Encouraging Active Citizenship in PGCE Practice

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I have heard of public school headmasters who prefer not to take graduates of colleges and departments of education because of the egalitarian, anti-elitist and child-centred attitudes to education which are promulgated in such places… thanks to which many primary schools are largely indistinguishable from play groups, and in some undisciplined secondary schools, pupils and staff jointly determine school policy on matters of discipline.  

(Anthony O’Hear, 1991)

Pupils contribute, through group discussions and class and student councils, to policy development and review. This includes looking at behaviour, anti-bullying, equal opportunities and drug prevention policies, as well as policies on the curriculum.

(QCA, 2001: 2)

Introduction
This paper describes one approach adopted on a history with citizenship secondary PGCE course to address the requirements of the citizenship programme of study for key stages 3 and 4 in relation to the skills of participation and responsible action. As has already been discussed at length through Citized meetings and correspondence, ITT providers currently find themselves in the unique position of being responsible for training, and verifying the standard of training, in an area that scarcely exists in many schools. At the end of the first year of statutory citizenship education, it is evident that the curriculum requirements are often poorly understood, let alone implemented, with some schools continuing to “treat the strands in isolation, believing that … participation in other contexts can be counted as citizenship: such as… participation in team games” (Ofsted, 2003: 10). In the first year of a new programme at APU, we have experienced the same variability in awareness and action as Ofsted found. It is evident that some partner schools are still some considerable distance from having full programmes in place that transform their pupils’ entitlement into a practical reality.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section provides the context and includes a brief account of the background to the course, the nature of the partnership that supports it and the problem identified in relation to active citizenship. The second section outlines the actions planned to tackle the problem and ensure trainees had some worthwhile training in planning and implementing active citizenship projects. The third section considers the evidence generated by the trainees and partner schools and assesses the extent to which the approach adopted was successful.
1) Context
(a) Partnership
The APU history with citizenship PGCE started in 2002-3 and was run by a partnership including APU, the Anglo-European School and the Institute for Citizenship. APU recruited schools willing to accommodate trainees and support them through their training – in all cases the subject mentor was a history specialist. Jill Martin, Deputy Head of the Anglo-European School, and Lee Jerome, then Education Director of the Institute for Citizenship, planned the content of the course, ran most of the workshops, supported subject mentors and visited and tutored trainees.

(b) Problem identified
Subject mentors soon raised their concerns that they would not be able to offer trainees the opportunity to experience citizenship education, especially active citizenship, in their schools. As with so many schools, the curriculum requirement for active citizenship was causing problems in terms of:
(a) Planning, including clearly conceptualising the nature and role of such experiences.
(b) Action i.e. finding the time and resources to carry out and review activities.

Mentors were worrying that they would not be able to provide the same level of training in this area of the curriculum as in others, and the trainees were at risk of missing out on one of the most innovative and challenging aspects of the new subject – compromising any subsequent claim to subject expertise.

In addressing these issues we were keen to avoid some of the more nebulous interpretations of ‘active citizenship’ that have been emerging in some quarters. The path of least resistance adopted by some teachers is, unfortunately, to have a bit more group work, a few more simulations and an occasional visitor. In one sense this model of teaching and learning was not distinctive enough for the citizenship course, as it is a model we had been promoting for effective teaching in history already. Whilst all these things have an important role to play in making citizenship learning active and engaging and developing ‘action competence’ in young people (Holden & Clough, 1998: 18), we wanted trainees to experience the ‘sharp end’ of community participation.

If we are sending Newly Qualified Teachers out into schools with some claim to expertise in citizenship it seems to make sense that we should be encouraging citizenship trainees to get to grips with the very areas that are causing consternation in some staff rooms. They need to think about levels of participation, consider how to avoid manipulation and tokenism, understand the potential of active citizenship to break out of the confines of everyday classroom practice and experience the frustrations and obstacles as well as (hopefully) the satisfaction of a job well done.
Phillips (2002: 9) has drawn attention to the confidence and skills that trainees require before they feel able to take risks in their teaching. We wanted to reassure trainees that they would learn more by raising their aspirations and trying to reach a significant goal, than they would by playing it safe. Even if their project flopped, they would develop their skills, glean insights and enhance their capacity for future action. In some ways, this is a model for developing active citizenship with pupils – achieving the goal is great, but unnecessary for a meaningful learning experience. Jensen and Schnack (1994:6) expressed this viewpoint in rather stark terms when they wrote:

> It is not and cannot be the task of the school to solve the political problems of society. Its task is not to improve the world with the help of the pupils' activities. A school does not become green by conserving energy, collecting batteries or sorting waste. These (activities) must be assessed on the basis of... educational criteria. The crucial factor must be what the pupils learn from participating in such actions.

