Using Debate to Promote Critical Thinking in Citizenship Education

Theme
This research is based on a year long participant observation of a Citizenship PGCE course, undertaken as part of a PhD exploring the geographies of Citizenship Education from a social science perspective. The report aims to bring together the more theoretical elements of university-based training with the practical elements of school-based training. The central theme of the research is the use of debate to promote critical thinking in citizenship education. It is argued that using debate in classroom contexts and initial teacher training raises a number of important issues in terms of concepts of democracy and practices of pedagogy. These are integral to what is commonly termed ‘critical thinking’, but which is rarely that critical in practice. A number of concepts are explored which can be used to expand the knowledge base of Citizenship student teachers and teacher educators, by unpacking the terms ‘debate’, ‘democracy’ and ‘critical thinking’. The report then presents and evaluates a variety of models of debate and discussion which have been observed in the Citizenship PGCE and in school-based practice.

The research serves to formalise and categorise some of the more piecemeal discussion methods used regularly in both ITT and schools, whilst destabilising common-sense notions of debate, democracy and critical thinking, which are often taken for granted in teaching. It introduces some of the basic tenets of democratic theory, which I argue is necessary for the knowledge base of any teacher or teacher educator involved with Citizenship Education. It also offers practical guidance for teacher educators on how to promote serious and inclusive debate for critical thinking in Citizenship Education. Through debate, the purpose of citizenship education can be questioned by student teachers, and eventually, pupils. If debate is practiced in the classroom reciprocally, it can allow teachers and pupils to collaborate on more equal terms, giving them a sense of solidarity or joint stake in their education. This sense of anti-hierarchical teaching is, of course, much easier in theory than in practice, and it is this disjuncture which the report seeks to redress.

Curriculum Links
The knowledge and skills explored in this report are particularly relevant to the following curriculum strands in the Citizenship Programme of Study for Key Stages 3 and 4 (QCA, 1999 – emphasis below added). Central to this are skills of enquiry and communication, principally Ci/2c (KS3); “pupils should be taught to contribute to group and exploratory class discussions, and take part in debates”. At KS4, the emphasis is changed slightly, to “formal debates”. Some of the differences between formal and informal debates are explored below. Other skills covered by debates include Ci/2b (KS3); “justify orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events” and Ci/2b (KS4); “express, justify and defend orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events”. These
highlight the importance of developing not only the skills to justify opinions, but to progress onto expressing and defending opinions in the context of an oral discussion at KS4. Again, the practicalities of this process are outlined below and the nature of a valid opinion is put into question. Skills of participation and responsible action are also developed through the use of discussion and debating methods. Participation itself is encouraged by debate, though not always inclusively, as explored further below. More specifically, listening and empathy skills are brought out in debate and developed through the careful management of the teacher. Ci/3a (KS3) states that “pupils should be taught to use their imagination to consider other people’s experiences and be able to think about, express and explain views that are not their own”. This is perhaps the most radical statement in the Citizenship curriculum, promoting, as it does, ‘thinking otherwise’; using one’s imagination to empathise with others, and consequently questioning the foundations of one’s own views and experiences. The use of the imagination here is an important facet of critical thinking which has important political implications, since it is integral to thinking and talking about theories concerning the world, and our agency within it. At KS4 these skills progress to “critically evaluate views that are not their own” (Ci/3a). This suggests higher order skills of comparing and contrasting a wide range of perspectives and exercising judgment as to the value of these views. This involves explaining why people have different views, raising the issue of diversity. Thus, the curriculum can be sensitive to democratic theories which attend to notions of difference, not merely as accommodation or toleration, but as an integral part of the democratic process (see Young, 1990; 1996; 2000; Dryzek, 2000).

