An exploration of the students' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' at the Junior College of the University of Malta, through a qualitative method

Philip CARUANA, M.Ed.
Systems of Knowledge Department, University of Malta Junior College, Malta
e-mail: philip.caruana@um.edu.mt

Abstract: *Through a qualitative research method, namely the use of semi-structured interviews with eight lecturers of Systems of Knowledge at the Junior College of the University of Malta, this study explores the lecturers' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' and it also explores the lecturers' perceptions of the students' understanding of the same concepts at the same College. The research evolved mainly around the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' and their influence if any, on the development of the students as democratic citizens.*

Keywords: *democracy; citizenship; qualitative method; semi-structured interviews.*

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the Junior College students' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and ' citizenship'. The research evolves mainly around the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' and their influence if any, on the development of students as democratic citizens. The focus of the discussion and the research through a qualitative research design and methodology is the administration of eight interviews to lecturers of Systems of Knowledge at the Junior College of the University of Malta. By using the semi-structured interview instrument, the researcher will try to understand what is the lecturers' own understanding of these concepts and their perception of the students' understanding of 'democracy' and 'citizenship'.

The research will initially focus on a concise background to the subject of Systems of Knowledge, intended to serve as a peripheral boundary around the wider research process. The second section will explore the continuous debate in education about the concepts of ' democracy' and 'citizenship' with particular reference to the last decade. This should serve as a theoretical framework to the study, and furthermore

it should serve as a point of reference regarding what the lecturers should pass on to the students, so that this knowledge can contribute to them truly becoming citizens who live and participate in a democratic country.

The third section, which is the main part of this study, will describe how the researcher went about administering the research. This process will include the main research proposition and the preplanning of the research design and methodology. The researcher will also explain the task of compiling the interview questions for the semi-structured interview, piloting and reviewing the interview schedule, the recording and transcribing of the eight interviews and the data analysis from which the reflections and conclusions emerge. The reflections will review the research proposition in the light of the research findings and at the same time will comment on the effectiveness and shortcomings of the research instrument (i.e. the semi-structured interview) itself.

A Concise Background to the Study

Systems of Knowledge has been a compulsory subject for students seeking admission to the University of Malta as from 1st October 1989. When it was introduced it originally met with a lot of opposition, mainly because it was and still is a compulsory subject, and many students, parents and politicians viewed the subject as a form of 'numerus clausus' (i.e. a criteria to control the number of entries to the University or a specific course) that would be used as a selection device, and therefore as a form of discrimination. Today although it is still not popular with the students themselves, it is more accepted by most of them and they appreciate its value when they move on to tertiary education or to the world of work. Although there is no research to refer to, the researcher bases the above conclusion on his contact with students presently following this course of studies, and on discussions with ex-students when the researcher meets them at their place of work or anywhere in Malta after a number of years.

The first Systems of Knowledge syllabus for all post- secondary schools in Malta (i.e. government, private and church schools) was drawn up in 1989 on the assumption that the focus only on special fields covered by the Advanced Level subjects promoted certain habits of mind to the exclusion of others. This reasoning unfortunately is still evident today, because students tend to look at this subject as something extra, and at the end of the course, it is examinable. It has always been a challenge to make students understand that the subject aims at offering the students further areas of study, which could develop the candidates' ability to view ideas, skills and situations from a broader perspective than that of a single discipline.

In 1997, the Junior College of the University of Malta was set up specifically to initiate students upon completion of the secondary schooling, in methods of study appropriate to tertiary education. The College was born out of a generally recognized need to reform the local pre-university sector. Apart from the setting up of a Junior

College, a new Systems of Knowledge syllabus was drafted which aimed at preventing the subject as much as possible from becoming stereotyped and consequently inept for its initial purposes. The change was therefore of deeper and structural character.

The 1997 revised syllabus included three modules, representing three phases in history, each reflecting a number of values i.e. Antiquity and Early Middle Ages which includes the section entitled 'The influence of government on the value of life'; Middle Ages and Renaissance, and Modern and Contemporary. Without going into detail of the aims of the various module sections, it is correct to state that the syllabus aimed at inter-disciplinarity.