This vision is firmly rooted in the idea of developing ‘action competence’ and captures an important message about the need to focus on the ‘learning’ that takes place through action. Dewey however, warns about assuming a simplistic link between education and experience:

> 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.

Simply sending pupils out to undertake a novel range of activities in the community as a response to the citizenship curriculum would not only fail to guarantee an effective citizenship education, it would run the risk of causing damage to pupils in a whole host of other ways – from undermining self esteem, putting them off citizenship or even putting them at risk.

The more ambitious vision of active participation embodied in the national curriculum, and the vision of the 'citizenship school' described by Alexander (2001), indicate that we should be striving for both – meaningful project outcomes as well as learning through the process of participation. Ultimately though we have more control over the educative element than we do the outcomes of any social or political action.

Practicalities also played an important role in framing our project and so whilst we wanted to encourage trainees to take risks we also had to acknowledge that some would not feel able to embark on such projects. This may be because of the stage of development they were at, or because of the context in which they
were teaching. We developed a ‘let out clause’ which offered such trainees the opportunity to write up an essay on active citizenship if they were unable to undertake a project of their own. For the majority of the group we asked them to undertake an active citizenship project during their final school experience and to draw on this in their assignment.

(2) Action to tackle the problem
One of the university based training days was spent considering active citizenship, clarifying the nature of the project and discussing the assignment. Trainees were asked to undertake a project of some description that met the requirements of the third strand of the programme of study. This assignment sheet is included as appendix 2 and makes clear that whilst the active project in schools would be useful, it would not (indeed could not) be a requirement for the formal assignment.

The training day started with a powerful session focusing on trainees’ own experiences of school and moments when they felt empowered. We then looked at some conceptual frameworks that would be useful. Group activities encouraged trainees to look at examples of projects in relation to Hart’s ladder of participation (Hart 1992) and we considered the planning cycle used in several active citizenship projects, based on Kolb’s learning cycle (Kolb 1984; Britton, 2000; Easy & Johnson, 2002). We used these ideas to critically discuss examples of active citizenship in a BBC video *Getting Involved*. All of these activities were designed to introduce some of the basic ideas and processes one should be aware of in planning and carrying out an active citizenship project, whilst beginning to think about some of the practicalities that might emerge in its execution.

Trainees were then provided with a planning proforma (appendix 3) and worked in pairs or small groups to develop initial ideas for potential projects. Some of these were used as the basis of projects during the school experience, some were discussed with mentors in school and then abandoned, and others were simply used as exercises in the workshop. As many of the trainees at APU are from the eastern region, and most are very familiar with our main local authority, Essex, the feedback session, in which groups presented their plans, became a useful information exchange. Trainees had ideas and contacts to share, they discussed similar projects that had appeared in the local press, activities people had heard of in their own neighbourhoods, in youth groups and schools their children attended or though church and scout networks that individuals were involved with. The workshop provided a positive mechanism to draw on the expertise and local knowledge trainees brought to the course.

Ideally a training session for mentors would have helped to set up the project but the constraints of time and resources led us to send a newsletter to subject mentors in schools. This briefing provided an outline of the training session, a description of the project and offered support to anyone who felt they needed it.
Ultimately the onus was on the trainees to push this in their initial meetings with school staff. During the final school experience trainees are expected to pick up a 60% teaching timetable. We encouraged them to negotiate the active citizenship project as part of the teaching workload. The list of projects undertaken by trainees in this placement is in appendix 1.

(3) Evaluation and review of the active citizenship project
(a) Analysis of assignments
Analysis of the assignments produced by the trainees shows how variable their experiences were and provides an interesting insight into citizenship in our partner schools. Some trainees seem to have been quite disillusioned by the experience, but most had positive experiences. The following section outlines some of the issues that emerged from the trainees’ experiences during the summer teaching experience. The assignments have been coded with a letter A-O.

