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Whose citizenship? Developing practical responses to citizenship in the curriculum

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Introduction: the need for new approaches to citizenship education

Many European countries are now developing or rethinking their curricula in relation to issues of citizenship, identity and the challenges of living in diverse societies. For example most countries in Europe specify, either explicitly or implicitly, the promotion of citizenship as a fundamental national aim, and it is often linked to the need to promote a sense of national identity and social cohesion (QCA/NFER, 1999). The renewed interest in citizenship as an educational issue represents a response to the profound social and economic changes taking place across the world. As Torres states, questions of citizenship, democracy and multiculturalism are at the heart of discussions world wide on educational reform, and affect most of the decisions we face in dealing with the challenges of contemporary education. (Torres, 1998, 421)

There is growing recognition from a number of educational theorists and practitioners that a conception of citizenship education is required which explicitly engages with issues of cultural diversity, addresses the problems of racism and social exclusion and promotes open and inclusive forms of identity. (Giroux, 1980, Torres, 1998, Lynch et al, 1992, Rattansi, 1992) However educational and cultural traditions throughout Europe are highly resistant to such models of education, (CERI, OECD, 1995 in Bell, 1995) and there is currently a major and persistent gap between policy statements and educational practice in relation to citizenship education.

This paper is based on the belief that in order for citizenship education to effectively engage with contemporary challenges, there is a need to rethink the development of educational practice and theory and also to work in partnership with other sectors of civil society. Our responses must be based on an understanding of and engagement with the dialectical relationship between policy, theory and practice, and within this context an identification and analysis of the opportunities and capacity of educational actors and the wider community to creatively respond to the potential for educational and social change. Furthermore it is argued that these understandings require Higher Education Institutions to rethink how they relate to the wider education community and to rethink their role in terms of building and supporting a strong civil society.

This paper draws on the Global Citizenship Commission as an example of an integrated and creative approach towards developing and promoting citizenship education which engages with issues of cultural diversity and social justice. The Commission is central to a broader citizenship initiative which represents an example of a highly innovative programme providing opportunities for a range of educational actors and a range of other civil society organisations to collaborate in the development and implementation of citizenship education programmes in ways which seek to link policy and practice.

The Commission was officially launched in February 2000, and is therefore at a very early stage of development. However the commission builds on the work of Tide-DEC

(Teachers in Development Education, Development Education Centre, Birmingham) which has developed a distinctive approach to educational work which may provide important lessons for others who seek to 'share the challenges' and develop new approaches to inclusive citizenship education. This paper is therefore an exploratory piece of work which seeks to engage members of Higher Education in a debate about the ways in which we need to rethink our practices in order to effectively respond to the need to maximise engagement with the social and educational challenges we face within the wider society and to develop integrated approaches to our work.

The challenges

The primary challenge for those who seek to promote inclusive forms of citizenship education is that even when teachers and schools are keen to adopt such approaches, they appear to encounter a range of barriers, which are resistant to one-dimensional solutions. Thus in order to develop a viable and coherent approach to citizenship education it is necessary to engage with the linkages between theory and practice and between micro and macro levels of policy and practice. A brief review of the literature identifies four key themes which relate to the challenges we face.

There is no coherent basis for citizenship education

The provision of citizenship education in schools is said to be highly problematical for the following practical reasons: the contested, controversial and ambiguous nature and purposes of citizenship education, the lack of understanding of what citizenship education means for and to teachers, the lack of guidance, resources and support for teachers and schools (Beck, 1996, Kerr, 1999).

There is a major gap between policy and practice

Studies of citizenship education in Europe highlight the gap between policy and practice, and the problem is often formulated in terms of practice 'lagging behind' policy. Thus, for example, a recent international comparison of citizenship education formulates the challenges facing citizenship education in terms of practitioner needs, and neglects the ways in which contradictory policy developments and overall curriculum requirements may contribute to the recurrent gaps between policy and practice. (Kerr, 1999). In relation to education for European citizenship for example, Davies argues that while there is a rhetoric of Europeanism, there is no real support or time on teacher education courses for citizenship education. (Davies, 1998,165) Furthermore an overview of educational trends within Europe carried out by EURYDICE found that vocational education priorities resulted in the neglect of forms of political education such as citizenship education (Davies, 1998, 157).

There is a need to rethink citizenship education

A series of highly theoretical analyses of citizenship education locate citizenship education within social and political theory and analyse its limitations in terms of its underlying epistemology and conceptions of identity formation and processes of cultural development. They highlight the need to develop new theoretical accounts of citizenship, to rethink educational interventions in relation to questions of race, culture, identity and citizenship and to rethink the development of educational theory. (Giroux, 1980, Torres, 1998, Lynch et al, 1992, Rattansi, 1992) Whilst these analyses identify important ways forward, they are highly abstract and complex, they are removed from practitioners and

practitioners' contexts, and they fail to engage with current policy developments in this field.

