Chapter 8

Schools for citizens

By the year 2000 we should be number one in the world in the percentage of eighteen year olds that are politically and socially involved. Far more important than our mathematics and our science scores is the involvement of the next generation in maintaining our democracy and helping those within it that need assistance--the young, the ill, the old, the retarded, the illiterate, the hungry and the homeless. Schools that cannot turn out politically active and socially helpful citizens should be identified, and their rates of failure announced in the newspapers.

(David Berliner, 1993)

Citizenship implies freedom – to work, to eat, to dress, to wear shoes, to sleep in a house, to support onself and one's family, to love, to be angry, to cry, to protest... Citizenship is not obtained by chance: it is a construction that, never finished, demands we fight for it.

(Paulo Freire 1998)

Education for Citizenship, a recent addition to the curriculum in Britain, poses a creative challenge for school improvement. The intersection of citizenship with pedagogy, curriculum, school ethos, the wider community, and school development processes, including possible conflicts of values, makes it difficult to regard it as simply a discrete addition to the curriculum. It has the potential, if taken seriously, to challenge current trends in school development - if not a Trojan horse, it is at least a Trojan mouse.

Teachers elsewhere are invariably surprised, not by its introduction but that it was ever missing. In Germany for example, *politische Bildung* (political education) has been an accepted part of the secondary school curriculum for decades. No one appears to doubt its importance, as a contribution to ensuring that no future generation will fall under the influence of fascism. Similar democratic motives recur in other parts of Europe, with their various histories.

While most countries have a version of education for citizenship, under a variety of titles, its political orientation can vary enormously.

> The movement for democracy in China and the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square were an inspiring moment. In particular, in the confrontation with the army, the picture of the student in front of the tanks throws up a vital problem relating to both democracy and citizenship: in essence, there are two models of citizen - the twenty year olds in the tank and the twenty year olds in front of the tank. (Henry Maitles 2001:23)

In chapter 6, I used a 'three orientations' model of the curriculum:

- academic / vocational – based on the intention of adapting the young to a pre-existing social structure

- liberal-progressive – based on the premise that promoting empathy and individual sensibility would lead naturally to a better world

- socially-critical – enabling young people to question and challenge unjust social structures and values, including direct social engagement during the years of schooling rather than being deferred until adulthood. (Kemmis et al 1983)

Some versions of education for citizenship – often bearing the title Civics – are designed to promote conformity and obedience. The earlier but short-lived introduction of citizenship as a cross-curricular dimension in the National Curriculum for England and Wales in 1990 placed a heavy emphasis on 'duty, the importance of wealth creation, and the family' in line with the political preoccupations of the Thatcher government (Brown 2000:114). The values of monarchy and Empire pervaded the school curriculum of late Victorian and early 20th Century Britain through literature, history, geography and religious instruction.

Many approaches based on social awareness and empathy can best be described as liberal-progressive. Progressive teachers of English, in many English-speaking countries from the 1970s onwards, aimed to develop sensitivity, emotional development and human values by reading literature and performing drama, but because this was limited by its disconnection from other subjects. Thus, the poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon helped to make young people less naive about the glory of war, but they developed little sense of how the First World War had resulted from imperial rivalries, nor that collective popular action in Russia, Germany and elsewhere had been able to end it. Similarly, in geography lessons, children might develop a feeling for the fragility of

the environment but have no opportunity of campaigning to protect it. The divisions between one subject and another, and between knowledge and action, cognition and emotion, school learning and the outside world, placed serious limitations on these embryonic forms of education for citizenship.

The new model of citizenship education has the potential to overcome these limitations and to develop into a socially-critical curriculum, though this is by no means guaranteed. The Crick Report provides a basis for more engaged and authentic forms of learning by identifying three complementary and interlocking strands:

- social and moral responsibility
- community involvement
- political literacy.

However, the direction of education for citizenship is inevitably sharply contested, including attempts by all kinds of agencies to rebrand their resources under its logo. There is even a resource pack available from the British Army. Students could conceivably help out in various community groups, under the rubric of 'active citizenship', but without the opportunity for evaluative discussion.