Issue 1 – Attitudes towards citizenship
Many of the assignments commented on the status citizenship had in their schools and reflected on the attitudes they encountered during the project. Perhaps one of the most negative comments also pointed out the dangers of such scepticism:

*My experience has been that active citizenship has lip service paid to it, but when the issue of practical application arises, then resentment and disinterest have followed… If certain teachers regard the basic premises of citizenship as invalid then the tendency will be to avoid engaging in projects which can impinge on their time (a common argument during both school placements), or half-heartedly pursuing schemes which are teacher led, and deny any form of pupil empowerment.*

Trainee D

Another trainee came up against a barrier in the staff room and reported the following conversation:

*The teachers that I have spoken to about organising this project showed a level of scepticism on a par with the pupils. One… teacher told me, “You have to remember that they are children after all, and need educating about how democracy works. You cannot simply give them the power to make decisions, chaos would just ensue.”*

Trainee L

Others encountered views that were less obviously damning about citizenship, but which were nevertheless likely to lead to inaction. Trainee N encountered a dismissive attitude towards this “new initiative” as the Headteacher explained, “teachers have long been doing this in one form or another.” As the recent Ofsted report on the implementation of citizenship clearly indicates, such complacency
seems rarely justified and is likely to indicate a lack of engagement with the specific requirements of the programmes of study (Ofsted, 2003).

Reflecting some of the more fundamental reasons behind this scepticism the trainee noted:

*Another feeling is that teachers are again being burdened with extra work because of the failing of political figures to engage young people and the failure of society to value the young... Many teachers feel that their voices are ignored by the education system... They often feel powerless... If teachers are to be at the front line in terms of helping young people to become good citizens, then they must surely feel valued as citizens themselves.*

One trainee noted that the whole ethos of their school seemed antithetical to developing active citizenship and wrote of schools as “one of the few remaining institutions where authoritarianism is actively relied upon to enforce order and behaviour” (Trainee L).

Despite the strength of some of these concerns, they were in a minority. In contrast to the fear of unleashing chaos on the school, encountered by trainee L, another trainee quoted a teacher explaining:

“I’ve been teaching for many years and it is very difficult for me to accept. Pupils are suddenly having a say in lots of things that 15-20 years ago would have been unmentionable. But I suppose if you are giving students that empowerment you must look at your attitude and the things they are saying – you must take them on board and say ‘OK, they’ve got a fair point there.’”

Trainee A

Whilst few referred to overt enthusiasm amongst teachers about active citizenship, most were able to get the support necessary to get a project up and running and this enabled them to see the advantage from the pupils’ perspective. From the following extracts it is evident how the trainees have been able to recognise the positive impact active citizenship projects can have:

*The pupils who are involved are enthusiastic about the magazine as they see it as ‘theirs’. They feel that that the magazine includes their ideas and views about their surroundings, which make (sic) them feel more responsible and more part of the school community.*

Trainee K

*Active learning within any subject is able to make a topic seem relevant by creating a sense of ownership and personal involvement.*

Trainee J

Even in those schools which have made a positive commitment to training citizenship teachers, trainees have to be prepared to encounter resistance from
some teachers about citizenship generally. The challenge for us is to help trainees to ‘manage’ these experiences in ways that do not create premature cynicism. Bearing this in mind, we were fortunate that every school offered each trainee some experience of teaching the subject. In terms of developing active citizenship, their experiences were as varied as these opinions would indicate, and it is to these practical observations that we next turn.

Issue 2 – The practicalities of setting up a project

As the main objective of the project was to enable trainees to gain some insight into the practicalities of managing active citizenship in schools, the following section reflects the bulk of the trainees’ work and illustrates that although our group was fairly small (only fifteen trainees) they nevertheless encountered a wide range of problems.

At one extreme trainee L found that the negative attitudes he encountered translated into a lack of support and the blocking of potential projects. Reflecting on a previous trip to clean up an area of environmental interest, his mentor advised him that it was “more trouble than it was worth” and suggested doing something else instead.

