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The Role of Formal Schooling in building Active Citizenship

Abstract

This papers sets a new context for the consideration of formally taught citizenship education, critically examines the experience of introducing citizenship into the national curriculum in the UK, reviews the research results from this, and points to lessons about citizenship education that may be transferable across the enlarged EU.

Key Words

citizenship education, participation, social exclusion, citizenship curriculum, development, citizenship policy

As recently as a few months ago, it would have been possible to provide a very upbeat and optimistic critique of the context for education for building active citizenship and the contribution of formal schooling in realising a positive way forward. The new EU Constitution had been signed in Rome and was to provide the foundation for the identity of the new enlarged and ever expanding European Union. The Open Method of decision making appeared to be protecting the autonomy of Member States, and the opportunities in the new enlarged Europe were plain to see. As a White, Anglo Saxon Protestant British male, I could have been forgiven for sitting in Trafalgar Square, in London, and looking forward to a clear vision of the future. This vision of the future would have included a vigorous support for active participative democracy, underpinned by sound citizenship education and based on Lifelong Learning principles. I would, too, have looked out on a multicultural society and celebrated the diversity of its citizens.

Two events have radically questioned that position. The result of the referenda in France and in the Netherlands means that the European Constitution is effectively dead. This “No” vote has been explained as the expression of disillusionment with the policies of Europe and a desire to defend traditional national lifestyles, with

corresponding national autonomy. This vitally significant event has had many ramifications. The result is that the future shape and direction of the EU is no longer certain. We are being offered choices between social protection models and economic, so called “Anglo-Saxon”, models. We no longer know what being a European citizen actually means. Not surprisingly, I am told by colleagues working in Brussels that the Commission “is very quiet at the moment”. Over the last year, I have been working on a project to develop curricula for the integration for Third Country Nationals. This we found could be based on Human Rights values reflected in the Constitution. We then found ourselves in a position where we were in a dilemma over our constitutional position and in difficulties over Human Rights let alone responsibilities, as these issues were now being seen more and more as a menu for national choice. The second event that has changed the context perspective has been the suicide bombings and attempted bombings in London. A major significance in any discussion of citizenship is that the bombers themselves were largely “home grown”. There were British citizens, who had bombed London. The results have been new proposals for legislation related to detention without charge, deportation powers and new crimes related to incitement based on religious belief.

It is glib to promote active citizenship as if it were an ideal of positive universal virtue and that there is a consensus about its meaning. It is, however, realistic to argue that the development of citizenship education has been prompted by the political and social problems and concerns of the day. “The suggestion that notions of citizenship should provide a panacea for social ills is not new to British politics. Its importance on today’s political agenda, however, suggests that previous initiatives have borne little fruit”, (Greenwood and Robins, 2002,). While this is right, the current context now gives an opportunity for reappraising concepts and planning new developments.

An illustration of this process comes from a previous episode of social unrest. In 2001, there was violent unrest in the north of the UK, in the towns of Oldham Bradford and Burnley. This was in areas of high concentrations of Black and Minority Ethnic populations, particularly from the Indian sub-continent. The resulting Denham Report on these incidents made specific observations on citizenship. “Issues of identity and values…raise questions which go to the very heart of what we mean when we talk about concepts of citizenship, community and civil society…A uniting identity can have a powerful effect in shaping attitudes and behaviour which are conducive to community cohesion….We recognise the importance of constructive

debate about citizenship, civic identity, shared values, rights and responsibilities. It is only through having such a debate that we will have the basis for bringing together people of different races, cultures, and religions in a cohesive society and within cohesive communities…It will sometimes necessary to confront cultural practices that conflict with …basic values…..Similarly, it means ensuring that every individual has the wherewithal, such as the ability to speak English, to enable them to engage as active citizens in economic, social and political life….Citizenship means finding a common place for cultures and beliefs, consistent with our core values", (Community Cohesion Unit, 2004).

