

Identifying the European dimension in citizenship education

The concept of European citizenship has been evolving through a variety of laws and regulations. Here, **Gerard McCann** and **Peter Finn** examine the recent developments in citizenship education within the European Union policy making process.

Introduction

The idea of a European citizenship is central to the generic process of European integration and has been a current of policy making since the earliest days of the Community. Key concepts such as cohesion, harmonisation, integration, subsidiarity and transnationalism have enhanced a generally accepted definition of citizenship within the auspices of the European Union (EU) and as conveyed through its treaties. As a policy focus citizenship has been evolving through the various laws, regulations and programmes - the *acquis communautaire* - and has come to represent a distinct entity across the range of policies being developed.

In effect, Europeans can now identify their citizenship within the parameters of the EU. As a means of encouraging a distinct European identity, education has increasingly come to the fore, with a process aimed at encouraging civic participation and recognition throughout the various facets of the emerging EU education policy. As a result of the decisions taken at the Maastricht Treaty in particular, citizenship in education is now operating on a number of levels in terms of both policy and practice. This article aims to give an overview of recent developments in citizenship education from within the context of the EU policy making process. It will also assess the background to this policy and will attempt to highlight links and potentials that may exist between the differing aspects of this type of social induction across member state education systems.

The background to the EU's policy

Historically European citizenship has been a sensitive concept for the designers of EU policy and its emergence has revealed ongoing sensitivities between national governments and the supranational EU system. Two comments almost fifty years apart link the process and confirm the evolution of EU citizenship - the first, from the original 1957 Treaty of Rome, states

that the objective of the EU is: “ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen” (Article 151; also Article 308). The second comment is 49 years later in the 2005 Commission document *Citizens for Europe*, which sees the intention of the EU as: “involving citizens in the construction of a more united Europe and by fostering mutual understanding among European citizens” (EC, 2005b, p.8). Two seemingly clear statements on citizenship yet it has only been since the 1990s that the subject has managed to generate consensus among the different member states and institutions. Indeed, institutional tensions and political competition have dominated the way in which both citizenship and education policy have evolved in the European Union. In the lead up to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty - the Treaty on European Union - commitment had been given by all member states to the development of a Community wide education system, albeit selective in its provisions (EC Commission, 1989, p.236). This was to affect education policy as it existed within the EU, the cross-curricular theme ‘citizenship education’ which applied in terms of a ‘European dimension’ in education, and actions such as Erasmus and Comenius which sought to embed a transnational understanding of Europe.

The ideal of citizenship was central to the Maastricht project, with education becoming another vehicle for the promotion of a post Cold War *demos* in Europe. After 1992 EU citizenship was to become a ‘live’ entity with education in particular having a role in the re-branding of the community at transnational level. The treaty itself begins with the agreed priorities:

“Article A: ...This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen... Article B: The Union shall set itself the following objectives: - to promote economic and social progress which is balanced and sustainable, in particular through the creation of an area without internal frontiers, through the strengthening of economic and social cohesion... to strengthen the protection of the rights and interests of the nationals of its Member States through the introduction of a citizenship of the Union” (Maastricht Treaty, TEU, Articles A and B).

From this point onwards, and through to the education provisions of the treaty, EU citizenship would be an accepted prerequisite in the design of policies.

For the education system this commitment to the EU citizen had specific

resonance. The programmes that emanated from the treaty served to tie together both culturally sensitive themes and selective areas of each curriculum, and were intended to encourage a ‘European dimension’ in the curricula across the continent. Certain topics and subjects were to be utilised and developed to secure EU compatibility for each member state’s system. In 1992 in a document entitled *New Prospects for Community Cultural Action* the Commission stated the policy concisely:

“Economic and social cohesion has been identified as a fundamental condition for the balanced development of the Community, and education and training have been identified as a crucial factor in achieving balanced social and economic development in all the Member States” (EC Commission, 1992, pp.11-12).

For the Commission it was quite clear that citizenship and economic integration were inexorably linked, that the prosperity of the people of the EU needed to be marked by a shared civic identity. From the member states’ governments’ point of view the question of national sovereignty was still a prominent reason for hesitating at the proposed progressive development of topics such as citizenship, and indeed the European dimension in education - viewing education as still primarily a national preserve. Attitudes did seem to soften however at national level throughout the 1990s and citizenship education in particular was to benefit from this attitudinal shift.

