The promotion of knowledge and skills for democratic participation is at the heart of citizenship education. But how are young people best taught to be 'change-makers', prepared to speak out on issues that concern them? If citizenship education is to achieve more than merely encouraging functional participation and empower young people with the skills to challenge perceived injustices, it needs to confront a widespread fatalism about the fixity of politics and society. For this to happen, teachers need to have a sense of themselves as change agents, too.

The then Chief Inspector of schools in England, David Bell, acknowledged in a speech devoted to 'Citizenship through participation and responsible action' (November 2005) that defining what the curriculum said about participation was problematic. He made a distinction between helpful things that pupils did in schools that contributed to an institutional culture of citizenship (for example, peer mentoring, reading support and charitable fund-raising) and citizenship education as outlined in the Citizenship National Curriculum Programme of Study. He cited John Potter's view that 'there is a significant difference between a form of citizenship education that simply encourages decency and good behaviour and one that is rooted in political awareness and a commitment to social justice and equal opportunity' (Bell, 2005, Potter, 2002).

It is an important area around which to establish definitional clarity. Discourses centring around concepts such as 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'active democratic citizenship' are widely used in education but can easily be misappropriated by the New Right - and/or indeed 'New Labour' (cf. Ledwith, 1997). Participation with an emphasis upon duty, and without political drivers, can collapse into an unproblematic conception of active citizenship as volunteering. It can become a way of offloading state responsibilities onto the family, individuals, voluntary organizations and the community. The Crick Report was indeed criticized from this perspective as promoting notions of
social capital without the possibility of real political change (Gamarnikov & Green, 1999). In fact, Crick's own position was in opposition to this type of approach – “participatory skills in real situations are the essence of any genuine education for democracy” (Crick, 2002 : 500-501). Crick opposed citizenship education as simply community involvement - usually in a volunteer capacity - without the possibility of critiquing the current political order.

Misunderstandings in this area are relatively common in English schools. We know from recent evidence of the Citizenship education longitudinal study in England that community involvement as a facet of citizenship education is an area which many schools find challenging (Kerr et.al, 2004 and 2006)). The evidence in the latter report confirms that although students currently have opportunities and experiences of active citizenship, in general, these:

- were largely confined to the school context;
- they concerned opportunities to take part rather than opportunities to effect real change by engaging with the decision-making processes;
- often only involved certain groups of students rather than all students, despite an invitation for all students to participate;
- did not regularly link to wider contexts and communities beyond school.

‘Participation’ as a concept has also had its critics in the Conservative press in England:

“The significance that the curriculum attaches to the value of participation is symptomatic of the subject’s [Citizenship’s] lack of moral and substantive content…The exhortation to participate is not founded on any vision of what constitutes a good society or what it means to be a responsible citizen. Nor is it clear what kind of community-based activity pupils should engage in. Foxhunting? Going to the pub? Protesting against the building of a new supermarket? The inability of the curriculum to endow participation with meaning suggests that the promoters of this subject cannot provide a convincing account of what it means to be a good citizen” (Furedi, 2005)
Few Citizenship educators would agree with this view, but it is fair to say that there has been some fuzzy thinking about the benefits, purposes and practice of young people’s ‘participation’ in and beyond school-settings. The ambiguities of education for active citizenship have been clear for some time (See, for example, Wringe (1992); Masschelein and Quagebeur (2005)). Thus Furedi sets a fair challenge – how does the curriculum seek to ‘endow participation with meaning’?

This paper argues that in looking towards more effective participation by young people, it may be necessary to move beyond the boundaries of the school education literature to engage with different but allied discourses. For example, theorists and practitioners in the field of development studies have argued for greater citizen-agency where citizen-learners move from being relatively passive ‘users and choosers’ to being the ‘makers and shapers’ of a more active and engaged citizenship altogether (see, for example, Mohandy and Tandon (eds.), 2006). More central to the focus of this paper, it is argued that there are lessons to be learned from adult education and social theories of learning such as those espoused by Paolo Freire. This paper will look closely at Freire’s ideas in so far as they may provide some useful touchstones for Citizenship teachers and educators.