In response to the terrorist attacks on 11th July 2005, a letter was sent to all members of parliament from the Cohesion and Faiths Unit in the Home Office. "The importance of Community Cohesion to a strong and healthy society was recognised following the 2001 disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford. Reports into the disorder identified a common theme of a lack of interaction between individuals of different cultural religious and racial backgrounds in society. Community Cohesion was seen as crucial to promoting a greater knowledge, respect and contact between various cultures, and to establish a greater sense of citizenship. This theme (of social cohesion) encourages ideas of citizenship, founded on an understanding of the responsibilities that citizenship entails, such as tackling racism sexism and ageism and embracing diversity and cultural difference", (Community and Race: Home Office, 2005).

Might this idea of a "common place", identified in the Denham Report, be developed through formal schooling and a more dynamic curriculum of citizenship education in schools, colleges and institutions of adult learning, and might the key drivers for this be found in the current contextual shifts in perspectives? We do not start from a blank sheet of paper.

The Council of Europe's substantive report, "All-European Study on Education for Democratic Citizenship Policies", provides an overview of the state of the art in citizenship education. Cesar Birzea reports on the formal curriculum, "Regional studies include specific references to the location of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) in the formal curriculum. This particular interest in EDC in the formal curriculum is due to the following reasons

- National curriculum is the main instrument for implementing EDC policies

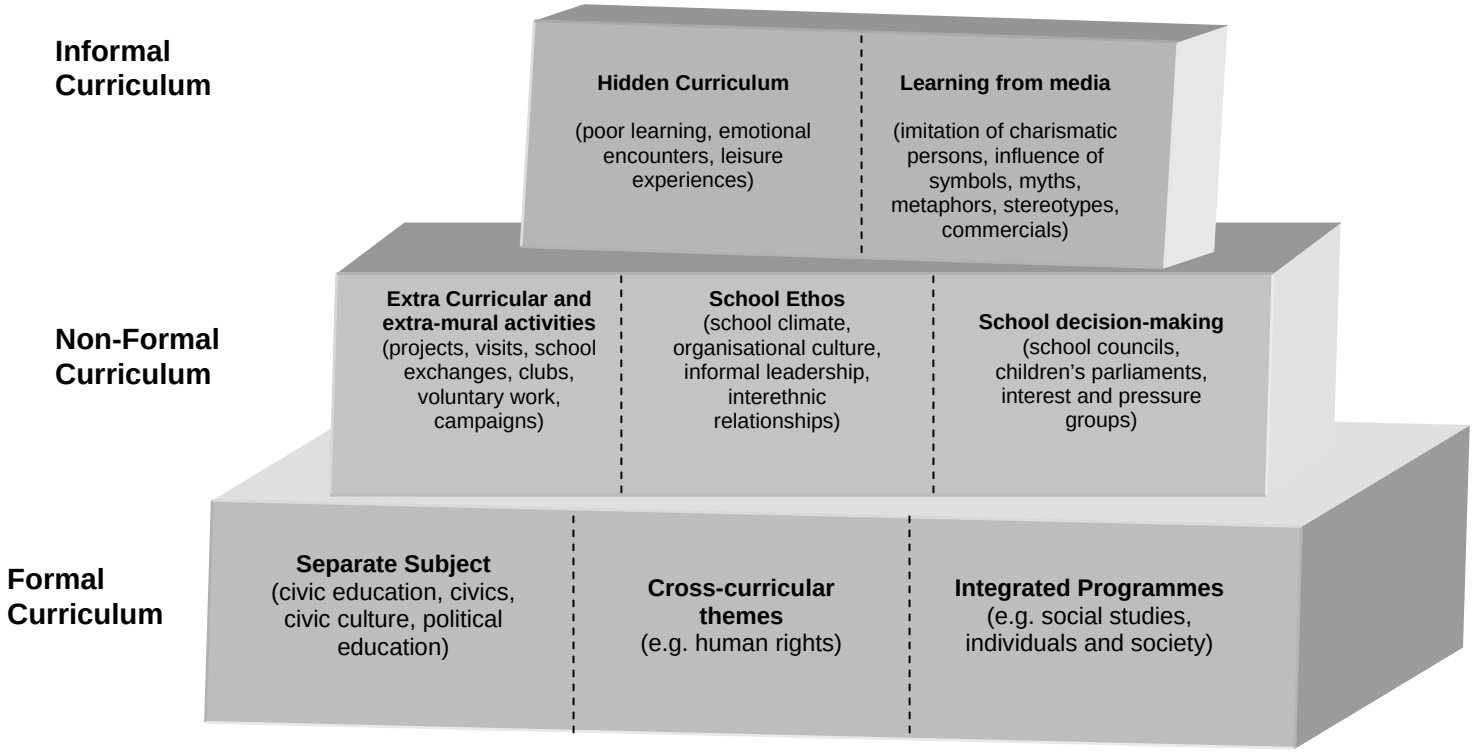
- Formal curriculum provides basic knowledge on democracy and allows the systematic acquisition of civil and social competencies
- Formal curriculum represents the visible side of learning situations in school contexts; it is the centre of attention for decision makers, teachers and parents, as the object of school assessments and it leads to diplomas and recognised certificates.

