



This paper is taken from

*Lifelong Learning and Active Citizenship
Proceedings of the twelfth Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2010

**edited by Peter Cunningham and Nathan Fretwell, published in London by CiCe,
ISBN 978-1-907675-01-0**

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
Karayianni, E. (2010) The place of national and European identity in England's history education: Enacting the politics of identity in history classrooms, in P. Cunningham & N. Fretwell (eds.) Lifelong Learning and Active Citizenship. London: CiCe, pp. 687 - 694

© CiCe 2010

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.



Lifelong Learning Programme

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 therein.

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
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

The place of national and European identity in England's history education: Enacting the politics of identity in history classrooms

Eleni Karayianni
Institute of Education (UK)

Introduction

My research is concerned with issues of identity and official history education and it is shaped mainly by two contemporary issues. The first is relevant to the intense debate about British identity that the country is currently experiencing. The debate is caused by both old and new tensions particular to the British case such as the rise of Scottish and Welsh national sentiment, the fast growing number of immigrants and their persistent attachment to their traditions, and the new realities of the twentieth century that have created the need for English people to re-define the meaning of their national identity. The second is concerned with the emergence of a perceived need for European identity in relation to the development of the European Union, and the emerging relationship between the EU and the English people. Within this contemporary context, an investigation into the ways in which history education is shaping identities is timely and worthwhile.

The specific aim of this research project is to explore the place of Europe and European identity in England's history education and its interplay with national identity formation. The study aims to investigate whether, and in what ways, Europe and European identity are constructed in history classrooms and to investigate the extent to, and the ways in which, certain forms of identity are favoured over others. The study extends its exploration into policy and curricula, history textbooks, and history teachers' practices at Key Stage 3 (KS3)¹. While this is still a work in progress, this paper touches upon the analysis of curricula in order to provide the context in which history teaching is practiced. Then, it briefly presents the findings of the research undertaken with history teachers. Their views and practices were investigated first by conducting a survey and then by performing 8 semi-structured interviews.

The National Curriculum documents

When the survey was launched, the National Curriculum for History (2000) was in effect. According to this document (NC2000), history teachers were required to teach six units throughout KS3. The table below illustrates the content prescribed.

Figure 1: Study units prescribed in the National Curriculum 2000

<p>Breadth of study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Britain 1066–1500 A study of major features of Britain's medieval past: the development of the monarchy, and significant events and characteristic features of the lives of people living throughout the British Isles, including the local area if appropriate. 2. Britain 1500–1750 A study of crowns, parliaments and people: the major political, religious and social changes affecting people throughout the British Isles, including the local area if appropriate. 3. Britain 1750–1900 A study of how expansion of trade and colonisation, industrialisation and political changes affected the United Kingdom, including the local area. 4. A European study before 1914 A study of a significant period or event in the pre-history or history of Europe. 5. A world study before 1900 A study of the cultures, beliefs and achievements of an African, American, Asian or Australasian society in the past (other than those included in the programme of study for key stage 2). 6. A world study after 1900 A study of some of the significant individuals, events and developments from across the twentieth century, including the two World Wars, the Holocaust, the Cold War, and their impact on Britain, Europe and the wider world. <p style="text-align: right;">(QCA, 1999; p.21-22).</p>

In this document, the place of European history was quite uncertain. It could be argued that, while the study of British history was approached consistently and chronologically, the study of European history was not. On the contrary, it appeared in an isolated and fragmented way. Typically, for example, a student would study the Roman Empire or perhaps the French Revolution and then 20th century history with emphasis on certain European countries such as Germany. Thus, the fragmentation and isolation in the presentation of European history can be seen both in a chronological and in a geographical sense. Furthermore, the NC2000 did not provide any opportunities to study the common modern history of various European countries other than in the case of conflict. In effect it did not seem to employ the necessary means to help pupils understand the ways in which the history of European countries is connected and the ways in which the events or developments in one region affected another.

