

Active Citizenship and the Development of Social Literacy: a case for experiential learning

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This paper explores the relationship between social literacy, citizenship education and community involvement and argues the case of the centrality of experiential learning to the development of active citizenship.

Introduction

‘An active citizen...is someone who not only believes in the concept of a democratic society but who is *willing* and *able to translate* that *belief* into *action*.’

Education for Active Citizenship – 1989, p. 7 Australian Government

The concept of service has informed curricula aimed at the social development of pupils since the 19th Century. The main purposes of these curricula were to develop habits and dispositions of industry, thrift and prudence thereby preserving social fabric and to equip future workers not only with skills but also dispositions, such as humility and perseverance. During the first half of the 20th Century, the inception of vocational and social education anchored in workplace was premised upon the inculcation of a desire to be of service to the nation, or society in pupils. However, in the 1960s, a consideration of individual needs was regarded as equally important. Such concern slowly shaped policy. 1980s vocational and social education was primarily driven by a desire to develop libertarian citizens who would be able to operate successfully in a market economy. However, by the end of 1990s this approach gave way to a commitment to the development of the social aspects of the curriculum founded on community service. Subsequently, successive New Labour Governments have stamped their ethical mark on the National Curriculum by placing an obligation on schools and teachers to promote:

- social cohesion;
- community involvement;
- inclusion;

- a sense of social responsibility.

Citizenship education emphasises a range of social skills and schools are to ensure that through the curriculum children will learn positive social dispositions.

Social Literacy

Social literacy concerns itself with the development of social skills, knowledge and positive human values that engender the desire and ability in human beings to act positively and responsibly in range of complex social settings. Many Commonwealth countries, such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia, as well as Scandinavian nations such as Sweden (Kerr, 1999) have the development of the child in and through society as a foremost principle of education. The New Labour Government's agenda for the social development of pupils is located within Personal, Social and Health Education and in the new curriculum area of citizenship education. In November 1997 the Advisory Group on Citizenship Education, chaired by Professor Bernard Crick, was established to provide advice on effective education for citizenship in schools. The resultant 'Crick Report' contains recommendations relating to the development of the knowledge, skills, understanding and values necessary for 'active citizenship' (QCA, 1998a: 10). The Report highlights three 'mutually-dependent' aspects believed to underpin an effective education for citizenship: 'social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy' (QCA, 1998b: 11-13). In other words, Citizenship Education in the National Curriculum highlights the development of social literacy (Arthur, Davison and Stow, 2000).

The 1988 Education Reform Act effectively ended the development of social studies, which had developed during the 1970s (see, for example, Rennie *et al* 1974 and Elliot & Pring 1975), in English schools through prescribing a range of traditional subjects and defining them in abstract academic terms. The social aspects of the curriculum were marginalised as academic subjects sought status in the hierarchy of academic credibility that underpinned the structure of the first National Curriculum statutory orders. Core and foundation subjects were not concerned overtly with the social and practical aspects of

daily life. However, in order that the National Curriculum fulfil the intentions of the 1988 Act - the curricular aim to fit pupils for life and the world of work - the teaching of the social component of the school curriculum needed to be integrated in a cross-curricular fashion. Consequently, a range of cross-curricular documentation relating to, *inter alia*, *Citizenship, Health Education, Economic and Industrial Understanding* was produced.

Elsewhere, during the 1980s in Australia and New Zealand, education for social literacy was developing. The term social literacy was first used within the context of multicultural education in Australia (Kalantzis & Cope 1983). Kalantzis and Cope extended the use of the term to include knowledge about, and particularly learning from, the social sciences as taught in schools. Subsequently, the New Zealand national curriculum speaks about children acquiring social literacy by means of a study of social studies through the social processes of enquiry, values exploration and social decision making. Here the term relates to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding linked to the promotion of responsible behaviour and the development of appropriate social skills. During the 1990s, the 'Emotional Intelligence and Social Literacy' movement developed in the USA (see, for example, Goleman 1996).