As well as the concern that a project would simply be too difficult to get off the ground, another obstacle was sheer teacher workload. As trainee J put it, reflecting on the lack of teacher support:

- *I came to realise that whilst most of them thought active citizenship was a great idea, they personally had too great a work-load to be the person who organised it, or gave up their time to oversee it.*

Interestingly parental pressure caused problems in one school. Although the parents were enthusiastic about the aims of a peer-coaching scheme, they were unhappy at their children’s participation in extra-curricular activities during their SATs tests and GCSE mock exams. Thus the issue of timing became crucial and this trainee was unable to convince them that the additional activities would not detract from academic priorities. Such concerns appear to echo the wider debate about the relationship between an ethos of active citizenship and academic achievement (Hannam, 2003).

Lurking in the background of some trainees’ assignments is a fear that some staff might simply see citizenship as something that needs to be ‘done and got out of the way’ rather than a philosophy or ethos that needs to be creatively engaged with. Trainee D explained this concern when he commented:

- *There are a vast number of ways in which projects can be attempted and completed, which may fulfil statutory requirements, but that does not equate to them being valuable experiences for the participants.*

Such concerns reflect the words of warning from Dewey above – simply getting some sort of activity underway is no guarantee of effective citizenship education.
Given the strength of these constraints, it is heartening that so many of the assignments reflected a much more positive and productive experience. In contrast to the obstacles identified by trainee L in planning his environmental project, trainee J described how she overcame the problems through support from staff and other adults:

*The pupils were keen to conduct a conservation project, however, an activity involving water and young children could potentially be disastrous. I conducted a risk assessment and minimised the risks by: inviting a ranger from the council to come in and talk to the pupils and oversee the operation; taking an additional teacher on the trip who was also trained in first aid; taking a first aid kit and getting permission slips signed by parents.*

Reflecting on the level of work involved in overcoming these obstacles though she recognised “it would be easy for schools to opt for the safer and easier option of in-school active citizenship.”

The time spent organising events appeared as a recurrent theme throughout the assignments and trainee H vividly records the levels of organisation required just to arrange for some year 9 pupils to sell bottles of water during a break time:

*A disadvantage of being a trainee teacher in a school is that you are not aware of the protocol when organising a charity event. Here the class teacher wanted to make sure herself that the caretaker had been asked to provide tables… that pastoral staff had been informed… and permission given by the head of year 9… there was also a mention in the full staff briefing… as well as reminders to go out in all tutor folders.*

Rightly she reflects, “If I was (sic) to do this again… I would allow the pupils involved to make these final arrangements but follow them up for my own peace of mind.”

Trainee H’s assignment is also interesting in that it illustrates how a relatively small project helped her gain an insight into working with pupils. After some initial problems getting pupils motivated, the regular class teacher asked another group of pupils to help design posters to advertise the water sale.

*The class felt that their idea had been hijacked and when we were trying to find out who would be helping out on the day, [some] sulkily said that they didn’t need to help because the Environmental Group were going to help. This highlighted to me how quickly a group of people can take ownership of something.*

Recounting the day of the sale itself she notes:

*There seemed to be line drawn down the middle of the classroom where half were eager to volunteer to help and the other half thought they were too cool to be associated with charity events. Surprisingly though some of these pupils did come and buy water from their classmates by way of showing support.*
This final reflection indicates both the potential of citizenship projects and the difficulty in trying to measure success. The fact that some of the reticent pupils came to the stall and supported their peers is significant, especially given that there are vending machines all over the school where they could easily get drinks. The small steps recounted in this assignment help to underline the ways in which citizenship teachers have to be sensitive to the variety of approaches and measures of success they will encounter. This trainee’s ability to put the project in the wider context of building relationships with, and within, the class was important in assessing its success. Trainee F provides a fitting conclusion to this type of project when she asserts:

*Smaller events such as individual tutor groups organising fund raising activities where they design and plan the activities themselves with teachers acting as guides are often more valuable than whole school organised events which have little student participation in the planning stages.*

As well as getting involved in their own small-scale projects, several trainees discussed school councils in their assignments and the trainees reported a variety of opinions about how they worked and what might count as successful practice. Trainee C cites the school council as a success, but then only lists toilets, doughnuts and decoration as issues under discussion. Trainee A holds such a list as a positive goal for the council to work towards:

