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Citizenship education - what do student teachers need to know?

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Introduction

From September 2002, for the first time in its history, citizenship education is to become statutory in England and Wales at Key Stages 3 (11-14 year olds) and 4 (14-16 year olds). It is therefore imperative that a coherent approach is developed for the provision of teacher training in this area. In the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, individual tutors were beginning to explore elements of citizenship with their students. However, a strategy to incorporate it across the course was not planned. MUNDI, as a development education centre based at the university, was already running workshops in schools exploring elements of citizenship with pupils, developing projects focusing on the global dimension of citizenship, and providing in-service training for teachers. MUNDI felt they were in a strong position to work together with the university to explore citizenship and citizenship education issues with staff and students. The first stage was to administer questionnaires to students to find out how they understood citizenship. The questionnaire was followed up by discussion with students during which they were given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and begin to analyse the values and attitudes which underpinned their ideas. We were interested to find out whether their ideas about citizenship education resonated with government understandings of the role and purpose of citizenship education, whether they were based on their own experiences of citizenship education at school and whether there was much congruence was between students' ideas.

Methodology

Four organising questions were used. The first question focused on student teachers' understandings of what being a citizen meant to them, and the second on global citizenship. The third question asked students to consider the knowledge and skills they felt pupils would need to be educated for citizenship. The final question asked student teachers how they felt citizenship education could be developed in the classroom. One hundred and thirty eight questionnaires were returned.

Findings

Question One: What does being a citizen mean to you?

The frequency of response was as follows:

Being a member of society	48% ¹
Being a member of community	36%
Responsibility for actions	21%
Observing rules of society	17%
Rights and responsibilities	14%
Respect for others	10%
Active participation in society	9%
Democracy	6%
Caring for each other	4%
Sense of identity	4%

¹ Some students referred to more than one concept in their answers to the questions so the results do not total 100%.

It would seem that for many the concept of citizenship implies a sense of belonging either at a local (community) or national (society) level. Individual statements reflected the importance of belonging:

Belonging to a particular national group and identifying with it socially, culturally and economically and enjoying the freedoms of citizenship (Geography).

Although citizenship as identity was cited by only 4% of students, respondents seem to believe that being a member of a community means that individuals have the right to be who they are while at the same time allowing others to hold beliefs which may be very different from their own. Typical comments included:

Tolerance of others. Your life and *beliefs are not the only ones*. (Maths)

Having personal freedoms within a framework which *allows people to be different*. (Maths)

The categories 'responsibility for actions', 'observing rules of society' and 'rights and responsibilities' could be said to have legal undertones. This may be because within citizenship education there is a significant amount of law-related education in many schools.

A small proportion of students who cited rights and responsibilities as part of being a citizen elaborated on what those rights and responsibilities might be. Those that were mentioned included paying taxes, voting and not dropping litter. Individual statements included:

Rights include: justice and fair hearings, the right to education, employment and medical treatment. Responsibilities include: obedience of national laws, recognition of others' *human rights and citizen rights*. (Modern Foreign Languages).

Rights and responsibilities tended to be seen as being a reciprocal arrangement - respondents acknowledged that they have responsibilities towards society but it was also felt that that society has responsibilities towards the individual, and that people should 'look out for each other'. As a way of trying to reinvigorate community spirit the government has employed the concept of mutual obligation and is promoting the idea of 'a something-for-something society'. Indeed the government speaks in terms of a contractual arrangement between individual and state, with individuals only being in a position to claim their rights when they have fulfilled their responsibilities. The following statements from students embody New Labour ideology:

Being a citizen is to be an active member of society who, to the best of their ability, contributes the same amount of positive input to the dominant social system as they *expect to get out of it in return* (Geography)

Having a contract with the state for me to perform certain rights and responsibilities in exchange for the state to do the same. Therefore being recognised by the state and *playing an active role in society*. (English)

The most colourful answers to the question 'What does being a citizen mean to you?' came from some of the students from English:

Much to my displeasure, I don't believe that I am actually a citizen; I am a subject of a monarch, a product of an antiquated, illogical and iniquitous feudal system (English).

All should be aware of 'rip-off' Britain's consumer conspiracy predicated on all members of society except those in power – it is time to enlighten youth and empower all! (English: emphasis in original)

It means putting up with things you don't want to have to do for the vast majority of your time on this planet, but still keeping a smile on your face. Finally it means enjoying subverting the system and making life better for others. (English).