However, contrary to the direction of official government documentation in the 1990s, the Report of the National Commission on Education (1993), commissioned by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, reasserts the importance of schools in the socialisation of pupils. Further, it maintains that education is the conduit through which 'society transmits its values from one generation to another' (1993: 93). The Report exemplifies values that are not out of place in other approaches to developing social virtues and they include 'truthfulness, respect for other people, a sense of the obligations due to the community in which we live...and a caring attitude towards others' (1993: 93). A renewed emphasis has been given to the social dimension of the 1999 revision of the National Curriculum for England in its *Statement of Values, Aims and Purposes* (QCA: 1999b). The *Statement* includes: the development of children's social responsibility; community involvement; the development of effective relationships; knowledge and understanding of society; participation in the affairs of society; respect for others and children's contribution to the

building up of the common good, including their development of independence and self-esteem. Indeed, since the election of the New Labour government in 1997, it has become clear that much of the content of educational policy has its roots in the 1993 National Commission Report.

Despite acknowledging that adults operate in a complex social world, the revised National Curriculum documentation ignores the complexity of the processes through which pupils' social literacy is developed. Unlike scientific or mathematical knowledge which, in the main, may be developed in the school context, children's values, beliefs and attitudes are also developed within the home and in the wider community in which their socialisation takes place. Indeed, some children's 'home' values may be in direct opposition to those espoused by the school, as well as being at variance with those of other children. The 'primary socialisation' of the home, may be based on values that are at variance with the 'secondary socialisation' of the school. The importance of home and school in the socialisation of children is recognised by Lawton (1973). In all societies, primary socialisation takes place predominantly within family groupings as a 'process of inducting children into (the) rules, beliefs and values (Lawton, 1973: 41). This is a mediated worldview (a version of society's beliefs and values presented by someone with whom the child identifies), but for the child this is *the* world. Secondary socialisation, on the other hand, 'deals with the internalisation of *partial* realities. Knowledge is now mediated by means of an institution, or by a functionary within the institution (work or school)' (Lawton, 1973: 41 - emphasis original author). A difficulty for schools lies in the fact that these beliefs and values may be markedly different from, or in direct opposition to, a child's primary socialisation. In a pluralistic society, therefore, problems of knowledge and meaning are exacerbated by a multiplicity of groups holding different perspectives of the world and of knowledge (Lawton 1973: 42). A limited model of citizenship education, like the one presented in the revised National Curriculum will be insufficient to fully develop pupils' social literacy.

Bentley (1998) believes that 'The practice of citizenship can best be described as a connection between the particular and the universal'. While it is possible to accept the

idea that an act of citizenship is always bounded by an interrelationship of self and other, Bentley's everyday use of the phrase 'the practice of citizenship' ignores the fact that there are many versions of citizenship. National Curriculum guidance documents for Personal, Social, and Health Education (QCA, 1999b), which includes Citizenship for Key Stages 1 and 2 (QCA, 1999c), and Citizenship Key Stages 3 and 4 (QCA, 1999d) also present citizenship as monolithic. We would argue that such a position is untenable. We have argued elsewhere (Arthur & Davison 2000) that there are many versions of citizenship: some of which are diametrically opposed. Briefly, we propose four broad categories of citizenship: libertine, palaeoconservative, libertarian and communitarian. Each of these has its own values and discourses, which underpin the worldview of its citizens. Clearly, models of citizenship education developed from different sets of values and beliefs are quite likely to lead to the construction of markedly different curricula.

In a paper of this length any characterisation of beliefs and values of the various types of citizen is not exhaustive and runs the risk of appearing reductive. We acknowledge fully that there are many other values, beliefs and attitudes that might be attributed to the versions of citizenship education described below. Values have been ascribed with the sole intention of showing that it is too simplistic to refer to citizenship education as if it were not a debatable term. Similarly, the beliefs and values listed are not necessarily only confined to the particular version to which they have been ascribed. For example, the idea of *service* would naturally exist in both palaeoconservative and communitarian versions of citizenship education, but the versions of service would be markedly different, for example: a palaeoconservative acceptance of externally-constructed and imposed rules, opposed to a communitarian collective engagement in the construction of rules. Further, we offer these descriptions as a means to explore the concept of citizenship education and the values that underpin its varying forms, as they illustrate the differing values and beliefs that might be seen as characterising types of citizenship.