In the 1997 Systems of Knowledge syllabus, values education emphasized the moral, religious, aesthetic, civic, democratic, national, personal and social dimension of values in everyday life chronologically, from antiquity to modern times. In August 2002, citizenship became a statutory subject in key stages of the primary and secondary curriculum in the UK. In Europe and even in other parts of the world, this focus on citizenship had already been established as such. It is therefore understandable that one should also consider these international developments while drafting the new Systems of Knowledge syllabus that is planned to come into effect in the near future in Malta.

The concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship':
documenting and critically evaluating the debate

Some of the most recent studies and publications[1] provide evidence of the need to redefine 'democracy' and the role of citizenship education in the preparation of the younger generations to fulfil their role as democratic citizens in the future. If citizens are responsible for the upkeep of democracy, they should be taught the major values of the system and at the same time citizens should know about the shortcomings and dangers that face democracy.

The growing need to redefine concepts is often triggered by crisis in society at large. Kerr argues that towards the end of the twentieth century academics and commentators started arguing whether 'a watershed has been reached, namely the end of modern, liberal democratic society and the onset of a less certain post modern world'.[2] Kerr also refers to a number of theorists of education such as Kymlicka,[3]

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[1] M.S. Williams, 'Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education' in McDounough, K. & Feinberg, W. (eds), *Education and Citizenship in Liberal Democratic Societies,* New York, 2003, and M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A. O'Neill, *Education Policy: Globalisation, Citizenship and Democracy*, London, 2004.

[2] D. Kerr, 'Citizenship Education in England: The Making of a New Subject', http://www.sowf-onlilnejournal.de/2003-2/england_kerr.htm, p. 2.

[3] W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford, 1995.

Callan,[4] Giddens,[5] and Crick,[6] who are redefining the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' in the post-modern world. While performing this task theorists meet challenges that are associated with diversity, location, social rights and participation.

The complexity of the two concepts mentioned previously is one of the reasons for this ongoing debate in education. It is for this reason that Kerr argues 'it is essential that citizenship becomes a strong, evolving and lasting feature of the curriculum experience of all pupils in the 21st century'.[7] And Evans refers to the new form of active citizenship, 'i.e. to promote the highest forms of learning with understanding critical skills, and above all, lifelong learning and inquiry'.[8] This is clearly also the main aim of Systems of Knowledge as has been pointed out in the previous section.

In the last decade, theorists in education have debated whether to define 'democracy' as a system that promotes a 'national identity' or 'a community of shared fate'. Heater affirms that this movement in favour of nationality and identity goes back two hundred years when 'citizenship was an assertion of freedom from arbitrary power, and usually intimately bound up with patriotism'.[9] Kymlicka & Norman point out that 'contemporary democratic theory begins from the supposition that meaningful democratic citizenship requires citizens that share a subjective sense of membership in a single political community. This sense of shared membership constitutes a distinctive identity, i.e. it partially constitutes individuals' understanding of who they are'.[10] But global events of even the last decade make one question whether this theory of national identity should be the only theory to be considered.

Melissa Williams questions to what extent liberal democracy accommodates particular identities, and to what extent must they focus, instead, on inculcating a shared identity of democratic citizenship.[11] She casts doubt on the implicit premise that meaningful citizenship and stable constitutional order must be grounded in a shared identity among citizens. Williams further proposes, instead, that because we see 'a model of citizenship as shared identity, we should move toward an idea of citizenship of membership in a community of shared fate. [This community] of shared fate can yield a pragmatic conception of citizenship that is freed from the pernicious tendencies that are inherent to notions of citizenship as identity'.[12]

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[4] E. Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*, Oxford, 1997.

[5] A. Giddens, *The Third Way: The renewal of Social Democracy*, London, 1998.

[6] B. Crick, *Essays on Citizenship*, London, 2000.

[7] Kerr, 2003, p. 7.

[8] K.M. Evans, *Shaping Futures: Learning for Competence and Citizenship*, Aldershot England, 1998, p. 134.

[9] D. Heater, *What is Citizenship?*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 95.

[10] W. Kymlicka, & W. Norman, 'Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory' in Beiner, R., (ed.), *Theorizing Citizenship*, Albany, 1995, p. 301.

[11] Williams, 2003, p. 208.

[12] Ibid., p. 209.

Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, like Williams, depart from theories of education proposed by Rawls and Dewey. But then Olssen *et al.* emphasise the effects of globalization and argue that citizens should prepare themselves for 'a strong civil society based on norms of trust and active responsible citizenship and that education is central to such a goal. Thus, the strong education state is necessary to maintain democracy at the national level so that strong democratic nation-states can buttress forms of international governance and ensure that globalization becomes a force for global sustainability and survival'.[13]

This more recent theory emphasizes the role of the state and education in relation to citizenship and democracy in a global order. It theorises a new conception of the political interpretation of citizenship moving beyond 'third-way' formulations currently practiced in the U.K. based on the relationship between democracy and education to advance the model of the *education state*. Olssen *et al.* also defend the arguments for public schooling because they claim, 'the benefits [of public schooling] are related to issues such as citizenship, tolerance, literacy and the democratic functioning of a community'.[14] They contend that 'the education nation-state, with strong institutions of democratic citizenship, offers the positive way forward in a world that is increasingly threatened by global conflict, terror, and catastrophe',[15] and, further on, that 'Neo-liberalism delivered obvious policy disasters within nation-states, and bears the prospect of even greater catastrophes as it expands at the global level'.[16]

Their argument presents a case for the construction of a non-bureaucratic welfare state that has radical democratisation as its main aim. Essential to the creation and maintenance of this form of participatory democracy is a strong democratic system of public education that has education for citizenship as its primary aim. Arguably, it is in this way that education can promote a more active role for citizenship.

Like Williams – but in other words – Olssen *et al.* propose the 'idea of multiple overlapping' communities, in that individuals can identify with many different communities – ethnic, religious, political and social – at the same time'.[17] Then they move further by proposing 'a "community of communities", so there is a common good for humanity expressing the core of these values and species necessities'.[18] They define democracy as a comprehensive discourse including (1) safety and security, (2) freedom and autonomy, (3) inclusion, (4) fairness and justice, and (5) equality of resources and capabilities. 'Democracy has to be seen as more than merely

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[13] M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A. O'Neill, 2004, pp. 1–2.

[14] Ibid., p. 240.

[15] Ibid., p. 242.

[16] Ibid., p. 245.

[17] Ibid., p. 261.

[18] Ibid., p. 261.

participating in society' [. . .] If there is no commitment to substantive principles, democracy may be reduced to mere rule of the majority [. . . and] ignore its moral significance'.[19] Olssen *et al.* define education for democratic citizenship (after Amy Gutmann)[20] as 'education that places higher value on the qualities of open-mindedness, tolerance of diversity, fairness, rational understanding, respect for truth and critical judgement'.[21]

All these conditions create the need for a deliberative democracy and an educated citizenry. And as the Crick Report[22] emphasizes, citizenship education has three interrelated elements to include in the curriculum, in the UK, after September 2002, i.e. social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. The aim as stated in the same report is to 'induct young people into democratic practices and procedures'.[23] However Olssen *et al.* affirm that 'the problem of the Crick Report is that democracy is still conceptualized in a too narrow, overtly Eurocentric, even nationalistic· sense',[24] rather than with a more global aim and interpretation of global affairs.

Although Malta has nearly always assumed a European character, it has cultural characteristics moulded by centuries of colonialism. This experience is likely to have nurtured, in the majority of the Maltese citizens an attitude of subservience, where most of the decisions were left to be taken at the higher echelons of local government, or even from abroad, without any inclination towards the right of participation by citizens in decision-making. Although Malta achieved Independence in 1964 and became a Republic in 1974, it was only in 1979 that the British forces officially left Malta, and therefore there are still generations of Maltese citizens who find it difficult to define democracy and citizenship in a way that makes them conscious of the right and role of full participation in a representative democracy. Furthermore, it is felt that many Maltese still need to understand that their participation is important throughout the government's term and not only in the electoral process every five years. However the readiness of the Maltese population to participate should be continuous and should be encouraged on the national and global levels as well as the more local one.

After a concise exploration of different theories that define 'democracy' and 'citizenship' in education, this study, through the use of a qualitative research method, specifically semi-structured interviews with eight lecturers, will explore the lecturers'

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[19] Ibid., p. 268.

[20] A. Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, Princeton, NJ, 1987.

[21] M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A. O'Neill, 2004, p. 269.

[22] B. Crick, *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*, UK, 1998.

[23] Ibid., p. 55.

[24] M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A. O'Neill, 2004, p. 276.

understanding of the two concepts discussed above. This study also aims at exploring the lecturers' perceptions of the students' understanding of the same concepts at the Junior College of the University of Malta, always keeping in mind the theoretical discussion as background to the research.

