Social Literacy, Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum

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The movement to raise social literacy among school pupils has become a major priority of government education and social policy. Whereas citizenship education emphasizes developing pupils with social and moral dispositions, social literacy widens the issues. This timely book looks at social literacy within the revised National Curriculum, which places an obligation on schools and teachers to promote social cohesion, community involvement and a sense of social responsibility among young people.

Social Literacy, Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum is an introduction to the social purposes and aims contained in the revised National Curriculum. It provides the theory behind the movement for social literacy as well as providing information for teachers, lecturers and policy-makers on putting the government's ideas into practice.

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Preface

Social Literacy, Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum reflects our concern relating to a major priority of government education policy: the movement to raise social literacy among school pupils. The New Labour government has stamped its ethical mark on the National Curriculum for England by placing an obligation on schools and teachers to promote social cohesion, community involvement and inclusion together with a sense of social responsibility among young people. The social development of pupils is promoted by non-statutory guidelines for Personal, Social and Health Education and a new curriculum area, Citizenship. Citizenship education emphasizes a range of social skills and schools are to ensure that, through core and foundation curriculum subjects, children will learn positive social dispositions. We believe that, while developments in recent years have been positive, the proposals within National Curriculum documents are not suffi-ciently explored or defined beyond an evocation to 'active citizenship'. The aim of this book is to explore the meaning of social literacy for schools today and to critique the nature, purpose and role of social literacy across the school curriculum by describing not only what it is, or how it might be defined, but also by examining how it might be conducted and assessed in schools.

In Chapter 1, James Arthur introduces the concept of social literacy by tracing the history of its development and describes the context in which it might be employed within education and schooling. Dr Arthur moves to an analysis of social virtues in schools in Chapter 2 and he examines how social virtues are linked to social literacy. In Chapter 3 Jon Davison builds upon the key issues identified in the first two chapters and he extends the concept of social literacy by drawing upon the field of sociolinguistics. The chapter highlights the importance of discourse in relation to our understanding of citizenship and social literacy. Finally, the chapter includes proposals for pedagogy to develop pupils' meta-cognitive understandings that are likely to develop active and ethically empowered citizens. William Stow, in Chapter 4, looks at the curriculum context for social literacy, and argues for a stronger emphasis on social learning in the early years of education. He outlines ways

in which such an emphasis can be achieved in all key stages, within, across and outside the curriculum. Service learning is the focus of Chapter 5, and in it Jon Davison examines the idea of social service and social learning in an experiential context. He proposes an approach to service learning based on a dynamic model of the school in the community that will promote learning from service and thus empower pupils and make them the committed active citizens the government envisages. Finally, in Chapter 6, the contentious area of assessing social development is explored. William Stow draws upon the discussions and recommendations of the first five chapters of our book in order to explore a new model, which provides opportunities for truly integrated assessment and learning, by having ipsative assessment at its core. He argues that normative, summative assessment of schools and children is incompatible with the stated aims of Personal, Social and Health Education.

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Towards an Understanding

Introduction

Much educational research which focuses on investigating children's roles as social actors often assumes a degree of social competence or skill and therefore concentrates on how these competencies and skills are expressed and acknowledged. The influence of parents in the socialization process is often acknowledged in the literature, but the predominant focus is on the formative role of peers and schools on social skill development. These social skills are often expressed as consisting of three inter-related components: social perception, social cognition and social performance (see Hollin and Trower 1988). Increasing emphasis has been placed on the last component, particularly in terms of outcomes. Combs and Slaby (1977: 162) define social skill as 'the ability to interact with others in a given social context in specific ways that are societally acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial, or beneficial primarily to others'. Obviously, in the course of their daily lives children manifest a whole range of positive social competencies, but to reduce a study of children's social roles to the measurement of 'competencies' or behaviours which involve positive and negative consequences would be both narrow and restricting. Simply providing children with a 'social first-aid kit' runs the danger of being totally instrumental in approach: we need to recognize that there are intrinsic values within all human interaction which are difficult to ignore. Consequently, the determination of what social attributes or behaviours a child might exhibit in order to be judged socially literate is only a small part of the process and, ultimately, reductive.

Children are most certainly social beings and one of the central problems for teachers is to decide how they learn to live socially with each other and with adults. There are two distinct ways of answering this question. The first view is *normative and communal*: from their culture children learn customs that provide them with a guide to act in ways that minimize conflict. The second view is *pragmatic and individualistic*: the social order of children is created by explicit and implicit agreements entered into by self-seeking individuals to avert the worst consequences of their selfish instincts. In this last

view social order is dependent on sanctions and formal agreements: rules are obeyed because they confer personal advantage on a child. In the *normative* view children are persuaded of the moral force of acting socially through their voluntary associations with others, both in their immediate circle, such as the family, and in the wider community, for example, through membership of a church or club. The child in this *normative* view will not only know the correct behaviour but will perform the role without any need for regular, conscious reference to the rules governing it. Depending on the political circumstances, in the *pragmatic* view the real possibility of coercion (physical force) could be employed by the State to ensure a degree of social order.

