

Citizenship education policies in Northern Ireland and the recognition of ethnic and racial diversity in the wake of new immigration

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This paper investigates the emergence of a citizenship education policy in Northern Ireland and its recognition of ethnic and racial diversity. This is particularly important in the wake of the recent rise in racist attacks on non-nationals. It argues that Northern Ireland constitutes an interesting case study in both the conceptualisation and the accommodation of diversity in education. The distinctive contribution of citizenship education *à la nord-irlandaise* to the debate on education and immigration is situated within the context of the emergence of this curricular module in Europe. The importance of international normative models emerges out of the consideration that European initiatives in citizenship education may point the way forward and provide a useful lesson for Northern Ireland.

The correlation of educational reforms with immigration policies may not be as apparent as it is with other areas of social policy. Yet, the school system of a country contributes highly to the preservation and development of national identities and bears a great responsibility for the way in which a society learns to adapt itself to historical changes. In Anderson's analysis of the birth and development of nationalism (Anderson, 1983), the idea of a nation as a political unit with shared rules and a bounded territory is demystified by the revelation that such a community is an imagined construction, imagined as both limited and sovereign. It follows that the ad hoc creation of a national community must evidently be supported by different degrees of political indoctrination or, in its milder form, of civic education. As the Italian nationalist Mazzini, stated in the aftermath of Italian independence and unification in 1861: "Italy is made, now we have to make the Italians".

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In time, ethnicity and culture oriented approaches to civic education have paved way to post-nationalist conceptualisations of belonging and membership with the emergence of the forces of Europeanisation and later globalization. Post 1989 changes in Europe have questioned how society prepares young people to adopt a European citizenship and effectively confront racism, xenophobia and, generally, all the issues related to social justice. For education, the consequent challenge is the implementation of strategies that positively promote diversity which are conducive to the accommodation of minorities.

According to Dahrendorf (1996), the 1990s have been characterised as 'the decade of citizenship', that is to say the decade in which citizenship became 'institutionalised'². The concept of citizenship and its capacity for inclusiveness and equality have become the 'performative'³ language informing social policy discourses (Butler, 1997; Favell, 2002).

The debate about rights and responsibilities of citizens and the contribution of education towards the active political participation of the individual are taking place at a particular time when constitutional reforms are activated in order to counter democratic deficit in governance and when nationality and national identity are being re-examined. Citizenship education policies have been developed in a context of perceived growing disillusionment and political apathy among young people (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995; Annette, 2000; White, Bruce and Ritchie, 2000).

Lynch (1992) argues that much of what in the past has been classified as citizenship education has in fact been teaching for national citizenship. However, for educators, in the light of eco-

² 'Perhaps awareness for the values of civilized living in civic communities has grown in recent years; there is now a Citizenship Trust; civic sense is mobilized for initiatives notably at the local level; civil society may yet come to compete with the stakeholder society for the hearts and minds of voters. Could it be that the words become more current as the values behind them seem to retreat? Is the discovery of citizenship, of civil society, of civic sense and civil behaviour a response to the experience of disintegration, to widespread anti-social behaviour and to the crude competition between individuals embodied in the "philosophy" of *Enrichissez-vous, Messieurs?*' (Dahrendorf 1996)

³ According to Favell (2001), a performative language, such as political language, invokes conceptions in order to create the phenomenon of which they are speaking. See also Butler (1997).

conomic and political changes at both the global and local level, the challenge of the 1990s requires a change of paradigm towards the promotion and sustenance of culturally pluralist and democratic societies (where democracy implies active participation and recognition of difference) (Osler, 1995; Lynch, 1992).

The participation of young people in society is likely to be largely determined by the quality of the education they receive. This seems to be especially the case for students from ethnic and racial minority backgrounds, whose experience of socialization in society, and hence political participation in adult life, occurs principally in school (Bekemans and Ortiz De Urbina, 1997). For these children, as for every child, school constitutes the primary and immediate environment for full integration into society. In this context, citizenship education and its focus on values, skills and knowledge for political and civic socialization constitutes the touchstone of governments' commitment to the promotion of democracy and civil participation through education. As Hladnik (1995) suggests in his book titled *All Different-All Equal: who defines education for citizenship in Europe*, the way the state educates refugee children constitutes a test case:

Perhaps the answer to the question of education for refugees is the answer to education in general, and thus the responsibility of the state itself (Hladnik, 1995: 37)

In their review of citizenship education initiatives in the Britain, Greenwood and Robins (2002) agree with Hladnik (1995) in recognizing the centrality of education for minorities, but contextualising the situation at a national level:

Embedding notions of citizenship in asylum seekers, disaffected minorities and alienated young people is the challenge that political and educational establishment have to face (Greenwood and Robins, 2002: 521).

