



This paper is taken from

*Teaching Citizenship
Proceedings of the seventh Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2005

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 389 1

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

Alhelsi, R. (2005) Challenges facing citizenship in (post) conflict areas: a comparison between Northern Ireland and Palestine, in Ross, A. (ed) Teaching Citizenship. London: CiCe, pp 329-334.

© CiCe 2005

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 at the time of the conference, and for the initial stages of editing this book
- Lindsay Melling and Gitesh Gohel of IPSE, London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of the Department of Education and Culture of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Challenges facing citizenship education in (post) conflict areas: a comparison between Northern Ireland and Palestine

Rana Alhelsi

University of Ulster (UK)

The 1990s have witnessed a number of significant political, economic and social changes that have caused an increased interest in and posed numerous challenges to citizenship and citizenship education (Smith, 2003a). These challenges were brought about by a number of surprises that 'confront taken-for-granted assumptions about political processes and their psychological parameters, challenge both theory and method in the field of citizenship, and challenge how we think about democracy, its functions and antecedents' (Haste, 2004, p 414). The first surprise was brought about by the reality of societies: they are different. The second is the changing attitude towards nationalism from being pathological to becoming a means of creating national identity. The emergence of new democracies exhibited the use of nationality in rebuilding a nation-state where political turmoil demands the creation of new narratives to support and justify the new system. The third surprise was the blurring of the Left-Right continuum in western democracies which challenges the assumptions about the construction of the belief system and ideology (*ibid*).

These surprises have changed the perception of the individual as being 'passively socialised' to being active in 'constructing – and co-constructing with others – explanations and stories that enable him or her to make sense of experience, and to develop an identity in particular social context' (*ibid*, p 415). This paper investigates some of the main challenges that face citizenship and citizenship education policies in two conflict areas: Northern Ireland and Palestine. Though the focus is on policy makers, these challenges can usefully be amplified for policy implementers at the micro level. In addition, these challenges may not be confined to conflict or transition areas, they can also be faced in varying degrees in some of the oldest established-democracies.

Education and the Nation-State

The term 'state' refers to the modern notion of the 'nation-state' and constitutes the bureaucratic entity that governs under the symbol of its flag and in the name of its national narrative. It has the recognition of the international community of nation-states and

relies for its legitimacy on the intensity of its meaningful presence in a continuous body of bounded territory. It works by policing its borders, producing its people, constructing its citizens, defining its capitals, monuments, cities, waters, and soils, and by constructing its locales of memory and commemoration, such as graveyards and cenotaphs, mausoleums and museums (Appadurai, 1996, p 189).

The state also engages in a silent game of inclusion and exclusion through the educational system. The school is a major agent of cultural transmission and political socialisation. As such, the formal curriculum is not neutral but is rather dominated by ideologies or values in favour of the state or dominant groups (Green, 1997). Consequently, 'national education helped to construct the very subjectivity of citizenship, justifying the ways of the state to the people and the duties of the people to the state' (*ibid*, p 14). Its educational

system further has the task of perpetuating its language, its history, and its vision of the future so that its citizens remain predictable, law-abiding, and loyal subjects of the state, who ideally would even die for the state if they were called upon to do so.

Considering the 'surprises' of the past decade, the unique relationship between education, the state and citizenship was being re-discovered for maintaining or creating a healthy democracy. Education is now an important vehicle through which two major components of democratic citizenship can be achieved: political engagement and an understanding of, and a commitment to the fundamental principles and processes of democracy (Audigier, 2000).

Conceptually, citizenship education generally refers to institutionalised forms of political knowledge, values, attitudes, and group identifications, necessary for a political community as well as its members, which take place within formal and informal educational frameworks (*ibid*). The content and orientation of citizenship education varies in time and space, depending on the nature of a particular political system. Some components commonly included in citizenship education are historical and political knowledge at local, national and global levels, loyalty to the nation, positive attitudes toward political authority, fundamental socio-political beliefs and values, obedience to laws and social norms, sense of political efficacy, and interest in and skills concerning political participation.