Libertarian citizenship education would at best be about developing the child's competence to operate successfully within the capitalist system, to understand the rules and develop the dispositions of utilitarian creativity and entrepreneurial drive. At worst, it

could encourage the practice of deceit, fraud and hypocrisy that are destructive of community and lethal to democracy. Libertine citizenship education would be radically critical of concepts such as virtue, community, tradition, and its aim would not be to extend the common good. Instead, this type of citizenship education would engage in an on-going struggle to ensure the maximum freedom for each individual with everything up for questioning and argument. At worst, this libertine approach could cause division, fragmentation and strife within community. Citizenship education for the palaeoconservative would mainly be about complying with various kinds of authority. At best this type of citizenship education would encourage dispositions like respect, responsibility and self-discipline: at worst, submission, conformity and docility. Finally, communitarian citizenship education would emphasise the role, depending on the ideological perspective, of 'mediating' social institutions in addition to schools, in the belief that Society as a whole is educative. At best, this would not restrict itself to the transmission of a set of social procedures, but aim to strengthen the democratic and participative spirit within each individual. At worst, it could become majoritairean in approach; insisting on the acceptance of the moral position of the majority in society. We would argue that it is to the best ideal of the communitarian citizen that New Labour aspires, in its revision of the National Curriculum. (For a full discussion of these issues, see Arthur & Davison, 2000: 23-37).

Ultimately, the term 'social literacy' is not unproblematic for the means by which children acquire social literacy can privilege some over others. By using the 'right' behaviour and language in the 'right way', that is, by entering the dominant discourse, socially-literate citizens have avenues opened for them to the social goods and powers of society. The New Labour Government seeks to use citizenship education in the school curriculum as a means to redress deficiencies in the prior social acquisition of children in the name of 'inclusion'. Fundamentally, the school is an agency of socialisation that exerts pressures on those involved to accept its social values as their own. Successful engagement with learning through an induction into 'educated discourse' (Mercer, 1995: 84) will determine pupils' future acquisition of social 'goods': for example, particular employment paths, further and higher education, and, ultimately, status and wealth.

However, the Government's agenda goes further than the development of active, successful citizens by establishing citizenship education in the school curriculum. The Government is also eager to reduce truancy and exclusion from schools together with reducing crime and reconviction among young people. The Social Exclusion Unit, based in the Cabinet Office, has sought to achieve these ends by means of a whole range of initiatives that involve inter-agency work with voluntary and community groups – another communitarian characteristic of government policy. With over three million children living in poverty and one in four living in inadequate housing a Children and Young People's Unit has also been established to develop a national childcare strategy. This strategy will aim to increase the social literacy of children through interventions in socially disadvantaged areas of the country. It aims to develop confident children who are aware of their rights and responsibilities. The Policy Action Unit Team 11 published *Schools Plus: Building Learning Communities* (2001) and the document strongly advocates that schools in deprived areas should adopt a community focus and become centres of excellence in community involvement.

Essentially, the Government wishes to build schools as learning communities that develop individuals who feel they have an active and full part to play in society; who feel they can cope with relationships with other people; who are sociable and who are going to be good parents in the future. However, the school curriculum is not currently designed to facilitate this type of approach to education when the demand and emphasis is often simply that we make children literate and numerate. There is a real and growing tension in government policies that appear to advocate community learning and inclusion and others which aim to increase academic standards through competition between schools and encourage new forms of selection. It is perhaps why that experiential learning in community was made mandatory in the new Citizenship Order.

Experiential Learning

Most school learning takes place in the classroom and yet for citizenship education it is by no means an ideal learning environment. Indeed, the authors of the Crick Report

acknowledge that schools can ‘only do so much’ (QCA 1998: 9) in the development of active future citizens. Such development is not only the product of schooling, but it is also the product of the complex interactions between children and their homes, and between children and the wider community in which they grow. This fact is acknowledged in the Citizenship Education Curriculum as it recognises that pupils should be offered opportunities to practice political and social responsibility in the community. Active citizenship implies and even requires *action* on the part of the citizen pupil. The ability to think and act on social and political concerns underpins effective citizenship education. Pupils therefore need to develop active, collaborative and co-operative working patterns focused on real problems in a real community - what is variously called service learning, community-based learning, community participation, community education or experiential learning. For the purposes of this paper we will use the term ‘experiential learning’ to cover most of the activities included in all the other terms listed above.