As indicated by Bekemans and Ortiz De Urbina (1997), educating children from an ethnic and racial minority background (be they migrant or not) does not force to complicate the matter further: *"the education of immigrants is seen as a political and human rights issue and no longer merely an economic issue related to the single market"* (as was initially the case for migrant children from EU Member States) (Bakemans and Ortiz De Urbina, 1997: 8). With the pro-

gression of European integration and the growing challenge of immigration, intercultural education becomes a fundamental requirement of the curriculum for the human development of pupils and, therefore, inextricably linked with human rights, and specifically with the 1989 UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. The importance of an education for democratic citizenship (EDC), once devoid of limiting and exclusionary national traits, is reinforced by its claim to international humanitarian legislation and its underlying conceptualization of citizenship as global.

These universal values support a wider European political agenda set up to promote democratic and peaceful development among countries by financing and co-ordinating educational cooperation projects (Burbules and Torres 2000). As demonstrated by the specific focus of the Council of Europe Task Force on Education and Youth in its Enhanced Graz Process on citizenship education, accession countries and countries in transition receive a continued support for national education reforms with the view of furthering EU integration and actively promoting regional cooperation at system, expert and civil society levels. The list of countries benefiting from the Graz Enhanced Process does not include Northern Ireland which falls under the remit of the European Union's Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (or 'The Peace Programme'). Yet, the commonalities between these peripheries of Europe are evident in their status as countries in transition and in their cooperation under the aegis of other international agencies. An illuminating example of this cooperation is constituted by the participation of Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina to the International Bureau of Education's (IBE) regional programme on curriculum change and social cohesion in conflict-affected societies.

Northern Ireland constitutes a litmus case for this new approach in citizenship education and its full recognition of diversity, as the country has reached a turning point in its history. Notwithstanding the precarious peace process and intermittent transfer of devolved power in the region, negotiations among the parts (from civil society to politicians, the churches and the paramilitaries) may lead to the creation of a truly democratic society. Equality legislation is gaining momentum in Northern Ireland (Osborne 2003). Yet, the determination of which group, and in which way, is

to benefit from these affirmative legislative interventions may have future implication for the normalization of the situation. The Troubles are not yet over and racism is already on the increase (Chrisafis: 2004). While sectarianism (or the hostile attitudes and behaviour between Catholics and Protestants) has been long recognized, racism has always run alongside it and, only now, is being noticed.

This paper argues that the statutory introduction of education for democratic citizenship (EDC) in the Northern Irish curriculum has been dictated by parallel exogenous and endogenous socio-political changes, where the recognition of ethnic and racial minorities has come to occupy a prominent position. With the increase of immigration to the region, the emergence of a diverse and plural Northern Irish society affirms and, at the same time, overcomes the standard interpretative dichotomy between Protestants and Catholics which has traditionally dominated the political agenda in Northern Ireland.

In the past, the Northern Irish curriculum with its Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage has provided a specimen for best practices in EDC (Davies, 2000; Chauan 2001; Kerr et al, 1999). However, in the light of recent developments that have seen the discontinuous devolution of the Northern Ireland Executive and the steadily growth of asylum seekers and non-nationals (Irwin and Dunn, 1997; McVeigh, 2002), those forerunning educational initiatives are being supplemented by more 'holistic' and comprehensive 'adjectival'⁴ educational programs (such as Human Rights and anti-racist education). The Northern Irish experience of dealing with racial diversity in education comes later than the European and the British, as the existence of the conflict has shadowed the true plural nature of the Northern Irish society.

The long-drawn out inter-group conflict in Northern Ireland between the two traditional communities has tended to occlude the existence of a vibrant and growing ethnic pluralism within Northern Ireland. The growing visibility of these ethnic minorities in

⁴ By 'adjectival education', Davies and his colleagues (1999) mean to designate the introduction of new approaches to global education in the curriculum in the 1980s. Global education was characterised by affective and holistic approaches to world issues. The many 'educations' related to this approach included anti-racist education, peace education, anti-sexist education.