We noticed several interesting regional trends

- EDC appears as a separate subject especially in South-Eastern, Central and Eastern European regions, where the political changes of the 1990s led to greater curriculum support for EDC in the form of a specific and mandatory subject
- An integrated approach prevails in the Western and Northern European reports; in most cases EDC is a non-statutory part of the curriculum
- In Southern Europe the mixed model prevails; the cross curricular and integrated approaches coexist with EDC as a special subject
- In all regions the integrated approach is more prevalent in primary education; EDC as a separate subject is more frequent in secondary education.

Gaps persist between the central position of EDC in educational policies and effective formal curriculum provisions. It is obvious that owing to increased pressure on the formal curriculum as the main provider of learning situations, the manoeuvring space for EDC is quite limited; the solution envisaged in most European countries is increasingly to involve non formal and informal learning as alternative providers of EDC".

This Report provides a useful diagram of school provision across Europe.



Citizenship Education in the School Context (Birzea Report)

In the United Kingdom, citizenship is a very new introduction into the national curriculum. Citizenship has only been a statutory part of the secondary school curriculum since September 2002. In primary schools it was introduced earlier, in 2000, as part of the non-statutory framework of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). A national curriculum itself is a relative recent development, only instituted in 1988. The successful introduction of citizenship education into the national curriculum was steered by a committee chaired by Bernard Crick, Chief Advisor on Citizenship to the Department of Education (DfEE). In his own idiosyncratic style he offers us a reason for this. "It was a long time a-coming. England was the last country in Europe not to have citizenship as a subject in a national curriculum, and this not because a compulsory national curriculum was also a long time a-coming. Lord Baker told my committee that he had wanted it as part of the national curriculum of 1988 but She (Thatcher) had said "no"-which must at least have saved a lot of unpleasant reasoning. It was so long a-coming because, of course, we thought we did not need it. We were, after all, the Mother of Parliaments (more correctly, historically the survivor of the great purge of medieval parliaments in the sixteenth century). We had, after all, won the war (with some help, admittedly from the USA, the USSR and Hitler's folly). And we were moreover unfamiliar with, or hierarchically nervous about, the very concept of 'citizen' as the French, the Dutch,