Research Design and Methodology

This study is the third part of an ongoing research programme conducted between 2002 and 2004, at the Junior College of the University of Malta. The aim of this qualitative research, mainly through the administration of eight semi-structured interviews with eight lecturers of Systems of Knowledge at the College, is to serve as a triangulation method for two previous studies, one using a qualitative method i.e. content analysis of twenty examination scripts; the second a quantitative method i.e. the administration of five hundred questionnaires to students at the same College. The third study is administered because as Merriam argues, the reliability and validity of the results of any research study are contingent upon the way data is collected, analysed, interpreted, and presented. [25]

The choice of a semi-structured interview that is focussed on the particular theme was made firstly, because questions were formed and based on categories gathered in a previous study that was administered to students. Secondly, as Bell advises, 'if you are a first time interviewer, you may find it easier to use a structured format'.[26] Further on Bell contends, 'the advantage of a focused interview is that a framework is established beforehand and so analysis is greatly simplified. This is important for any research, but particularly so for limited-time studies'[27] as is the case of this study.

The first area of concern was the appropriate research design for the study. The second area of concern was the content, structure and sequence of the questions to be asked during the interviews. A research design is, according to Macmillan and Schumacher, 'the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer research questions'.[28] And Yin defines research design as the 'logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of a study'.[29]

Qualitative research is distinguished by its unique scope and focus. It provides a wealth of information about a relatively small sample, in this case eight interviews,

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[25] S. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Application in Education*, (Rev. edition), San Francisco, CA, 1998, pp. 199–201.

[26] S.J. Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, Buckingham, 1987, p. 93.

[27] Ibid., p. 94.

[28] J. Macmillan, & S. Schumacher, *Research in Education: A Conceptual Introduction*, New York, 1997, p. 33.

[29] R. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2nd edition), Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994, p. 18.

which provide a more intimate picture of the individual and issue being studied. As Patton affirms 'the qualitative approach provides a more holistic picture of the phenomena being studied'.[30] In this study the researcher wanted to explore the understanding of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' of eight lecturers and their perception of the students' understanding of the concepts mentioned above. At the same time the researcher aimed at exploring 'the meaning of that experience for them [the lecturers], which is one of the prime advantages of the qualitative research'.[31]

Therefore, in this study, the researcher is exploring the lecturers' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' and at the same time the lecturers' perception of the students' understanding of the same concepts. The study also aimed at studying the effectiveness or shortcomings of the 1997 syllabus for Systems of Knowledge and aspired to obtain feedback for recommendations to be forwarded to the Syllabus Review panel. Furthermore, as was stated above, the study was also meant to reconfirm the previous studies for validity and reliability.

A – Research Design

In drafting the questions for the interviews, the researcher's first task was to come up with a clear identification of the categories of data to be studied. The categories, (as already stated), were based on an earlier research conducted by the researcher and consisting of a content analysis of twenty examination scripts by Junior College students carried out in October 2003. In this earlier research through content analysis the researcher was able to identify categories such as *'defining democracy'*, *'democracy in practice'*, *'equality in participation'*, *'majority and minority rule'*, *'freedom of expression'*, *'criticism of democracy'*, *'women in politics'*, and *'democracy and pluralism'* amongst others. These categories were later used in the current research to draft the questions for the semi-structured interviews.

This was supported by the second task, namely a theoretical framework reflected in the debate regarding democracy and citizenship, presented earlier in the paper. This provided a sound background to the interview questions and data analysis. Both Yin[32] and Merriam[33] argue that every study has either an explicit or an implicit theoretical framework that guides its design. By stating the study's propositions, the researchers make the focus explicit and identify what Miles and Huberman[34] call the researcher's 'conceptual framework'. The conceptual framework for this study was

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[30] M.Q. Patton, *Practical Evaluation* Newbury Park, CA, 1992, pp. 187–8.
[31] S. Merriam, 1998, pp. 5–8.
[32] Yin, 1994, p. 28.
[33] Merriam, 1998, p. 45.
[34] M. Miles, & M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd edition), Thousand Oaks, CA, 1994, pp. 16–22.

developed from the exploration of the ongoing debate of the concepts of 'democracy' and ' citizenship' in education. The main emphasis is on the developments in the last decade on the different ways of defining democracy, and the changing role of citizenship education as the main proponent and at the same time, the main safeguard of democracy in society.