Northern Ireland reflects wider changes in Europe and in many other parts of the world, and its range, extent and implications are neither well recorded nor well understood by policy makers in Northern Ireland (Irwin and Dunn, 1997).

Following extensive research carried out by the University of Ulster (Smith and Robinson, 1992), the Department of Education has recognized that the Northern Irish curriculum on political education, human rights and social justice needs to be strengthened and 'has to reinforce appreciation and respect for the full range of diversity that exists within society' (Working Group on the Strategic Promotion of Education for Mutual Understanding, 1999: 5). In order to address these changes, schools should aim to develop an idea of 'shared citizenship' based on the principles of pluralism, pursuit of justice, acceptance of human rights and responsibilities and democracy (where democracy implies active political participation) (Working Group on the Strategic Promotion of Education for Mutual Understanding, 1999: 6).

In 1998, a curriculum review began under the aegis of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). In September 2001, informed by extensive consultation⁵ and in the light of the preliminary findings of a University of Ulster project (the Social, Civic and Political education programme), the Department of Education introduced pilot programmes in Local and Global Citizenship (Arlow 2001). These projects will run for three years and will be accompanied by a comprehensive training programme with a view to introducing them statutorily in 2006 (Arlow 2001).

The Department of Education recognizes the delay from which the Northern Irish program has been suffering and addresses the possibility to emulate existing international models:

The working group is aware that other societies are exploring greater commitment to such values through the development of education for citizenship in England; for 'civic, social and political edu-

⁵ 'By the end of the consultation period, in June 2000, some 426 written replies were received from schools, colleges and others. At 20 consultation seminars, approximately 700 teachers had opportunities to voice their opinions. Fifty meetings were held with other stakeholders' (Arlow 2001)

cation' in the Republic; and by similar initiatives, being supported by international organisations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the European Commission on Human Rights and the European Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Working Group on the Strategic Promotion of Education for Mutual Understanding 1999: 5) (emphasis added).

Whilst the Department shows a keen interest in relevant curricular developments elsewhere, it is somehow silent on the potential impact of proposed reforms on other correlated areas such as school organization, participation of stakeholders, teacher training and professional development.

By adopting a policy analysis perspective on schooling and culture in Northern Ireland, McEwen (1999) is able to pinpoint the predominance of curricular development over school practice, organisation and administration and his conclusion points unequivocally towards an expansion of policies. Commenting on curricular intervention in 'combating sectarian distortions' such as EMU (Education for Mutual Understanding) and Cultural Heritage, he notes:

Appreciation of each other's traditions and aspirations will only be fully realised when, in addition to the policy's emphasis on ameliorating cultural prejudices and mutual understanding, other more deep forms of inequity...are also fully explored (McEwen 1999: 40).

Although McEwen recognizes the importance and validity of EMU and Cultural Heritage as forerunners of citizenship education and, in doing so, brings the Northern Irish experience of dealing with diversity and conflict into the spotlight, he admits that Northern Ireland education has to look at international and 'exogenous models' for the development and the advancement of citizenship education policies (McEwen, 1999):

The policy requires a harder edge with regard to the more material sources of mistrust and prejudice through, for example, looking more closely at the work of the Commission for Racial Equality in Great Britain and similar agencies in America and the European Community (McEwen, 1999: 41) (emphasis added)

From this analysis, it has emerged that exogenous developments have not only had an impetus on existing arrangements in Northern Ireland, but have also indicated the potential contribu-

tion of external models in assisting educational reform. For Northern Ireland, international lesson-drawing in citizenship education may constitute a useful investigative approach for a wider and more comprehensive conceptualisation of diversity not only at the theoretical level but also at the policy-making level with its plans, strategies and actors.

In 2002, in co-operation with the Enhanced Graz Process, the Council of Europe launched a stocktaking exercise on national government policies on EDC and the management of diversity (MofD). Initially, the research involved exclusively countries from the Southeast Europe. However this was later extended to include all European states. It would constitute an interesting and useful exercise for Northern Ireland to map its national policies with the use of the policy framework provided by the Council's Stocktaking exercise.

In fact, now, the main question for policy makers and educationalists in Northern Ireland rests on the timing of this envisaged change towards the full recognition of diversity and its ability in catching up with the rise in racist attitudes in the region (Connolly, 2002).

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