*Through my discussions with staff... I was conscious that many pupils saw these meetings as an opportunity to try and improve ‘their own’ school life or at best improve the life of themselves and their close circle of friends... I wanted this council to centre around more important requirements such as how to eradicate the toilets being in such a poor state at the end of the school day or ideas on how to keep the school clean.*

Clearly these observations present an issue about how we can extend trainees’ expectations about the potential of school councils to address a wider agenda. Whilst on the one hand we have to acknowledge that many of these common issues are important to young people, we also have to think more creatively about other areas where school councils have a positive role to play. The assignments indicate that it is unreasonable to expect schools to provide an insight into the full range of possibilities for school councils, and it may be too easy for trainees to adopt a school’s own definition of ‘success’ uncritically, without considering alternative models. None of the assignments mentioned the role of school councils in curriculum, staff appointments or policy development for example. Trainee A did however, go on to describe a powerful example that also illustrates the potential of pupil involvement in policy review.

*A good example... of the school council process was during one of the earliest meetings. The issue being raised was bullying. One particular boy in year 10, who I had reservations about from the start, contributed ... to the discussion and gave many important*
suggestions. He went on to explain… that through his experiences of being bullied inside and outside of school, it was a real and increasing problem that left many pupils like him to rebel, because they did not feel enough was being done to help. Unfortunately, this account ends before the example is explored in any more detail and there is no indication about whether, or how, the school council took the issue on.

**Issue 3 – Inclusion**

Perhaps because it was mentioned in the suggested plan for the assignment, many trainees included some comment on the link between inclusion and active citizenship. Some shared the kinds of concerns common among some experienced staff, especially some of those who have experience of tricky situations in work experience placements. Trainee M for example wrote:

> With regards to my main experience of severe behavioural difficulties there seems to be a blank spot emerging, in that the guidelines stresses (sic) the need for every pupil having the opportunity to experience success in learning and to achieve as high a standard as possible. When applied to Active Citizenship and problem children the possibilities range from the child causing severe upset during any given project to souring relationships with external agencies.

Whilst this sentiment was evident in several assignments, some others had been able to appreciate the positive possibilities presented through active citizenship. Trainee J for example wrote:

> In some ways it is easier to make active citizenship inclusive than many other subjects, often it involves very little writing and so would be more accessible to those with literacy problems. Also as it is by nature a hands on subject it is likely to engage kinaesthetic learners where other subjects may not.

**Issue 4 – Assessment**

Unsurprisingly this area proved to be fairly contentious and there was little positive practice reported as part of the trainees’ own projects. In the university workshops we had talked about linking outcomes to objectives and the difficulties inherent in assessing active citizenship. We considered the cyclical models adapted by many organisations working in this field, with planning, doing, reflecting and evaluation linking back to the next phase of planning. In this context we discussed the importance of ‘closing the circle’ by reflecting on lessons learned and celebrating achievements. Sadly, none of the projects
described seemed to have incorporated these points and trainees appeared to have assumed that the end of their project coincided with the end of the planned activity. This was a key finding for us, that trainees are as likely as the pupils to perceive the active citizenship project as the planned activity (e.g. the sale of bottles of water) rather than perceiving the activity as one stage in a wider learning process.

For some, this failure to engage with the intricacies of assessment seemed to stem from scepticism about the idea of assessment:

*If the project turns out to be relatively unsuccessful how can a student who has put in a great deal of effort receive a fair assessment? …For teachers and students alike it is perhaps the experience rather than the grade that will be remembered for years to come.*

Trainee F

At the other extreme, the most positive reflection on involving pupils in the assessment process came from a trainee who had been developing self and peer assessment methods with his history pupils. He was able to reflect on this experience as part of a broader discussion of appropriate assessment methods for citizenship:

*Pupils were to identify the strengths of their projects, recognise weaknesses and offer suggestions for improvements. The huge variations in the results of this self-assessment exercise demonstrated above all that it is a practice which must be learnt and developed like any other.*

Trainee N

More common was a more measured judgement about the processes schools had already put in place in this regard. Trainee E, for example, reflecting on a ‘community merits’ scheme that had been introduced as a way to recognise pupil participation, was keen to use the system to recognise participation in a formal way. This system was designed to recognise and celebrate individual’s participation and was therefore not specific in terms of describing achievement and levels of attainment. When she considered how assessment could be more detailed she expressed some concern that alternative assessment models may be burdensome and still fail to capture the full nature of achievement in active citizenship which “may only become clear once a pupil has left school and may get involved in their own community.”