However, it is not only the curriculum skills of ‘enquiry and communication’, and ‘participation and responsible action’ that debate/discussion develops. It is precisely through debate that important areas of ‘knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens’ can be covered. Some brief examples include Ci/1a (KS3/4) which is concerned with “legal and human rights and responsibilities”, and “the criminal justice system”. A mock trial could be one way of debating justice issues through role-play. Ci/1b (KS3) can also be explored using debate, since it is concerned with “the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the UK and the need for mutual respect and understanding”, and later at KS4, with “the origins and implications [of diversity]”. These issues are central to democratic theories based on identity politics, recognition or difference (which I argue should be integral to the knowledge base of those involved in Citizenship Education), and thus can be used to explore the principles of democracy as well as topical issues. Ci/1d (KS3) and Ci/1c (KS4), which deal respectively with “the key characteristics of parliamentary and other forms of government” and “the work of parliament, government and the courts in making and shaping the law” would be well served in the form of debate, outlined in one of the exemplary models below. Ci/1g (KS3); “the importance of resolving conflict fairly” is also well suited to debating methods, which some democratic theorists would argue, must always take place with an aim of consensus (though we shall see below how this idea has been vigorously challenged by critics). This strand also raises the issue of what is a ‘fair’ resolution to a conflict, thus questioning the foundations of democracy and interrogating claims to justice (fairness).

Ci/1h (KS3) and Ci/1g (KS4) are concerned respectively with the “significance of the media” and “the importance of a free press, and the media’s role in society,
including the internet, in providing information and affecting opinion”. These strands of knowledge and understanding can again be explored through debate, perhaps with the use of a particular article, issue or series of conflicting news stories/styles as a stimulus for discussion. Similarly, Ci/1i (KS3/4) and Ci/1j (KS4) concerned as they are with the “global community”, “the role of the European Union, the Commonwealth and the United Nations” (KS3) and “the United Kingdom’s relations in Europe” and “global interdependence and responsibility” (KS4). These issues deal with supra-national institutions which each have formal debating procedures. These can be emulated in role play for educational purposes, such as in ‘Model UN’ meetings and ‘Youth Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings’ (see below). Since these geographic scales must take into account different national interests and deal with issues of global importance, they are useful for exploring conceptual ideas about democracy and difference, as well as the role of institutions and geopolitics. Again, it is through debate that these (arguably quite ‘dry’) issues can come to life, as seen in the examples below.

Summary of curriculum links covered
KS3 – 1a; 1b; 1d; 1g; 1h; 1i; 2b; 2c; 3a
KS4 – 1a; 1b; 1c; 1g; 1i; 1j; 2b; 2c; 3a

Knowledge Base
The previous section outlined the main skills and topics that can be developed through debate. In this section, I expand on some key concepts which are central to Citizenship Education, and which demand self-reflection and critical thinking on behalf of all those involved in Citizenship teaching. First, teachers need to know about democratic theory in order to understand the social and political context of the introduction of Citizenship Education. Secondly, they need to know about the role of debate, both formal and informal, in democratic life. And finally teachers need to be able to situate themselves and their role as Citizenship educators with a critical appraisal of the purpose of Citizenship Education. The knowledge base for student teachers therefore comprises political literacy in terms of different political theories and democratic models. Community involvement is addressed as the classroom debate can encourage an ethic of communication and empathy, and foster a community of learning. In addition, model debates can involve invited speakers, can take place in council chambers, or can involve community project-oriented debate and group decision-making. The subject knowledge required for social and moral responsibility can include the critical questioning of the foundations of democratic models, and the political and philosophical approaches which underpin the practices of democracy, i.e. debate. This can include considering ethical ideas about diversity or difference, and involves responding to, and being open to others in a social context. Just how these are linked is explained in more detail below.

Democracy
A political or historical analysis of the Crick Report (QCA, 1998), and the QCA Curriculum (QCA, 1999) is an important area of knowledge which situates the introduction of Citizenship Education in wider democratic processes. As Crick proclaimed, the purpose of Citizenship Education is to create an informed, voting citizenry. Citizenship Education is therefore an instrument of democracy, or a ‘technology of government’, as Foucault would have it. Foucault’s theory of ‘governmentality’, considers that power is exercised through practices rather than
imposed as political rationalities or ideologies from above (Foucault, 1991). The central point here is to stimulate discussion about the purpose of Citizenship Education, to familiarize student teachers with key democratic theories, and to foster critical thinking, not just by pupils, but by teachers and ITT tutors (and one might add, researchers interested in Citizenship Education). Much of the Citizenship curriculum’s emphasis on responsibilities is in the sense of taking responsibility for oneself, one’s own actions, and one’s own learning, rather than responsibility in terms of responding to others. Foucault might argue that Citizenship Education is one such way of governing the ‘conduct of conduct’, to ensure that citizens are self-governing according to a dominant political rationality. By considering such a knowledge base, including issues of power and democracy, student teachers will be better equipped to situate their teaching practice in wider social context and to question their own position as educators, question the curriculum and the skills required by the Citizenship curriculum, and to consider the politics, sociology and geography of their own teaching.