The success of Education for Citizenship depends upon substantial change at a whole-school level. It raises key issues for the School Improvement project, as it potentially challenges dominant practices and ideologies of schooling.

Learning and teaching

Education for citizenship cannot simply be seen as an add-on. We need to relate citizenship and personal and social development, within a human rights perspective, to core practices and beliefs across the curriculum. A separate set of lessons on citizenship is of little use if all the other lessons socialise towards passivity and blind obedience.

When Dickens characterised Mr Gradgrind's teaching as pouring facts into empty vessels, he was making a political as well as a methodological critique. In Hard Times, he pours scorn on schooling which shows no respect for the knowledge which children gain in their everyday lives, from their families and communities. Though much has changed in the past 150 years, the period in which Dickens was writing has had an enduring influence on schools up to the present day. Despite surface differences, his satire essentially represents a default model of teaching

on which we tend to fall back whenever we stop thinking about alternatives.

Behaviourism now has little credibility as a general theory of learning, but implicitly underlies many didactic practices. It ostensibly presents a more scientific explanation than Dickens' metaphor, but it is reductionist; Pavlov's and Skinner's conditioning of caged animals provides an alarming metaphor for school learning, and an impoverished model of human learning in general. It can't even account for the learning of the proverbially curious cat. It is also inherently *undemocratic*. For behaviourists, learning is definitely something you do to children.

If children accept that 4 times 4 makes 16 simply for the reward, as behaviourists recommend, we are turning them into unquestioning victims, not citizens. What if we were to reward them for agreeing that the earth is really flat? Or, to use a more realistic example, for believing that Jews or maybe Palestinians are 'vermin' rather than fellow human beings?

The following characteristics of learning in too many classrooms are problematic, not only in terms of a psychology of learning but in their implications for citizenship.

a) The teacher is the main source of information. (Sometimes information comes from a book or computer, but rarely from a child, parents or the outside world.)

b) Knowledge appears as fragments of facts, with limited connections and little opportunity to evaluate its truth or moral implications.

c) The learners are largely passive, their role being to absorb facts or to practise set moves before demonstrating their acquisition back to the teacher.

d) Factual knowledge and the acquisition of motor skills predominate over evaluation or higher-level cognitive development, and are divorced from emotional and social development.

e) The learning doesn't link with prior experience, and is divorced from the wider society or environment.

f) Active cooperation in groups is rare and most time is spent either listening as a whole class or practising as an individual.

g) There is no space for social action which will utilise or test out new knowledge and ideas.

Corson (1998:100) points to the following authoritarian aspects of the standard teaching conventions which we simply take for granted, but

which actively undermine self-esteem and students' rights on a daily basis in our schools:

- the unrestrained use of the imperative (by the teacher)
- the use of the (absolute) right to speak last
- the use of the (absolute) right to contradict
- the use of the (absolute) right to define the world for others
- the use of the (absolute) right to interrupt or to censure
- the use of the (absolute) right to praise or blame in public.

We see these practices directly undermining learning which ought to promote citizenship. In Scotland, which avoided the Thatcher Government's curriculum reform and its censorship of contemporary social studies, Modern Studies has equal status to history and geography, but to a considerable extent its respectability has been bought at the price of an 'academic' approach to knowledge. My own analysis of two recent and very popular textbooks for 15-17 year olds revealed the following characteristics:

a) There is little acknowledgement of the student's personal experience (for example, in a passage about old people with dementia, or in a chapter about racism).

b) Student tasks involve much memorisation and collection of data, and some low-level interpretation (e.g. of a graph), but little opportunity for evaluation, research or critical reading.

c) Even seemingly realistic tasks ('Why are stereotypical viewpoints dangerous'; 'Prepare a short speech in which you explain why women are under-represented in Parliament') are presented as paper exercises for the teacher to mark, rather than opportunities to interact with a real audience.

d) Virtually all tasks are intended for individuals, rather than cooperative activities.

e) There is almost no attempt to relate cognitive understanding to affective, or knowledge to action.