the Scandinavians, the North Americans and the post-war West Germans understood it……..Of course, the addition of one new school subject in a heavily crowded and over monitored curriculum is not ever going to turn us into a citizen culture", (Crick, 2002). What needs noting is that this is a bland reflection on what was a fiercely hostile policy drive from the Thatcher government. The first stirrings of renewed interest in citizenship in the 1970s were deliberately dropped from a hard line right wing government ruthlessly pursuing policies of individualism. Any talk of citizenship in terms of community development was actively discouraged. Society was "abolished" as a concept and so individual success and wealth generation had to become paramount. Competitiveness was the key driver and Thatcher's fear of the success of a well trained labour force in West Germany and her innate xenophobic fears laced in Eurosceptism, resulted in policies devoted to neo-vocational training for young people and the unemployed in the interests of creating a more competitive labour force in the UK, and one that would out perform the German labour force. We quickly forget that these training programmes specifically prohibited any political content. The training schemes were administered by the government's "quango", the Manpower Services Commission that would withdraw funding and close training provision if political discussion was included in teaching and learning provision. Later in the Thatcher years, citizenship was mentioned only in terms of the "good citizen", who individually behaved morally and helped others. The citizen had effectively become depoliticised.

The Crick Committee produced its final report, "Education for Citizenship and teaching of Democracy in Schools", in September 1998. The key recommendations of this report provide the basis for the citizenship education curriculum in the UK nation curriculum. These recommendations rest on three strands- moral and social responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. These now are reflected in the knowledge, understanding and skills set out in the national curriculum Orders for citizenship, "They are also central to schemes of work and teachers' guidance developed by the (UK) Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. It might be helpful to recall how these are defined- 'moral responsibility is children learning, from the very beginning, self-confidence and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, towards those in authority and towards each other'…..The second strand is 'learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement….Political literacy is 'pupils learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values'. It is important to note the emphasis on values. It is one

of the elements that marks it off from other subjects and makes it more of a subject in terms of daily life and relationships both within the school and on a wider front", (Newton, 2002).

Currently the UK government is pushing a raft of social policies related to what might be heralded as social reform by its supporters, but perhaps is little more than a loose collection of knee-jerk policy responses to perceived social problems. This paper has been arguing that the political context has direct repercussions in the development of citizenship education and how we understand it, but in the UK we have more a "portfolio of initiatives" that are addressing social issues that are defined in a very loose way. The consequence is that they overlap and indeed at times are contradictory. The result on the ground is that "initiative fatigue" sets in with the introduction of yet another initiative with its own set of targets, timeframes, deliverables and funding mechanisms. These initiatives tend not to be perceived to be meeting real need, but to be offering politically driven opportunity for short term development at best, and, at worst, a way of maintaining financially strapped services responding to real need. Citizenship education has been seen as yet one more of these initiatives. Indeed in 2004 Stephen Twigg, Minister for Schools, affirmed the importance of citizenship education and the government's commitment to it in association with other government agendas such as

- Inclusion
- Personalised learning and offering choice
- Putting children first
- Active communities
- Community cohesion
- Robust and enduring democracy

Few of us would argue that this agenda is not desirable and so deserving of general support, but are not these agendas duplicating a response to social issues that need a more specific definition than we have reached through these truisms? For those who are interested in citizenship education the Twigg policy agenda is the curriculum of citizenship. Citizenship is no just one more "add-on bullet point" to be presented in the interests of political rhetoric.

Citizenship Education has one new major policy and practical advantage, or at least potential advantage in that it has been mainstreamed into statutory provision. It is fair to say that citizenship education, as it now is in the UK, is in its “early days”, but it would also be fair to ask, how is the initiative progressing. In 2004, the UK Inspectorate, Ofsted, identified emerging issues. “Scott Harrison HMI, gave evidence of emerging good practice in some schools, but also suggested a number of reasons why others have been slow to develop strong programmes. These included

- The ambition of National Curriculum citizenship was not recognised by school leadership and some subject leaders were given insufficient status
- There is a genuine confusion between National Curriculum citizenship and citizenship in a more general sense; schools ‘thought they were doing it already’
- The National Curriculum, particularly the significance of the three strands, was misunderstood, assuming that a programme could be identified though the existing curriculum without adding anything extra
- ‘Curricula inertia’ and vested interests made it difficult to introduce a new subject in the curriculum
- Citizenship was ‘planted’ within Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) without recognising the individuality of each
- The school had other priorities.