The conceptual framework then led to the third component of the research design, the study's main research question and other questions for the interview schedule. The primary inherent research question for the study was, 'With the understanding of "democracy" and " citizenship" that the students acquire through their years of education at the primary, secondary levels of education and the limited content in Systems of Knowledge about the subject, are the students really prepared to live as democratic citizens and at the same time are they able to safeguard and nurture democracy when they become citizens in the wider society?'

The fourth component of the research design was the piloting of the interview schedule with one respondent. The researcher was also guided by the comments from the tutor. It resulted in the researcher changing the wording of some questions to further subscribe to the guidelines mentioned above. The researcher also used the critical friend approach where one respondent was given the schedule and was asked to comment about the questions. One example of the piloting process and the eventual change is in the following question, which was changed from: *'What do you think is the Maltese society's understanding of racism (including the Junior College students)?* to *'How does the Maltese society respond to racism?'*

The fifth component of the research design was data collection through the recording of the interviews, data transcription, data analysis and the eliciting of conclusions and recommendations from the data. In addition to the interview transcripts the researcher added notes taken during the interviews or during discussions that followed the interviews. As transcripts were collected they were examined using the 'constant comparison' method to explore responses about the key themes which frame the research as well as look for emerging new themes. The examination of responses included a comparison aimed at bringing out the commonalities and divergences. In seeking to understand the data, the researcher identified categories that seemed to describe a similar phenomenon or carry a similar meaning. Some categories were more descriptive in nature, while others inferred a certain pattern of interaction [between themes].[35] At the same time, the researcher was careful not to overlook data that was contradictory to prevailing themes.[36] These themes were then related back to the study's main proposition and the other interview questions. From

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[35] Ibid., p. 57.

[36] Yin, 1994, and I. Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*, (2nd edition) New York, 1998, pp. 107–9.

this analysis, final conclusions were then drawn as to the lecturers' understanding of the concepts being studied, the lecturers' perceptions of the students' understanding of the same concepts, the effectiveness or shortcomings of the 1997 syllabus for Systems of Knowledge, and the ability or lack of ability of the students to live as democratic citizens when they go out in society and live as full democratic citizens.

The sixth and final research design component was an identification of the criteria for interpreting the findings resulting from the study. Due to the fact that in qualitative research, there is no statistical test that can be done, there is no precise way to set the criteria. The researcher decided on two criteria for this study. Areas of convergence and commonality among participants were assumed to indicate a significant finding, whereby areas of great divergence suggested that a broader theoretical framework might need to be developed. In addition, the researcher employed the principle of triangulation by comparing transcript evidence with written documentation of the previous research, the content analysis of scripts, administered in October 2003 and the questionnaire administered to students in March 2004.

One example of triangulation is the following: in an identified category emerging from the content analysis namely *'Defining democracy'*, some responses from scripts defining democracy refer to *'the rule of the people'*, *'equality for each and every member* of s*ociety'*, *'the people elect representatives'*, and *'today's democracy concerns more winning the consensus of the people'*. Later, in the quantitative study, using a structured questionnaire in March 2004 and carried out among 500 respondents, to question 1, 41.2% say that people are allowed to vote in elections. In the third research i.e. the qualitative research carrying out semi-structured interviews with eight lecturers for triangulation, the lecturers' perceptions of the students' understanding of democracy, are believed to be the 'importance' attributed by the students to participation in political elections and the right to vote. In fact, the lecturers' awareness of the students' understanding of democracy included the following perceptions: *' a party system'*, *'mostly the rule of the country electing a government and a majority in parliament'*, *'their idea is simplistic, it revolves around the idea of elections [. . .] a strict partisan approach to democracy which is painted very much in terms of the two main political parties and to a lesser extent by the third party'*.