Although they are entertaining statements, there is a more serious side to consider. Research has found that, without formal training, it is the personal ideas and values of teachers that are transmitted in their teaching. Student teachers therefore need to be able to consider their own values and how these might compare with the values which underpin the curriculum they are trying to teach.

During discussions with students about the question 'What does being a citizen mean to you?' students themselves identified a number of points such as:

- students have a range of knowledge and understanding of citizenship which varies according to their life experiences. Students who have already been in the world of work have a broader view and understanding of citizenship than those straight from university;
- 'knowledge' does not rank as highly as 'understanding, skills, attitudes and values' in terms of citizenship;
- some students assume citizenship has a national perspective, some assume it is European and others that it relates to the world.

Question Two: What does being a global citizen mean to you?

The following responses were made:

Learning from other cultures	30%
Being part of a global community	30%
Responsibility towards others	14%
Being aware of global issues	12%
Human rights	12%
Environment/sustainability	11%
Understanding own culture	8%
Knowledge of other ways of life	5%

Again a sense of belonging seems to be important with the idea of citizenship being extended outwards:

It implies that the individual is part of a wider environment and that his citizenship is no longer limited to his country (Modern Foreign Languages).

Students from across subjects felt that one should be concerned about issues such as human rights, development and the environment even if these issues do not impact directly on a person's life. Students also thought that being aware of what was going on

in the world was part of being a global citizen, whereas a small minority of students thought that being aware of current affairs was part of being citizen.

There were a few students who felt that they either did not understand the concept or felt that it did not exist. Some students commented:

No such thing (History)

Don't have a *sense of being a global citizen* (Geography)

On the whole, however, students were much clearer about the rights and responsibilities of global citizenship than the rights and responsibilities involved in being a citizen:

Feeling a responsibility towards those *in societies of other countries* (History)

Being part of a wider community working towards *global responsibility with others* (Geography).

Furthermore, environmental issues were seen as an important part of global citizenship:

Doing what is best for the planet even if others are not, for example by reducing *pollution* (Maths)

During the follow-up discussions, students were invited to participate in a small-group activity to further explore the concept of global citizenship. Key concepts which emerged as being important included 'empathising with the experiences of others' while others (including several geographers) felt that 'making links between diverse cultures' was key. Other concepts which ranked highly were 'active participation', 'bringing about social change' and 'respecting the rights of others'. Concepts which did not rank highly included 'understanding the role of global organisations' and 'learning about the democratic and electoral processes'.

Question Three: What pupils need to know

The next question asked student teachers to consider what they felt were the knowledge and skills pupils needed to be educated for citizenship. All students from across the subject areas seemed to have clear ideas about this. Suggestions included:

Knowledge of other cultures and places	31%
Responsibility	21%
Respect	19%
Knowledge of laws/government	17%
Communication	17%
Tolerance/compromise	14%
Knowledge of own country history	9%
Understanding/valuing societies	8%
Concern about the environment	7%
Empathy	6%
Impact of actions of other	5%

The only distinction between the subjects was that History and Modern Foreign Language students were more likely to cite communication skills as a skill necessary for citizenship than students from any other subject. Comments from students included:

Pupils should be given a sense of responsibility and made to see that their actions can affect people – sometimes quite dramatically. They should be sensitive to the problems of others. To enable them to put *themselves in other's situations*. (Maths).

It would be good for pupils to have to consider their position as members of society and the implications of their *behaviour on society as a whole*. (English).

Question Four: Citizenship education in the classroom

Students were less clear about ways to develop citizenship in the classroom. Methodologies that were mentioned include:

- Role play
- Debate
- Discussion
- Visiting speakers

In discussion, several Maths and Science students explained that they had taught lessons using participatory techniques such as role play and simulations but had never recognised them as relating to citizenship. They felt also that issues raised in these lessons did relate to citizenship, but they had not considered this before. These discussions highlighted the need to enable student teachers to recognise the potential of developing elements of citizenship within their subject.

A key point that came to light during these discussions was the importance of trying to maintain students' enthusiasm for participatory learning techniques in the face of apparent disinterest from pupils and disapproval from teachers. One Modern Languages student discussed a French lesson about French-speaking Togo she had prepared using the internet, only to be met by negative and sometimes racist comments. Another described how teachers in his school had disapproved of his teaching methods, which promoted discussion and debate, as there was not enough written work in the pupils' exercise books.