As a result

- The time available is very limited
- Topics are covered in one lesson in the whole key stage
- Some aspects are not addressed at all
- There is little depth to work and little record of what has been done

And in these circumstances

- Some teaching is tokenistic
- Some teachers are unhappy to address citizenship issues and are inexpert
- Expectations are sometimes very low, and this is reflected in low standards
- Work is not properly assessed and there is no progression.

Scott concluded that

- This is not just another initiative
- The great weight of support for subject development needs to be turned into action in schools
- Senior managers' full support is needed for citizenship to develop
- Hard decisions need to be made on the curriculum, the timetable and staffing",

(Ofsted Subject Conference Report: Citizenship, 2004).

These concerns were put in to sharper focus earlier this year. The Ofsted Inspectorate went on record as saying "evidence shows citizenship is the worst taught subject at secondary level". David Bell, Chief Inspector of Schools commented that, "it is disappointing that in the two years since citizenship education became a statutory requirement in schools 25% of classes were still unsatisfactory".

Ofsted commissioned a poll of teachers and pupils aged 14-16, who are currently studying citizenship as part of the National Curriculum. One in four could identify the correct balance of power in the House of Commons, yet 45% said they did not think it was important to know more about what the political parties stand for. More than one in ten pupils interviewed did not know what citizenship classes are. When asked what was most memorable about these classes, a further 17% said there was nothing memorable about them, whilst 26% simply do not know. Bell said, "Britain's diversity has the potential to be one of its greatest strengths, but we should also cherish what we hold in common. Citizenship education has an important role to play in developing respect for diverse identities while identifying shared goals and interests". 64% of pupils and 85% of teachers identified as "British", while only 3% of pupils identified as "English". Only 2% of pupils and 3% of teachers identified as European. Overall 70% of pupils and teachers thought pupils should learn about Britain's cultural diversity, with even higher support from young teachers. 40% of pupils in the north were opposed. Bell said, "Faith should not be blind. I worry that many young people are being educated in faith, with little appreciation of their wider responsibilities and obligations to British society…..We must not allow recognition of diversity to become apathy in the face of any challenge to our coherence as a nation. We must be intolerant of intolerance…… One of the most ambitious aspects of citizenship

education requires pupils to understand and respect the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom. At the heart of this is national identity" (Ofsted News, 2005).

Underneath this last statement from Ofsted lies the unresolved dilemma of faith schools. The formal schooling structure in the UK has grown from a close relationship with Christian Churches. While some faith schools have remained independent of the state, others are part of state education and teach the national curriculum, for which they are in receipt of public funds. Faced with promoting multicultural policies and emphasising the importance of diversity, the Blair government has been concerned to promote a policy of supporting faith schools and extending this to faiths other than Christianity. Ekklesia, a theological think-tank, reports that the terrorist events in July have reawakened this debate. "The argument has been complicated in recent weeks by a growing debate about the ways in which the mainstreaming of minority groups can help to eliminate extremist ideas which could be a breeding ground for violence". Gaye Nicolson, Head of an Islamic girls school, suggested that Islamic Studies can help promote integration, "The London bombers might not have been so susceptible to a distortion of the Qur'an if they had attended a Muslim School. However, those against faith-based education say there is a proper distinction between teaching about religion and other life stances and forming people for religious commitment. The latter is the business of private institutions not public education", (Ekklesia, 2005).

