Citizenship Education in Northern Ireland – Preparing the Teachers

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Abstract: The 1990's have been described as the 'decade of citizenship' (Dahrendorf 1996), that is, the period during which citizenship has become 'institutionalised'. In Europe, this has presented educators with challenges concerning how young people may be prepared to become reflective, participative citizens, and empowered to engage with issues such as diversity, equality and social justice. In Northern Ireland, despite the ongoing instability of the political process, there is evidence of a genuine will to recognise and affirm diversity and to create a more equal and democratic society. This is demonstrated through the recent inclusion of citizenship education in the Northern Ireland Curriculum for schools. While perceived as an exciting opportunity for teachers and pupils, it is acknowledged that it also brings specific challenges relating to the acquisition and development of knowledge, resources and pedagogy. It also requires educators to reflect on their personal values and attitudes in relation to many citizenship issues. This paper focuses on student and beginning teachers in Northern Ireland and considers the nature of their early engagement with citizenship. In so doing, it references findings from two research projects, one of which considers the implementation of the citizenship curriculum and another which investigates the values dimension of teacher education. It explores students teachers' perceptions and understanding of the concept of citizenship education at different stages in their professional development, examines the nature of the preparation they receive to teach citizenship and reports on their early experiences teaching citizenship in the classroom. In reflecting on these different issues, the paper concludes by highlighting a number of factors which impact on the effectiveness of beginning teachers' engagement with citizenship, including their personal biographies, the nature of skills development and the influence of different educational contexts.
Keywords: citizenship, teacher education, skills development

1. Introduction

Dahrendorf (1996) described the 1990's as the 'decade of citizenship', suggesting that this was a period during which citizenship became 'institutionalised'. Consideration of this societal concept during the first years of the new century suggests that for many governments, there is a continued preoccupation with citizenship, in terms of how it is defined, how it is disseminated and how it might translate into practice. The growing number of formal democracies and increasingly diverse nature of many societies in the world has also been accompanied by greater interest in civic and citizenship education. As a result, citizenship education increasingly has become a core feature of the statutory educational curriculum, both nationally and internationally.

In recent years, successive initiatives in the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI), have placed curricular emphasis on, and attributed statutory status to, civic and citizenship education in schools. Latterly, these have included Local and Global Citizenship in Northern Ireland (mandatory from 2007), Civic, Social and Political Education in the Republic of Ireland (mandatory since 1997) and Education for Citizenship in England (mandatory since 2001). National programmes have been matched by comparable

international initiatives such as Education for Democratic Citizenship (Council of Europe) which set down a series of guidelines for citizenship education[1], and the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCES)[2] which will explore the ways in which young people are prepared to undertake their roles as citizens.

2. Citizenship Education in Northern Ireland

The development of citizenship in Northern Ireland has evolved from the cumulative outcomes of previous research and development programmes[3]. Local and Global Citizenship currently exists as a pilot programme in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland; it is due to become a statutory requirement and central component of the revised curriculum from September 2007.

The basis for the inclusion of Local and Global Citizenship in the Northern Ireland curriculum goes back almost ten years. The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (NICCEA) included the theme as part of its preparatory work for the review of the Northern Ireland curriculum from the mid-1990s. This included pilot work in 25 post-primary schools, initiated by the University of Ulster, which eventually became incorporated into the formal stages of the review from 2000. Since then, significant progress has been made in introducing Local and Global Citizenship to all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.

Local and Global Citizenship addresses four key concepts:
1. Diversity and inclusion
2. Human rights and social responsibility
3. Equality and social justice
4. Democracy and active participation.

The expectation is that citizenship education will not simply involve the transmission of knowledge. Instead, enquiry-based approaches are advocated. This might involve 'active learning' and project work that investigates the core concepts through a range of issues using local, national and international examples. There is therefore considerable emphasis placed on the relevance of teaching and learning through the citizenship curriculum.

3. Preparing teachers to teach Citizenship

The introduction of Local and Global Citizenship, has required the preparation of teachers both as part of their continuing professional development through in-service and for beginning teachers, during their Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Local education authorities or Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have identified officers with a responsibility to develop a co-ordinated approach to support the phased introduction of citizenship education to all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland by September 2007. Over a four-year period, schools from each Board area have opted into a professional development programme that provides seven in-service days for up to five teachers from each school. By the end of the programme, it was envisaged that all 230 post-primary schools (representing a critical mass of over 1,000 teachers) would have taken part.

Additionally, the Universities and Colleges of Education have adapted their initial teacher education courses to include the preparation of student teachers for Local and Global

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[1] See http://www.coe.int/T/E/CulturalCo-operation/education/E.D.C/
[2] See http://www.iea.nl/icces.html
[3] See, for example, CCEA research (1995-98); the Primary Values and SCPE projects (1998-2000).