By contrast, Political Education in Germany emphasises engaged learning which is cooperative and related to action. Action is categorised as:

- real action (e.g. investigations, placements, asking local experts, street interviews)
- simulated action (e.g. role play, games, decision games, debates)

- production (i.e. as an outcome of learning, the students produce reports, a video, a newspaper or exhibition, or simply make a presentation to their class). (Herdegen 2001)

These practices are important not only for citizenship education, but for school improvement more generally; they might provide a means to make learning more engaged, realistic and challenging, and create opportunities for personal and social development.

Curriculum

It comes as a shock to find Danish teachers advised not to overplan in advance, as this can undermine their negotiations with students about what to learn. The same document suggests that 14-16 year olds should themselves take the initiative of inviting speakers into school or arranging visit, rather than their teachers doing it. (Ministry of Education, Denmark 1995)

Teachers in Britain have become so accustomed to every detail of the curriculum being decided from above that the idea of negotiation sounds almost revolutionary. From an early age, children learn that they have no right to choose: the literacy hour has virtually removed all opportunities for individual choice of books to read; individual choice of topics for research has been squeezed out by the push to cover content. Literacy is predefined in terms of genres and linguistic terminology for every term of primary school, regardless of children's needs or interests. The increasing frequency of tests has tightened control for secondary students. Scottish 17-year-olds studying for the Higher have formal assessments almost every week; in Geography alone, they have to complete 14 different tests in two terms to be eligible for the examination, and no time for frivolities such as fieldwork! The AS-level in England means that Year 12 – once a time for encouraging deeper thinking and wider reading - is no longer free of examination pressure.

This regime is not conducive to citizenship. Adult society does need to set out what it feels is most important to pass on to the next generation, but young people in Britain now experience an imposition which far exceeds this necessity, and denies young people's rights. Who, for example, decreed that all 7-11 year olds would study Anglo-Saxon Britain, and why? That all children in the third term of Year 5 need to learn the meaning of personification? The selection of content is often arbitrary, and denies particular groups the right to see themselves represented in what counts as legitimate knowledge. In the words of the principal of a multiethnic school in downtown Toronto, 'Why should my

students be learning about a barbaric medieval Europe – knights hitting each other over the head with lumps of metal, and disastrous levels of public hygiene – when the Islamic or Chinese civilisation at that time was far more advanced?' Clearly, we are dealing not with the simple imposition of curriculum by adults on children and adolescents, but a powerful elite's claim to represent society as a whole.

There has to be a compromise between the adult world's responsibilities and the interests of the young. The Danish curriculum (see Chapter 6) suggests that a class might embark on a major topic either because students raise it, perhaps because of a recent event, or because the teacher raises the issue. In either case, discussion and interaction between teacher and students leads to a range of questions and problems which individuals and small groups in the class can then choose to pursue.

The time frame for study, its division into periods taught by too many separate subject specialists, often mitigates against deeper learning. In many parts of Germany, timetables are suspended for Project Week, so that students can work as a class on a major topic, or regroup with students from other classes. It is recommended that a planning group consisting of teachers and students display suggested themes beforehand, but that individuals can post suggestions too.

The relationship between citizenship and curriculum is not exhausted by questions of pupil choice and timetable. In Britain, we tend to fight shy of more controversial issues. Whereas British teachers tend to privilege middle of the road viewpoints, the emphasis in Germany, following the Beutelsbach Conference, is for teachers to be open about controversiality, present a wide range of views, and acknowledge their own standpoint.

Teaching about controversial issues : the Beutelsbach Consensus (Germany)

1)   You must not *overpower*. It is unethical to take pupils unawares, however that is done, in imposing preferred opinions, and thus to prevent learners reaching an independent judgement.
2)   Whatever is *controversial* in social science and in politics, must also appear controversial in teaching.
3)   Pupils must be placed in a position where they can analyse a political situation and their own interests and position, and also to look for ways and means of influencing the social situation they find themselves in.