Dyson and Robson (1999) provide an excellent summary of the research and literature on school and community involvement and clearly, experiential learning, of which community service is a type, has its roots in the writings of John Dewey. The most relevant of Dewey’s works to our discussion are *How We Think* (1933) and *Experience and Education* (1938). Aldous Huxley observed that experience does not happen to people, rather it is what people do with what has happened to them. Therefore, experience of itself need not result in learning. For Dewey experience *per se* was not necessarily educative ‘The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted’ (Dewey 1938: 25). Dewey’s comments are a salutary reminder that community learning experience is not unproblematic. In order for experience to become educative, an individual needs to

engage in 'reflective thinking', which Dewey defines as 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends' (Dewey 1933: 9). Through engaging in reflective thinking practices, pupils will be enabled to begin to see and understand things about themselves, their peers, their school, their community and, ultimately, about the society in which they live.

Experiential learning can have an extremely broad or narrow definition depending on what the 'experience' is. We define it as the knowledge, skills and understanding acquired through observation, simulation, and/or participation by engaging the mind, and/or body, through activity, reflection, and application (Arthur and Wright 2001). It should facilitate pupils' affective and cognitive development. Experiential learning is therefore about doing something that integrates concrete experiences with reflective observations about the experience. Learning, the development of 'knowledge understandings and beliefs is a synthesis of experiences' (Arthur, J., Davison, J. and Moss, J. 1997: 77-78). The process of synthesising enables pupils to focus, probe, and test and to begin to make sense of emergent attitudes, beliefs and understandings of themselves, their peers and the community. 'Experiences' as described here will not only take the form of direct involvement, but also they may also result from reading, writing or discussion with peers, teachers, community members or others.

Director of CSV Education for Citizenship, John Potter, calls experiential learning 'Active Learning in the Community' (ALC). He defines it as an educational method that offers concrete opportunities to pupils to learn new skills and to think critically. He believes it should be incremental progressing from one year to the next and integral to what is taught in the whole curriculum. Potter advocates a whole school approach that responds to the needs in the school and community. He also believes it should be assessed, accredited and celebrated. ALC is clearly more than simply helping out in the community: there need to be outcomes and pupil learning must result. There are also many benefits from such an approach including, among others, giving pupils a sense of purpose, independence, self-understanding and confidence, leadership skills, a sense of

belonging and positive personal values. In summary, Potter (1999:10) defines experiential learning as being ‘based on a methodology that brings together young people’s activities that benefit others with structured curriculum-related opportunities to learn from the experience’.

As such, this definition of effective community learning resonates well with communitarian conceptions of citizenship, which emphasise that identity and stability of character cannot be realised without the support of a community and thus there needs to be contributions from pupils to their community (Arthur 2000). The strongest advocates of ‘community service’ programmes have been American communitarians who believe them to be an indispensable prerequisite of citizenship education. Etzioni (1995: 113) argues that community service programmes are the ‘capstone of a student’s educational experience’ in school. Communitarians advocate mandatory community service programmes in schools because they say volunteer programmes only attract a minority of students. A debate on this issue of whether service learning should be required or voluntary has taken place for the last ten years in the USA where service learning in the community has formed the basis of many programmes in schools and colleges (see for example Andersen 1998). However, few states in the USA have made community service mandatory, but in England there is growing pressure on all schools to introduce some form of experiential community learning. The Crick Report discussed whether ‘service learning or community involvement initiated by schools should be part of the new statutory Order for citizenship education’, but it ‘concluded not to ask for their statutory inclusion’ (QCA 1998a: 25). Nevertheless, it was given statutory status by the Secretary of State for Education in the Citizenship Order. Schools are, therefore, legally obliged to provide some form of community based learning for every pupil.

Young (1999: 469) has outlined the main obstacles to experiential learning in the community and lists them as the:

- superiority of subject-based knowledge;
- under-valuing of practical knowledge;

- priority given to written knowledge as opposed to other forms of presenting knowledge;
- superiority of knowledge acquired by individuals over that developed by groups of pupils working together.