Paolo Freire was an influential figure in espousing the politics of liberation and a radical sociology of education. He is known mostly for his literacy campaigns in South America and Africa, and for his seminal work ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ (1972). Others have re-interpreted Freire’s writing and research to apply his ideas on literacy and pedagogy to developed world struggles for ‘liberation’ (for both students and teachers) in schools and colleges. As a Professor of education in the early 1960s, Freire worked with peasants in the north east of Brazil during the country’s national literacy campaign. At this time, and during a subsequent fifteen year period of exile from his country, he evolved a theory of literacy based on conviction that every human being is capable of critically engaging the world in a dialogical encounter with others.
Freire articulated a radical vision of political empowerment. He wrote of a ‘magical’ fatalism about Brazilian people’s lives and was concerned with awakening their political passivity. He aimed to enable them to realise the injustices they experienced. Through problem-posing pedagogy he hoped to awaken their political consciousness. Freire also developed the notion of ‘conscientization’: “A humanising education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world. The way they act and think when they develop all of their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others” (Freire and Frei Betto (1985) ; 14-15]

Freire’s ideas and suggested teaching approaches thus have much to say to Citizenship educators working in a range of contexts. At the heart of Citizenship education are questions such as ‘What sort of society do we live in?’; ‘What kind of society and world do we want to live in in the future?’; ‘What can I and others do to change things and make a difference to the world that we live in?’. It is about being able to imagine a better local and global future and having the knowledge, skills and self-confidence to take some practical steps to achieving that future. Citizenship education like Freirean philosophy aims to help young people to become more fully human. To become more fully human involves discursive debates over meanings and definitions.

Freire’s critical methods ask teachers and students to question existing knowledge as part of the questioning habits appropriate for citizens in a democracy. Freirean educators pose critical problems to students, treat them as complicated substantial human beings, and encourage curiosity and activism about knowledge and the world. Through problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely answer questions. In this pedagogy, students experience education as something they do, not as something done to them. The aim is the establishment of ‘critical consciousness’. The four qualities of critical consciousness are:

- power awareness – knowing that society and history can be made and re-made by human action and by organised groups;
critical literacy – imbibing and practising analytical habits of thinking;
• de-socialisation – challenging the values and language learned in mass culture;
• self-organisation – taking part in and initiating social change projects

The pedagogy advocated by Freire was intended to be more than teaching method but also philosophy and social theory. He insisted that no genuine learning could occur unless students were actively involved. This shift overtly signified an altered power relationship in the classroom. He was firmly on the side of a pedagogy that begins with helping students achieve a grasp of the concrete conditions of their daily lives. He emphasised ‘reflection’, in which the student assimilates knowledge in accordance with his/her own needs, rather than didactic, ‘chalk and talk’ learning.

Freire’s famous metaphor for traditional education, the ‘banking’ method, focused on the stifling of creative and critical thought in mass education. In ‘banking’ style classrooms, Freire wrote that:

“Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise, and repeat…In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing”
(Freire 1972 : 58, 60)

Classrooms die as intellectual centres when they become delivery systems for lifeless bodies of knowledge. In contrast, instead of transferring facts and skills from teacher to students, a Freirean class invites students to think critically about subject matters, doctrines, the learning process itself, and their society. In the liberating classroom suggested by Freire’s ideas, teachers pose problems derived from student life and current social and political issues and debates in a mutually created dialogue.
Essential elements of Freire’s approach to education are his views on respect for student’s views, political neutrality in the classroom, progressive teaching and the creation of knowledge. Freire is clear that developing critical consciousness is not the same as having a class agree with the views of the teacher. This is an essential element of Freire’s pedagogy and he demands that teachers respect the conclusions that students draw even if they are reactionary in nature (de Figueiredo-Cowen 1995:21, 68-69). The knowledge and skills that students develop might thus as easily and appropriately be applied to campaigns that are seeking to resist change. Freire was dedicated, like other elements of the progressive tradition descending from John Dewey, to helping learners become the subjects of their own education rather than objects of the system’s educational agenda. (Dewey wrote that education should help create a society "in which every person shall be occupied in something that makes the life of others better worth living, and which accordingly makes the ties that bind people more perceptible" (Dewey (1916: 316)

