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Citizenship Education: An Examination of the Relationship between the Crick Report and Policy Implementation in the UK

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The introduction of citizenship as a statutory subject for state secondary schools in 2002 precipitated a debate on the application and implementation of suitable programmes of study. This paper examines the way in which citizenship education in the UK is being implemented within the context of the Citizenship Order and the National Curriculum. I argue that whilst flexibility within the Citizenship Order allows for creative interpretation by some schools it has also allowed for a lack of engagement by others. It is this freedom of interpretation within the policy that has prompted questions about the quality and nature of the citizenship being introduced in schools with a particular focus on the strength and utility of school councils.

Introduction

In 2002 Citizenship became a compulsory aspect of the national curriculum within secondary education in the UK. The Citizenship Order that introduced the subject was largely consistent with the main findings of the Report of the *Advisory Group on Citizenship Education*, chaired by Professor Bernard Crick. This report (commonly referred to as the Crick Report) was commissioned by the new Labour Government in 1997 and reflected a concern with the perceived political apathy and disengagement of young people. The new subject rests on three practical ideals; social and moral responsibility, political literacy and community involvement.

> Firstly, children learning from the very beginning self-confidence and social and moral responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other … Secondly, learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service in the community … Thirdly, pupils learning about how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values-what can be called 'political literacy', seeking for a term that is wider than political knowledge alone (QCA, 1998, p.11-13).

The key or central concern is active citizenship which, it is believed, should be achieved through voluntary community participation and the acquisition of the skills necessary for political and community involvement.

> It is vital that pupils are provided with structural opportunities to explore actively aspects, issues and events through school and community involvement, case studies and critical discussions that are challenging and relevant to their lives. It is difficult to conceive of pupils as active citizens if their experience of learning in citizenship has been predominantly passive (QCA, 1998, p. 37).

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Crick states that the school curricula should seek to promote 'an ideal of active citizenship' that places the emphasis on responsibility for 'trying to change unjust laws, trying to democratise voluntary bodies' and encouraging 'the occasional demo and non-aggressive protest' (2002, p. 498). In this paper I will critically evaluate the Crick Report in terms of diversity and democracy and will assess the way in which policy has been implemented in the UK. The focus of my PhD research will be school councils and so this paper will focus, in particular on this aspect of citizenship within schools.

Policy Implementation

The Citizenship Order, with its emphasis on active citizenship and political literacy, offers an idea of how a citizenship education programme might be transformed, providing the knowledge and understanding of human rights as the principles underpinning democracy and allowing students to develop confident identities able to challenge inequality and effect change (Osler and Starkey, 2000). It represents a significant break from 'traditional' conceptions of citizenship education that help students to accept their subordinate disadvantaged positions within a class divided society rather than encouraging social action and criticism (Cunningham and Lavelette, 2004).

I feel it important to note however that although the Crick Report has made a valuable contribution to the creation of a citizenship education the implementation of this education is very much at the discretion of each individual school. Crick felt it necessary to maintain a degree of freedom within the creation of a citizenship curriculum so as to allow for the consideration of different school and local contexts. This lack of flexibility has ensured that some schools will not endeavour to positively address the contradiction that can occur within a curriculum that seeks 'on the one hand, to foster compliance, obedience, a socialisation into social norms and citizen duties; and on the other, to encourage autonomy, critical thinking and the citizen challenge to social injustice' (Davies, 2001, p.307). Cunningham and Lavelette (2004) carried out research that explored these issues by examining pupils who took part in the demonstrations against the war in Iraq. They discovered that rather than being encouraged to think critically and participate as Crick (2002) suggested in 'non-aggressive protest', pupils were in fact penalised for their disobedient actions by the schools and the Local Education Authorities (LEAs). I feel that a pupil's access to opportunity for a full and all incorporating citizenship programme becomes dependent upon the school of which they are a part. In many cases it is clear that citizenship classes are merely 'shoved into the curriculum' and approach only the very basic moral questions of sex and drugs, not those of democracy and difference (Brooks, 2003, p.420). The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which examines teaching standards, confirmed this negative view in 2003 when it evaluated citizenship teaching. Its inspectors 'were directed to lessons that purported to be citizenship but in which citizenship elements were peripheral or absent' (OFSTED, 2003, p.14-16). The national curriculum has created a programme of study for citizenship that, far from encouraging participatory involvement, merely reinforces the status quo and does little to encourage negotiation, debate and the promotion of active citizenship.