(Hans-Georg Wehling: Konsens à la Beutelsbach? Nachlese zu einem Expertengespräch. In S Schiele, H Schneider ed. p179)

Teachers have a responsibility to evaluate standard practices carefully, including those which are apparently progressive. Circle time in primary schools has created new opportunities for discussion, but can be subverted into a disciplinary function, or even an opportunity to correct speech habits. (see Claire 2001:154)

School ethos and human rights

In rethinking school organisation and ethos, we need to ask political questions about educational purpose, and what we mean by a good school. Ethos cannot simply be seen, instrumentally, as a means of improving exam results, although it is crucial in doing so. We need to relate the quality of school life and relationships to the human rights of young people during the years of schooling. This is particularly true in schools serving disadvantaged communities; in successful inner-city schools, the daily experiences of schooling reaffirm a sense of human dignity, rather than appearing to confirm a lack of status and value.

This is why 'orderly behaviour', as a key characteristic of effective schools, is so misleading. Schools which appear orderly on the surface can have a negative and combattive culture. Charlotte Carter's action research project in a boys' comprehensive school in the English West Midlands revealed a culture in which hostility and disparagement had become the norm, and were profoundly affecting self esteem and achievement.

> The school just expects us to do wrong and that's the way we get to be involved in what happens… They seem to think we are totally selfish and want to wreck the school.

> Your mates are always knocking you… it's easier just to see things the way they do and then you don't get disappointed. Say you miss a goal, you still know you are okay really, but the rest of the team might force you to feel bad and then you do.

Charlotte Carter offers the following interpretation:

> The participants' self-image was tentative and precariously dependent on their daily negotiation of conflicting information about who they wanted to be and what they were told they were. As a result they were held back by a quagmire of self-doubt and by dependence on others and the school, neither of which was felt to be safe or just. (Carter 2000: 155)

There is increasing understanding that it is better to involve students in establishing codes of behaviour. Rules imposed from above will always be

resisted and are never fully internalised. 'We'll always cause problems because we don't like adults ordering us to do things… A rule is a convention if you've made it your own… it's inside us.' (Alderson 2000:127)

There are signs that some schools are moving to a conscious understanding of ethos change in terms of democracy and human rights. The work of the Scottish School Ethos Network has been important in developing this perspective, and its case study reports are encouraging (www.ethosnet.co.uk). The democratic involvement of pupils takes time, but releases initiative which can also ultimately reduce the pressure on teachers and heads.

Encouraging pupils to take more responsibility is hard work, but can also reduce anxiety. We had local politicians visiting, and I suddenly realised that I hadn't noticed it was raining and we needed games and activities out for breaktime. I needn't have worried: some older children had organised it themselves for Primary 1 and 2 – they'd spontaneously taken on the responsibility.

At the School Council, pupils suggested restarting the Bullying Advice Centre (run by pupils). The next week, I felt very guilty that I hadn't done anything about this. The pupils said, 'Mrs Howarth, we know you've been very busy. We put the notices up, and it's already running.

Carol Howarth, Headteacher, Spittal Primary School, Glasgow (Improving Schools 4/1)

'I've decided to cancel the Pay-to-Park event. You are not well enough organised, you haven't done the publicity… I don't have time between now and next week…'

I was surprised then, the following Friday, to arrive at the school gates (in my car) to a large group of pupils with collection buckets and a huge banner. In my absence they had gone ahead on their own.

What struck me most was that they were genuinely in control, empowered. They became 'co-creators and participants in the evolution of the school' (Senge)

Michael Farrell, Portobello High School, Edinburgh (Improving Schools 5/2)

Community involvement

Traditionally, our schools have been oriented more towards competitive individualism than supportive cooperation. This has implications both for achievement and for citizenship. The inclusion of community involvement as a strand within education for citizenship has a transformative potential for education generally. We tend to take for granted the limited opportunities for learning beyond the school gate, regarding it as a major victory if geography students take part in a field trip every year or two, 15 year olds have a week's work experience before they leave school, or primary school children occasionally go out into the countryside. Some schools do better than this, but they are the exception.

Visits and placements provide highly motivating sources of learning. Rushey Mead School, Leicester, has for some years devoted one afternoon a week for its senior pupils to a combined citizenship and PSE programme which includes placements in community groups (Wrigley 2000:55). Students who helped to redecorate a women's refuge, for example, brought back to school an important awareness which could not have been gained from a lecture. Community placements potentially change the balance between teachers and learners, making the learning relationship more reciprocal and symmetrical. Some schools in the USA are beginning to explore an 'apprenticeship' model of learning by arranging extended work-placements. This enables inner-city youngsters to experience careers which they would otherwise think unattainable. We should not forget the importance, however, of ensuring that the practical experiences are complemented by the opportunity to question, discuss and critically evaluate the practices which are observed.