Citizenship. Whilst preliminary courses have been devised within each institutional context, it is envisaged that, where possible, provision will continue to be revised and enhanced. The University of Ulster has included Local and Global Citizenship as an optional subsidiary subject to the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) since the 2003-04 academic year. The citizenship module is delivered to students during 30 hours over ten weeks. Students also participate in a three-day residential programme, where they have an opportunity to explore citizenship-related issues in depth and experience a range of innovative teaching pedagogies and techniques in a more focused and sustained manner.

ITE evidently presents a valuable opportunity to introduce student teachers to the concept of citizenship as they are engaged in the earliest stages of their professional development. This includes an introduction to active teaching methodologies as a key feature of citizenship teaching. Additionally, it enables teacher educators to indicate connections between citizenship and other subject areas, to illustrate how the key concepts underpinning citizenship have relevance and importance across the curriculum, and to highlight the transferability of interactive and participatory teaching approaches.

This paper focuses on student teachers as they are prepared to teach citizenship during initial teacher education and specifically as part of the PGCE course, which is a one-year teacher preparation programme offered in higher education institutions throughout the UK. The research findings are drawn from two projects. The first is an evaluation of Local and Global Citizenship in Northern Ireland at Key Stage 3 (11-14 years), which is funded by NICCEA. The evaluation will span a period of four years from 2003 to 2007. As the final curriculum changes will impact not only on pupils, but also on practising and student teachers, the evaluation has focused on three levels of analysis - the impact of citizenship education on pupils and schools, the impact of citizenship training programmes on teachers and the introduction of citizenship education into Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

The second project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through their Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). Entitled 'A Values-based Approach to Teacher Education', the research aims to investigate the values underpinning the different phases of teacher education in Northern Ireland from recruitment and selection, through initial teacher education (ITE), and Induction to Early Professional Development (EPD. The project employs a longitudinal research methodology, tracking a cohort of 40 primary and post-primary beginning teachers over three years as they pass through the different phases of teacher education and professional development. Using a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, beginning teachers have been consulted about their views, opinions and experiences of teacher education and early professional development. During the ITE phase, the emphasis of the research is on three major 'value-related' dimensions; inclusion and specifically student teachers' development of inclusive practices in the classroom, controversial issues and how student teachers encounter and engage with these in their practice and citizenship and in particular the preparation student teachers are given to mediate this area. The research is particularly interested in student teachers' initial perceptions and understanding of citizenship and their individual experiences while engaging with myriad challenging concepts and issues relating to citizenship. It also reviews the use of various innovative techniques and pedagogies and the perceived effectiveness of these from both student teachers' and teacher educators' perspectives

The issues addressed in this paper are informed by research findings emerging from the two projects described above. It is important to note that the findings are preliminary and therefore necessarily tentative. Both projects are ongoing and definitive conclusions have still to be drawn, however the insights presented here are intended to offer a 'flavour' of student and beginning teachers' experiences of citizenship thus far.   The views and experiences of forty-seven primary and post-primary PGCE student teachers were recorded through structured interviews conducted in the latter stages of their course.   Additional feedback was collected through a focus group session convened with twenty post-primary students who participated in the citizenship residential programme. A smaller sub-sample (n=7) of the original post-primary student cohort was then re-interviewed towards the end of their first year in teaching, when they were asked to reflect on their initial experiences of teaching citizenship.

5. Exploring the findings
Student teachers' perceptions and understanding of citizenship
Most students considered the optional inclusion of a citizenship subsidiary within their course as timely and beneficial, particularly within the framework of a changing educational environment. Reasons given for electing to select the module ranged from prospective career aspirations to the relationship between citizenship and subject area, as well as an appreciation of personal development.   The majority of students expressed an interest in citizenship education and could identify the potential pedagogical relationship between citizenship and their main subject area.

In initial interviews, students offered various interpretations in their definition of local and global citizenship. Most students were able to offer a generic definition, proposing for example, that citizenship was concerned with enhancing individuals' understanding of local and global issues, or that it was linked to the role and contribution of the individual within society. A frequent response was that citizenship sought to encourage people to live and work together, regardless of their cultural, religious or social identity. Some students were less articulate in their rationalisation, however and 10% of the cohort were unable to offer a definition. The challenge to define and implement a citizenship programme in Northern Ireland was acknowledged by some students, due to the potentially contentious content within thematic areas.   In follow-up interviews, students revealed greater articulation and appreciation of the key concepts within local and global citizenship. The application of a values system that fosters self-reflection, respect and tolerance and that is grounded in knowledge, understanding and human rights underpinned many student responses.