I will now introduce a key polemic in democratic theory which is concerned explicitly with the role of debate. It can be argued that debate is indeed paramount in both formal politics and the parliamentary process, and is integral to democracy itself. This is perhaps one of the major omissions of the Citizenship curriculum. Although at Key Stage 4, the importance of the electoral process is highlighted, and at both Key Stages, skills of participation encouraged, the strand Ci/1e (KS3), which states that “pupils should be taught the electoral system and the importance of voting”, seems to be derived from a model of democracy which precludes debate and sees voting as the end point of the democratic and electoral process. Both Habermas (1996) and Young (1996) question the validity of this liberal, or “interest-based” model, which regards “democracy primarily as a process of expressing one’s preferences and demands, and registering them in a vote” (Young, 1996: 120). Critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas, who developed the very idea of ‘deliberative democracy’, explains the liberal model as:

“…the political process of opinion- and will-formation in the public sphere and in parliament is determined by the competition of strategically acting collectivities trying to maintain or acquire positions of power. Success is measured by the citizens’ approval, quantified as votes, of persons and programs. In their choices at the polls, voters give expression to their preferences. Thus voting decisions have the same structure as the acts of choice made by participants in a market.”

(Habermas, 1996: 23, my emphasis)

By contrast, Habermas’ notion of the public sphere is based on a republican model (giving greater salience to the notion of the ‘public’), and his theory of ‘communicative action’. Thus, opinion- and will-formation are not expressions of privately held interests, aggregated into a majority vote, but are constituted through social interaction (Habermas, 1996). He argues that democracy is a process which creates a public who come together in to discuss and deliberate on problems and actions with the common public good as the ultimate aim. We can draw parallels here with Vygotsky’s ideas about the cultural mediation of higher mental functions. His theories, again in the tradition of critical social theory, take as their starting point the inherent sociality of individual thought and action. He states that:
“Every function of a child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on the individual level...all the higher level functions originate as actual relations between human individuals”

(Vygotsky, 1978: 57, in Nicholl, 1998; my emphasis)

Here is one important connection that student teachers can draw between their university-based training – in the philosophy of education, and more concrete or tangible classroom practices. Through a deeper understanding of how democratic and learning theories are linked, student teachers are better-equipped to appreciate the importance of communication, debate or deliberation, in forming an informed and responsible (in the sense of responding socially to others) citizenry. Iris Marion Young’s ‘communicative democracy’ (based on a post-structural philosophy) offers an important critique of Habermas. Just as Vygotsky gives a primordial status to the social (we are first social, secondly individual), the post-structuralism of Levinas and Derrida (on which Young draws) attends to the social in terms of difference or ethical responsibility. Put briefly, Levinas’ theory of ethics, on which both his and Derrida’s political theories are based, are founded on the central and undeconstructable ethos of the “care for the other”. This is based on an always already, unavoidable and visceral experience of social being together in the world, and responding to the Other.

It is important to note, then, that Young’s critique of Habermas is based on the idea of difference, or cultural pluralism, as opposed to the ideal of universal citizenship. These are important issues when considering how to teach Ci/1b and Ci/3a (KS3/4) on diversity and the views and experiences of others. Habermas considers that deliberation and communication, “bring[s] to the fore the deepest force of reason, which enables us to overcome egocentric or ethnocentric perspectives and reach an expanded...view” (Habermas, in Stephens, 1994: 6). This suggests that the aim of democracy and public debate is to overcome the obstacle of difference in the pursuit of universal reason, characterized as the common good. Young, by contrast, considers that difference is the defining characteristic of debate and democracy, and that citizens, by their very nature have different backgrounds, interests, preferences, desires, problems, aims, views, and importantly, different ways of speaking. This is where all this political theory becomes practical and tangible for teachers using debate in the classroom. Young’s major criticism of deliberative democracy is that it prioritises equality, universality and western forms of communication and reason. It will be clear for most student teachers in their first school-based practice that not all pupils are equal, and all have different learning styles, values, and styles of communication. Hence the following QTS standards: S1.1 (respect the social, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds of pupils); S2.4 (how pupils’ learning is affected by their development); S2.6 (SEN); S3.2.4 (meeting pupil’s needs); S3.2.5 (EAL); S3.3.1 (establish a learning environment where diversity is valued); S3.3.4 (differentiating teaching); S3.3.5 (supporting EAL); S3.3.6 (taking account of diversity) and S3.3.14 (equal opportunities). If student teachers are to take inclusion policies seriously, this means attending to difference within the classroom, especially in terms of planning debates which allow all pupils to participate in some way. The quality of pupil’s participation can depend on the competencies and cultural capital that they bring to the forum, which are often differentiated in terms of ability, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality; i.e. “social power”, which
“derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others”

(Young, 1996: 122).