Freire’s work points us to the importance of teachers understanding the importance of a critical pedagogy. In other words, learning is not about accepting the existence of a given social order but rather to appreciate that the ‘status quo’ is not a fixed entity and that it is possible to work with others to participate in and shape the construction of new social formations that affect their lives and the lives of others. Young people need to develop what Henry Giroux has called ‘a language of possibility’ to see themselves as change-agents. This kind of teaching and learning also involves the questioning of power and knowledge as a central expression of the development of critical consciousness. Freire was interested in power, inequality, social justice, processes of self-reflexivity and political action for human freedom. The politics of liberation is essentially about ‘doing’ on the basis of a language of hope. Freire’s work was thus a unique fusion of social theory, moral outrage and political action. He added meaning to Karl Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (Quoted in Fernbach, 1975).
How does Freire’s work relate to thinking about Citizenship education in England? Some individuals have sought to make explicit comparisons between the work and thinking of Freire and Bernard Crick (e.g. Lister (1994), Lawson (2005), McCowan (2006). Ian Lister, for example, pointed out that both emphasise the centrality of issues and the importance of such general features as power and authority, discussion and debate, decision-making and resource allocation. The concepts of ‘conscientization’ (Freire) and ‘political literacy’ (Crick) are also closely related: “Although there are differences – conscientization has the connotation of consciousness raising’ and of seeing the world in a new way, while political literacy has the connotation of ‘reading political situations’ – both are aimed at the empowerment of learners and at helping them acquire new knowledge and develop skills” (Lister, 1994). Both stress the importance of ordinary people as political actors. As Crick put it, “The politically literate person is capable of thinking in terms of change and methods of achieving change…The ultimate test of political literacy lies in creating a proclivity to action” (Crick, 2000). Both Freire and Crick tend towards civic republican approaches to citizenship, in that they value universal political participation and see political participation in terms of co-operation with others.

Yet there were significant differences between the two of course. Freire was strongly influenced by Marxist and liberation theology ideas. For Freire the polemical notion of ‘oppression’ had a paradigmatic status. His philosophy can be characterised as pragmatic utopianism. Crick has a stronger tendency towards political realism – “A political education should be realistic and should chasten the idealist. Ideals are too important to be embalmed…” (Crick 2000: 25). Both, however, see the key to political learning as grappling with problems that have as their base the real lives of learners. McCowan makes a case for seeing the value in Freire’s ideas in so far as they might illuminate thinking about citizenship education both lucidly and carefully: “In relation to citizenship education, it might be dangerous to think in terms of ‘adding on’ a little Freire to the existing Crick: this may be impossible, since, in many ways, the implementation of Freirean pedagogy is an ‘either-or’. Yet
understanding of the political in education in general terms and citizenship education, specifically, are substantially richer if Freire’s approach is acknowledged” (McCowan, 2006)

There is thus a case to be made for a synthesis of Freirean ideas with notions of active and effective Citizenship teaching that are developing in England (See Huddleston and Kerr (2006) for recent ‘official’ statements of good practice). This synthesis has been well-expressed by a recently trained Citizenship specialist teacher on the CitizED website:

“The concept of agency can be developed by examining issues which students see as significant to their community (local, national and international) and then initiating action to influence these events. Thus the student, as an agent of change, develops the skills of political literacy as well as understanding of the significance of the institutions involved in this process. Reflection is also a vital element of this learning model. Students should be encouraged to reflect on not only what they have learnt but on the skills that they have developed by this learning. This meta-cognition can be developed through self assessment and peer assessment. In this Freirean model, political literacy is derived from a learning process in which the dialectic relationship between action and reflection lead to the creation of knowledge” (Lawson, 2005)

Of course it should be stressed that this is a long-term project. The transformation of teachers and students from authoritarian to democratic habits will not happen overnight. It is not easy for teachers to share decision-making in the classroom, negotiate the curriculum and pupil activities, pose problems based upon student priorities and thinking, and learn with and from students. Moreover, Leighton (2004) has rightly pointed out that there has been very little discussion in schools about the meaning and nature of Citizenship education. This lack of a questioning approach to implementation of Citizenship in the curriculum has then allowed it to be, “offered within a framework of established order to encourage more participation in the system rather than to question it”. He is also critical of the lack of student participation in the development of the curriculum noting that, “Those who...
promulgate participation have not asked the young why they do not participate”. Young people in England rarely have an explicit sense of themselves as ‘oppressed’. But after years in passive, authority-dependent classrooms – even in a more recent educational environment in Britain that celebrates, valorises and legislatively enshrines children’s rights - most students do not see themselves as people who can transform knowledge and society. In a school system devoted to banking pedagogy and formally assessing anything and anyone that moves, students internalise values and habits which sabotage their critical thought. They may well go on to become alienated and anti-intellectual adults.

