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Citizenship education in a multicultural 'democracy' of the 'old' Europe: the case of Great Britain

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Introduction

In the political tradition stemming from the Greek city states and the Roman republic, citizenship has meant involvement in public affairs by those who had the rights of citizens: to take part in public debate and, directly or indirectly, in shaping the laws and decisions of a state. The first to articulate a consciousness of culture were the ancient Greeks or, more specifically, Athenians. Athens was the metropolitan centre of the classical world; and diplomats, philosophers, and professional rhetoricians from as far away as Sicily came to Athens to participate in the exchange of ideas taking place there. Many of them also profited by the exchange, offering to teach others the art of discourse in return for money. Among these early teachers were the Sophists, itinerants who roamed the countryside around Athens giving lessons in the art of forensic public speaking, or legal rhetoric. In *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Werner Jaeger places the Sophists at the very heart of the origins of citizenship, noting that '[through] them *paideia* - the ideal and theory of culture, consciously formed and pursued - came into being and was established on a rational basis' (Jaeger 1970, p 298). Although many of the Sophists were 'doubtless content to sell their knowledge to the public, their greatest representatives, such as Protagoras, [claimed] that cultural education is the centre of all human life' (Jaeger 1970, p 300). Jaeger attributes the birth of humanism itself to Protagoras, telling us 'that [t]he only true 'universal' culture in Protagoras' eyes is political culture, which is distinguished from the baser concept of civilization, or technical efficiency' (Jaeger 1970, p 300). In modern times, however, democratic ideas led to constant demands to broaden the franchise from a narrow citizen class of the educated and the property owners, to achieve female emancipation, to lower the voting age, to achieve freedom of the press and to open up the processes of government.

However, the schools that intend to prepare the students for the realities of the 21st century should take into consideration the fact that cultural variation is the rule, so much in the domestic as in the international scene. All over the world, we witness a unique mobility and cultural interaction that is owed in factors as the economic immigration, the movements because of military conflicts and famines, as well as the technological progress in transports and communications. The increased cross-cultural contact in the interior of industrial countries because of immigration of many decades is accompanied by continuously larger cross-cultural contact between countries, which reflect the increased economic and political interdependence in world level.

This paper focuses on England and to some extent on Wales because in law both of these parts of the UK share the same legal and educational systems. Scotland has its own educational system; that of Northern Ireland is directed from the Department of Education which has its own variants of education practice which make generalizations about Citizenship in the six northern counties of the Island of Ireland inappropriate in

the present context. It is also difficult to give a perspective from the UK because of the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales in the form of a regional parliament for these two parts of the UK. The perspective given here is therefore from England and by a foreigner.

By introducing citizenship education in schools in 2002 British-English society has a unique opportunity to create a 'citizen democracy' where cultural variation would be considered as an element of cohesion within the society.

The societal framework

The question of multiculturalism and of Britain as a multiethnic society does suggest that to some extent questions of citizenship are undermined, not simply by the relative weakening of the reach of the nation-state as a political entity, but also by the growth of cultural diversity.

From the early 1960s, British subject status, citizenship and nationality were 'redefined in an attempt to embrace what was always a compartmentalized conception of global Britishness' (Pearson, 2001, p 82). In a nutshell, New Commonwealth immigration was seen as creating 'a race relations problem'. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act confirmed the transformation from universal British subject to 'coloured immigrant', while a further Act (in 1971) heightened 'the distinction between 'the truly British' and the rest' (Pearson, 2001, p 82). Initially, there was disagreement between Labour and Conservative Party political leaders about the ethics and efficacy of slamming the door in the faces of Commonwealth 'family', but a consensus emerged between the centre right and left, in and across rival parliamentary parties.

Between 1962 and 1981 'the evolution of British immigration and nationality legislation reflects a 'dynastic shift' from subject-ship to national citizenship' (Joppke, 1995, p 35, in Pearson, 2001, p 134). The 1981 Nationality Act introduced the overthrow of a thousand-year convention of granting automatic citizenship for children born in Britain of non-British parents. With this Act distinctions were drawn between cultural, national and legal meanings of 'Britishness', with only those with direct genealogical connections and residency being granted 'full' membership of the state.

The 1970s saw the establishment of a race relations 'industry' based on a national Race Relations Act and Commission for Racial Equality, and local Race Relations Councils set up (in 1976) to provide social welfare and monitor racial discrimination. The Scarman Report (1981) on racial disadvantage, which resulted from further flashpoints of racial tension in south London, pointed the finger at urban deprivation and inequitable life chances rather than institutionalised racism. The Swann Report (in 1985) is commonly seen as marking the official shift to multiculturalism in Britain, with its stress on 'diversity within unity' and an acknowledgment of different modes of attachment to 'being British'. The Swann Report led to the establishment of more independent voluntary-aided schools for different 'cultures', for greater flexibility in modes of dress, cuisine and curricula within 'multiracial' schools, and the hiring of more Asian and black teachers.