Education and peace: Palestine and Northern Ireland

The relationship between education and political transition (de Santisteban, 2002) is exhibited in the cases of Northern Ireland and Palestine. In both areas, citizenship education was introduced as a support to the peace process and as a facilitator for the anticipated political change at the end of this process. Civic education was introduced in Palestine 'to enable citizens to create a cooperative society through knowing of one's rights, responsibilities, and civic duties' (MEHE, 2004, p8). The new Palestinian curriculum is perceived to reflect Palestinian needs and aspirations and provide a means of establishing 'the national identity and sovereignty of the Palestinian people, and a basis for fostering democratic values and human rights, and an instrument of sustainable human development' (*ibid*). In Northern Ireland, introducing citizenship education to the curriculum is considered a means 'to develop the capacity of young people to participate in a fair and inclusive society throughout their lifetime' (CCEA, 2000, p18) by providing them with opportunities to 'explore and clarify personal and social values in relation to the core concepts of diversity/interdependence; equality/justice; democracy/active participation; and engage in democratic processes' (*ibid*). These are seen to respond to the local 'needs and aspirations as well as encompassing the broader issues/concepts of democratic citizenship to be found in most liberal democracies' (*ibid*).

However, Northern Ireland and Palestine face similar challenges that might pose questions on the motives for the chosen policy and its expected outcomes. These challenges rise from the vague concept of citizenship as a result of the conflict and the anticipated outcomes of the peace process; the legitimacy of the authority/state is questioned due to the fragility of the peace process; and finally the contradiction between socio-economic and political realities and what is promoted in citizenship education programmes. Investigating these challenges might provide insight into ways of

overcoming them or perhaps an understanding of the real motives of policy makers in these areas.

The vague concept of citizenship as a result of the conflict and the anticipated outcomes of the peace process

The last 100 years witnessed the fluctuation of Palestinian citizenship between phases of decline and phases of prominent rise, at least in legal terms. This led to a rather complicated situation where Palestinians find themselves subject to varying legal definitions of their status whether as citizens, residents or temporary refugees. That should not however be confused with national identity which seemed to have become more focused and robust as a result of the conflict. The peace process and the subsequent agreements that have been signed by the PLO and Israel complicate things even more. Defining 'the Palestinian' in relation to the 'stateless' Palestinian state, which is the expected outcome of this process, is quite challenging considering that the 'state' which will bestow the status of 'Palestinian citizen' cannot in itself be clearly defined. The Palestinian refugees also face the dilemma of acquiring this Palestinian citizenship, which in effect will deprive them of their right of return to their homes, now inside Israel. The state-citizen relationship is something of an enigma since Palestinians do not feel that the authority is capable of performing sovereign state-functions that would justify the proclamation of Palestinian independence. Thus composing citizenship education texts in Palestine faces a profound challenge at its core: what is Palestinian citizenship and who is the Palestinian citizen?

In Northern Ireland a recent research questionnaire asked young people to define themselves: 42% of those asked described themselves as Irish, 23% as British and 18% as Northern Irish (Smyth and Scott, 2000). This of course makes it difficult to find a common definition of the 'citizen' in Northern Ireland and consequently poses challenges to devising policies of 'citizenship education'. The Northern Irish community is an ethnically divided society and 'although ethnicity is commonly cited as a major cause of conflict, many analysts conclude that ethnicity is more often mobilised and politicised by conflict rather than the other way round' (Smith, 2003b, p22). The Good Friday Agreement states that 'The two Governments (British and Irish) recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments' (The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 1998, Article 1 (vi)). This actually encourages an increasing division in the community and consequently, neither national identity nor state-loyalty can be adequate basis for identifying citizenship in Northern Ireland. 'The two nationalisms have deep roots and it has yet to be tested whether a concept of citizenship based on equal rights and responsibilities can help transcend these deeper, emotionally based loyalties. Since there is no consensus on nationality in Northern Ireland, or indeed the legitimacy of the state itself, this means that the concept of citizenship must be regarded as problematic and contested from the outset' (Smith, 2003b, p25).

