of these two areas. The gender balance of the group, which comprised seven females and two males, was a reflection of that of the entire class group and the students ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty years.

Respondents were required to indicate the extent of their agreement with twelve statements and an index of agreement based on summed scores was calculated for each statement. The five statements accorded the highest rank by students are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Student Teachers' opinion of selected aspects of course content and pedagogy in citizenship education

Course content and pedagogy in citizenship education	Rank order
It is essential to begin the development of citizenship education their reference to the context of the local community	1
It is necessary to organise classrooms using, as far as possible democratic structures (i.e. taking pupils' view into account when establishing rules)	2
Environmental issues should be part of citizenship education	3
Questioning should be used to allow students to express their opinions freely on issues related to multiculturalism	= 4
An understanding of the cultures of Third World countries should be part of citizenship education.	= 4

This reveals that student teachers consider that citizenship education should begin with reference to the context of the local community. While this was accorded the highest ranking, the organisation of classrooms on a democratic basis with structures reflecting pupils' views was rated second in importance. The approval of democratic procedures was reflected in students' views that pupils should be encouraged to express their opinions freely on multicultural issues. Student teachers also indicated an awareness of global considerations in the importance they accorded to environmental and the third world issues in citizenship education.

Table 2 Teaching strategies in citizenship education: frequency of use

The use of teaching strategies in citizenship education	Rank order
Class discussions	1
Relating all work to themes (such as poverty issues, rights of others, responsibilities of citizens)	2
Small-group instruction	= 3
Individualised approach	= 3
Formal class lessons	5
Team teaching	= 6
Following textbook only	= 6
Drill work	= 8
Memorisation	= 8

All of the four most frequently used teaching strategies are informal and facilitate the active participation of students through discussion. These interactive methods incorporate a thematic approach using such themes as poverty issues, rights of others and

responsibility of citizens. In marked contrast, the five least frequently used methods all utilise a didactic approach and leave little room for discussion and pupil-teacher interaction. These more traditional didactic methods which do not find favour among the student teachers are textbook dependent and use drill work and memorisation. This seems to suggest that for this particular group of students active learning is viewed as an essential aspect of citizenship education.

Students' perceptions of factors inhibiting active learning

Problems related to classroom management were most often cited by students as inhibiting active learning. Two-thirds of students noted such factors as poor discipline, disruptive students, noise and lack of class control as making active learning, and in particular discussion methods, difficult to operate. The second most noted problems concerned classroom layout and the physical environment of the school. Such arrangements as fixed seating and rows of desks were not conducive to active learning activities. It was also considered a problem that student teachers were expected to stick very closely to the text in certain schools. Time constraints were third in the student teachers' list of inhibiting factors. One class period per week was considered to be insufficient time to allow for active learning, and insufficient in overall terms. Another common problem was the perception of pupils that CSPE was not an important subject as it was not part of the Senior Cycle Programme and had no place in the points system. In general then it seems that student teachers considered classroom organisation skills to be most important in facilitating active learning in the CSPE Programme.

Conclusion

The aspects of the pilot study reported here clearly indicate that the student sample consider that active learning involving discussion and teacher pupil interaction are an important aspect of citizenship education. Further, there is a strong belief amongst the group that citizenship education should begin with reference to the local community context and that classrooms should be organised as far as possible according to democratic structures and procedures. Student teachers are concerned about problems of classroom management and discipline, and there are some indications that their inexperience makes it difficult for them to use active learning methodologies and at the same time deal with disruptive pupils. They are also of the opinion that both the physical environment and timetable of schools should be designed to facilitate active learning.

References

Learning for Active Citizenship (1998) DGXXII publication Education and active citizenship in the European Union EU.

Osler A, (1997) *The contribution of Community Action Programme in the Fields of Education, Training and Youth to the Development of Citizenship with a European Dimension*, School of Education, University of Birmingham

Denicolo, Entwistle and Hounsell, (1989) *What is Active Learning?* CVCP Universities Staff Development and Training Unit, University of Edinburgh

Revans, R. W. (1982) *The origin and growth of active learning*, Chartwell-Bratt

Charting Our Education Future, (1995). Republic of Ireland's White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland Publications, Dublin)

Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century, (2002) Report of the Working Group on Primary Preservice Teacher Education, Government of Ireland Publications

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) *Education policy analysis 1997*. (1997). Paris: Author

McNeil, J. D. (1999) *Curriculum : The teacher's initiative*, (2nd. Ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L., & Ryan, J. (1996) *Schooling for change: Reinventing schooling for early adolescents*, London : Falmer

Killeavy, M., Collinson, V., Stephenson, H. J. (2000), 'Making Curriculum Relevant to the Lives of Second Level Students: Teachers' Classroom Practices', Paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April 24-28

Holden, C and Clough, N, (1998) *Children as Citizens: Education for Participation*, Jessica Kingsley Publications, London

Osler, A and Starkey, H, (1996) *Teacher Education and Human Rights*, (London.)

The Junior Cycle Review Committee Progress Report Issues and Options for development, (2002). National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

McCarthy, S., (1998) 'Rewarding Activity: Assessment and Certification of the Junior Certificate Course in Civic, Social and Political Education', in Hyland, A (ed.), *Innovations in Assessment in Irish Education*, Education Department, University College Cork, Republic of Ireland