While the present study was in progress and before conducting the teacher interviews, the most recent reform of the national curriculum for history was published in 2007 and came into effect in 2008. The new National Curriculum (NC2008) does not prescribe a specific number of units to be taught. What it does prescribe is a range of content divided into two categories: a) British history, and b) European and World history. The table below illustrates the content prescribed in the NC2008.

Table 2: National Curriculum for History 2008 – Range of Content

<p>1. British history:</p> <p>a) the development of political power from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century,</p> <p>b) the different histories and changing relationships through time of the peoples of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales,</p> <p>c) the impact through time of the movement and settlement of diverse peoples to, from and within the British Isles,</p> <p>d) the way in which the lives, beliefs, ideas and attitudes of people in Britain have changed over time,</p> <p>e) the development of trade, colonisation, industrialisation and technology, the British Empire and its impact on different people.</p> <p>2. European and World history:</p> <p>a) the impact of significant political, social, cultural, religious, technological and/or economic developments and events on past European and world societies</p> <p>b) the changing nature of conflict and cooperation between countries and peoples and its lasting impact on national, ethnic, racial, cultural or religious issues.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(QCA, 2007; p.115-116)</p>
--

It could be argued that, there is a renewed emphasis upon British history in NC2008 since the five themes that pupils should learn about in British history guarantee that teachers will devote most of their time to teaching British content. Moreover, the most important and interesting change in the new National Curriculum is that it tries to respond to contemporary concerns about diversity and the need for mutual understanding and tolerance as well as about developing a common national/civic identity. The first study which concerns the development of political power clearly aims at promoting an understanding of the development of the UK as a political entity and serves a contemporary concern about promoting British civic identity. Although the political history of Britain was also part of the Curriculum 2000 throughout its three British history units, the new Curriculum places emphasis on it by isolating it from social, cultural, religious and other perspectives and focusing on the theme of political development across time. The second theme can also be said to contribute to promoting British identity. Bearing in mind the recent strengthening of voices calling for devolution in Wales and especially in Scotland as well as recent concerns raised because of a large percentage of the population that claims not to identify with Britain but with England, Wales, Scotland or Ireland, the purpose of the inclusion of such content in the curriculum seems to aim at promoting an understanding of the common history and the strong relationship between the four constitutive parts of the state, thus strengthening identification with Great Britain. Finally, the third theme of the prescribed content also seems to be related to contemporary concerns. The NC2008 states that this study must include the wide cultural, social and ethnic diversity of Britain from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century and how this has helped shape Britain's identity. It seems that the aim is not only to promote an understanding of the diversity in the British society but also of the historicity of this diversity and thus of its contribution to the shaping of Britain and British identity. This study then seems to serve in promoting a sense of an all-embracing British identity that does not simply tolerate diversity but is in fact formed by it.

Within the context described above, there does not seem to be sufficient attention paid to issues of European history and citizenship whose place and purpose have remained largely out of the concerns of policy makers. Judging from the requirements of the NC2008, it is deemed extremely important for young people to study British heritage, British experience, and British values. Such preoccupation with everything 'British' does not seem to allow for European and world history to be studied in any meaningful way. Thus, it seems that Europe will continue to be taught fragmented and in temporal and spatial isolation.

Research with Teachers

Before conducting teacher interviews, a small scale survey was carried out with a total of 90 participants. The most important findings of the survey research can be summarised in four points:

1. Teachers' responses when asked to exemplify the European history topics they teach illustrate a small presence of European history in Year 7 and 8 and a much greater emphasis on national history. Year 9 presents a somewhat different picture with WWI, WWII and the Holocaust being the most popular European topics.
2. Almost half the sample agreed that there was too much emphasis on national history and the majority agreed that it should not be increased. Moreover, the vast majority recognised that there was not too much emphasis on European history but very few agreed that there should be more of it.
3. According to teachers' views, history teaching has a role in identity formation. A high percentage of teachers (93.3%) agreed that history education should inform students' identity. The majority of teachers (60%) also agreed that history education should promote national identification. Additionally, a lesser percentage (43.3%) agreed with promoting a sense of European identity.
4. Issues of British identity and citizenship were very important for teachers. The study found a remarkable degree of agreement amongst teachers with the new requirements of the National Curriculum 2008 which emphasise British identity. Especially high percentages of support were found in relation to the inclusion of a study on diversity.