Young states that ‘deliberative’ democracy, especially parliamentary debates, value gentlemanly, white, and upper-class expression, based on ‘competition’, and “assertive and confrontational” speech. Such circumstances are therefore culturally specific, not universal – as Habermas had previously claimed (Young, 1996: 123).

With explicit reference to the institution of the school, she writes:

“in formal situations of discussion and debate, such as classrooms, courtrooms, and city council chambers, many people feel they must apologise for their halting and circuitous speech”

(Young, 1996: 124).

She argues that dominant groups in debate fail to recognize the cultural specificity of the rules and situation. This silences disadvantaged groups by privileging speech which is “formal and general”, which “proceeds from premise to conclusion”, and which is “dispassionate and disembodied”. “These norms of “articulateness”, however, must be learned; they are culturally specific, and in actual speaking situations in our society exhibiting such speaking styles is a sign of social privilege” (Young, 1996: 124). Hence, in the classroom, the norms and rules of putting one’s hand up to speak, rather than shouting out, are more socially acceptable. Furthermore, rational deliberation is prioritized over storytelling (narrative), rhetoric (emotional, figurative speech which makes explicit the situation of speaking together and listening), and greeting (including gestures and preliminary remarks which participants of debate use to recognize and acknowledge each other, establishing trust and respect). (See Young, 1996: 128-132 for more explanation on these points.)

This is in contrast to the work of the Values Forum, who had some influence in the consultation process and committee of the Crick Report. Here we see not just how dominant forms of communication are prioritized, but also how the Crick Report and Citizenship Education itself were founded on a universalist conception of deliberative democracy so powerfully criticized by Young above. Tate states that “during [the Crick Advisory group’s] consultations of this kind we were required to be dispassionate and simply listen” (Tate, 2000: 66). Other members of the advisory committee have told me that the process was one of individual compromise, aimed at consensus (see Pykett, 2003: 32); comparable to Habermas’ idea of ‘deliberative’ democracy directed towards the ‘common good’. This comparison reflects also Tate’s view that there are ultimately shared values in ‘our’ society (see also Talbot and Tate, 1997). The idea that ‘we’ have a universal ethics fails to deconstruct the exclusionary logic of universal values and to question the process by which the public is constructed as an entity. Similarly, Osler and Starkey have demonstrated the exclusionary assumptions of the use of the word ‘our’ in the Crick Report (QCA, 1998: 17-18 in Osler and Starkey, 2000: 7). It would be an interesting exercise to use these issues to stimulate a debate amongst student teachers to consider the significance of debate, the exclusions of the debating process, and to think critically about debate and Citizenship Education. I would argue that introducing skepticism or doubt about the basis of consensus-making policy and debate is not a lapse into moral relativism, but opens up a valid space for critiquing the political and ethical
foundations of conceptions of the common good which uphold the status quo (see Green on the complex relationship between critique and consensus in relation to education policy and practice, 2004).

**Debate**

Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy, and Young’s communicative democracy suggest the importance of debating and discussion in both ITT practices and in schools. This activity can promote active learning through talk, and allows students to explore what is perhaps the essence of political education, that is the nature of the decision (see Derrida, 1992). They can also explore the political implications of debate aimed at consensus as opposed to that based on difference, raising the question of whether ‘structured’ talk and ‘reasoned’ judgment should be prioritized as they are currently in the classroom setting. So what kind of democracy do teachers and pupils want, and how will this play out in debates the classroom? It is often argued by student teachers that such educational and democratic theories become irrelevant when faced with the practicalities of actually teaching – including time, exam pressure, permanent audit and accountability, and classroom management. Thus it is important to offer some applications and activities which serve to translate these ideas into practice. This involves considering both what to debate and how to talk. I have already considered the areas of knowledge and understanding which can be most effectively tackled through debate. I will consider in more detail in the debating activities below, the question of how to talk – in light of Habermas’ ideas about the purpose of talk, and Young’s conception of what counts as valid talk. I therefore cover a variety of models and objectives of debate, both formally structured and more open ‘semi-structured’ models, including student teacher activities, pupil-led active citizenship tasks, and model diplomatic forums.