PGCE students were asked to briefly explain their understanding of the purpose of citizenship education. Most referred to its potential to show pupils how they belong and have a role in the wider world. Respondents highlighted how citizenship could encourage pupils to reflect on their ability to 'contribute' and 'influence', both individually and collectively and also help them to establish connections between issues broached in the classroom and the wider community and society.   Other student teachers defined the purpose more narrowly, linking it to issues concerned with reconciliation between different religious and ethnic communities in Northern Ireland.

Student teachers' initial experiences of citizenship education
In initial interviews, students considered that teaching local and global citizenship would differ from traditional lessons. Students commonly suggested that the citizenship class would be structured more informally than other lessons, with greater opportunities for group work,

and increased emphasis on interactive discussion and debate. The role of the teacher was considered important in creating potential opportunities for participative and instructive learning in a safe and comfortable environment with respect for others' opinions. This teaching strategy was considered particularly important prior to the introduction of controversial and/or sensitive issues. In contemplating teachers' specific role in developing pupils as citizens, PGCE students believed that teachers could become role models, 'moulding them into good citizens by example'. Respondents also emphasised the importance of teachers teaching in an unbiased manner, actively encouraging diversity in the classroom and employing teaching techniques that challenged prejudice and promoted tolerance.

The citizenship residential which took place over three days, was regarded by student teachers as a supportive and effective context in which they could become 'focused on' and 'immersed in' citizenship issues and teaching. Sustained contact with peers over the three-day period was also believed to have facilitated a build-up of trust between group members, to the point where many participants felt more confident and comfortable in sharing personal opinions and experiences. Student teachers indicated that the residential had enabled reflection and consideration of their own personal views, beliefs, values and in some cases prejudices. In many cases students indicated that it had presented them with an opportunity to discuss a range of sensitive political, cultural, religious issues with which they had hitherto not engaged. Evidently, PGCE students felt challenged by invitations to articulate their personal views concerning such issues in a group setting and a small number opted not to participate. In their evaluations of the residential programme PGCE students indicated that they believed they had not only expanded their knowledge about different pedagogies and techniques for mediating citizenship but also developed greater self-knowledge and understanding. As one student commented, 'I know more now about my own opinions and reactions'. This enhanced self-awareness appeared to have contributed to students' confidence and enthusiasm to engage with citizenship and in particular to address sensitive or controversial issues which they might have previously avoided.

In the follow-up interviews it emerged that all students had had the opportunity to introduce local and global citizenship in at least one teaching practice. The context and amount of delivery varied widely, depending on the existing levels of citizenship provision and staff engagement in individual schools. All students reported that they enjoyed the opportunity and the challenge to develop and deliver a dedicated module within the time available. Students mainly focused on some of the concepts represented under the theme of Diversity and Inclusion, presenting them within an overarching framework of human rights and responsibilities.

Issues for consideration emerged during the course of the teaching practice. Most students considered that sound knowledge of the class group was an important factor. Some students believed that the location of the school and its wider community might impact on the way in which certain issues, such as policing, were taught. For example, one student considered the advantage of teaching pupils from one religious community potentially reduced the risk of inadvertently offending others; this concern also applied to pupils from an ethnic minority background. Increased timetabling provision was considered essential to successfully implement the alternative teaching methodologies of a citizenship class. Most students considered 30 minutes insufficient to introduce topics and engage pupils in meaningful and sustained discussion.

In follow-up interviews students were asked to consider the transparency and evidence of school ethos and perceived institutional attitudes to the introduction of citizenship. All students cited instances of individual school ethos, although implicit and explicit examples varied between institutions. In some schools the ethos was promoted through an institutional culture of mutual respect amongst and between teachers and pupils. Some students reported demonstrable practice of the valued democratic process. Common practice included the development of class rules that had been negotiated between teachers and their pupils. In another instance school ethos was actively supported through the development of a school council. In those instances where students perceived a less transparent ethos, the main reasons were considered to be lack of involvement by head teachers and other senior management, and lack of collegiate support amongst teaching staff.

Students reported schools to have mixed opinions to the introduction of local and global citizenship. A few students considered that some schools were still uncertain about the remit, content and delivery of the subject and its possible location within the timetable of the school. In a few instances, this uncertainty was underpinned by a perceived scepticism and apathy amongst some staff members. Other students considered that younger members of staff were less resistant and more willing to engage with the subject matter; a few commented on a seeming lack of support within the senior management of some schools and lack of involvement at this level was considered detrimental. However, a supportive and positive and network was perceived to exist in those schools that had an established citizenship programme in place, including an identified co-ordinator and a visible hierarchy of support.

