

Citizenship education in changing contexts: opportunities and threats

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Citizenship is a feeling, status and practice. It is essentially about living together and working to transform society towards greater democracy and social justice. It is a curriculum space shared by educational movements for human rights, political literacy, sustainable development, peace and equalities. Implementing this synthesis of politics, philosophy, sociology, law and international relations is an adventure in curriculum development. I identify three periods of Citizenship in England, analysing opportunities and significant and severe threats now and in the future.

1992 saw Citizenship being implemented as a cross-curricular subject in the new national curriculum. A skeleton framework was provided in the National Curriculum Council's Curriculum Guidance 8 (1990). Its tentative tone proposes studies of duties, responsibilities and rights, in that order. In the context of the ending of the Cold War and an international impetus to democratisation, the guidance names the Universal Declaration and the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the recently ratified UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as possible rather than essential knowledge for citizens.

Curriculum Guidance 8 also situates Britain as a multicultural society and invites study of the origins and effects of racial prejudice within British and other societies. However, schools and local authorities attempting to counter racism at that time experienced hostility from sections of the press and conservative think tanks. What would have been Curriculum Guidance 9 prepared by the formally constituted task force on multicultural education was never published. In other words, citizenship was launched with little recognition that human rights and racial equality are sites of political struggle where tensions in schools and wider communities are to be expected. Curriculum development includes supporting teachers of Citizenship to explore difficult issues. This requires very clear statements of values and principles from school and education service leaders.

The report of a cross-party commission convened by the Speaker of the House of Commons, *Encouraging Citizenship* (1990) was influential in ensuring that Citizenship was offered in the new national curriculum. Citizenship as a new area of study was promoted by, amongst others, the Citizenship Foundation (1990), associated with the Law Society; the University of Leicester's Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education (1991) and the Institute for Citizenship (1992). Citizenship developments were informally coordinated by the Education in Human Rights Network set up in 1987 inspired by the Council of Europe's vision of education for democratic citizenship / human rights education. It was an uphill struggle since cross curricular themes have little purchase and, indeed, the 1995 five-year review of the national curriculum dispensed with them.

The 20-year period that ACT is celebrating had its foundations in the election of a Labour government in 1997. Constitutionally significant changes were introduced, including devolution, a peace settlement in Northern Ireland, the Human Rights Act, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the Every Child Matters policy that could have been associated with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but wasn't. At a global level, the reaction to the destruction of New York's World Trade Centre in September 2001 was to have lasting effects across the world. This was the context in which Citizenship was launched as a statutory element of the national curriculum. The new Citizenship was strongly influenced by the political philosopher, Bernard Crick, who chaired the advisory group on *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*. He brought to bear his previous work on political literacy and found a ready audience for his pledge to transform the national political culture, taken to mean enhanced formal participation in voting by young people.

At the University of Leicester, from 2001, I led the new PGCE course for Citizenship, one of four accredited nationally. Working with Professor Audrey Osler, director of the Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education we welcomed the Crick report and the obligation on schools to offer Citizenship. Nonetheless, we engaged with Crick in a dialogue that he called Friendly Arguments where we challenged what we perceived as a somewhat colonial and national tone to the report. Whilst noting that Crick avoids racism, a substantial barrier to

citizenship, we argued that his framework based on political literacy can include addressing racism and promoting human rights.

We set up a research project in Leicester where we worked with children in primary and secondary schools to explore their sense of citizenship and community. We found that the young people had or were developing: a strong identification with their local neighbourhood and city; recognition of our common humanity and a sense of solidarity with others; and ability to make connections. Education that simply referenced a national, UK, citizenship felt inappropriate for children of any background living in mixed communities with ties of family, friendship and heritage across the world. We developed a theory and practice of education for cosmopolitan citizenship firmly based in understandings of human rights and child rights. We expanded this in a book *Changing Citizenship: democracy and inclusion in education* (2005).

The Labour government response to the 2005 London terrorist bombings included an educational dimension. A highly politicised debate on Britishness and British values had been launched by Gordon Brown in 2006 and the Department for Education and Skills set up a curriculum review *Diversity and Citizenship* chaired by Keith Ajegbo (2007). The review proposed a new strand of Citizenship called Identity and Diversity: Living Together in the UK. It had a five-year implementation period. The review noted that many schools had not developed an equality policy as required by the Race Relations Amendment Act and that Ofsted had failed to hold schools accountable.

The five-year implementation period for Ajegbo was brought to a premature close by the 2010 election resulting in a coalition government wedded to neoliberal reforms including academisation. This policy weakened local authorities and undermined the principle of a national curriculum that includes Citizenship. The discriminatory Prevent agenda for the surveillance particularly of Muslim students was accompanied by a requirement for schools to promote 'fundamental British values' (FBV). Citizenship offers depth of engagement with human rights as the values that underpin the UK's public life, but it was side-lined. By defining the promotion of FBVs as a statutory obligation to ensure Spiritual Moral Social and Cultural development, the Department for Education returned to the discredited cross-curricular approach.

The weakening of the national curriculum, however, provides renewed opportunities for creative curriculum development. Currently, democratic values and human rights are threatened in the UK and in many contexts in Europe and across the world where they have been traduced by authoritarian populist leaders. Teachers of Citizenship will keep struggling to foreground a vision of inclusive societies where diverse citizens are committed to each other and to social justice. We can learn with our politically aware students who campaign for Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion. We can use narratives of successful campaigns and encourage the development of decolonial counternarratives. In short, our role is to keep alive the utopian vision of freedom, justice and peace in the world that is our heritage through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to encourage our students to aspire to be transformative citizens.

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