Trainee C, discusses the end of key stage statements available to her in her placement department, which have been designed for reporting citizenship attainment to parents. She describes them as including:

*a broad descriptor… and no real criteria for the levels which should be reached… This does not therefore allow for differentiation between students who work hard and show ability and those who just coast along letting others in their groups to do the work.*
Whilst failing to resolve any of the dilemmas in assessing active citizenship, the assignments do therefore highlight some of the main tensions.

(b) Trainee evaluations
After their final school experience and before they received comments on their assignments, trainees were asked to complete an additional evaluation form about the active citizenship project and the assignment they had completed. All fourteen of the trainees who were able to attend the evaluation session responded. Responses are summarised below:

*Were trainees given less classroom teaching on their timetable to compensate for undertaking active citizenship projects?*
Yes - 5    
No - 9
This was encouraging in that at least some of those who had tackled the active citizenship project seriously had obviously been helped in their departments by having some additional time ‘freed up’ - we had been concerned that subject mentors might feel uneasy about doing this. There were several reasons why so many trainees did not have their teaching load reduced: some did not undertake additional projects or simply observed some activities that were already taking place around the school; and some were able to incorporate their active projects in class time.

*To what extent did the project and assignment give trainees a deeper understanding of citizenship education?*
All trainees felt that they had benefited from one or more aspects of the project. Responses indicated that some had benefited from undertaking focused reading on the area that they might not otherwise have done. Others felt that the practical project had given them a much deeper appreciation of some of the problems and implications of the subject in practical terms for schools and teachers.

*How useful was the focus on an active citizenship project in school?*
Most responses here focused on the relationships trainees developed with pupils. Many respondents commented how different they found the experience of working with young people out of the classroom context compared to their regular classroom role. One trainee summed this up by saying “it helped me look beyond history and attainment targets and look at the school as a community.” Another felt it had helped to provide an insight in to the process of coordination and communication across departments.

*How useful was the formal assignment?*
Not surprisingly perhaps opinion was more divided on this issue. In the majority of cases though there was a positive response to this question. Perhaps the most back-handed compliment came from a trainee who wrote, “If assignments are not an option then this one was at least relevant”. Others said it helped them organise their reflections on the experiences to make the links between some of the literature and their own experiences.
How did this project differ from the other activities undertaken during the final school experience?
Many trainees felt the active citizenship project had shown them a different side to teaching. Some felt that working more intensively with a smaller group of pupils had enabled them to develop very different relationships. Others felt that the pupils responded much more positively when they were out of the formal classroom environment and able to steer the project for themselves. Several trainees also noted that this was the first time they felt they had complete ownership of a project.

For a minority the project seemed to have been quite difficult in that they felt that the teachers saw the project as having a very low status. One trainee reported that the project was different because “most teachers thought I was ‘wasting my time’ by bothering to organise anything.”

What are the main issues schools need to solve to provide active citizenship?
Trainees were asked to write down any factors they felt were relevant. These responses were then grouped under the following broad headings (number of times mentioned in brackets):
Time (9)
Money (4)
Pupil and teacher apathy (4)
Status of subject (4)
Health and safety restrictions (3)
Equal opportunities and inclusion (3)
Responsible staff identified (3)
Community links (2)

(c) Mentors
During the final school experience there were fifteen trainees on placement in different schools. At the end of the summer term a newsletter was sent to all subject mentors for the history and citizenship course including an evaluation form for this project. To date only four subject mentors have responded, which makes it impossible to draw any conclusions about how the project was perceived from the mentor’s point of view. However, some comments have echoed those of the trainees and are therefore useful in thinking about revising the project for next year.

Only one of the four schools felt they were in a position to provide a useful opportunity for the trainee to develop active citizenship experience. In line with trainee’s experiences, mentors felt citizenship’s relative underdevelopment created problems in several schools.
Some of the comments also indicate that this is a project where trainees seemed to have ploughed their own furrow to a certain extent. Again, the limited number of replies limits our ability to draw conclusions but one mentor never saw the project or spoke to the trainee about it in any detail, another was unaware if the trainee had done anything other than simply teach some citizenship lessons in the PSHE slot in their timetable. Obviously this raises an issue for us about how we prepare trainees to negotiate opportunities in placement schools.