The importance of triangulation is also seen when discussing democracy as an ongoing process with an emphasis on *'equality in participation'*. In content analysis most answers refer to other people who should represent the individual citizen, such as, *'fair elections to select highly educated and trained politicians to represent the general public'*, *'decisions are left in the hands of professional people who are right for the job'*, *' in the modern world we live in it is peace of mind to be assured that your country is in the hands of professional people who are able to tackle the situation better than any other person'*. Then, in the quantitative research, specifically in

question 17 focussing on whether the students are willing to participate in active campaigns, only 15.8% of the respondents said they would; others would criticise or just stand and watch. Thirdly, the lecturers' perception of the students' willingness to participate is that they are not prepared to participate and most of the time, even the whole population prefers to have someone else do the job. This is substantiated by the following response: *'I think that the time when the students are united against a policy is when the policy affects them directly. Otherwise they have a very limited appreciation of what is happening around them and would just let things* roll over *them as long as they have money in their pockets.'*

The research design became the plan to follow as the researcher conducted the interviews, analyzed the data, and drew conclusions. The researcher often referred back to the research design, especially when uncertainty as to what the next step should be or how one should best handle a piece of data, arose. In this way the research design kept the researcher focused on the task.

B – Research Procedure

While administering the interviews, the researcher kept to the interview schedule as much as possible. Even when the respondent was answering a question that was listed later in the schedule, this was asked just the same later on because at times the respondent gave more information. While compiling the questions great care was given to the fact that the questions would be worded in such a way that the respondent would be asked one thing at a time. While compiling the questions the researcher was careful to avoid leading questions that unwittingly prompt a certain response from participants.[37] While there are no set guidelines for the sequencing of questions[38] the researcher thought it best to begin with an uncontroversial question, which asks for basic descriptive information and enables the respondent to talk at length.[39] Drever advises moving from more general to more specific questions using prompts (for more detail) and probes (for more clarification) for more information.[40] General questions enable the researcher to discover the respondent's overall understanding of an experience and a general frame of reference, and help to determine the significance the respondent places on a particular event. More focused questions allow the researcher to seek out detail, explore complex meanings, and break a response down into various parts.[41] The interview schedule was closed with what

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[37] Ibid., pp. 69–70.
[38] Patton, 1992, p. 294.
[39] Merriam, 1998, p. 82.
[40] E. Drever, *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research: A Teachers' Guide,* Glasgow, 1995, pp. 21–5.
[41] D. Keats, *Skilled Interviewing,* Victoria, Australia, 1988, p. 43.

Drever calls 'a sweeper question, which invites the respondent to share any additional pertinent information not already covered in the interview'.[42]

The first question asked was *'How do you define democracy?'* Since the interview was administered to lecturers who teach the subject to all first year students or are involved in the correction of examination scripts at the Junior College, all of them found it interesting to participate and answer the interview questions; some lecturers even went as far as to add their personal comments apart from the content that they usually teach to their students. The 'sweeper question' at the end – *'Is there anything you would like to add that has not been addressed by any of my questions or your responses?* – often elicited responses that the researcher had not anticipated. Two respondents stated that they had nothing to add and that they had said everything they had to say in the interview, or that it was a very interesting experience for them that made them think about the content and the pedagogical side of the topic. Another respondent affirmed that she asked some of the questions put forward in the interview to the students to see their reaction because she had never considered the issue from that angle, and she felt she should involve the students more in her lectures.

The actual focus of the questions arose directly from the propositions based on the conceptual framework that the researcher articulated in the research design. The substance of those questions arose from the literature on the continuing debate about the definition of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' explored in the second section of this study where one finds mainly three main theories: one defining democracy as a way of creating and safeguarding the identity of society; the second one argues that with all the movements of citizens in the world, and the multicultural characteristics of societies, one should start defining democracy as creating a society of shared fate; and the third theory whilst acknowledging the first two theories, emphasises the importance of defining democracy and citizenship from a global perspective because of the effects of international affairs on every society in the world. There was a clear link between the underlying assumptions of the research design and the content of the questions being asked of the respondents.

Finally, in developing questions and then conducting the interviews, there were certain ethical considerations that had to be considered. First of all the researcher asked the consent of the lecturers even though they were his colleagues, and informed them that the information was going to be used in this study, and furthermore in the thesis that will follow. For this reason the respondents were given the opportunity to ask any questions they might have prior to the interview and even during the interview. However there were no questions asked, and none of the respondents found any problem in answering the questions. Another ethical consideration related to the

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[42] Drever, 1995, p. 27.