Early experiences of teaching citizenship in the classroom
All students acknowledged a distinction in the pedagogy of the citizenship class in comparison to other subject areas. This was perceived to be manifest through a more informal teaching style and a controlled leniency in classroom management. The most commonly reported variation was the increased level of interaction between pupils and teacher and between pupils themselves. Although less time was spent writing, students considered the impact of active learning had equal value. All students identified key factors that they considered important for the success of a citizenship class. The most commonly reported was the development of, and adherence to, collectively negotiated class ground rules. Some students, who took the same class for citizenship as well as their own subject area, found benefits in a more sustained relationship with pupils. This relationship, however, had to be developed within the context of two distinct subject areas where the teaching style in both was different.

Students expressed mixed views on the assessment of citizenship. Some students considered an exam would reinforce the validity of the subject within the academic culture of grammar schools. However, reservations on assessment related to the perceived contradiction between the academic expectations of an exam and the promotion of a more active learning methodology. Alternative suggestions for assessment included the completion of an action project that allowed schools to identify a specific issue and develop it within the context of institutional relevance.

Drawbacks to teaching local and global citizenship were commonly perceived to be time allocation, varied patterns of delivery within schools, institutional attitudes and access to resources. Some students considered that limited timetable allocation restricted teachers' capacity to introduce and sustain a meaningful programme. The potentially detrimental impact of a lack of staff engagement was considered a crucial issue. The importance of

participation in the training programme offered by the ELBs, and a genuine interest in the subject area were considered essential for successful implementation. Students considered resource development a potential, albeit preliminary, problem. Although all students were familiar with the CCEA publication and had used it for reference purposes, most chose to use resources they had developed during training. The time demands of gathering suitable and relevant material were considered problematic, although the pedagogical benefits of having a broad and varied selection of accessible resources was acknowledged. All students expressed a desire to become involved in teaching citizenship in the future. They welcomed the opportunities and experiences that their teaching practices had offered and were keen to become involved in the future direction and delivery of the subject.

6. Issues for further consideration

This section will highlight some emerging issues for citizenship within initial teacher education. As stated previously, this paper has presented interim findings from two ongoing research projects. It is anticipated student interpretations of , and responses to citizenship will evolve as familiarity and confidence with the subject matter grows.

Role of personal biography

Reflecting on their responses during the interviews and residential programme, it was apparent that personal biography has a significant influence on the nature of PGCE students' interpretations of and attitudes to citizenship. Student teachers' previous exposure to citizenship at school; their involvement in community relations programmes or similar activities; their individual experiences of growing up in a divided society and the influence of family and community all informed their views of and engagement with this subject area.

Motivation of citizenship teachers

Discussions with student teachers indicated that they had different motivations to become citizenship teachers. These related to a values perspective, perhaps influenced by particular life experiences or personal aspirations or goals. Alternatively, it was defined in terms of strategic career decisions in consideration of a changing educational environment. Of course, tt is reasonable to assume that teachers' decisions to teach citizenship will be motivated by different factors. This does raise questions however as to the impact these motivations may have on their teaching. Will the teacher who has elected to teach citizenship in order to further their career, mediate the subject with the same enthusiasm and interest as the teacher who is strongly committed to the values underpinning the subject and to engaging young people's participation?   Consequently will there be considerable disparities in pupils' learning experiences in citizenship?

Challenging nature of citizenship education

The findings from both projects clearly highlight the challenging aspects of citizenship teaching, in terms of the issues addressed and skills development required. Particularly important is the focus on affective as well as cognitive skills and this presents a specific challenge for younger and less experienced teachers who are simultaneously attempting to develop their knowledge and understanding of many other aspects of teaching. While further experience and a growth in confidence may enable beginning teachers to engage more effectively with the issues, initially they may find the challenges quite daunting. It is therefore important during these early stages in a teacher's career to consider the extent to which it is reasonable to expect beginning teachers to engage with active/challenging methodologies while they are still consolidating fundamental classroom management

strategies and discipline techniques and to consider the nature and level of support/mentoring they may require during their induction period.

Skills development

It is widely accepted that effective citizenship teaching involves the use of innovative and active teaching and learning methodologies. Such techniques are quite different to traditional teaching methods where, for example, pupils may work individually on written tasks. Beginning teachers involved in citizenship education will therefore be expected to acquire and develop skills for active pedagogy. This raises issues around the importance of developing beginning teachers' confidence and the provision of ongoing support. Interestingly it also highlights the potential for the transferability of such teaching skills to enhance other subject areas and possible opportunities for beginning teachers to share their skills and expertise with other colleagues.

Potential impact of school context

Beginning teachers' early experiences of teaching citizenship are clearly shaped by the school context in which they are located. Their status as a beginning teacher and new member of staff, the profile of citizenship in the school in terms for example, of how and when it is timetabled, the views of senior management in relation to citizenship and the degree of support offered by the citizenship co-ordinator will each have a significant impact on their initial teaching experiences in this area.