These few comments seem to support the impression we got through the year, that subject mentors have an additional role to play in coordinating training experiences across departments. It often seemed to be the case that whilst the head of history was the mentor, another member of staff seemed to be taking a lead role in terms of citizenship, presenting the potential for a communication gap between staff.

**Taking it forward**

It is clear from the above that the assignment and active citizenship project did not solve all the problems we identified and did not provide all trainees with the insights into active citizenship that we hoped. However, it is equally clear that everyone on the course gained something in terms of their understanding of the nature and role of active citizenship. It also evident that their views embodied the range of opinion that exists in schools, some of which we would take issue with. Within this range though there were one or two trainees who seem to be succumbing to the scepticism they encountered in school and perhaps we need to be more aware of the risk involved in raising expectations and thus increasing the likelihood of some disappointment. We also need to think carefully about providing guidance to trainees on a suitable range of activities with which to engage. Clearly if a school is itself having teething troubles getting citizenship off the ground we need to consider how we support trainees in negotiating a suitable project, and not just leave them to come up with impossible suggestions.

It has been particularly enjoyable, in talking to trainees about their projects and reading their assignments, to see the flashes of inspiration and insight they have experienced. If we have drawn any single message from reviewing the work it is a positive one related to the way the project has helped to broaden trainees’ perspectives on school, relationships and the nature of education. Those who shared their reflections about working with young people in a more flexible way than they have in the classroom have learned a valuable lesson about how teachers connect with young people and how and where ‘education’ can take place in school. Placing this centre stage as an objective of the project will hopefully help us extend these benefits to more of the trainees in the future.

But perhaps the key facet of this project, and one that we had underestimated, is the significance of raising the level of thinking of the trainees. We need to emphasise the learning cycle within which this project fits, both for them and for the pupils. Rather than see the project unfolding along a linear path from
inception to completion we need to raise the possibility of a longer-term cycle in which observations of existing practice are more thoroughly examined before their own projects are negotiated and planned.

The active citizenship project must be clearly established as a vehicle for developing pupil’s understanding of citizenship concepts and knowledge and for developing their skills of participation and responsible action. These include planning and reflection, in addition to doing. For the trainees too, we need to emphasise the place of this project within their own training programme. Not only will it help them to reflect on the nature of active citizenship in schools, it will also enable them to think about supporting pupils to translate practical experiences into deeper learning. James Atherton, in describing the uses of Lewin’s model of the learning cycle, emphasises that mentors and tutors may need to “chase’ the learner round the cycle, asking questions which encourage Reflection, Conceptualisation, and ways of testing the ideas” (Atherton, 2003).

The challenge seems to be to encourage trainees to move from a model like the one below (where the third stage seems optional):

And to move them towards a model of their own learning which is more like Lewin’s, where the focus is on the continuous process:
The cycle will be familiar to trainees as this seems to capture the process they work through with their mentors in school in their usual teaching. Where their usual ‘experience’ is a single lesson or short sequence of lessons, trainees are observed, share feedback with their mentor, discuss the conclusions that can be drawn, formulate targets for the future and start the cycle again. This is documented in weekly target-setting diaries and referenced against the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status. In moving to the second model in relation to the active citizenship component of the teaching experience we have identified the following variables as the key ones to work on in year 2:

**Time-frame**

The cycle of doing, reviewing, reflecting and experimenting is facilitated through the rest of the PGCE by the weekly mentor meetings and establishes a regular pattern or rhythm. The active citizenship project in the summer term is different and does not sit comfortably within this rhythm for two reasons. Firstly because it is often the first experience trainees have had of active citizenship education and therefore they start the cycle almost from scratch, with little observation to draw on, to formulate their own ideas about what will work. Secondly, the project itself takes several weeks to get up and running and time constraints make it difficult to envisage wrapping up one project and then starting another straight afterwards.
In response to this we need to encourage trainees to see the cycle happening over a longer period. Thus we will be encouraging them to search out relevant activities throughout the school in advance of their own project, to help them through the first few stages in the model. Ideally they will be able to see their own project as the active experimentation phase, rather than the first period of concrete experience. Secondly, we need to be able to frame the learning experience as one that will stretch beyond the PGCE year, and which will yield further benefits through trainees’ first year in post.