But, as Vertovec (1996, p.51 in Pearson 2001, p.136) notes, in a survey of multicultural initiatives in British cities, 'there is no single view, strategy or mode of political incorporation under this rubric. What we have is a plethora of associations, units and councils in the realm of local and national minority representation'. And as Gundara (2000, p 59) puts it, most recently, 'the new government [Blair's] has failed to recognise the nature of multiculturalism in British society. It has tried to focus on exclusions within it but without recognising the wider implications. There is the same old stereotyping of 'ethnic minorities' and 'ethnicity' as categories, with their familiar assumption of there being a dominant English nation.' Gundara stresses the fact that there is little recognition of the multilingualism within British society and the need to develop models of teaching first and second languages formally in the schools. 'Other languages' are not seen as fundamentally part of the school's work, not only to enable young people to learn their first language better but to acquire greater competence in English as a second language.

As Pearson (2001, p 136) notes, all major parties have an eye on the 'ethnic vote', as the rise in minority electoral candidates, and Labour's formation of black sections in some local party organizations, reveals. Some events, like the Rushdie affair in 1989, spark national (and international) recognition of the limits of majority tolerance and bring multicultural issues into the mainstream of British politics. British centrist political elites have been remarkably successful in steering a hazardous political course between the dangers of majority intolerance and minority separatism. Mainstream politicians involved in the Rushdie issue were able to distance themselves from media hysteria. They effectively defused the situation by sympathizing with 'moderate' Muslims while extolling the virtues of Britain's multiracial framework. The Rushdie case, therefore, is an exception illustrating the rule, that, in sharp contrast to the United States, over the past three decades 'race' has become a comparatively minor national theme in British politics.

The case of citizenship education

Citizenship has been a continuous topic of discussion for the last fifteen years in intellectual and political circles in England. It has attracted copious comment from social commentators, political and economic theorists and politicians across the spectrum. Everyone from the New Right, across the crowded Centre, to the Old Left, has been preoccupied with redefining and claiming ownership of the concept (Kerr, 1999b).

However, these attempts to redefine citizenship have had only a limited impact on debates about citizenship education in schools. They reached their apogee in the late 1980s and early 1990s with discussion of the implication for schools of the then Conservative Government's championing of civic obligation or 'active citizenship' (Kerr, 1999b).

Since 1989 England has a compulsory national curriculum for all local authority schools, but Citizenship has not been a required subject. The history of educating for

citizenship in England is well documented (Batho, 1990; Heater, 1990; Kerr, 1993, 1996, 1999b; Oliver and Heater, 1994; Annette, 1997). Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999, p 16-17) argue that from 1969 to 1999 'there have been three main (overlapping) frameworks-types of citizenship education which can be discussed: political literacy; 'new' or 'adjectival' educations and education for citizenship.'

The Program for Political Education (PPE) had as its key aim political literacy. The principal figure was Bernard Crick. There was a critical approach to knowledge and efforts were made to ensure that pupils could learn about politics. Political literacy made four main shifts from earlier work. It was issue focused; it used a broader concept of politics than had been used in British Constitution courses; it valued procedural concepts; and it was concerned with skills as well as knowledge and attitudes, so as to develop pupils' potential for action. By the end of the 1970s, political literacy did seem to have gained a strong position with key policy makers. Legitimization had been achieved, however, without implementation and during the 1980s it was replaced by a raft of 'new' educations.

The 'new' educations are perhaps not a coherent school of thought or action other than in the commitment they have to social justice. The relationship to citizenship education is not necessarily always helpful or straightforward. Some, such as Peace Education and World Studies, had existed from the post-First World War era (Heater, 1984); others, such as anti-sexist and anti-racist education, were more recent. Academics in 'new' areas such as women's studies, as well as trade unionists, workers for aid organizations and teachers were regarded as being the ones involved in the promotion of projects as well as, at times, setting up departments in schools. These various camps often competed between themselves for resources and curriculum space.

The 1990s were seen at an early point, according to Dahrendorf, as being the 'decade of the citizen' (Keane, 1990). Education for citizenship having been declared as one of the five cross-curricular themes of the National Curriculum (NCC 1990) and the subject of a report by the Commission on Citizenship (1990), it seemed that perhaps something would be done. For the first half of the decade this expectation was soon shown to be unfulfilled. The cross-curricular themes have for various reasons been generally ignored (Whitty *et al.* 1994). Indeed, of the five themes, education for citizenship seems to have been the one which is ignored more often.

Kerr (1999b) points out that there is a complex relationship between citizenship and education for citizenship. Citizenship, he argues, is a contested concept. At the heart of the concept are differing views about the function and organization of society. Because education is accepted as central to society, it follows that attitudes to education, and therefore to citizenship education, are dependent on the particular conception of citizenship put forward.