These and other issues were explored further during teacher interviews.

Teacher Interviews

After the completion of the survey research, 8 of the history teachers of the sample further participated in semi-structured interviews. The interview sample comprised of five male and three female teachers. Six were of white-British ethnic background, one was White-Irish, and another described himself as of white-other background. Six of the participants were working as the head of the history department of their school. Two of the interviewees were new to teaching with less than two years of teaching experience, three had less than ten years of experience, two participants had a little over a decade while another had 35 years in the

profession. The participants worked in schools in London and the surrounding area. Four of the participants worked in schools with a majority of white-British student population and the other four teachers were working in schools with a diverse immigrant population. The key findings of this part of the study can be summarised in eight principal points:

1. National history was strongly emphasised and prioritised by teachers, while European history was not a real consideration. Teachers' curricula were heavily oriented towards British history with certain inserts of world history. It seemed that the primary focus of history teachers was to help students understand the development of Britain, its ideas, institutions and traditions². This emphasis on national history left little room for European history which seemed to occupy no place in teachers' considerations. The participants agreed that they never thought about European history per se and that most of the time they did not even make it explicit to their students when they were studying European history. Generally, European history carried no real significance for teachers while, in contrast, national history was of great importance. This can also be seen from teachers' unwillingness to sacrifice any national history topics for a better representation of European history in their curricula.
2. History teaching was linked with an understanding of identity and British/English identity was emphasised while European identity was rejected. All teachers agreed that discussing British identity was important. Some went as far as to define the role of history teaching as that of shaping a sense of British identity. Others agreed that the understanding of British identity should be pursued because it helps bring people together. On the contrary, seven out of eight participants agreed that European identity had no place in history teaching.
3. While British identity was emphasised as important, history teachers most of the time did not explicitly teach about British/English identity. Only one teacher taught a separate unit on national identity and two others briefly discussed its definition by showing film extracts. The rest of the teachers in the sample did not have any explicit discussion about national identity. Rather, they promoted its understanding in implicit ways; the emphasis on national history in their curricula and the choice of specific content and perspectives was designed to clarify important characteristic of British/English identity and, thus, to promote its understanding.
4. Where European history topics were taught typically they revealed Britain and other European nations as rivals. Teachers almost always taught about the two world wars, the Battle of Hastings, the Spanish Armada, and Queen Elizabeth's relations to France and Spain. Within the study of these topics, British experiences and perspectives were typically emphasised. While more research into what and how topics are taught is necessary, one could argue that often the topics included in schools' curricula are examples of rivalry and opposition between Britain and European nations. It can also be legitimately argued that these topics can create negative images in the minds of the young about Europe and they can also serve in defining the national self against a European 'other'.
5. European history, European identity, and the teaching of the development of the EU were dismissed as not relevant, not interesting and too difficult. Teachers justified the poor

attention paid to European history and their disagreement with teaching about European identity by saying that students and the British people in general do not feel European and thus European history and identity are not relevant to them. Some teachers also referred to the lack of definition of European identity as an excuse for excluding it from their lessons. Interestingly, half the sample also said that citizenship is the subject better suited for the teaching of the EU because it is strictly a contemporary political issue. However, they did not object to teaching other contemporary political issues - such as immigration - perhaps because they also saw them as important social issues with direct relevance to students' lives. On the contrary, they saw the EU as simply having no relevance. In general, the place of European history and identity in teachers' practice can be justified by the lack of teachers' interest in making it explicit. Teachers, it appears, believe they have other far more important considerations than thinking about the role and place of European history in their lessons. Thus, given additionally the lack of time and the need to prioritise, European history seems to lack importance and to be burdened by a perceived lack of interest on behalf of students and a perceived lack of relevance.