**Mentor role**

The second variable, which is markedly different in this project, is the level of mentor confidence. For most of our mentors, observing and facilitating reflection on classroom practice in history is second nature. They can see good practice, analyse it and explain it in ways that support trainees and help them improve. In this project this did not seem to happen in the same way. This may be partly due to the mentors’ lack of confidence and expertise, as often history teachers are being asked to provide support in citizenship. It may also indicate that the weekly cycle established in schools is less well suited to the on-going nature of the active citizenship project. We will need to work much more closely with mentors to develop models of mentoring that enable them to ‘chase’ or even to accompany trainees round the cycle of learning.
References


Dewey, J (1938) *Experience and Education* New York: Macmillan


Hannam, Derry (2003) ‘Participation and responsible action’ for all students – the crucial ingredient for success Teaching Citizenship, Issue 5, Spring


Appendix 1
Trainees’ projects
Given the variety of practices in schools it was felt it would be too difficult to require trainees to undertake a practical project during their final school experience. They were asked to organise or get involved in some form of active citizenship if they could and to incorporate their reflections in the final assignment. Most did this, but some undertook more general pieces of work on active citizenship without an element of school-focused enquiry or participation.

The following summary indicates the approach adopted by each of the fifteen trainees.

A Started a school council.
B Linking history work on the franchise to a citizenship campaign to boost turnout in school council elections.
C Participated in school council and undertook fund-raising project with class.
D None referred to in essay.
E Peer support groups for year 7 pupils with families involved in the Iraq invasion in a school near a barracks.
F None - interviewed staff about events and opportunities around the school.
G None.
H Pupils selling bottled water to raise money for Water Aid.
I Sports project – based on peer coaching, also involved in school council.
J Environmental project – steered by pupils.
K Started newsletter with small group of volunteers.
L Tried, but failed to lead the re-launch of the school council and abandoned an environmental clean up.
M Participated in curriculum delivery of citizenship, through tutor period.
N Involvement in school council, and trialling self and peer assessment in history.
O Development issues (active learning adopted in citizenship rather than active citizenship).
Appendix 2
CURRICULUM ASSIGNMENT

Active Citizenship in Schools

Title: Discuss the implications of pupils' entitlement to active citizenship experiences in schools.

Suggested content: You may determine your own particular focus, alternatively the following points might be useful in structuring your answer.

- What are the precise requirements of the citizenship curriculum with regard to active citizenship?
- Outline the main arguments in favour of this entitlement and discuss the contribution it could make to the broader aims and objectives of the national curriculum.
- Outline some of the arguments against this entitlement, including both theoretical and practical factors.
- Consider the range of approaches schools could develop to achieve this provision in practice.
- What are the implications for pupils, teachers and schools?
- What issues arise in relation to equal access and provision for all?
- How can the learning that takes place be assessed, without the assessment becoming a burden?

Sources of information:
- Interviews with pupils and / or staff to find out about attitudes to active citizenship.
- Reflection on your own active citizenship project during your summer teaching placement.
- Analysis of QCA guidance and schemes of work.
- Exam board specifications also include guidance on active citizenship coursework.
- Useful books:
  - Useful articles also appear in Teaching Citizenship the journal of the Association for Citizenship Teachers
- Useful websites: www.csv.org.uk
  - www.qca.org.uk
  - www.schoolcouncils.org.uk

Assessment Criteria: To achieve a 'pass' work must demonstrate the following:

- Show evidence of critical reflection on school experience (1.7)
- Demonstrate an awareness of how issues such as Health and Safety and Equal Opportunities guidance might affect the development of this area of school provision (1.8; 3.1.3; 3.1.4; 3.1.5)
- Demonstrate an understanding of this area of citizenship and how it relates to the wider aims of the national curriculum (2.1; 2.2; 3.3.2)
- Demonstrate an awareness of the practical issues in implementing and assessing this element of the curriculum (2.4; 2.6; 3.2.1; 3.2.3; 3.3.4; 3.3.6; 3.3.14)

(References in brackets refer to linked Standards for QTS)

Word count: 2000 words
Appendix 3

Active Citizenship Summer Term Project

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