Diversity

Whilst the Crick Report can be commended for recognising the need for the creation of democratic citizens, it does not effectively tackle the issues of multi-culturalism. Archard (2003) suggests that implementing a citizenship education based on the policy outlined within this report will inevitably highlight problems with the values of equality and mutual toleration and of creating common ground between different ethnic and religious identities. It is important that the concept of citizenship recognise diversity within white (Osler, 1999, 2001) and ethnic minority populations and builds upon a vision of multi-culturalism, which is inclusive of all communities. It can be seen that tensions could, therefore, arise between the creation of an active citizenry, sharing a common civic and national identity and the persistence of community diversity (Archard, 2003). According to Olssen (2004) the Parekh Report represents an important and necessary counterweight to the Crick Report in that it challenges the issues of racism and multiculturalism and recognises the importance and relevance of difference. The Parekh Report was the outcome of The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, an independent think tank devoted to the cause of promoting racial justice in Britain. It was intended that the Commission was to analyse the state of multi-ethnic Britain and propose ways of counteracting disadvantage and racial discrimination in order to make Britain a more vibrant multi-ethnic society (Olssen, 2004). The Parekh Report questioned the concept of 'Britishness' and advocated the use of 'British' in a more multi-ethnic way, referring to different sub-groups that make up society, 'black British', 'Asian British' and so on (Davies, 2001, p.301).

I feel that the Crick Report has also failed to acknowledge the questions of social equality and gender making no attempt to challenge or transform the current gender based character of politics. Arnot (2003) argues that policy must be implemented that includes social equality as a goal of citizenship education. The Citizenship Order does not question the location of women in the private sphere and does not address the specificity of female citizenship. She has suggested that policy changes could be made to include; integration of sexuality education into citizenship programmes; recognition of community and family as citizenship spheres and the involvement of women in all economic, political and cultural decision making.

Democracy

Political literacy was outlined as a key criterion of the Crick Report, but although citizenship education can be seen to encourage personal responsibility and interpersonal skills and students learn about morality and justice, learning about political institutions and processes can be seen not to be sufficient (Frazer, 2003). Citizenship programmes of education are allowing young people to develop concepts of citizenship and democracy yet they seem increasingly likely to spurn politics in their everyday lives (MORI, 2002). In terms of media coverage

> of all the issues covered in news, politics was the most consistently singled out for rejection and condemnation….Politics was seen by the large majority as simply irrelevant to their lives (Buckingham, 2000, p.67).

In the 1970s there was a general concern to democratise educational institutions but the factors that seem essential today are the need to encourage loyalty in the face of a diminishing local government, rising crime rates and a declining welfare state that requires the support of active citizens (Davies, 1994). At the centre of young peoples rejection of politics is a sense of political alienation rather than political apathy. The political system has created a difficult environment in which to foster a programme of citizenship education that provides the stimuli necessary to encourage young people to take a more active interest in and take a greater part in politics and political processes (Henn et al, 2005).

In September 2002, after the introduction of compulsory citizenship classes, Newsround (a television news programme specifically for young people and children) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) conducted an online poll under the headline 'Young People "don't care about voting"'. The Newsround website (BBCi, 2002a and 2002b) declared that only 22 per cent of the 400 that took part wanted to learn about voting; just 28 per cent cared about local and national politics and only 27 per cent said that they would care if the right to vote was taken away.

It is fair to suggest that this disinterest is not as a result of the issues discussed within the political arena and thus citizenship classes but as a result of a disillusionment with party politics (Fahmy, 2003) and a deep scepticism in politicians (White et al, 2000). Edwards et al (2001:6) stated that 'young people are not apathetic or disengaged from the issues that politicians and decision-makers seek to address…[They] are not switched off from the issues that form the foundations of political decision-making but they are less enamoured with the way we 'do' politics'. The Newsround and DfES poll did indicate that young people are anxious to maintain the 'right to feel safe' and the 'right to be treated equally whether you're male or female'. This interest in law and order can be seen as a sign of a healthy democracy with young people being actively concerned about the issues central to contemporary politics (Russell, 2004).

Results of quantitative research would seem to support this claim. Evidence would suggest that young people are concerned about matters that are political in nature and that they do take part in political activities. Roker et al (1999) revealed high levels of volunteering, campaigning and other social action activities, although the young people carrying them out did not necessarily consider these activities political. Recent qualitative studies show that young people are more likely to engage in 'cause orientated' politics (Cunningham and Lavelette, 2004) and 'micro-politics' (Pattie et al, 2003) than formal party politics. I feel that it is important to question to what extent citizenship classes and programmes are developing and supporting active political participation? Prior to the introduction of citizenship education in schools in 2002 the most recent initiative was the Politics Association and the Hansard Society's Programme for Political Education, between 1974 and 1978. The main aim of this programme was to enhance 'political literacy', the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to make young people more informed about politics; ensure that they are able to participate in public life and groups of all kinds, both occupational and voluntary and teach them to recognise and tolerate diversity. The programme argued that:

> a person who has a fair knowledge of what are the issues of contemporary politics, is equipped to be of some influence whether in a school, factory, voluntary body or party, and can understand and respect , while not sharing, the values of others, can reasonably be called 'politically literate' (Crick and Porter, 1978, p.7).