There are potential models of citizenship education in alternative contexts

At the other end of the spectrum a series of practical models or blueprints for citizenship education have been developed, based on a range of different starting points, e.g. in relation to values education, political education, multicultural education, global education and European education (Bell, 1995, Davies, 1998, Sears and Hughes, 1996, Bottery, 1995). The proliferation of models of citizenship education indicates clearly that it means different things to different people; furthermore the models that currently exist do not represent fully developed theoretical and pedagogical models. They pay too little attention to underlying concepts such as culture and identity, they are lacking in theoretical rigour, and they fail to take into account the different contexts and sets of constraints which shape educational practice.

Responding to the challenges: new directions for citizenship education

An integrated approach to the challenges of citizenship education is thus required which takes into account three overlapping dimensions of citizenship education: the theory, policy and practice of citizenship education, and which engages with the dynamics of education change processes in different contexts. Halpin identifies the key dimensions of integrated strategies in his paper, which seeks to demonstrate the relevance of utopian realism to thinking analytically, and practically about education policy (Halpin, 1999, 345). Halpin states that utopian realism seeks to combine the capacity to be experimental and innovative with an appreciation of the limits and potentialities for social change. Drawing on Halpin's work, it is argued that an organisation which adopts such an approach would therefore:

- Seek integrated solutions which derive from experimental ideas which connect with practical realities and constraints.
- Explore new possibilities by challenging assumptions, testing the limits of change and focusing on the development of new practices and policies.
- Adopt a problem solving and open ended approach which is characterised by democratic dialogue, collaboration, creativity and risk-taking.

Furthermore in order to maximise the effectiveness of such approaches there is a need to counter fragmentation between educational and social networks that have a role to play in citizenship education, by building common agendas and creating the spaces or contexts for action for a range of people to engage with the issues. For example Tide-DEC was involved in setting up the Development Education Commission, which brought together a range of activists, teachers and academics in the UK and Ireland to collectively review the experiences of development education and human rights education and to debate strategies for strengthening these areas of work. The Commission highlighted three key issues of particular relevance to the role of Universities in supporting the development of new approaches to citizenship education:

1. The need to develop a common framework around which to structure and deliver contemporary social issues education (of which development education and human rights education are a key part).

2. The need to maximise engagement and responsibilities for this agenda within society at large and for a greater understanding of the necessary and complementary roles both of the state and voluntary sectors.
3. The need to ensure greater involvement and ownership of key players in the development of policy and practice. (Final Report of the Development Education Commission, 1999, 5)

The Global Citizenship Commission

Origins and Background: Tide-DEC

The Global Citizenship Commission has been set up by Tide-DEC in partnership with the Centre for International Education and Research, School of Education, Birmingham. The DEC is a small-scale development education non-governmental organisation working with groups of teachers to introduce a global dimension and development perspective to the curriculum. Tide - Teachers in development education - is a network of teachers in Birmingham and the West Midlands which currently has about 500 members. The network was set up by the DEC, and there has been a gradual integration of the DEC and the Tide network, and the DEC views the network as the foundation for its work. This is reflected in the new name for the organisation: Tide-DEC, whose strategic aim is that a diverse range of development education activities increasingly takes place largely independent of the centre. It therefore seeks to enable educational change by acting as a catalyst.

Tide-DEC's primary aim is to get the education system to take on development education as part of its own agenda. It therefore seeks to 'implicate' the education system by engaging a wide range of people in educational debates and projects and inviting them to respond to contemporary educational challenges in partnership with others. Teacher involvement in curriculum development work has been at the core of Tide-DEC's work for many years. An evaluation of the curriculum projects carried out in 1996 shows that teachers highly value their involvement in Tide-DEC because it contributes to their personal and professional development. They highlighted the central importance of the working process adopted by Tide-DEC and identified four key aspects of the process:

- Teachers are actively involved in projects, from initial planning and project design through to the production and dissemination of educational resources;
- DEC respects and values teachers' input and recognises their professionalism;
- DEC works in partnership with teachers who feel joint ownership over the work;

Working processes are open, creative and challenging (McCullum, 1996, 7).

Whose citizenship?

The Global Citizenship Commission is at the core of a wider programme entitled 'Whose Citizenship?' which involves a wide range of partnerships between schools, environment centres and universities in the West Midlands. For example there are a number of curriculum development projects in secondary schools which focus on citizenship (see below), and a range of initiatives which complement and support the work of the Commission such as 'Essential Learning', which was published as part of the work of the Development Education Commission. At any one time over 250 teachers, advisors and

lecturers are involved in a voluntary capacity in collaborative education projects at Tide-DEC, in which teachers often co-ordinate the projects with the support of DEC staff.

Learning from change in Northern Ireland is a project which seeks to raise awareness about the peace process, political change in Northern Ireland and a building of 'new citizenship', and to explore the challenges we all face in terms of the need to build 'new citizenship'. The project will explore ways of introducing ideas about new relationships in these islands and includes a teacher group study visit to Northern Ireland.