All these obstacles are located within the school curriculum. Young argues for an education that gives pupils a sense that they can act in the world, an education that helps create new knowledge and for the relevance of school knowledge to everyday problems. Community participation on the part of pupils offers the possibility of fulfilling the vision outlined by Young. Garratt (2000) believes that community participation is predicated on an Aristotelian perspective, where the process of becoming habituated through experience in community leads to the development of a virtuous character. He argues that, both in and out of school, pupils should be exposed to as many experiences as possible that encourage positive behaviour. Ruddock and Flutter (2000) also seek to 'create a new order of experience for them [pupils] as active participants'. They recognise that secondary schools offer less responsibility and autonomy than many pupils would be accustomed to in their lives outside of school. All of these educationalists, whilst recognising the problems associated with experiential learning in community believe that citizenship education offer, through its community dimension, opportunities to develop active citizens. Others, such as Tooley (2000), argue that citizenship education should be learnt out of school. He believes that the State should not intervene in schooling by providing citizenship education as this will lead to greater control over individuals. Whilst recognising that education alone cannot bring about the development of citizenship, we do not accept his arguments and refer readers to McLaughlin (2000) for a detailed rejection of Tooley's stance.

Hart (1992) offers us a way of understanding this process of becoming part of a community. Hart outlines a model of community participation that he calls the 'participation ladder'. In sum it may be described as:

- (a) pupils understand the community project they are involved in and know its purpose;
- (b) pupils know why they are involved,

- (c) pupils have a meaningful role within the project,
- (d) pupils have made a free choice to be so involved.

Hart concludes that (a), (b) and (c) are necessary before (d) can be reached. Holden and Clough (2000:20) offer further clarification in detailing their idea of 'action competent'. The action competent pupil is able and ready to participate and can argue, reflect critically and relate his or her opinions and actions to a values framework. Holden and Clough describe this as a values-based participation in community, but do not provide us with how these values are formed in any depth.

A good community participation programme will address the issue of academic relevance by connecting knowledge, skills, and concepts with accomplishing a meaningful purpose in the school and/or community. As such, experiential learning becomes an integral part of school improvement and contributes to this by ensuring that knowledge is gained by the pupil through guided interaction with the community and local environment. It should develop critical thinking skills that help pupils make evaluations and judgements since community issues and problems cannot always be neatly defined and solved so pupils will also develop problem-solving skills. This should in turn assist pupils to think across the boundaries of traditional curriculum subjects which should help them become more adept at integrating and applying what they are learning. Experiential learning, well planned and executed, allows pupils from a variety of backgrounds and abilities to work together on real problems that provide unity and purpose beyond the classroom. This facilitates inclusion, promotes equity and fosters appreciation of cultural diversity by assisting pupils to relate to others from a wide range of backgrounds and life situations. It will help pupils to value and understand the differences among individuals and communities. The school community itself will change by creating new relationships with the local community that will be viewed increasingly as a positive learning environment that benefits the school. As all members of staff and pupils become participants in the process of experiential learning they develop a personal and collective stake in making something positive happen beyond the walls of the school.

National Curriculum

The Report of the National Advisory groups on Personal, Social and Health Education *Preparing Young People for Adult Life* (DfEE 1999) proposes that schools should provide pupils with opportunities for pupils 'to play a positive part in the life of their school, neighbourhood and communities'. In a paragraph reflecting Bentley (1998) the Report notes that the learning environment goes beyond the school, because the school 'is part of the community and learning opportunities will be offered by the quality of the school's relationship with the wider community' (DfEE 1999: 2). The Report identifies the roles of significant contributors to PSHE, including parents, schools, governors, pupils, FE colleges, health services and central government. From the community it cites such significant contributors as 'the people living in the locality, the shops, the services and amenities which serve them, the churches and other religious groups they belong to and other cultural and ethnic groups with which they identify' (DfEE 1999: 19). Other local and national organisations, civic and voluntary bodies are mentioned as providing support for personal and social development 'often in conjunction with businesses' (DfEE 1999: 20). Although there is mention of pupils working to be of service to the school in its pages, nowhere does the Report exemplify the nature of service to, or in, the community. Therefore, any school beginning to develop a model service learning in the community needs first to be clear about how it will construct its model.

Will the school develop a model based upon:

the community of the school?

the community in the school?

or

the school in the community?

What will be the underlying purposes of service learning? Will the school attempt to develop in pupils, understandings that will result from:

learning for service?

learning about service?

or

learning from service?