The legitimacy of the authority/state is questioned due to the fragility of the peace process

The Palestinian Authority (PNA) was created in conjunction with the Oslo Accords as the 'Interim Self-Government Authority' to establish a bureaucratic power structure to

oversee Palestinians in specified areas of the West Bank and Gaza. The Oslo Accords raised Palestinian expectations of an independent state so they put their faith in the Palestinian Authority to oversee their affairs. However, time has demonstrated that its 'state' powers were never intended to extend beyond these limited functions, as the cantonisation of the West Bank and Gaza became clear. In fact, the legitimate power of the Palestinian authority is defined, and crippled, theoretically by the peace agreement, in reality by the control of Israel. 'The Palestinian authority does not have control over that (Palestinian Occupied) land, only over the Palestinians' (De Santisteban, 2002, p 154). This greatly undermines its legitimacy in the eyes of Palestinians. Vision or policies for the future state promoted by the authority are treated with apathy and passiveness. In addition, the PNA's domination 'by the old mentality of the PLO days, a mentality of Fatah domination, of tribalism, paternalism, and clientelism rather than a scientific and institutional mentality appropriate to an emerging state' (World Bank, 2003) led to its weak institutional capacity and accountability thus reducing the public's trust in its legitimacy. The state is an integral part in 'citizenship education'. When that state is vague and indefinable, its policies for citizenship education seem to be a work of fiction.

The state as a representative of authority has always been problematic in Northern Ireland. Nationalists carry a 'sense of alienation from the state that encompassed them through partition and for unionists, a Protestant minority within the island, it has been the fear of assimilation' (*ibid*, p 27). State bodies that were set up to serve both communities, such as the Northern Ireland Executive, are regarded with suspicion and apathy by both sides of the community. This is partly because of the conflict history and also by the fragility of the Good Friday Agreement, which promises to fulfil the hopes of both unionists of maintaining the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the nationalists of eventual Irish unity. These hopes obviously contradict each other and an agreement which promises to meet both ends of the spectrum is likely to draw the kind of suspicion it is facing today. 'The Belfast agreement is presented as a stage-managed strategy, the purpose of which is to 'spin' the people of Northern Ireland into accommodation 'rather than to persuade supporters and public opinion to support the peace process' (Aughey, 2002, p 5). This has created a suspicion which 'is profoundly dangerous for democratic politics. Just how radical such suspicion can be is revealed in specific republican and widespread unionist responses' (*ibid*, p 7). One can imagine the suspicion towards a national unified curriculum which promotes a common identity and puts forward a basis for citizen-state relations.

The contradiction between socio-economic and political realities and what is promoted in citizenship education programmes

When the Palestinian authority took control over the educational process, a new curriculum was devised 'to prepare the Palestinian people to restore all of their national rights on their land and to establish their independent state whose capital is Jerusalem, under the leadership of President Yasser Arafat'. However, reality poses challenges to this statement especially on vital issues such as Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, borders and even the form of the future state. 'There is a deep mismatch between the political situation and the curriculum, both in relation to Israel and to the Palestinian society itself' (De Santisteban, 2002, p154). The 'official' curriculum seems to be affected by the 'hidden' one, which is produced by the daily encounters of Palestinians with the Israeli occupation's continuous violation of human rights and control over the various aspects of

Palestinian life. In addition, the PNA itself has contributed to this contradiction through its violation of human rights and widespread corruption that became synonymous with its institutions:

There is a clear mismatch between the political and educational statements and the political and educational realities. It is difficult to be envious of the Palestinian teacher trying to answer his or her students' questions about international understanding, respect for the law, love for peace, and human dignity. Palestinian education authorities, teachers, families, and citizens in general, cannot avoid dealing with this schizophrenic situation (*ibid*, p 152).