West Midlands and the World will focus on the West Midlands and its relationships with the wider world. It aims to build an understanding of the new regional structures that are emerging in the West Midlands and their relations with other emerging structures. A teacher group will develop ideas for engaging young people in thinking about citizenship, and will have a particular role in responding to debates generated by the Commission.

Essential Learning seeks to involve people in a consultation about civil society, world citizenship and the role of education. It debates strategies for change and advocates a dispositions approach to education. Such an approach is based on the premise that there is widespread interest and engagement in an education response to the issues of justice, development and equality, and that there is a need to build on core dispositions and values as a basis for clarifying underlying principles and responding to change. (Regan and Sinclair, 1999, 21)

Whose Citizenship? seeks to build on the work of Tide-DEC, to expand the partnership model of working, to explore new ways of working and to further develop their commitment to addressing the policy dimensions of education. It will do this by providing a framework which engages a wide range of people (with teachers as the core group), in a process which enables them to respond collaboratively and creatively to the challenges of citizenship, and the challenges facing young people today.

Tide-DEC regularly consults with its members and the wider education community in order to identify their concerns and interests, and to anticipate opportunities for future work programmes. In Summer 1999, for example, it carried out a survey of teacher perspectives on development education and the proposed curriculum changes which served to confirm that citizenship was a potential channel for engaging the educational community (DEC, 1999). The survey found that teachers viewed citizenship education as a good opportunity to engage with issues such as cultural diversity, to challenge racism, to explore issues that are of relevance to young people and to 'sharpen the debate about the purpose of education'. Teachers also saw clear links between citizenship education and development education in terms of core concepts such as interdependence, local-global interconnections, human rights and valuing difference.

The Global Citizenship Commission

The Global Citizenship Commission is a West Midlands initiative for thinking creatively about citizenship, which aims to:

- Provide a focus for creativity about global citizenship;
- Explore awareness about identities in the West Midlands;
- Stimulate debate in West Midlands educational institutions about education for global citizenship;

- Facilitate creative work about practical policy frameworks in partnership with schools and other educational institutions;
- Identify research needs and to stimulate research in the field of global citizenship;
- Engage other organisations in the West Midlands (e.g. business, civil society, media, state organisations) in thinking about their contribution to education for global citizenship;
- Publish and disseminate aspects of this work.

The Commission has 21 invited members, including teachers, education advisors, lecturers and people from the business and community sectors such as the Director of West Midlands Business in the Community, and the director of Worcestershire Race Equality Council. The Commission is seen both as a focal point of the 'Whose Citizenship' initiative and a means of exploring and identifying new mechanisms or directions to further the work of Tide-DEC, and in particular to engage with policy issues. For example the Commission is planning to hold a series of consultation meetings in different locations throughout West Midlands, such as Stafford and Wolverhampton, inviting a wide range of people in different contexts (urban/rural, multiracial/predominantly white) to engage in the work of the Commission in different ways according to their particular interests and experiences.

The Lessons and Challenges for Higher Education

The work of Tide-DEC and the Commission model of working demonstrates an approach to educational change and the professional development of teachers which has important lessons for universities, particularly in terms of what Beck refers to as 'creative politics' which designs and forges new contexts, forms and coalitions (Beck, in Halpin, 1999, 345). In a context of increasing financial, institutional and bureaucratic constraints upon Higher Education, it is a difficult but vital task to work creatively in ways that are honest to the agendas and concerns of teachers and also to facilitate wider engagement in these issues. The principles which inform the work of Tide-DEC should also inform Higher Education Institutions who are responding to the challenges of citizenship education.

Tide-DEC has set out to test the limits - both of its own capacity to promote development education and the capacity of teachers, schools and other actors to share that agenda. It has set out to broaden and deepen its partnerships, and to work in new directions. For example the Commission will stimulate research and engage in wider policy debates in relation to citizenship education. The main challenge facing Higher Education revolves around the need to develop integrative strategies which maintain connections between areas of work such as research, policy and the professional development of teachers; to develop closer partnerships within the wider community and, rather than seeking answers on their own, share the challenges of citizenship education in collaborative, creative and experimental ways:

- In terms of theoretical development, new citizenship concepts need to be explored and developed in collaboration with practising teachers.
- Rather than producing comprehensive models or blueprints for citizenship education, there is a need to identify the core principles and concepts of citizenship education which

are widely debated and negotiated not only within the educational community but also in the voluntary and state sectors.

- When education policies serve to undermine inclusive forms of citizenship education, Higher Education institutions need to challenge these policies, not simply by including policy recommendations in research reports, but by joining coalitions and networks which seek to influence national and international policy agendas and developing research programmes in partnership with these networks.

In order to effectively support theoretical development, policy development and improved practice in citizenship education, these various strands of action depend upon Universities having a clearly defined role and strategy for building common agendas and engaging a wider range of civil society actors in these issues in order to create the space, the partnerships and the opportunities to test the limits of change and collaborate in the development of new policies and practices.

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