A useful reflection on the subject as it pertains to the European Union’s education system comes from J.A. Banks in *Diversity and Citizenship Education*, who presented the principle of citizenship education in the following manner:

“Increased diversity and increased recognition of diversity require a vigorous re-examination of the ends and means of citizenship education. Multicultural societies are faced with the problem of creating nation-states that recognize and incorporate the diversity of their citizens and embrace an overarching set of shared values, ideals, and goals to which all citizens are committed. Only when a nation-state is unified around a set of democratic values such as human rights, justice, and equality can it secure the liberties of cultural, ethnic, language, and religious groups and enable them to experience freedom, justice, and peace. Citizens who understand this unity-diversity tension and act accordingly do not materialize from thin air; they are educated for it” (Banks, 2005; quoted in Osler & Starkey, 2005, pp.6-7).

The interpretation of concepts such as citizenship can be particularly sensitive in regions that have peculiar national or cultural aspects to their education systems. For example, in the *Land* of North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany, Article One of the *Erstes Gesetz Ordnung des Schulwesens* (First Law for the Order of the School System) places “democracy and freedom” as key principles in education; in Finland the Basic Education Act (1998) highlights the development of “humanitarianism”; in Norway the Education Act (1999) focuses on “a Christian and moral upbringing”; Latvia’s ‘Concepts of Education Development’ (2002-2005) seeks to promote “a democratic and socially integrated society”; and the School Curriculum (2003) for Cyprus seeks to encourage “the harmonious development of responsible and democratic persons” (McCann & Davey, 2006, p.53). In practice twenty five education systems present scores of emphases with differing ideas of citizenship. The Banks definition is interesting in relation to the transnational interpretation that has emanated from the EU by showing its need to assert a community, a collection of states, a federation defined through a single ubiquitous citizenship which has to be nurtured in the manner of a ‘nation-state’, and the creation of European citizens. It is the key reason why the European dimension to education has taken such an indirect path to the curricula, yet has been given such prominence by the Commission.

The problem of a difference of opinion has constantly stifled debate within the EU institutions on education and citizenship, and as with most of the sovereignty related concerns, progress has usually been settled through financial constraints being placed on a project, or through long legal battles over the definitions and the legal implications of treaties. The reassertion of the competence of the Commission in terms of education policy initiation and implementation that came as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, and unlike the restrictive Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, marked a point where member states - with the notable exception of the United Kingdom - came to acknowledge the need for cohesion between key member state policies. Significantly, this process was tied to a timescale. It coincided with the completion of a number of the education and training programmes which had been established after 1986 and were set to complete their cycle. In the Commission’s review of education policy up until 1992, five areas were identified as successfully active and open to possible extension. These were vocational training/youth training; higher education and training (which was no longer distinguishable); continuing education and training; language training and cooperation with third countries/international aspect (*Official Journal of the EC*, 1992, C366/1).

Although the semantics continued to suggest a differentiation within education and training provision across the EU, the actual relationships, as Erasmus was to testify, were becoming less desperate. Circumstances were altering in favour of the Commission's interpretation of policy as transcontinental, cohesive and facilitating a platform for joint activities such as educational exchanges, funding projects and the European dimension in education. Furthermore, the revisions of the original Treaty of Rome brought to the Community a scope for the consolidation of the action programmes and a clearly stated role for the European Union in education policy advocacy.

In the lead up to and preparation for the Maastricht Treaty (7th February 1992) the Commission and Council of Ministers identified the objectives for the development of education policy within the dynamic of economic and possibly political unification. These objectives were, crucially:

- the promotion of a 'multicultural Europe' to develop a sense of belonging and to encourage a distinct European identity which could be inclusive of cultural and citizenship elements
- a 'mobile Europe' which could reflect the ethos of the Erasmus programme and aiming to provide opportunities for studying, teaching and training in other member states
- a 'Europe of training for all' to try and give all EU citizens the opportunity of life long learning (women were to be particularly targeted through this objective)
- a 'Europe of skills' was an objective which tried to open the technological barriers which prevented many from attaining employment, and where vocational training could be consolidated through technological innovation
- and finally, 'Europe open to the world', as operated through the Tempus programme which attempted to encourage co-operation between the EU and other states - with special reference for the potential member states of central and eastern Europe (EC Commission, 1989, p.236).

In this manner the EU introduced a single educational entity with its strong European dimension. The direction of EU policy post-Maastricht and through to the current programme cycle (2007-2013), was to be a refinement of these key objectives. The focus also marked a reconciliation of sorts between the Council, Commission and Parliament over the question of the role of education in the Community. Article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty detailed the agreed EU policy on education:

“1) The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

2) Community action shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, *inter alia*, by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of Member States
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and the exchange of socio-educational instructors
- encouraging the development of distance education” (Article 126 of the Treaty on European Union).

Furthermore, Article 127 of Maastricht revamped the problematic Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome on the whole vexed question of vocational training, while Article 128 dealt with the issue of culture and social cohesion, difficult as it was to define and relevant as it was to the ideal of European citizenship.