It is too easy to underestimate the life experience of inner-city children. Citizenship education, like PSE, is in danger of skimming the surface and having little real impact unless we find ways of engaging even disturbing experiences. Hilary Claire, in an illuminating book about children in two London primary schools, provides many examples. She demonstrates how young children are not only suffering the direct effects of poverty, but also feel the disparagement by others of their condition. Some use poverty to stigmatise and abuse each other.

> I get in lots of fights. Sometimes people force you, get you mad, you try and ignore, but you can't… they say about your family, you can't afford to get a house… most of the time it's about your family. They call you… you're a pig, and your mum doesn't even wear proper clothes, you can't afford to buy things… If you walk down the street and you see this drunk man, or tramp, they'll go: that's your father. That tramp looks just like you, the clothes you're wearing. (Claire 2001: 36).

She suggests that children need the opportunity of circle time for sharing and discussing experience, but that other less public interactions are needed so that children can be sufficiently open with trusted adults about the difficulties in their lives.

Unless we learn to connect with the experience of poverty, our school improvement efforts will fail to engage creatively with the challenge of raising achievement. The general message so far from official channels has been to reinforce the boundaries between school and community in the interests of minimising distractions to school learning.

Personal identity, power and school development

It is a serious contradiction in New Labour policies for education that teachers without rights are expected to explain them to children. The low-trust high-surveillance culture referred to in Chapter 3 cuts across the rhetoric of human rights which teachers are being asked to introduce into schools, and hinders the initiative and creativity which they will need to bring about necessary transformation. Teachers will need to assert their own citizenship in order to share it.

The further development of curriculum and pedagogy, in an age of such dramatic change, requires commitment, cooperation and imagination. It involves the engagement of teachers with theory and with the transformation of everyday practice.

Recent developments in learning theory around the idea of situated cognition, initially conceived in terms of work-based learning, need to be extended into the humanities. A particularly interesting feature of lessons observed in some multiethnic schools (Wrigley 2000; also 2000a) was the use of creative arts techniques such as imaginative writing and drama to explore aspects of belief and cultural practice. In one lesson, girls studying Romeo and Juliet improvised a scene that Shakespeare did not write – an encounter between the three main women Juliet, her mother and her nurse, after her father has commanded her to marry the man of his choice. In a religious education lesson, pupils wrote their personal Creeds, in which they characteristically moved from orthodox religious faith to a formulation of personal belief.

Visual arts and music were also used to explore questions of personal and cultural identity. In other lessons, a study of the semiotics of journalism and television drama led to a deeper understanding of the ideological functioning of everyday texts.

> I believe in one God but he does not control us.
> Instead he guides everyone towards the right things.
> I believe in Evolution. It does happen
> but very slowly so we do not even notice it.
> I believe that everyone is equal
> No man is higher or lower than anyone else.
>
> (Wrigley 2000: 69)

These forms of 'border pedagogy', to borrow Henry Giroux's phrase, all took place among bilingual pupils of South Asian heritage. For many, they provided a means of re-evaluating their complex cultural heritage and re-positioning themselves for the future. Without such opportunities, children and adolescents may find it difficult to reconcile family cultures and beliefs with the lifestyles of contemporary Western society. It is essential to do this in an open-ended way, in order to avoid the prejudice that modern Western ways are superior, and the creative arts provide an important means to do so.

This question is equally important, however, for monolingual students. They too need to develop a critical consciousness of the dominant ideologies which surround them and which ordinarily they simply take for granted. As the anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, the fish is the last creature to discover water. In this era of globalisation, consumerism, militarism, and the assumption of Western superiority are a form of fundamentalism as powerful as any religion. The creative arts and semiotic studies such as literature and the media encourage an emotional as well as an intellectual response and provide a medium for learning and development which engages young people actively and critically.