In Northern Ireland, 'for much of the early part of the 'Troubles', schools were seen as safe havens, a protected environment where the violence and communal conflict were excluded. Teachers often saw their role as one of limiting discussion of controversial issues and preventing the outbreak of dissension in their oasis of peace' (Arlow, 2001, p 38). Yet the segregated school system was itself providing a source of igniting the conflict and community divide. Consequently initiatives such as Education for Mutual Understanding and Integrated Education were launched to bridge this divide and provide a means of social reconciliation. Yet, while school children learn about 'the other' and form a pleasant image of one community, the reality that these children face outside, and inside, school greatly undermines the effectiveness of citizenship programmes. 'Indicators include increasing segregation in housing, less than five per cent of children in integrated schools, lack of support for inter-marriage, limited social and cultural contact and significant difficulties in establishing shared political institutions. As the level of political violence has subsided, inter-communal conflict has shifted to interface areas and support for the improvement of community relations has slipped down the political agenda' (Smith, 2003b, p 28). In 2000, integrated schools accounted for only four per cent of the school population in Northern Ireland after more than 20 years of work towards this initiative. Furthermore, citizenship education programmes tend to move 'from a focus on the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland, or approaches to its resolution, to broader themes ... Critics suggest that it dilutes the impact of community relations work and can be a way of avoiding analysis of the problems in northern Ireland, which are the ones pupils will have to face as adults' (Dunn and Morgan, 1999, p 147).

Can these challenges be met?

When challenges are investigated, the means to overcome them soon follow. However, when policy is concerned, overcoming challenges is not always a priority. Avoiding them, ignoring them or becoming driven by them seems frequent. My current research proposes to investigate how policy-makers involved in formulating citizenship education in Northern Ireland and Palestine perceive these, and maybe other challenges, and how they deal with them. Of course, the policy formulation must not be oversimplified to a decision made by a politician or bureaucrat somewhere in a closed office. Many factors and players are involved, which makes it even more difficult to formulate sensitive and uncontroversial policies. A background of ongoing conflict does not make it any easier either for policy makers, or indeed for policy implementers.

References

- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press
- Arlow, M. (5 – 8 December 2001) *The Challenges of Social Inclusion in Northern Ireland: Citizenship and Life Skills*, paper to the Baltic Sea Regional Seminar – Curriculum Development for Social Inclusion
- Audigier, F. (2000) *Basic Concepts and Core Competencies for Education for Democratic Citizenship*, DGIV/EDU/CIT 23, Geneva, University of Geneva
- Aughey, A. (2002) The Art And Effect Of Political Lying In Northern Ireland *Irish Political Studies* 17, 2, pp 1-16
- CCEA: Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment. (April-June 2000) *Proposals for Changes to the Northern Ireland Curriculum Framework Phase One Consultation*, Belfast, CCEA.
- De Santisteba, A. V. (2002) 'Palestinian Education: A National Curriculum against All Odds' *International Journal of Educational Development* 22, pp.145-154
- Green, D. (1997) Education and State Formulation in Europe and Asia, in Kennedy, K. J. (ed), *Citizenship Education and The Modern State*, London, Falmer
- Haste, H. (2004) Constructing The Citizen *Journal Of Political Psychology* 25, 3, pp 413-439
- MEHE: Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2004) *Ten Years of Work: Continuous Efforts and Achievements Despite Closures And The Wall*, Ramallah, MEHE Available at: <http://www.moe.gov.ps/publications/packeg.pdf>
- Seamuss, D. and Morgan, V. (1999) 'A Fraught Path' – Education as a basis for developing improved community relations in Northern Ireland *Oxford Review of Education* 25, 1&2, pp 141-153
- Smith, A. (2003a) Editorial *Cambridge Journal Of Education*, 33, 1, pp 3-14
- Smith, A. (2003b) Citizenship Education In Northern Ireland: Beyond National Identity? *Cambridge Journal Of Education*. 33, 1, pp 15-31
- Smyth, M. and Scott, M. (2000) *The Youthquest 2000 Survey*. Londonderry, Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity (INCORE)
- The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 10 April 1998, available at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>
- World Bank Group (May 2003) *Twenty-Seven Months – Intifada, Closure and Economic Crisis: An Assessment*. Jerusalem: World Bank Group