Education policy after 1992 was to reside within the long term political and economic strategy of the EU and where member states’ policies were proved to be wanting in regards to the aforementioned areas of provision, the EU could act to complement state policies. While John Field in *European Dimensions* pointed out that the new arrangements “explicitly excludes harmonisation of national education systems, including curricula”, the coherence of certain aspects of education provision would suggest a more concerted system was being established than publicly acknowledged by EU officials (Field, 1998, p.58; also see Lenaerts, 1994, pp.39-41). Through to the current arrangements, education policy in practice in the EU would come to mean exchanges, vocational training, language studies and citizenship through a European dimension. In practice citizenship education has been left up to the member state governments to introduce, and across the

continent it has been designed on a national bias often with a strong European aspect. For example, in the Republic of Ireland the introduction of citizenship education was tied to the Council of Europe's promotion of active citizenship whereas in the northern jurisdiction the European dimension is far less pronounced - reflecting two regions with different emphases. Working from Article 126 the Commission was also able to propose and promote umbrella action programmes to follow through from previous successful programmes such as Socrates (see References and Bibliography). At this stage in the development of the policy a symbiotic relationship had been successfully established between education departments across the Union, the economic base of education was well aligned and the concept of citizenship was to become a new arena for integrated programmes within primary, secondary and indeed tertiary sectors.

Citizenship education and its potential for European integration

With changing educational priorities and the adaptation of curricula to instil a sense of diversity and interdependence among pupils, core themes that have emerged in EU education policy after the 1990s reflect a number of influences. Changing demographic patterns have meant that previous priorities that may have been central to political, cultural and social education have had to be 'reframed' to reflect the more diverse and plural nature of the society in which pupils live. As a result the European identity and dimension was to be given more prominence throughout schooling (EC, 2005, pp.8-9). The implementation of new curricula across the continent permitted education departments to adapt to the changing circumstances and with the introduction of citizenship education in most countries in some form, a process began which arguably serves to embed the European concept of the subject through diverse education systems. The version of citizenship education as presented in the material produced by the Commission provides learning and teaching opportunities through elements that promote a better appreciation of the individual as person, as contributor to the society and as a contributor to the economy and environment - all within the European ideal. The Commission's impression of citizenship education was also to provide a framework for the adaptation of the education systems of the ten new member states after 2004. The Comenius action, for example, which supports schools across Europe, has the specific aim of enhancing:

“partnerships, projects for the training of school education staff, and school education networks. It thus aims to enhance the quality of

teaching, strengthen its European dimension and promote language learning and mobility...”

while emphasising “certain important issues: learning in a multi-cultural framework, which is the cornerstone of European citizenship”. In effect citizenship education can be seen to be active, if understated (European Commission, n.d).

Political and constitutional changes - such as multiculturalism, regionalisation and EU enlargement - have altered the nature of social, cultural and political participation, with education having to shift emphases in order to inform pupils of the type of pluralistic and democratic society within which they live. Beyond the contingencies brought forward by EU national sensitivities, citizenship education has become a vehicle for interpreting societies, individual relationships to the structures in society, and civic engagement in general. The concept has, as with the earlier interpretations of European integration, a generally accepted political impression. This generic definition of citizenship is stated in the European Commission’s 2005 review of ‘Citizenship Education at School in Europe’ and offers a comprehensive summary of the subject:

“Citizenship involves enjoying rights and exercising responsibilities in various types of community. This way of seeing citizenship encompasses the specific idea of political participation by members of a democratic state. It also includes the more general notion that citizenship embraces a range of participatory activities, not all overtly political, that affect the welfare of communities... Citizenship is about making informed choices and decisions, and about taking action, individually and as part of collective processes” (EC, 2005, p.14).

The links between peaceful democratic society and European integration are very much to the fore in the Commission’s handling of the subject. Ján Figel, the Commissioner responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism, highlighted the connections by coupling civic responsible behaviour, participation and a sense of inclusion. For him citizenship education was about: “Learning about the rights and duties of citizens, respect for democratic values and human rights, and the importance of solidarity, tolerance and participation in a democratic society” (EC, 2005, p.3). For Figel citizenship was something to be learned and the EU had a responsibility to educate the population into this sense of European identity. Subsequently, a new programme has been designated by the Commission, aimed at the active promotion of European citizenship and titled ‘Citizens

for Europe' (2007-2013). While acknowledging the cultural and political implications of these initiatives, the policy encourages citizenship across policy bases, including education, and is currently being implemented.