Students discussed the lack of respect that pupils sometimes have for each other and the difference in values they bring from home with those that the school may try to promote. Their experiences caused a shift in which concepts they felt important, and they now ranked 'developing self esteem and respect for others' as a vital component of citizenship education. They also felt that citizenship education needed to be grounded in pupils' interests and experiences and that citizenship education has a role to play in challenging their perceptions of the society in which we live. Furthermore students felt that pupils can become stale in the classroom whereas they might respond differently outside or in a different space.

Some conclusions

For the majority of student teachers the idea of being a citizen implies a sense of belonging to society or to a community, though none of the students expanded on their understanding of either 'society' or 'community'. Voiels (1998) believes that student teachers 'need to understand more explicitly the nature of community' and also 'how they might create a sense of community with the children in their own classroom' (p204) in order that they might become effective teachers of citizenship education.

'Being a citizen' does not equate with a sense of identity for many students. This is interesting given the current concern among many people that the British are undergoing an identity crisis. Indeed, political commentators such as Andrew Marr (2000) have written on the impact of recent cultural changes in Britain and Marr has stated: 'You could even say that Britain is dead already, that the imperial project and core values, the class system and rules and religion that held the peoples of these islands together have fallen away, leaving only a husk and a flag and a shape on the map' (Marr, 2000, p17). More recently Robin Cook, when Labour Foreign Secretary, controversially described British society as a 'Chicken Tikka Masala Society' because of the large number of different ethnic groups living in Britain. These comments point to one of the reasons for citizenship education becoming compulsory at this time. It is seen as a way of establishing a collective sense of what it is to be British. It is therefore important that student teachers have the opportunity to think about their own sense of identity and also ways in which they might enable pupils to explore issues of identity.

As with citizenship, global citizenship entails a sense of belonging. 'Understanding one's own culture' was also seen as significant, suggesting that it is important that individuals have a sense of their place and role in the world. It is interesting that the student teachers seem to be much clearer about their rights and responsibilities as global citizens, implying that they perhaps have a better idea of their role as citizens on a global level than on local and national levels. Reasons for this may be events such as Comic Relief, which raise awareness of environmental and development issues in a very accessible way using high profile celebrities. It may also be because young people find global issues inherently more interesting than local or national issues. David Mellor, ex-Conservative MP, stated during a radio debate on the impending General Election and the general public's apathy towards it that this was because 'there is a feeling that the election is in the bag. Not because of enthusiasm for the current government but because of a lack of enthusiasm for the opposition.'

However a number of students stated that they did not understand what the term global citizenship meant. Arguably therefore courses for student teachers should enable them to develop a sound understanding of global citizenship.

With regard to the knowledge and skills, the student teachers had a clear idea of those they felt were necessary for pupils to be educated for citizenship. There was a strong link between a student teacher's understanding of citizenship and what they felt pupils should know. For example it was felt by some that citizenship education should teach pupils 'knowledge of other places' which underpins the idea that student teachers felt it important to learn from other cultures. This emphasises the fact that it tends to be personal ideas and values which influence teaching a subject such as citizenship. Given that these personal values may not always be congruent with the values on which a curriculum is based, it is important that student teachers are given the opportunity to explore their own understandings and values. This process may also increase confidence in teaching citizenship education and in tackling topical events and issues. A skill which is pivotal to becoming an active citizen is that of participation, and the process of participation is a central theme of the Orders for Citizenship. Although it was not a skill that was mentioned by any of the student teachers in the questionnaire, in discussion it was a key concept deemed very important. That students had not considered the process of participation as an important aspect of citizenship education until prompted would suggest that this is an area that needs to be developed within the course.

Discussions with students emphasised the importance of enabling student teachers to consider how citizenship education might be developed in the classroom and how the range of techniques they employ in the classroom might be suited to the teaching of citizenship education. However a key consideration for student teachers is how to interest pupils and other teachers in active learning techniques in the face of disinterest. Discussions also highlighted the importance of rooting teaching in pupils' own experiences so that they are able to make connections on local, national and global levels. The ability to base teaching around pupils' experiences is therefore an aspect that needs to be built into the course.

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