Kerr argues that the current focus on citizenship, and therefore on citizenship education, has two triggers, one long-term and the other short-term. The long-term trigger was the impact of the world oil crisis of the mid-1970s in western, industrialized 'democracies'

such as Britain. This has caused such democracies to radically restructure economic, welfare and education provision to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing world.

More important, in terms of citizenship education, has been the short-term trigger, namely, the seemingly pervasive erosion of the social political, economic and moral fabric of society in England, in the face of rapid economic and social change (Kerr, 1999b). This has resulted in increasing disquiet, in many quarters, at the apparent breakdown of many of the institutions and values which have traditionally underpinned society and encouraged social cohesion and stability, such as family, marriage, religion and respect of law. It has led to a particular concern about the impact of such developments on the attitudes and behaviour of young people.

The findings of the IEA Civic Education Project (1999, p.204) point out the huge gaps that exist in the knowledge and research base which underpins the area of citizenship education in England. In particular little is known about the following:

at the school level:

- the impact of school ideology or ethos on approaches to citizenship education
- the provision for citizenship education in secondary schools
- the strategies, resources and approaches employed by teachers in the classroom
- the needs of schools and teachers regarding citizenship education

at the student level:

- the extent and type of knowledge and understanding 11- to 16-year-olds have of society
- the stages of development that students of this age group go through in acquiring social knowledge
- the individual, social and cultural determinations of the development and growth of students' social knowledge
- the relationship between knowledge, attitudes and behaviour among this age group
- the degree to which schools, teachers and the curriculum can affect the acquisition of social knowledge by students and influence their attitudes and behaviour.

The new era

The National Curriculum underwent considerable revision in 2000. The most significant new development is the introduction of citizenship education as an additional curriculum subject. From 2002, citizenship is a statutory subject in secondary schools and is also to be taught in primary schools, together with Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). The DfES also set up a working group on Citizenship 16-19 and programmes of citizenship education for those aged 16-19 have been developed.

The Government has highlighted citizenship education as a key means by which education for racial equality can be achieved (Home Office, 1999). Citizenship education in England is seen, as it is across Europe, as a means of strengthening

democracy and therefore of challenging racism as an anti-democratic force (see for example, Osler, Rathenow and Starkey, 1996; Holden and Clough, 1998). The Government sees citizenship education as a key means by which race equality initiatives will be developed in the curriculum.

But as Jill Rutter (2003) points out, there is a lot of work to be done by schools and teachers in order for citizenship education to become a real subject of the school curriculum. Her observations revealed the following:

- most schools have chosen to deliver citizenship education by merging it with personal, health and social education, or with PHSE and religious education
- citizenship is mostly a classroom-based subject, involving very little out of classroom activity – involving very little participation in the political process. students are rarely encouraged to bring about real change in their schools or communities
- much of the teaching is knowledge and concept focused
- many student teachers and some of the experienced classroom teachers, lacked skills in teaching controversial issues
- in most schools non-specialist teachers were teaching citizenship, usually without a background in politics (or philosophy or sociology)
- student motivation towards citizenship is poor. in many schools students perceive citizenship and citizenship PHSE as being the ‘doss’ subject – the subject where you mess around
- the merger of PHSE and citizenship was not always a happy marriage. political issues tended to be pushed aside by the concerns of health education.

Conclusion

Finally, what does all of this entail for citizenship education? If we are going to educate our children to become citizens, then we need to decide, obviously enough, what it means to be a citizen. Is it a matter of being a law-abiding member of the community, of having an essentially moral grasp of right and wrong? Or is it a matter of knowing what the state can do for you, how to ensure that you get what you are entitled to from public agencies? In my opinion, important though these two aspects of citizenship are, they are not sufficient. To be a citizen in the fullest sense you must in some way be actively involved in shaping the way that your community develops, whether this is through political activity in the strict sense or through public involvement of a non-political kind. This also seems to be the view of the Crick report on *Education for Citizenship*. But in that case we also need to decide what our future citizens are going to be citizens of: it is possible to disentangle citizenship from the issue of nationality, of the nature and boundaries of the political community to which someone belongs. Unfortunately it is no longer possible – certainly not in Britain – to say that someone belongs to just one such political community. Depending on who we are and where we live, we may find that our political identity is split between two or three different levels. So citizenship education will have to come to terms with this fact. One of its tasks will be to explain how the different levels of identity have emerged historically, and how they are now related – what it now means to be Scottish in Britain or British in Europe. These are hard

concepts to grasp; most people, I suspect, find single-level identities easier to deal with. National identity matters, and as we continue to debate the meaning of Greekness or Britishness in the 21st century, we should not hesitate to pass down our best understanding of this idea to the rising generation through the education system.

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