However, the National Curriculum offers little in the way of answers to these questions. At the heart of the National Curriculum is the *Statement of Values by the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community* (QCA 1999a and b). The statement uses the refrain ‘On the basis of these values, we should’ (QCA 1999a: 148). Although schools and teachers are assured that there is general agreement in society of these values the ‘we’ of the statement is never identified. On the basis of these values it is the responsibility of schools to enable to develop in pupils the capacity to: ‘understand and carry out our responsibilities as citizens’; ‘refuse to support values or actions that may be harmful to individual communities’; ‘promote participation in the democratic processes by all sectors of the community’ and to ‘contribute to, as well as benefit from economic and cultural resources’ (QCA 1999a: 147 - 149). Both *National Curriculum for England* documents (Key Stages 1 and 2 (QCA 1999a), Key Stages 3 and 4 (QCA 1999b)) are premised upon a statement of values aims and purposes (see for example QCA 1999a: 10 – 12). In the preamble to the non-statutory guidelines for PSHE and Citizenship at Key Stages 1 and 2 the authors state the importance of pupils finding out about ‘their rights and duties as individuals and members of communities’ (QCA 1999a: 136). At Key Stage 1, opportunities for interaction with the wider community cited are ‘meet and talk with people (for example, with outside visitors such as religious leaders, police officers, the school nurse)’ (QCA 1999a: 138). While at Key Stage 2, the ‘Breadth of Opportunities’ include ‘meet and talk with people (for example, people who contribute to society through environmental pressure and groups or international aid organisations, people who work in the school and the neighbourhood, such as religious leaders, community police officers)’ (QCA 1999a: 141). The model of service learning exemplified in the National curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 is based upon *the community of the school* (school nurse), *the community in the school* (visits by significant community members) and focuses upon opportunities for *learning about service*. These opportunities are, of course, at the passive end of community involvement and, as such, are unlikely to promote the active citizenship the National Curriculum espouses.

At Key Stage 3 the opportunities cited are similar but indicate a shift towards more active community involvement: ‘meet and work with people (for example, people who can give them reliable information about health and safety issues, such as school nurses)’. This, of course, could be a passive activity based on *the community of the school, learning about service*. The example continues with: ‘develop relationships (for example, by working together in a range of groups and social settings...by being responsible for a mini-enterprise scheme as part of a small group)’ - *the community in the school, learning about service* - and ‘participate (for example...in an action research project designed to reduce crime and improve personal safety in their neighbourhood)’ (QCA 1999b: 190). While such involvement is undoubtedly positive, with the possible exception of the action research project (see below), however, it does not promote actual community service in a real sense as the engagement is more likely to be *academic* rather than *experiential*. Only at Key Stage 4 are pupils recommended to participate ‘in an initiative to improve their local community’ - *learning from service*. Other recommendations refer to the traditional ‘work experience and industry days’ (QCA 1999b: 193) - *learning for service?* Despite the fact that the revised *National Curriculum for England* is predicated upon clearly articulated beliefs and values, much of what is proposed in relation to community service is consistent with ‘traditional’ approaches to personal, social and vocational development. The only mention of ‘community-based activities’ in the programmes of study for Citizenship at Key Stages 3 and 4 is the phrase, which is identical each Key Stage, ‘negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community-based activities’, (QCA 1999b: 184 - 186). On close inspection, however, this phrase is premised upon models of *the community of the school, the school in the community* as well as *learning from service*. From this brief analysis, it would appear that the dominant model proposed service learning in the National Curriculum, with the possible exception of some activities in Key Stage 4, is passive rather than active. In the main community service is constructed upon academic curricular experiences arising from models of *the community of the school, the community in the school*, which will promote *learning about service* rather than *learning from service*.

The Community Service Volunteers organisation has extensive experience in the area of community involvement and has listed five citizenship competencies for experiential learning that are worth listing here. They are to:

- work in a variety of group settings;
- identify and evaluate the values and ethics of self and others in the community;
- recognise, appreciate and support vital elements of the local community;
- gather and evaluate data necessary to effect positive change;
- implement effective decision making and problem solving strategies.

All of these competencies need to be integrated into the academic school curriculum and CSV also lists four components that must be present to provide a quality experience for pupils. First, *preparation* is concerned with orientating the pupils for action. Second, *action* is hands-on experience. Third, *reflection* is developing critical skills. Finally, *celebration* is due recognition for pupils' efforts and learning (CSV: 2000: 13).