'Social literacy' is used in this book instead of 'social competence' as it provides a broader and more subtle approach to understanding in what ways the school curriculum plays a determining role in children's social maturation. How children develop their social literacy is intrinsically a contextual matter and is not something which can be easily traced in a linear or developmental fashion. The acquisition of social literacy is a complex process which is historically and culturally conditioned and context specific. Children learn through social practices, both explicit and implicit and become human through social interaction. Nevertheless, it is also the case that children engage in social activity before they are taught it; in other words children are disposed to be social before they learn what sociability is all about. A child may acquire some cognitive understanding of what would be desirable social behaviours in certain circumstances but be unable to translate this knowledge into behaviours or actions. The question of whether schools should be assessing knowledge and understanding of a social behaviour, or the ability to perform the behaviour, remains an area of contention. Consequently, an examination of 'social literacy' is required.

Social Education and Social Literacy

Social Education, or, more commonly, Personal and Social Education, is the traditional phrase used in schools to describe the social dimension of the school curriculum. Scrimshaw (1989: 28) defines the aims of this social education as factual knowledge combined with a commitment to desirable values and attitudes with a range of social and life skills and desirable qualities of character. In contrast, 'social literacy' has not been a phrase in general usage in British education despite the recent fashion for the proliferation of 'literacies', such as: 'political literacy'; 'emotional literacy'; 'visual literacy'; 'personal literacy'; 'media literacy'; 'computer literacy'; 'technological literacy'; and 'intellectual literacy', to name but a few of the phrases enjoying their moment in the educational literature. The new National Curriculum (1999) even refers to 'financial literacy'. In many cases such phrases are left undefined, or used in ways which display different authors' conflicting conceptions of, apparently, identical terms.

The history of social literacy can be first located in its use within the context of multicultural education in Australia in the 1980s (Kalantzis and Cope 1983). Kalantzis and Cope extended the use of the term to include knowledge about, and particularly learning from, the social sciences as taught in schools. Members of the Education Faculty in the University of Waikato, New Zealand, further extended its use to include children learning *from* the study and teaching of social studies in schools. The New Zealand national curriculum therefore speaks about children acquiring social literacy by means of a study of social studies through the social processes of enquiry, values exploration and social decision-making. The term obviously relates to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding linked to the promotion of responsible behaviour and the development of appropriate social skills. It is exactly along such lines that the Sonoma State University in the USA held a conference in 1998 entitled 'Emotional Intelligence and Social Literacy' which highlighted the behavioural aspect of social literacy. Goleman (1996) provides an account of the development of this movement in the USA.

Nearly thirty years ago in the United Kingdom the Schools Council Humanities Project and the Schools Council Social Education Project (1974) were largely underpinned by a belief that there should be a clear connection between learning *from* the social sciences in the school curriculum and acquiring social skills to function effectively within a community or society. The Social Education Project report (see Rennie *et al.* 1974: 119) declared that a fundamental principle of social education was 'that everyone needs to develop the skills to examine, challenge and control his immediate situation in school and community'. The Projects linked the teaching of the humanities and social education explicitly with the social development of children. However, the term 'social literacy' was not used by the members of these Projects. A year after the Project report Richard Pring (Elliot and Pring 1975: 8) described four aims for social education: to learn about the local society; to understand how society works; to learn to be responsible; and to have the right social attitudes. These social aims anticipated much of the current debate about 'communitarian education' (Arthur 1998, 2000 and Haste 1996). Many communitarian theorists believe that the social order rests on people's interdependence and induction into social practices through which they develop their social identity. However, these social practices, within institutions like schools, can be oppressive and lead to conformity and passivity.

The 1988 Education Reform Act effectively ended the development of social studies in schools through prescribing a range of traditional subjects and defining them in abstract academic terms. The social aspects of the curriculum were thus marginalized as academic subjects sought status and respectability in the hierarchy of academic credibility which underpinned the structure of the new National Curriculum. These core and foundation

subjects were not concerned overtly with the social and practical aspects of daily life. There was a realization by many, however, that if the National Curriculum was to reflect the full breadth of the aims of the 1988 Act, which included a curricular aim to fit pupils for life and the world of work, the teaching of the social component of the school curriculum would need to be integrated in a cross-curricular fashion. Subsequently, a range of cross-curricular documentation including *Citizenship, Health Education, Economic and Industrial Understanding* was produced. Social education was therefore not completely removed from the school curriculum and the National Curriculum Council *Curriculum Guidance 3* (NCC 1990a) stated that: 'the education system is charged with preparing young people to take their place in a wide range of roles in adult life. It also has a duty to educate the individual to be able to think and act for themselves with an acceptable set of personal qualities which also meet the wider social demands of adult life.'