**Critical Thinking**

Teaching and learning for critical thinking involves questioning the assumptions of critical thinking itself. We must ask, and discuss – as people involved in Citizenship Education – just what is critical thinking? Critical thinking can be exercised in relation to a variety of scales; from teacher-pupil relations, to the current global political climate (in addition to other scales, including the ‘local community’ and the ‘nation’ – none of which are unproblematic terms). One could argue that we must question and discuss critically the actions which are pursued globally in the name of democracy, and interrogate on what premises democracy is founded, and what claims to justice are made. This is especially pertinent when teaching and learning about topical issues, global interdependence, human rights, and social and moral responsibility is part of the statutory curriculum.

Thinking critically about critical thinking involves questioning:

(a) the purpose of citizenship education (the importance of this in relation to democracy itself is suggested above), and the social and political context of its introduction;

(b) the self as Citizenship teacher, student teacher, or ITT tutor. This involves self-reflection in terms of questions of political commitment, allegiance, bias and assumptions we may make as a result of particular facets of identity (ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, ability, for example) which are often taken for granted;
(c) the power relations exercised between teachers and pupils, between teachers, and between pupils. This may indicate some differences in perception of the aims/value of education, identities, and claims to know – which may have important effects on the context in which the debate takes place;

(d) the foundations of thinking/knowledge (i.e. considering theoretical and philosophical issues, despite their apparent impracticality or abstraction). This involves asking on what basis do we make claims to know things (evidence, standpoint, expression), and what knowledges do we exclude as a result?

(e) the language valued and devalued in debate – as shown above, the kinds of expression and reasoning deemed acceptable in the context of a debate says a great deal about democracy, so critical thinking in debate involves questioning axes of social power as it is expressed through speech – hence the use of story-telling, rhetoric and greeting (Young, 1996). Furthermore, the language and vocabulary we use can be important for thinking critically about what we take for granted. Often, it is through speaking aloud that things become acceptable to say, and that allows us to envisage living our lives in alternative ways. Sometimes this serves to restrict or dilute new ideas, but creative use of language can enable us to ‘think otherwise’, or to ‘think outside the box’, the political implications of which are huge.

(f) the anatomy of judgment (after Abercrombie 1960) – this is the central problematic of debating, and the different democratic theories that I explored above. It involves the link between identity and justice, and the embodiment of judgment. Abercrombie touched on the embodied dynamics of small group-based teaching with reference to debate between medical students, and how opinions are related to identity. The purpose of Citizenship Education should not simply be to enable pupils to ‘find their voice’, nor assume that everyone is by rights entitled to their own opinion. This assumption is reiterated in the Citizenship curriculum, in strand Ci/2b (KS3), which states that “pupils should be taught to justify orally and in writing a personal opinion…” or “…to express, justify and defend orally and in writing a personal opinion” (KS4) (QCA, 1999, my emphasis). Although these are concerned with the skills of expressing, justifying and defending opinions, the curriculum does not deny the common interpretation that we each hold our opinions personally, and that we come to the debate with our individual opinions already in tow. This is reminiscent of the liberal, ‘interest- or preference-based’ model of democracy and debate which saw the resolution of conflict or ‘overcoming’ of (problematic) difference as a function of aggregating personal interests in a vote. This is surely not the model of democracy that Citizenship Education seeks to propose, as it suggests the assimilationalist, majority-dominated British identity which Osler and Starkey have so effectively criticized (2000: 7).