Preparation

Community service projects may originate in a number of ways. Pupils conducting research on their community may identify community needs. This community might be the school itself, but such projects would carry the caveat above about the dangers of a model that focuses solely of the *community of the school*. Pupils might identify needs of the wider community in which the school is placed, either individually, jointly or in collaboration with members of that community. It needs little reflection to appreciate that teacher-initiated, focused and directed community projects are likely to reap fewest benefits. When pupils are engaging on a collaborative action research project, they will not only identify community needs, but they will also have to prioritise in order to identify areas of greatest need and make realistic judgments about the feasibility of their ability to meet those needs. At the same time, teachers will need to identify opportunities for learning within any proposed project: How does the project relate to other curriculum areas? What might pupils need to know, understand or be able to do before the project? What might they need to be taught before the service learning experience? What might pupils know, understand or be able after the project? What will they learn from the

experience? How will this be logged, recorded, presented, assessed? What opportunities will the service experience provide for oracy, literacy, numeracy, research, and problem solving? What affective outcomes might be reasonably expected – self-esteem, virtues, dispositions, habits, beliefs, and attitudes? Although this list of questions might begin to appear lengthy, and perhaps, a little daunting, it is in reality no different from preparation for any other teaching and learning experience. Central to preparation for service learning is the articulation of the points raised in this paragraph.

Action

Action as part of community service needs to be a learning experience. ‘Experience’ as described here will not only take the form of direct involvement, but may also result from reading, writing or discussion with peers, teachers, community members or others.

Pupils, therefore, need to be provided with opportunities for this range of experiences during service and, most importantly, they need to be provided with a means to record and document action. Pupils need to be supported in maintaining journals in which they record events, concerns, fears, pleasures, insights, doubts, critical questions relating to incidents, to people and indeed to themselves.

Reflection

Arguably, for community service experience to be worthwhile, pupils need to see the connection between service and learning. The experience needs to be ‘made visible’ to them. Data collected in service experience journals, logs, etc. will enable service learning experiences to become ‘texts’ that may be studied by an individual pupil, groups of pupils and others engaged in the project. In their early discussions/writings, it is quite likely that teachers will see pupils being what they believe to be more *descriptive* rather than *reflective*. However, we believe that this fact should not surprise us, nor does it invalidate the activity; for it is in the initial stages, in such *articulation* or *description* of some aspect of the service learning experience, which may seem blindingly obvious to an adult, that learning and development takes place. Such description in these early stages can for the first time make visible the values, beliefs, attitudes present in the community.

McIntyre (1993) identifies three levels of reflection: the *technical* level - concerned with the attainment of goals; the *practical* level - concerned with the 'assumptions, predispositions, values and consequences with which actions are linked'; and the *critical* or *emancipatory* level, where concern ranges to wider social, political and ethical issues that include 'the institutional and societal forces which may constrain the individual's freedom of action or limit the efficacy of his or her actions' (McIntyre, 1993:44). We would argue that pupils should be encouraged and supported in engaging in all levels of reflection.

What are the purposes of reflection? How will reflecting enable the social development of pupils? The following list (adapted from Frost (1993:140) is by no means exhaustive, but it helps to provide answers to these questions. Reflection enables pupils to:

- assess his or her own knowledge, understandings and skills and to improve them;
- evaluate the approach to their community service project in terms of its appropriateness;
- comprehend and, where appropriate, question their own assumptions and preconceptions and those embedded in aspects of the community/society they encounter;
- continue to examine and clarify their personal values and beliefs;
- continue to examine and clarify the values and beliefs they encounter in the community;
- theorise about the context of their service learning - that is, to try to develop explanations about aspects of the community;
- examine the social and political dimensions of the issues that arise in their reflection on community service and critique the discourses in which they are located.

Celebration

Finally, it is important that there is recognition not only of service, but also of the learning that has taken place. While the first may involve a public or community manifestation of recognition, or celebration of a successful project – a plaque, a

newspaper report, a ceremony of some kind, the second may involve a more personal dialogue between: pupil and teacher, groups of pupils; pupils and mentors. The second form of recognition may also involve community members, parents, siblings, etc. in order that the school is recognised as a fully active member of the community. Pupils should be encouraged to develop a portfolio of community service, or record of community involvement, which might be used for assessment as appropriate, but might also be used as evidence for further work – voluntary, or paid on leaving school – as a tangible manifestation of the qualities of an individual pupil.