These are, of course "snap shot" research results and comments. On the face of it they provide a negative picture of the new school initiatives, but this may well be that the current need for citizenship education is far more profound and complex than was generally thought by politicians, policy makers and educationalists. If this is so, we might well have expected such negative results from a very new provision. It will take a longer time before we know how well citizenship has been established in formal schooling and even longer before we can assess its impacts on individuals, schools and colleges and society as a whole. The government, through the DfES (Department for Education and Skills), has commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to undertake a longitudinal study on a section of the first pupils involved in the compulsory citizenship education curriculum. The key findings of the third annual report are now available. "The survey was administered in the academic year 2003-4. The findings are provisional at this stage but provide potentially new insights about student experiences of, and attitudes to, citizenship

education and wider citizenship issues and the factors that that influence those experiences and attitudes. Though they relate to the context of England, they have implications for wherever citizenship is being developed, implemented and researched across the world", (Kerr 2005, p 74).

This Citizenship Longitudinal Study survey is tracking over 18,000 young people who entered secondary schools in September 2002 and so were the first students to have a continuous statutory entitlement to citizenship education in England. The latest report suggests there is a growing consensus emerging that provides answers to questions about definition, approaches and wider dimensions of citizenship. "This consensus includes

- Definition- a growing conceptualisation of citizenship in schools as comprising three interrelated aspects-the three 'Cs': Citizenship in the curriculum; Active Citizenship in the school culture; and Active Citizenship in through links with the wider community
- Approaches- acceptance that provision is uneven, patchy and evolving
- Factors- the identification of and agreement about key school level and learning context level factors that work together to support, promote and champion citizenship education
- Challenges-recognition of key issues and challenges that need to be tackled in order for citizenship education provision to become more visible, coherent and effective

Students in the Survey were presented with different definitions of citizenship and prioritised six items

- Belonging to your local community
- People's responsibility and obeying the law
- Making sure everyone is treated fairly
- Working together to make things better
- People's rights (e.g. health, education, jobs, housing)
- Being a good citizen

"Interestingly, 'voting, politics and government' was the least selected definition across the range", (Kerr, 2005).

The disillusionment with politics of swaths of the population, especially young people, has been thought to be the key driver for the need for formal citizenship education. This needs to be countered by the evidence of the growth of single issue politics. It may well be that institutional ideologies are a phenomenon of our past, but there is plenty of evidence of interest, commitment and action to support growing interest in single issues, from the environment to globalisation. To paint a picture of disaffection and non-participation in citizenship has to be contested.

"The findings (from the Longitudinal Survey) reveal some potential new insights into students' development of citizenship dimensions across different age ranges and educational stages. They suggest students' development of citizenship dimensions is neither even nor consistent. Indeed there may be a considerable dip in this development in the later years of adolescence among both male and female students…..Students' development is also influenced by their personal family and community characteristics, among other factors. For example, the finding show a clear relationship between home literacy resources and feelings of empowerment, levels of trust, engagement, community attachment and commitment to volunteering and participation……..Students' sense of belonging and attachment to the different communities in their lives change over time. It is noticeable in the survey that students' sense of belonging to the school community increases with age in comparison with their attachment to other communities…. The findings suggest that schools do and can have a strong influence on students' development of citizenship dimensions", (Kerr, 2005).

This gives a few insights into the way formal schooling relates to the building of active citizenship, particularly in the UK. How does this relate to Lifelong Learning? In one sense, formal education of whatever variety faces the same issues. The recent introduction of citizenship curricula for Third Country Nationals is one aspect of this. The first of the new citizenship ceremonies in the UK took place in February 2004, before the introduction of "Britishness" tests that are aimed at helping determine the eligibility of a person from abroad to receive formal citizen status. "Becoming a British citizen is something to be proud of……We want to help people becoming citizens to play a full part in our society and encouraged those settled here to apply for citizenship", (Hughes, 2004). This includes language skills and knowledge of British "systems". "Anyone applying for naturalisation from 1st January 2004 will take part in a citizenship ceremony in their home area…….applicants will now usually need to

understand sufficient English to enable them at least to get an unskilled job…..Applicants will not be able to take part in the citizenship ceremonies until they have demonstrated measurable progress in language and an understanding of Britain's laws, rights and duties", (BBC News, 2004).