The converse position is one of opinions based on conversation, responsive/responsible debate and openness to difference. This suggests that identity, or the self, must be open to transformation or change within the context of a debate. This is a deeper critical thinking, concerned with questioning the self and the anatomy of one’s own judgment. This, as I have called it elsewhere, is a “learning politics” (Pykett, 2003: 43; see also Biesta in Kushner, 2004) – that is, a politics which, through communication, learns – and a resulting identity which is also constantly open to and learning from
others. Here I would wish to suggest that unless you are willing to justify your opinions to (different) others – not just by gentlemanly, reasoned argument, but to the very foundations of justice – then you are not justified to a personal opinion simply by rights. This is a strong contention (and not simply an exercise in confusion or obfuscation) but a way of thinking critically rather than paying lip-service to ‘critical thinking’ merely as a transferable skill. This forces participants in the debate to question the foundations of justice to which they lay claim, and to caution against ill-justified foundational thinking, i.e. fundamentalism. Hence, it is not viable to lay claim to justice which does not take into account or acknowledge the claims of others, and thus, one must see one’s ‘personal’ opinions as partial, provisional and open to question. In this kind of debate, the purpose is not necessarily consensus, but to rupture thought, question identity, change opinions in response to others and to listen. Therefore, debate should not prioritise ‘thin’ rationalizations of opinions, and should not value decisiveness over indecision, as indecision is a key characteristic of those people who’s identities remain open to the claims of others, and thus, deeply democratic. Despite some of its deficiencies, it is within the flexibility of the Citizenship curriculum to foster such thinking.

Reference was made above to two different conceptions of critical thinking in the teaching and learning literature, either as a skill or as a political commitment/aim (ten Dam and Volman, 2004: 360), and it is instructive to trace their theoretical roots, and common usage. Lipman highlights how critical thinking has lost its critical potential as it is practiced in schools today:

“[e]verywhere there seem to be signs – no doubt feeble in many cases – of a certain degree of institutionalization of critical thinking in schools…this is what happens to educational fads that are considered successful: they come to be taken for granted, although at a fairly low level of efficiency” (Lipman, 2003: 5, original emphasis).

These practices belie some of the origins of ‘critical thinking’, which are rooted in critical pedagogy (see Giroux, 1992 and McLaren, 1995 in ten Dam and Volman, 2004: 360). This tradition of critical thinking, more akin to the critical theory of Habermas and Vygotsky, posits critical thinking in terms of “the capacity to recognize and overcome social injustice” (ten Dam and Volman, 2004: 362). It is an educational theory which takes account of the political, economic, social and cultural context of the school (e.g. the local neighbourhood and education ‘market’, pupil behaviour and articulacy as functions of social status, streaming/setting, and the employment conditions of teachers), and relates it to ideas about social power, and the “political effects of argumentation and reasoning” (ibid.: 364).

Taking a critical pedagogy stance on critical thinking and Citizenship Education involves reconsidering pupil-teacher relationships in terms of socio-economic status and social power. It involves questioning whether pupils behave in challenging ways because they are indeed thinking critically, not just at the level of the classroom, but at the institutional level of the school. Perhaps such pupils are expressing critical thinking with regards to school, society and the power relations which they experience (which contribute to the formation of their opinions, identities and actions). As ten Dam and Volman point out, there has been little research done on how to promote critical thinking and high-level skills amongst ‘lower ability’ pupils, who are often
(wrongly) assumed to be incapable of thinking critically or abstractly. There is also little research on how different cultural groups prefer to interact and argue in debate, nor on critical thinking at the level of school culture/organization (2004: 376-7). Asking such sociological or geographical questions is an important part of developing core professional values as critically thinking teachers.

Application

It is in the context in which critical thinking has become depoliticised, and in which debate has become taken-for-granted that I posit the following models for debate to promote critical thinking. My aim is to address some of the gaps in research highlighted by ten Dam and Volman above (2004). Many student teachers (as well as more established teachers), are fearful of allowing pupils to talk openly, and rely on well-practiced ‘question and answer’ sessions as a substitute for real debate. This allows particular behaviours in class to gain credit, and thus silences the perspectives of less orderly pupils who rebel against the civilizing techniques of putting their hand up or speaking only in articulate, dispassionate styles. (Such dynamics of whole class discussion have been criticised by the ‘TALK’ project, which found that in most lessons, teachers dominate the discussions, there is little genuine interaction or conversation, and participation depended on gender and academic ability (Burns and Myhill, 2004: 35).) Perhaps quite understandably, teachers feel challenged when the lesson is taking its own course, and are reluctant to deviate from the ‘aims and objectives’. This probably results from the structural constraints on teachers’ time and the imperative to cover exam-oriented curricula (and importantly the National Strategy at key stage 3 which provides ‘authoritative’ statements about what a ‘good’ lesson should look like); this is itself an issue which should arguably be up for debate in the teaching profession, perhaps in the form of teacher-citizenship, union activism etc. But a well-planned debate, in addition to a set of interesting low and high-order prompt questions can lead to a more inclusive classroom debate which attends to difference. The models offered below are by no means exhaustive, and reflect my partial observations of Citizenship practice in ITT and school placements over the past year and a half. These offer exemplary formats and strategies which student teachers can model in school, and which ITT tutors can explore and evaluate within PGCE training in Citizenship Education. The models are outlined in the next section, and are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Promoting critical thinking skills;
- Encouraging participation, inclusion and anti-hierarchical teaching;
- Developing subject knowledge base;
- Learning pedagogic skills;
- Developing core professional values of student teachers;
- Exploring the purpose and wider social and political context of citizenship education;
- Contributing to student teachers’ and teacher educators’ own sense of citizenship.