6. After the implementation of the new national curriculum 2008 there seems to be a renewed interest on behalf of teachers in strengthening national identity via emphasis on national history which also seems to be having negative effects on the presence of European history. There also appears to be emphasis on diverse cultures within the UK at the expense of Europe. Four of the eight participants had made changes in their curricula after 2008 which had negative effects on the teaching of European history; in one school European content was dropped, in the second it retained much lower status, and in the other two schools European history became less explicit, more ambiguous and superficial. This negative influence, or even the complete lack of influence in other cases, is a sign of indifference when it comes to the teaching of European history. Generally, it seems that England's current history curriculum and context has convinced teachers to put certain mechanisms in place which reduce Europe as irrelevant and uninteresting in favour of understanding the nature of British society and identity.
7. Teachers made very conscious personal decisions when emphasising national history and identity at the expense of Europe. Some teachers recognised a political agenda in the inclusion of a study on immigration and diversity in the new national curriculum. Four teachers recognised attempts to reinforce national identity and at the same time define it as open and inclusive so that everyone can relate to it. Three teachers had acted on this new requirement by including studies of immigration and emphasising topics such as Black Peoples of the Americas and Islamic Civilisations. Interestingly, two teachers also recognised political motives in the inclusion of the EU topic but said they refused to allow a political agenda interfere with their history teaching. However, it seems that their disagreement with teaching the EU was not based so much based on the ideological principle of not allowing politics to interfere with history since they did not seem to mind when the curriculum asked them to include contemporary political concerns specific to Britain. Rather, they were making a very conscious personal choice based on what they thought was important to teach children; and in their minds the EU was simply not considered a priority.

8. Teachers were influenced by citizenship concerns and were willing to situate history closer to citizenship. The study has found that two teachers were teaching about immigration and diversity, one was planning to include such a study, three had citizenship concerns in their statement of learning objectives and five teachers agreed with the importance of teaching about British identity in creating a coherent society and a strong country. All teachers made references to citizenship issues; some made stronger connections than others. Generally, it can be argued that history teachers had important concerns about making their students good citizens, an objective that was pursued by talking about morals and values, by giving examples of good and bad behavior, by including certain topics that allow for citizenship issues to be discussed and by using empathy as a vehicle to understanding other people. It can also be argued that the concerns about citizenship are closely linked to concerns about British identity since the emphasis on understanding and connecting with British identity aimed to create better citizens who feel part of this country.

Conclusion

The main findings of this research illustrate that English identity is high in the priorities of history teachers who see the understanding of national identity as an important aim of their practice. On the other hand, Europe and European identity is very low in their list of concerns. This becomes evident not only from their descriptions but also from their lack of clear conceptualisation about Europe in their practice. Moreover, history teachers are increasingly concerned with issues of citizenship such as helping students understand the diversity and multiculturalism of the British society and peoples' cultural identities. The study identified less interest in teaching history 'for its own good' and more in connecting history with contemporary social and political concerns. Concluding, the study provides interesting insights into teachers' conceptualisation of their role in shaping young peoples' identities and should be further progressed by long-term observations of teaching practice and more in-depth interviews with teachers of various ages and ethnic backgrounds.

References

- QCA (1999) *The National Curriculum for England*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.
- QCA (2007) *The National Curriculum for England*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.

¹ Key Stage 3 concerns the education of children aged 11-14. It concerns the first three years of secondary school (Years 7, 8 and 9). Key Stage 3 is the first stage of education where

history is more likely to be taught separately from other subjects and more consistently and the last stage where history is a compulsory subject.

² This is evident from various points made by teachers. One example would be their general disagreement with the teaching of European history holistically. The main reason for this disagreement was their concern that holistic history would subsume the national into a greater European narrative which would focus on commonalities and thus would inevitably fail to discuss Britain's separate and unique development.