One always needs to be careful with appropriations. So what are the dangers of appropriating Freire as a guiding light for Citizenship educators? There are always dangers in selective reading of texts, or cherry-picking certain aspects of theory that fit our own needs. Freire’s thinking was very much directed at Latin American closed societies. He talks about a ‘culture of silence’ and ‘the dependent society’ – “Only when the people of a dependent society break out of the culture of silence and win their right to speak – only, that is, when radical structural changes transform the dependent society – can such a society as a whole cease to be silent toward the director society” (Freire, 1985 : 73). Freirean scholars highlight the dangers in reducing his work simply to a method – the cause of liberal misappropriation and dilution – and thereby divesting it of its radical political thrust. His approach can find fertile ground in a variety of contexts but it does not comprise a set of techniques which can be transferred from one context to another at will, without any regard whatsoever for the process of ‘cultural invasion' that this can entail. Moreover, his writings and his pedagogical practice need to be properly contextualised and read holistically and critically (See Roberts, 2000; Mayo, 1999).

Nevertheless, the thinking and work of Paolo Freire provide some signposts to help teachers to ‘endow participation with meaning’. The following elements might constitute a six point plan:
1. Recognise that the point of participation within citizenship education is to develop a sense of social justice (and then to act constructively on it). Freire commented that:

“If the great popular masses are without a more critical understanding of how society functions, it is not because they are naturally incapable of it…but on account of precarious conditions in which they live and survive, where they are ‘forbidden to know’. Thus, the way out is…the critical effort through which men and women take themselves in hand and become agents of curiosity, become investigators, become subjects in an ongoing process of quest for the revelation of the ‘why’ of things and ‘facts’ (Freire, 1999 : 105)

2. Teach with a sense of hope for the future. Citizenship education should be driven by a vision of what should and can be. Its aim is to understand that the world as it is, is not the world as it might be. Freire noted that without “an understanding of history as possibility, tomorrow is problematic. In order for it to come, it is necessary that we build it through transforming today. Different tomorrows are possible”. (Freire in Fearon et al., 1997). Citizenship education is surely about creating a world which in Freire’s words is ‘menos feio, menos malvado, menos desumano’ (less ugly, less cruel, less inhumane). This is not to say that teachers and students work with a sense of blind or naïve hope. A sense of realism is important too. Young people also need to be educated for the possibility of democratic disappointment. However, it is also important that young people have a sense of the possibility of change and an understanding of their potential role in bringing about change.

3. Appreciate that participation in citizenship is more likely to be focused and effective if it has a political edge. Crick talked about ‘changing the political culture’. For this to happen, Freire has argued that teachers also need to see themselves as agents of change. In ‘A Pedagogy for Liberation’ (1987), he wrote:

“This is a great discovery, education is politics! When a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician too, the teacher has to ask, What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favour of whom am I being a teacher?...The teacher works in favour of something and against
something. Because of that she or he will have another great question, How to be consistent in my teaching practice with my political choice? I cannot proclaim my liberating dream and in the next day be authoritarian in my relationships with the students” (Shor and Freire 1987: 46). Freire insisted on consistency between the democratic values of his critical pedagogy and its classroom practices. The critical teacher must also be a democratic one. A ‘banking’ (or didactic) approach would tend towards ‘domesticating’ students. Crick would endorse Freire’s view that: “If we don’t transcend the idea of education as pure transference of a knowledge that merely describes reality, we will prevent critical consciousness from emerging and thus reinforce political illiteracy.” Freire (1985:104)

4. **Structure participation via a problem-posing approach.**
Effective citizenship education often involves teaching approaches that focus upon problem-posing or key questions as the basis of dialogical education – through which students “come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation” (Freire, 1990: 71). This approach has been endorsed in England by, for example, by the Elisabeth Hoodless, Executive Director of the Community Service Volunteers organisation – “What is core to effective citizenship education is the principle that pupils can identify problems within their communities with a view to finding and implementing solutions themselves” (CSV 2003)

5. **Place the notion of ‘critical consciousness’ at the heart of citizenship participation.** “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognise its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one that makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1972 : 29). If young people are not encouraged to be critical they will accept injustices and be unlikely to work with others to effect changes in society.