Account and Evaluation of Activity

1. Structured debate

An example of formal, structured debate is a ‘Youth CHOGM’ (Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting) (see http://www.resint.org/youthchogm/). This event, organised by the Commonwealth, brings together local schools and youth groups in a formal setting (e.g. a council chamber) to discuss contemporary global
political, economic and social issues (e.g. terrorism, security, trade, HIV/AIDS, global warming), as well as issues chosen by the young people themselves in a ballot (e.g. ASBOs, the media, Iraq, discrimination). Young people (aged 14-19) are provided with resource-packs which detail the main political, cultural, economic and environmental contexts of particular Commonwealth countries, which they are ascribed in groups. They are urged to research these countries prior to the debate and come together to discuss the particular issues facing them and the role of the Commonwealth in providing solutions. This could easily be adapted to group-work in a classroom setting, and could be a useful way to teach Citizenship through Geography, for example. This enables pupils to learn about the formalities of debate which are used in actually existing democracies, such as the role of the Chairperson, and an agreed system for hearing the contributions of each country in turn. The use of role-play here, in the form of assigning countries to each group means that pupils are not putting themselves on the line, but only representing the circumstances of their countries, so they may feel more inclined to speak.

**Evaluation**

This very formal, structured debate can lend a sense of occasion and seriousness to the activity, as well as exploring key topics of global citizenship, but the prioritising of informed (researched) and rational debate can devalue other ways of knowing and expression, as criticised by Young above. Therefore, the second form of debate within the CHOGM is of great importance, discussing topics chosen by the young people. Here, those pupils who may find it difficult to articulate abstract opinions (based on the premises of their role-play countries) can be better included in the debate, and storytelling and local experiences can be valued. Through the accepting and listening context of an open conversation, the topic of which is a field of expertise to the young people, many pupils can work through the assumptions and implications of what they hold to be their ‘personal opinions’.

### 2. Semi-structured task-oriented discussion

**(a) In school**

The example I give here is a wonderful illustration of active citizenship, which includes all three strands of Citizenship outlined in the Crick Report. This is not active for the sake of ‘doing’, but is contextualised in terms of political literacy, and is reflexive in terms of pupil-teacher relationships, relationships between pupils and relations between the school and the community. This model for debate was done as part of a year 10 ASDAN ‘Key Decisions’ challenge, and was seen to be engaging for pupils labelled most disaffected with school (though I would argue that a key issue in Citizenship Education is the structural/institutional practice of pupil labelling, streaming, and so on). The lesson consisted of three main activities: firstly pupils watched a short video of a debate in the House of Commons, and were asked some brief questions (e.g. who speaks, where do the parties sit, who chooses the speaker?) There was also a short time for a spontaneous discussion about the political issues of the day, including pupil observations about Tony Blair and the war in Iraq. Secondly, pupils sat back-to-back in pairs and one described the layout of the House of Commons (given on a handout), whilst their partner had to listen and draw its key features. This encouraged an atmosphere of mutual respect and listening which may be a good example of Young’s democratic speech category of ‘greeting’. Then the teacher asked ‘what is different about a Commons debate and a classroom debate?’ evoking replies along the lines of ‘they wait their turn to speak’, and conversely, ‘they
all shout at each other and boo’! The key rationale behind this lesson, though, was to bring the debating procedures of the Commons into the classroom, and the final activity was to come round the ‘negotiating table’ (tables and chairs rearranged into a central table) in order to take responsibility for planning their next lesson, broadly on the subject of the parliamentary process and debate. This is a rare example of critical pedagogy at work, and the pupils could hardly believe that they were really being given this chance to help determine the curriculum – electing a leader by common consensus, and beginning to break off into groups that would research the House of Commons, or write to the local council to request a school visit for the next lesson.