In order to achieve these aims, young people must be equipped with the knowledge to effectively understand who holds power, where the money comes from, how institutions such as local government work; how to be actively involved in using this knowledge to understand the nature of political issues; how to estimate the most effective way of resolving the political issues and how to comprehend the viewpoints of other people and their justifications for their actions. Although this programme has been criticised by many, including David Blunkett (Pollard, 2004, p.262), for being too narrow or conservative an emphasis, being concerned primarily with political literacy and not more broadly with how young people could be citizens, it represents a more in-depth approach to overcoming political apathy and could therefore be a key framework on which further themes and ideas could be built and developed.

School Councils-A Way Forward?

School councils could represent a way of adopting political literacy whilst encouraging pupils, regardless of diversity and difference, to campaign and work together. School councils UK describe school councils as 'democratically elected groups of students who represent their peers and enable pupils to become partners in their own education, making a positive contribution to the school environment and ethos' (www.schoolcouncils.org). The way in which pupils are elected and the number of representatives varies depending on many factors including the size of the school and the willingness of the pupils to participate. School councils can make a positive contribution to every aspect of the school community. It is thought that they can improve academic performance, reduce bullying and vandalism, reduce school exclusions and improve teacher-pupil relations. School councils could, therefore, represent an ideal way of developing a form of citizenship that encourages primarily, political literacy but also social and moral responsibility and community involvement. Halstead and Taylor (2000) suggested that establishing a school council may involve a number of aims, helping young people to understand democratic procedures and encouraging the motivation to engage with the negotiation of rights and responsibilities of citizenship in everyday life, recognising the duty to respect children's rights, offering young people the opportunity for service (learning to care for others) and promoting better behaviour by giving young people more responsibility and opportunities to express viewpoints. It can be argued that 'schools that model democratic values and practices by encouraging students to discuss issues in the classroom and take an active role in the life of the school are effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement' (Kerr et al, 2001, p.5). An examination of school councils as part of a local initiative between schools and an HE institution in a county in the South East of England indicates varying degrees of commitment to programmes of study with support being very much dependent on the ethos of the school. Some schools have a strong school council that meets weekly and is given curriculum time to do so. They are involved in community programmes and projects and are keen to challenge the stereotypical perceptions held by both young people and adults

in an attempt to create a more participatory and cohesive environment within the school and wider society. Other schools, however, do not facilitate or encourage this degree of commitment and dedication to the creation of an active school council. Meetings are held infrequently and there are no apparent links to the community. The nature of the issues and projects discussed within school council meetings also vary, from the school orientated, fixing or decorating toilets, to the more active community based, painting a mural in the town centre designed to raise awareness of the potential of young people to participate and become involved in their community. These issues are all important but indicate that some schools implement a policy which puts far greater emphasis on what a school council could and should achieve in terms of both school and community cohesion. Some schools, it could be argued, have a school council as a way of superficially meeting the criteria of the Crick Report rather than as a means of achieving the active citizenship considered so essential for the young people involved. These preliminary observations would seem to support the findings in research carried out by Rowe (1996) who suggested that school councils can promote citizenship learning and social confidence and help to improve the atmosphere of the school but they can also reflect the inevitable hierarchy of the institution being afforded a low status and thus fostering cynicism and mistrust among the young people.

Conclusions

In this paper I have demonstrated that curricula designed around political projects, either British or European, despite their emphasis on diversity, have problems addressing the entrenched pluralism of contemporary societies. The difficulty of democracy and democratic participation, that Crick is so acutely aware of, becomes transformed into a set of state policy objectives disconnected from the cultures of young people. Young people are perceived as problems that must be 'managed', 'moulded' and 'reformed' rather than as active citizens capable of thinking and making decisions about issues that concern them (Gewirtz, 2000). I believe this is partly why Crick wanted to keep implementation as a 'light touch'. It allows more creative forms of implementation to emerge. However, many schools view even the 'light touch' as onerous and there is too much emphasis on teaching institutional politics rather than an emphasis on democratic political process and experience. Young people remain disillusioned and sceptical towards politicians and official political debate, preferring to be involved in 'cause orientated' issues such as the war in Iraq and whilst some schools have succeeded in creating a participatory environment encouraging involvement in decision-making processes they do not necessarily facilitate the expansion of this sense of inclusion into the local community. The level of commitment to active pupil involvement can be seen to be dependent on the Local Education Authority and the ethos of the individual school. It can also be seen to be linked with the support and encouragement given to school councils. I have indicated that an active school council would be an ideal way for pupils to become involved in a body that shares many of the same processes as a political party, for example, members are elected and represent the rest of the student body. A preliminary examination of the school councils in one county of the South East has, however, indicated that school councils are under-utilised and are not as active as they should or could be, often being assigned a low status within the hierarchy of the school. The Crick Report was confused and contradictory and so, therefore, is the implementation. There has to be a shift away from concentrating on content and

outcomes to an advanced understanding of process and political experience. This would challenge the current models of citizenship education upon which policy implementation is based and allow for the discussion of more inclusive and cohesive models.

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