researcher's personal attitude toward the information that was being shared. The researcher found it difficult to maintain an attitude of neutrality, and it was made clear before the start of the interview that the respondents had to consider the interviewer as a researcher and not as their colleague. Hinds also suggests that 'you should record accurately what was said and not what you think should have been said'.[43] Bell contends that qualitative research, 'is a highly subjective technique and therefore there is always the danger of bias'.[44] 'If you hold strong views about some aspect of the topic you need to be particularly careful about the way questions are put'[45] and 'honesty about the purpose of the exercise, integrity in the conduct and in the reporting of the interview, and a promise to allow interviewees to see the transcript and/or draft of the report will all help, though cost and time may make it difficult to circulate drafts.'[46]

The researcher conducted eight interviews during October 2004. The respondents were contacted at work and arrangements were made to meet them in a convenient location relatively free from distractions. Bell affirms that 'people who agree to be interviewed deserve some consideration and so you will need to fit in with their plans, however inconvenient it may be for you'.[47] In most cases the interview was administered in the interviewer's or the interviewee's office, and although most of the interviews were free from distractions there were one or two occasions when students needed to see the lecturer for some urgent matter and the interview had to be stopped even though a notice was stuck to the door asking not to be disturbed. The researcher discovered that some of the questions were more thought provoking for respondents than others. 'Besides the verbal aspects of the interaction', argues Hinds 'non-verbal communication also affects the encounter both in obvious and more subtle ways. Both body language or eye contact are important and you may wish to record or note an interviewee's body language or eye contact when you cover a particularly important question or theme.'[48] During the analysis of the data it was found that there are a range of responses on any given question. However it was noted by the researcher that since the research design and the interview schedule were carefully constructed the study was focused on the issues and the questions were relevant to their lecturing and the interviewees' experience.

The interviewer observed that there were a number of issues relating to validity. Whilst the researcher remained neutral during each interview, it was evident that

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[43] D. Hinds, 'Research Instruments' in Wilkinson, D. (ed.) *The Researcher's Toolkit*, London, 2000, p. 49.

[44] Bell, 1987, p. 91.

[45] Ibid., p. 95.

[46] Ibid., p. 98.

[47] Ibid., pp. 96–7.

[48] Hinds, 2000, p. 48.

each respondent brought his or her own background to the responses given. In fact, each participant brought a unique personality and perspective into the interview. One can mention the following characteristics that made every interview unique; nationality, the academic background and field of specialization, gender differences, outlook to the concepts, work experience, and present life situation. One particular challenge arose when one interviewee kept talking for a longer time, and his answers were not always focused on the question. In this case, the researcher did not interrupt, but when the interviewee had finished, the researcher tried to redirect the conversation to the question and used prompts or probes to get a relevant answer. The researcher took pains to minimize such effects and took account of these instances in drawing conclusions from the data collected during these semi-structured interviews.

Reflections and Conclusions

In conclusion it can be stated that through the interview method the researcher gained a lot, not only on the level of content that is directly related to the study but also through other observations of the human experience. The diversity of perspective and experience is what makes qualitative research challenging, yet rewarding. Through this research method the researcher gained a lot of insights as to the way lecturers defined concepts, other related perceptions of citizenship, and also their perception of the students' understanding of the concept of democracy and other related issues of citizenship. Through the interview method the researcher was able to explore the richness and complexity of how people think, react, and respond to the world around them. Although the researcher interviewed only eight lecturers, the researcher had 47 pages of transcripts i.e. approximately 26,500 words, apart from the notes, which provided the wealth of data that was not only stimulating and enriching but also a great eye-opener on some issues that made the difference between reading theory and actually exploring theory in practice.

Sears argues that 'citizenship in a modern pluralist society is complex and shifting and that educating for citizenship will require much more nuanced and sophisticated approaches than have dominated in the past'.[49] This study shows that citizenship is complex because every citizen in society is becoming more complex, and that qualitative research, particularly the interview approach, is one sophisticated method that helps researchers and education planners get to the core of the issue and not remain on the theoretical level. The interview approach supports researchers in eliciting information in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation; it can also be used to explore interesting areas for further research.

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[49] A. Sears, in *Theory and Research in Education,* Vol. 2, No. 3, Nov.2004, London, p. 367.

Researchers who would like to use this method for data collection are advised to first familiarize themselves with the techniques informed by the research methodology literature, followed by having a 'hands-on' experience of these techniques. One should understand that there are many factors that inevitably differ from one interview to another. To ensure success, researchers should be sensitive to individual situations and allow flexibility in different interviewing circumstances, without compromising the quality and soundness of the research.

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