**Evaluation**
This is a form of active citizenship, since it develops key life-skills, of participation and responsible action, and enquiry and communication, yet it can also promote critical thinking about power relations, language, and judgment. It opens up possibilities for more collaborative relations between pupils and teacher in the form of common ownership of the task, and a common stake in its success. As a critically thinking teacher, one would have to be aware of the internal dynamics of the group, and the validity of selecting a leader. This is also a brilliant opportunity to critically assess the ‘ideal’ form of debate of the House of Commons, which may exclude certain forms of speech, perhaps as a plenary or follow-up lesson.

**Evaluation**
This is an activity which is particularly useful for student teachers facing hostility in their school-based practice, and trying to clarify for themselves and to others, the purpose of Citizenship Education and their potential roles as Citizenship co-ordinators. Rather like Young’s theory of communicative democracy, meeting and conversing with different subject teachers promotes self-reflection, and can foster critical thinking in terms of student teachers’ own sense of citizenship – that is, why they chose to train as teachers and why Citizenship teachers in particular. Questioning one’s own sense of political commitment and the purpose of education is an integral part of developing core professional values.

3. **Semi-structured open discussion**
The example used here is ‘Philosophy for Children’ (see http://sapere.net/), which could be billed as ‘true’ democratic teaching, since the teacher is only the facilitator of discussion (though they often chose the initial stimulus for discussion), and the pupils control entirely the content. The discussion is started with a stimulus, usually a picture. Secondly, pupils pair up and reflect on it. Third, these ideas are shared with the group. Forth, pairs come together again to prepare some questions which may help to define words or concepts evoked by the stimulus. The fifth stage is a vote, done with all eyes shut (a secret-ish ballot) on which is the best question. Sixth, the question is used to initiate enquiry into this particular issue. An observer is appointed to note down whether people are listening, and whether the dialogue flows on logically – this kind of peer surveillance is intended to set some ground rules.

Evaluation
This has great potential for valuing all kinds of contributions and thinking critically and openly, as opposed to simply expressing unjustified opinions in a persuasive, formal debate. However, despite my earlier suggestion that it is structured talk which can exclude different voices and styles of speech, this too can be a dauntingly open forum for many – perhaps reflecting too much it similarities with university-type tutorials, which favour the most confident and articulate participants. There are many pedagogic strategies to overcome this, including the use of ‘pairing-up’ (buzz groups), which can enable less confident pupils to rehearse or write down their ideas, and is a good example of anti-hierarchical teaching (Herring, 2004). Pupils can also be trained to ask ‘reciprocal questions’ (Biggs, 2003: 92), such as ‘do you agree/disagree’, ‘what do you mean by…’, and ‘what is the same/different about…’ Teachers learn pedagogic skills through facilitating the conversation, and through their attempts to include all pupils (e.g. use of prompts, encouragement, eye-contact). The use of Socratic questioning can also be useful for promoting critical thinking; here, pupils must learn to challenge statements made, as a kind of devil’s advocate. Clearly, the point is to democratise the curriculum, by having a pupil-led discussion, promoting a different power relationship between pupils and teacher, but these pedagogic strategies can be applied to more directed topics, where the ITT tutor or student teacher has chosen an image or statement which will naturally lend itself to covering a particular strand of the curriculum.

Concluding Remarks
The ‘dreaded discussion’ (Frederick, 1986: 139) is often much feared amongst student teachers in school, as well as those more established in the profession, despite being one of the most well used pedagogic activities in ITT in the context of university-based teaching and leaning. I have argued that through exploration, discussion and evaluation of different forms of debate as an ITT activity, student teachers will be better-equipped with the pedagogic skills required to plan a debate, introduce a discussion in an atmosphere of inclusion, manage the discussion, and summarise the outcomes. In addition to these pedagogic skills, such activities can also increase the subject knowledge base of student teachers, by introducing some key debates concerning democracy itself, the purpose of Citizenship Education within it, and the critical role of classroom practices and pupil-teacher relationships. This style of teaching and learning, of course, generates more questions than it answers, but it is only through this critical thinking at multiple levels – not just as a skill, but as a political commitment – that we can question ourselves and others’ claims to justice.
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Bibliography
SAPERE (The Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education) at: http://sapere.net/, accessed 10/12/04.