The processes above provide a useful starting point for beginning to construct an active version of community service arising from a model of *the school in the community* that will promote *learning from service*. The essence of the benefits of effective service learning is mutuality. Instead of having a focus of primarily meeting the needs of just one of the ‘stakeholders’ in community service, effective service learning has benefits for each participant: the pupil, the school and the community. Without doubt, the benefits to pupils are related to their academic, intellectual, personal and social growth and development. Engagement in effective service learning will develop not only oracy, numeracy and literacy skills, but also it will involve them in higher-order thinking skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and learning skills, such as inquiry, observation and application, will be enhanced. Most important the pupils’ capacities in relation to insight, judgment and understanding will be developed and pupils’ self-esteem, personal efficacy and sense of responsibility will be enhanced.

The benefits to schools are equally important. Effective community service encourages pupils to play a more active part in their schooling and to take more responsibility for their own learning. Increased pupil motivation and co-operative learning structures enhance the quality of work produced and the quality of classroom relationships. Teachers will become reflective practitioners engaged in curriculum enquiry and development. There will be increased benefits as a result of collaborative decision-making among school governors and managers, teachers, parents, pupils and members of the community. Effective community service will not only enhance the ethos of the

school, it is also likely to mean that the school will have access to community resources, both material and human, to support teaching and learning.

The benefits to the community can arise from the provision of service to meet real human, educational, social, health or environmental needs. Positive school and community partnerships empower not only pupils and schools, they also empower communities through joint planning, negotiation and resolution of community problems. Pupils are members of the community and as a result of active and effective community service, they will become positive and effective members of the community as pupils and later as adults.

Conclusion

Community education is a term that is ambiguous and open to different interpretations. Many educationalists and teachers believe that experience in learning is as, if not, more important than the content of what is taught. Experiential learning aims to acquire social, political and personal skills that are essential to the practice as well as the understanding of citizenship. Experiential learning in the community provides pupils with concrete opportunities to participate with others in serving the public. It presents schools with a powerful way of enhancing their pupils learning by developing an effective range of social skills. The progress of pupils in citizenship needs to be recorded through a variety of means and they will need to learn how to gather their own evidence of progress. This means that teachers need to support pupils in reviewing and recording their own evidence that can be used by the teacher to compile the annual reports on citizenship which will be required. However, the circumstances for active community involvement need to be present in the local community for it to work. The school cannot create these itself and they will only happen if local and national government truly encourage participation and involve the public in this process. Schools need to respond imaginatively to the new opportunities that experiential learning offers. Above all, schools will need to be committed and be able to adopt good principles for community involvement and participation that follow through into good practice.

Experiential learning cannot remain as a ‘peripheral’ activity of the school and it appears to us that this type of learning is often best addressed outside the formal structures of the school because the aims and values promoted are more congruent with the processes being learned. Many schools have successfully involved themselves in this area and found to their surprise that the community can also become the teacher. However, we know from the very limited studies that have been done that service learning or community involvement has not been a priority of many English schools (Unicef 2001: 8). Indeed, some believe that faith in community experiential learning schemes is perhaps overly optimistic for schools.

However, we believe that experiential learning in the community is more likely to inculcate and develop altruism, philanthropy, self-reliance and personal social virtues than is a classroom-based, ‘delivered’ course of citizenship education. The social dimension of the curriculum must be about acting and doing in real contexts – *learning from service* – not simply a cognitive activity – *learning about service*. Opportunities for moral development, the development of virtues, dispositions will arise as pupils take on new roles, identities, challenges and interests and work collaboratively for the benefit of others. They will develop increased sense social responsibility and concern for others. Political and civic knowledge and understandings will also be developed. Ultimately, pupils will develop their appreciation of and ability to relate to, a diverse range of situations with people from a variety of social backgrounds. Experiential learning in the community offers a tangible and valid way for developing pupils’ social literacy that will actively involve, engage and empower pupils.

Note

A version of this chapter was published as ‘Experiential Learning, Social Literacy and the Curriculum’ in Scott, D & Lawson, H (eds) (2002) *Citizenship Education and the Curriculum* Westport, Connecticut: Ablex

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