6. **Teachers see themselves as agents of change.**
Citizenship education needs commitment from teachers and a mission to commit young people. It will not work without an inner set of convictions – if it
is sanitised, labelled and ticked off inertly on a whole school curriculum plan or curriculum audit. Ralph Leighton (2006) has recently reminded the citizenship community through the work of Postman and Weingartner that teaching – and specifically teaching citizenship – can be a subversive activity. This is not to recommend bias or indoctrination – Freire stood out strongly against these. Nor is it to suggest that education and educators are capable of curing all the ills of society. It is about citizenship teachers attempting in and beyond their classrooms to be irresistibly, if critically, optimistic.

Teaching and learning approaches that foreground active, participative citizenship projects in which young people have a genuine sense of ownership can clearly be seen as investing in social capital for the future (although Freire would not have put it like this!). Robert Putnam in Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community (2000) argued persuasively that:

“Other things being equal, people who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often, contribute more readily to charities, participate more often in politics and community organisations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue…In short, people who trust others are all-round good citizens, and those engaged in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy”.
[Quoted in Print and Coleman, 2003].

However, one clear danger of a focus on social capital is that, as with all capital, the greater stocks you have initially, the stronger position is your potential to develop more (Zacharakis & Flora, 1997). Schools may not serve one community but in effect several fragmented and diverse communities. Proximity no longer equates with communication, community and commonality. As George Orwell might have put it – all people can participate, but some participate more equally than others. This point emerges very powerfully from a recent study of participatory democracy in various Indian
contexts (Mohanty and Tandon, 2006) For low caste ‘dalits’, women in different settings, tribal nomads, shanty town, pavement or slum dwellers, participation means unequal competition with those who are better equipped socially and materially. The editors pose some key questions: “In a country like India, which is diverse, hierarchichal, complex, faction-ridden and where a large number of people are still deprived of the basic necessities of everyday living, can the marginalized citizen be [change agents] ? What are the structural barriers to this? What enabling environment is required to make the citizen act and engage? How is development to be executed so that includes and not alienates people?...”. The essence of the book provides examples of case study projects which seek to turn “an overwhelmingly exclusive citizenship experience into an inclusive one”.

Returning to an English context, interestingly the Power Commission report (March 2006), chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy, provided further positive ammunition to support the participation agenda, in so far as it related to extending young people’s political rights across the UK. It concluded that the voting and candidacy age should be reduced to 16 (See: http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/index.php). The report described itself as “a report about giving people real influence over bread and butter issues which affect their lives”. The Power Inquiry Report notes that: “People in Britain still volunteer; they run in marathons for charity; they hold car boot sales to raise funds for good causes; they take part in Red Nose days and wear ribbons for breast cancer or AIDS. They sit as school governors; do prison visits; read with children with learning difficulties. They take part in school races and run the school disco. They march against the Iraq war and in favour of the countryside. They sign petitions for extra street lights and more frequent bin collections. They send their savings to the victims of tsunamis and want to end world poverty. What they no longer want to do is…get involved in formal politics…This is a travesty for democracy…The only way to download power is by re-balancing the system towards the people”. Fired up, enthused young people can be to the fore in seeking to bring about this re-balancing.
Nevertheless, simply to assert the positive benefits for society of an engaged, involved citizenry is not to deny some very real challenges for educators. While there has been increasing emphasis on the importance of civic and political literacy as a goal of the educational process, assessment of this policy objective has demonstrated how unsuccessful past initiatives have been in creating a mass of active citizens. Research has shown that many traditional citizenship education programs influence political knowledge, but not necessarily political interest, political/social activity and efficacy, or social trust (e.g. John, Halpern, and Morris 2001). However, if citizens only possess civic knowledge and do not have a sense of political efficacy or the belief that they can influence the government to make changes, civic literacy cannot empower the electorate.

