

The dissolution of Citizenship education as a separate subject in secondary schools across England



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Research Question

Should Citizenship education be dissolved as a separate subject throughout schools in England but rather embedded within traditional subject areas in order to impart the advantages that outstanding Citizenship education can accomplish for both the individual and wider society?

Abstract

Modern day globalisation facilitated by technological advancements has altered the fabric of society impacting the conceptualisation of citizenship profoundly (Jackson, 2016). Thus as the idea of citizenship changes, it follows that ideas about Citizenship education across democratic societies should also be changing. As a result of globalisation, the aims of Citizenship education have been re-fashioned which has led to a struggle between curricula reflecting both national and cosmopolitan ideologies (Starkey, 2018). Globalisation prompted nation-states to pursue global Citizenship education due to its heightened economic, political, cultural and social advantages in comparison to what could be achieved within the confines of its national boundaries as well as pursuing national Citizenship education due to the global movement of people, products, services and information forging a crises of national identity for many nation-states. However, due to the shortage of Citizenship education specialists alongside the infringement of the subject in its entirety, the responsibility to deliver Citizenship education is being assumed by staff who do not possess the subject knowledge nor pedagogical skills to teach the subject effectively in order to convey the advantages that outstanding Citizenship education can accomplish which in turn renders it ineffective.

Thus, the benefits of embedding Citizenship education within particular subject areas can reaffirm Citizenship education as a significant force in being able to conceive of a more inclusive conceptualisation of citizenship for the benefit of all citizens in a globalised society as staff would be more confident in engaging in deliberation and discussion of the issues within their own subject specialisms.

Context

The problem of Citizenship education in England stems from exclusive policies and the transmutation of policy into practice.

The Labour government commissioned the Crick report in 1998 to promote political literacy throughout England. The report has been criticized for an overly consensualist model of society (Osler and Starkey, 2009); a failure to consider the existence of institutional racism and structural disadvantage. Moreover, the authors were reluctant to recognise as legitimate the particular claims of different cultural groups (Olssen, 2004) and finally, it was criticized for not encompassing well enough the three forms of a 'good' citizen in a democratic society (Westheimer, 2019). It gave minimal attention to the concept of the social-justice-oriented citizen as a way to promote societal obedience. Thereafter, the 2011 Prevent strategy amplified concerns surrounding national security and the prevention of extremism in the educational campaign labelled 'Fundamental British Values'. This campaign was received negatively as it attempted to prescribe 'British' values without consensus on how 'Britishness' is defined resulting in much resentment towards the initiative (Bamber et al., 2018).

Both reports were not prescriptive with respect to the delivery of citizenship education which led to Citizenship education being taught in a variety of ways. As a consequence of this limited government guidance alongside an unskilled staff delivering lessons, schoolchildren have been receiving a mostly watered-down notion of civics that emphasizes good character and blind patriotism over critical thinking and engaging with multiple perspectives which has contributed to its ineffectiveness across the country (Westheimer, 2019).

Case Study: Observations

I investigated the quality of Citizenship education being delivered as a separate subject during year 8 form time compared with the quality of Citizenship education being delivered through the A-Level French curriculum at a large comprehensive school in Liverpool.

During my observations of year 8 form classes, Citizenship education was delivered in a 'bitesize' Powerpoint slide once a week (see figure 1.1). This figure illustrates the content shown to students to encourage a discussion surrounding the concept of cultural appropriation at Halloween. After speaking to the form tutor at the end of the form lesson, the teacher expressed their apprehension in engaging in debate with students due to their limited knowledge of how to conduct deliberation around polemic issues professionally. They also expressed how this is further problematized by the 15 minute slot to complete this task alongside managing the late arrival of students and students who have to leave form-time for various reasons in addition to managing the other duties that must be carried out during this period.

During my observations of staff members within the Modern Foreign Languages department, I observed many opportunities for students to investigate profoundly concepts related to Citizenship education as well as confident staff delivering lessons. An example of a lesson can be seen in figure 1.2. The figure illustrates a lesson on the striking culture in France, the aim of which was to act as a stimulus for students to engage with questions such as 'Why do citizens strike?' or 'What are possible consequences of striking?'