Across the European Union the principle of 'responsible citizenship' has moved towards a consensus on not only the individual's role in society, but also the role that education has to play in establishing a value for citizen participation. In Latvia, for example, the education system has adopted the teaching of 'civic attitudes', in Poland 'civic awareness', in Romania 'civic involvement', in Germany and the Netherlands 'civic rights and duties'. France, of course, has its tradition of *l'éducation civique* within its system. Also the Council of Europe has been promoting activities around education for citizenship culminating in the 'European Year of Citizenship' in 2005 (Brock, 2002, p.399). The objective of the Council's initiative was to encourage governments across Europe to reassess the role of civic engagement within the respective education systems (O'Shea, 2003). To put it another way, through education, the European identity and citizenship can be located across the curriculum in Europe.

The EU initiative on citizenship education can also be placed within global and development contexts and the attempts by various international organisations recognising the need for and possibilities of citizenship education. With the priority within member states of trying to hold to principles of national identity, global aspects - and development education - offer further opportunities. UNESCO, for example, highlights the connection between citizenship education and peaceful society. Working from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its call for "...the preparation of the child for responsible life in free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples", UNESCO has been promoting peace building through the practice of citizenship.

In its concluding statement from the 2004 International Conference on Education it outlined the priorities it saw for education systems. These included:

"...the willingness and the capacity to live together and to build peace in a world characterized by inter-state and internal armed conflicts and by the emergence of all forms of violence and war" (UNESCO 2004).

The responsibility should be for what it labels "education for active and responsible citizenship". The link is therefore made at international level between peace and citizenship, education and democracy, all of which can be read into the EU's strategy.

Following on from an international acceptance of the pedagogy of ‘citizenship education’ promoted through the auspices of organisations such as the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - particularly since 2001 and heightened global tension - many EU governments have been promoting the subject as a catch-all discipline for topics such as human rights, equality, diversity, justice, tolerance, and peace. The emphasis across the different states has been noticeable, although the separate administrations have been working through the varied aspects of the citizenship syllabi.

For example, in the new member states of the EU the principles of freedom and democracy are very prominent and reflect the recent histories of these regions, whereas in England the multiethnic society and diversity comes through strongly; in France citizenship education highlights social integration and targets anti-social behaviour; in the Republic of Ireland with civic, social and political education (CSPE) the intercommunity aspect of society is emphasised; while in Northern Ireland citizenship education means ‘local and global’ awareness with reference to education for mutual understanding (EC, 2005, pp.17-26). The pattern is that citizenship education, while being promoted through EU programmes, emerges in various contexts in different ways, depending on governmental priorities.

Conclusion

Citizenship education as a cross-curricular theme has been given an unprecedented role in the progressively integrating education systems of the EU as a core component along with language learning, mobility and vocational training. The legal basis has facilitated a policy shift that has meant that certain aspects of citizenship education - such as civic responsibility, concepts of freedom, communal interdependence, diversity, and human rights - are becoming more noticeable in school curricula across the continent. Cultural and national bias in aspects of citizenship education remain functional aspects of the process even to the point of using the term citizenship education at national level, yet resisting the term at transnational level. The practice and implementation of this policy is however in line with other macro-policy developments progressively promoting ‘ever closer union’ and a European model of citizenship.

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European Union Education Programmes and the Legal Basis

Socrates - Articles 126, 127 Treaty of Rome; Decision No819/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14th March 1995 establishing the

programme (*Official Journal of the EC*, OJ L 87, 20th April 1995, pp.10-24). See: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/socrates_en.html

Leonardo da Vinci - Article 127 of the Treaty of Rome; Council Decision of 6th December 1994. *Official Journal of the EC*, OJ L 340, 29th December 1994, pp.8-24. See: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/index_en.html

Tempus - Council Decision 90/233/EEC, 7th May 1990, Tempus I (*Official Journal of the EC*, OJ L 131, 25.5.1990); Council Decision 93/246/EEC, 29th April 1993, Tempus II (*Official Journal of the EC*, OJ L 112, 6.5.1993) Council Decision 96/663/EC of 21 November 1996, Tempus II. *Official Journal of the EC*, OJ L 306, 28.11.1996.
See: <http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/tempus.html>

Eurydice - This action covers 30 states participating in the citizenship education initiative of the European Union and its website includes network details and funding support mechanisms.

Web: www.eurydice.org

For the full database of EU education systems see:

http://194.78.211.243/Eurybase/frameset_eurybase.html

Active Citizenship: the European Dimension - see:

http://europa.eu/youth/active_citizenship/index_eu_en.html

Citizens for Europe - see:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/index_en.htm

New Programmes 2007-2013 - The new Integrated Action Programme in the field of lifelong learning comprises sectoral programmes on school education (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci) and adult education (Grundtvig), and is completed by transversal measures and an additional Jean Monnet programme focusing on European integration. The proposed budget is € 13.62 billion for the total period 2007-2013. See: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index_en.html

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