There are also cultural, psychological, and basic lack of interest barriers. Many young people don’t want to participate actively in political life anyway – that is they perhaps prefer what Freire calls a ‘culture of silence’. They don’t like the illogical notion of compulsory volunteering. Ian Lister noted of a Political Education programme attempted in the early 1980s in Britain, “The view of politics in the culture – it is dirty, not here and not for you – was more of a barrier than we had imagined” (Lister (1994) : 69). Unless there is some clearer thinking about how schools and teachers view participation, critics can - with a degree of rationality - depict Citizenship projects as an embodiment of woolly political correctness:

“Alongside fairness, honesty and community, participation and voting [have been] turned into values. Professor Bernard Crick, who was David Blunkett's intellectual mentor and key adviser on citizenship education, stated that ‘students must demonstrate a commitment to active citizenship, commitment to voluntary service and concern for the environment’. In other words, in the guise of studying an academic subject, school children have to adopt a particular form of behaviour demanded by the prevailing political code of conduct” (Furedi, 1995)

To challenge the disconnect documented by John, Halpern, and Morris we have to help students personally engage in learning and inculcate habits of
democratic involvement. An active/engaged young person can thereby be transformed into an active, engaged citizen. Around 80% of school leaders and teachers in England expect that citizenship education will have some impact on students’ future participation in the community and propensity to vote in elections (Kerr et al., 2004). There need to be some practical steps to turn this expectation into a reality. David Bell (2005) in the speech cited earlier called for participation for all, not just a few. Even if participation beyond the classroom for all is logistically problematic (see Brett, 2004), students need to be able to act ‘as change agents within their classrooms…making recommendations and suggestions about the ways in which citizenship and community issues might be addressed or resolved’ (Bell, 2005)

There is some useful guidance in this area which might also help in the project of endowing participation with meaning. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England in its Post-16 guidance document ‘Play your Part’ has usefully brought together a list of the many ways in which ‘change actions’ can serve as the outcome of Citizenship projects. These include:

- Writing and/or presenting a case to others about a concern or issue
- Conducting a consultation, vote or election
- Organising a meeting, conference, forum, debate or vote
- Representing others views (for example, in an organization, at a meeting or event
- Creating, reviewing or revising an organisational policy
- Contributing to local/community policy
- Communicating and expressing views publically via a newsletter, website or other media
- Organising and undertaking an exhibition, campaign or display
- Setting up and developing an action group or network
- Organising a community event (for example, drama, celebration, open day)] (QCA, 2005)

Teachers need to be trained and become used to embedding ‘change actions’ such as these as natural rather than extraordinary or rare features of their
teaching.

It is not insignificant that as the key stage 3 Citizenship National Curriculum in England comes up for its first revision in 2007, one of the most important mooted changes is the official acknowledgement that it is a programme which is looking to develop skills of advocacy. How can support be mobilised? How might young people campaign? In short how might they act on an issue? It would be helpful for teachers to receive additional guidance on what to do when analysis of issues lead to students wanting to take action. One of the most dramatic cases thus far in England since Citizenship education was introduced surrounded the involvement of Lord Williams's school in Thame, Oxfordshire in highlighting how easy it is to transact illegal arms sales (Guardian 30 March 2006 – ‘Pupils import torture tools to highlight UK arms loopholes’). Few schools will take Citizenship action to this extent, but it is fair to point up an absence of local issues in many school programmes – that is, those issues which afford most access for participation and real-life study. Even when the will exists to explore such ‘edgy’ issues, it will be important to police the fine line which exists between empowerment and indoctrination. As Liam Gearon has pointed out in a recent suggestive paper, many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are ideologically committed and thus it is important to monitor and review the nature of their work with young people to avoid “the un-co-ordinated implanting of ideological bias by those who presume they are right” (Gearon, 2006: 17)

The Citizenship project in England was not informed explicitly by Freirean ideals. It would have been strange if it had, given that Freire was open in his intention of raising questions of power, culture and oppression in the context of schooling and that he pre-supposed fundamental social structural inequality which required a fundamental re-structuring of society. Few curriculum planners in developed countries would accept the starting point premise. Nevertheless, some of Freire’s ideas have become accepted as mainstream educational objectives, even if radical critics would argue that in the process they have been unacceptably neutralised. Freirean critical education invites students to question the system they live in and the knowledge being offered
to them; to discuss what kind of future they want and to re-make the school
and society they find. Freire points us away from submissive and tokenistic
participation and towards real, autonomous effective forms of individual and
collective action. Citizenship education is an opportunity to bring the school
curriculum across the UK - and indeed Europe and internationally - into closer
contact with the world as it is experienced by learners, in a way that enables
them to engage with public and political life at local, national and international
levels. This is a truth that has become established thinking across most
European countries (See Naval, Print and Veldhuis, 2002). As far as possible,
students’ participation should be authentic and real (as opposed to adult-
directed and artificial). The challenge that lies ahead is to make such
educational experiences the norm for most schools and most young people
rather than a fortunate few.

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