Figure 1.1 Powerpoint slide used as a stimulus for a discussion on cultural appropriation for the audience of a year 8 form class

Lessons Inspired For the Everyday

Life Lesson 1: Cultural Appropriation

'We love history': Kentucky father defends wearing Nazi SS officer's uniform and dressing his son as HITLER for Halloween

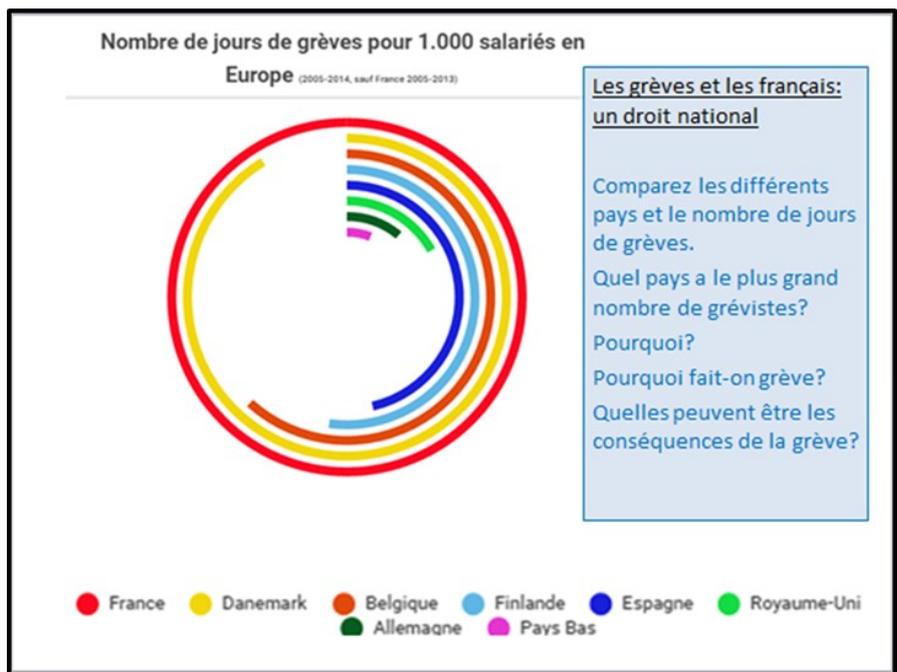
Should some costumes showing certain cultures/people be banned? Why?

Halloween:- A holiday for dressing up or wearing a costume- but does it matter what you wear?

Keyword: Cultural Appropriation

The act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture

Figure 1.2 Powerpoint slide used as a stimulus for a discussion on the striking culture in France for the audience of an A-Level class



Case Study: Discussion

As a Modern Foreign Languages teacher, I believe that Modern Foreign Language education can make a specific contribution to Citizenship education. It is able to do this through the concept of intercultural citizenship as it provides a perspective which breaks through the nationalism of most Citizenship education as it promotes understanding of its own and foreign culture on the basis of their comparison (Porto et al., 2017). Such insight provides the basis for respect and increased tolerance promoting global solidarity as well as pupils' own identity and cultural belonging being strengthened.

Conclusion

Just as citizenship has been reconceptualised in the past, where property or ownership of a weapon was once conceived as a necessary prerequisite to be in receipt of the privileges that full citizenship afforded, citizenship needs to be reconceptualised again to be more inclusive of minority voices, otherwise inequalities surrounding race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, civil status etc. will persist and I am of the opinion that education is a core mechanism in enacting this when policy and practice are working together effectively. Citizenship education can facilitate greater inclusion in order to access the rights and privileges of citizenship which can improve not only individual lives but the lives of our societies and our world - the foundation of a truly democratic education (Banks et al., 2005).

Policy Recommendations

It is commonly accepted that the aim of education is to help prepare people to live a better individual life and also to contribute to the improvement of wider society, thus there is clearly a crossover between the purpose of education more broadly and Citizenship education specifically. Thus the propagation of this primary aim should not be limited to one subject. To ensure that Citizenship education is more effective in fulfilling its objectives across England:

- Citizenship education should be dissolved as a separate subject including extra-curricular coverage during form-time/ assemblies/ drop-down days etc.
- Citizenship education should be integrated into traditional subject areas mainly the Humanities.

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