While I have not been to one of such ceremonies, I have seen film reports. A short while ago in the Netherlands I was visiting a Dutch language teaching initiative. This may justifiably be seen as an example of good Lifelong Learning practice. A large group some 50 asylum seekers from different countries of origin were working with local Dutch speaking volunteers from the local community on conversational Dutch (and with me on conversational English!). This was a very practical response to the issues raised by my own research on the learning needs of refugees and asylum seekers, namely "teach us enough of your language so we can get to know the people here, and worry less about our culture, as we are more than capable of doing that for ourselves". But suddenly the session was finished. Everyone stood up, the Dutch flag was unfurled and everyone sang the Dutch national anthem. The informal learning atmosphere froze and was transformed, not least by the inappropriate text of the national anthem. I have to ask, why this was so uncomfortable. It was the imposition of an attitude towards citizenship that sees citizenship education in terms of social control rather than the opportunity to change and transform. In starker terms, this control is based on a whole series of 'social mores' and values that are assumed and not questioned. The very real danger is that citizenship becomes a tool for social and cultural repression and not an activity that supports creativity and liberation.

This is the danger, but it is true that formal schooling has the potential to develop and deliver exciting innovative curricula. I was never taught about the British Constitution and how to vote. I was never taught about how to buy a house and what a mortgage is. I was never taught how to drive a car or even what happens in childbirth. There were, on the face of it, huge gaps in my citizenship education. I spent hours and hours of my life as a young person failing to master mathematics, but I still have a very accurate knowledge of how a Bunsen Burner works. I still have problems, or at least a hesitation, over whether I am English or British when I have to complete forms. I don't think I have ever been asked if I am European, but now no one can answer this question. So, I ask what I would need to support me being an active citizen.

The answer to this is quite complex. I do not want to be judged as a “bad” citizen, but I have never been comfortable being English or British. There is much debate at the moment about what makes up “Britishness”, but they are not qualities that I find wholly desirable. Nations may be described as entities that are “there”, but they are not fixed universals, as a quick glance at history will show. The confusion between the nation state and citizenship is as dangerous as it is problematic. To base citizenship on nationality is to do disservice to the concept of citizenship. I believe citizenship is tied in with identity and that it is perfectly possible, indeed desirable, to have a multiplicity of identities. “It is encouraging that the violation of collective rights in relation to identity, which bring civil rights into confrontation with cultural rights in relation to identity and the related issue of citizenship have met with greater attention by the public and the media….Supporting unity or collective identities is a basic part of new democratic philosophy, and this is connected with the more complex understanding of citizenship in which there is enough space for multiple identities and, ultimately, global citizenship….This need to provide a broader definition of citizenship is necessary so as to maintain a balance in society and democratically recognise communities as well as protect the basic unit of democracy, the individual”, (Rizman, 2000).

My own citizenship evolves from my understanding of identity, in that it is concerned with my perception of the world and my actions in relating to my reality. This must then result in more than the active citizenship that is defined in terms of participation. It is far more than what is currently being proclaimed on the Active Citizenship Centre’s web site that “ in simple terms active citizenship is about taking part……Citizenship is more than putting a cross in elections….Individuals are capable of creating a better society through a direct and positive contribution to communities”. This is voluntarism by another name. It results in sporadic local initiatives that seem close to the USA’s concept of community education. Active citizenship is not becoming the same sort of citizen as everyone else, by joining “us”, becoming “one of us”.

This kind of activity is something akin to adult education outreach of twenty years ago, where we invited and cajoled adults to enrol in classes, which taught a curriculum that we had decided. We need to be able to be aware of and to understand our identities and our perceptions of the real world. We need, too, to be able to make a critically aware relationship with this world in terms of actions. We need to know how to act and when to act and above all whether to act. The responsibilities rest in the fact that change will result from our actions, and we may be sure that we shall make some mistakes. In these issues there is a potential

innovative curriculum for formal schooling. In developing this work, it might be most positive to learn “with” rather than “about” others with many different identities.

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