In the tradition that the curriculum reflects the political and social context within which it is constructed, the New Labour government has given a renewed emphasis to the social dimension of the school curriculum in its *Statement of Values, Aims and Purposes* which accompanies the 1999 revised National Curriculum. This statement includes the development of children's social responsibility, their community involvement, the development of effective relationships, their knowledge and understanding of society, their participation in the affairs of society, their respect for others and their contribution to the building up of the common good, including their development of independence and self-esteem. In addition, citizenship education is now a statutory part of the school curriculum to be introduced in 2002 in all secondary schools and primary schools who will be expected to deliver citizenship education through personal and social education. Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) has been made more coherent within a new, non-statutory, framework. The government seeks to promote social cohesion and inclusion within society and requires schools to provide a curriculum that will contribute to meeting specific learning outcomes which involve inculcating pupils with social and moral dispositions as an essential precondition to civic and political education. Schools will be expected to motivate pupils and encourage their participation in the political processes of democratic society. This means the development of children's self-confidence and their socially responsible behaviour, in and beyond the classroom. The framework (QCA 1999b) makes it clear that schools are expected to help 'equip them with the values and knowledge to deal with the difficult moral and social questions they face'. This stated expectation extends the idea of social literacy beyond the social sciences and beyond an enabling model of citizenship education (see p. 27). Since it embodies a vision of society, it also implies that it is as much concerned with the needs of society as it is with the needs of the individual.

The framework for Personal, Social and Health Education and Citizenship

for Key Stages 1–2 and 3–4 (QCA 1999b) makes it abundantly clear that young people will be expected to learn specific social skills. At Key Stage 1, children will be expected to learn how to share, take turns, play and resolve simple arguments. At Key Stage 2, children will be expected to take increasing responsibility for their social behaviour in and out of the class-room and understand the effect of their choices on the community. At Key Stage 3, children will build on these social skills by developing higher-order skills which help them to confidently take part in aspects of the community's social life. Finally, at Key Stage 4, young people will be expected to have acquired a greater knowledge and understanding of social issues and be able to articulate and discuss these issues with each other and with other members of the wider community. It would appear that this framework proposes a linear development of social literacy without perhaps fully appreciating contextual determinants.

Nevertheless, in this framework, social literacy is perceived to be an achievement on the part of the child for it is defined as the ability to under-stand and operate successfully within a complex and interdependent social world. It involves the acquisition of the skills of active and confident social participation, including the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for making reasoned judgements in a community. Many schools already play a vital role in teaching these skills and educating children about the ability to abstract; to see the connectedness of living in community, through a socially relevant curriculum. This curriculum will necessitate children learning from the subjects being taught so that they develop social virtues and values which help them to live successfully with others, understand their rights and duties to society, and to be concerned with acting for the benefit of society. The extended curriculum of the school will also provide opportunities for children to experience how to collaborate with others and how to build communities through the contributions of the people who live in them (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Social literacy is concerned with the empowerment of the social and ethical self which includes the ability to understand and explain differences within individual experiences. Robinson and Shallcross (1998: 69) have reviewed the many attempts to explain or rationalize social behaviour and have highlighted how complex the process is. They summarize their research as follows: 'Social action occurs at two levels simultaneously. It occurs at the level of large institutions which shape the nature of the social, political, economic and cultural landscapes within which individuals develop their identities and it also takes place at the grass roots level, the level of action at which we, as individuals, have the free will to make choices but largely not in circumstances of our own making.'

However, the term 'social literacy' is not unproblematic, for the means by which children acquire social literacy can privilege some over others. By using the 'right' behaviour and language in the 'right way', that is, by

entering the dominant discourse, socially literate persons have avenues opened for them to the social goods and powers of society. The New Labour government seeks to use teaching and the school curriculum as a means to redress 'shortfalls' in the prior social acquisition of children so that they can be included fully within society and have access to these social goods and powers. Scrimshaw (1975: 73) described the socially empowered person as being 'characterised by the possession of a sound and detailed understanding of himself and others, and also by his ability to behave in an intelligent way in relation to others'. It is interesting how these aims for social education are almost identical to the aims enunciated by the National Forum for Values and the Community (SCAA 1996). The Forum spoke of valuing self, families and relationships with others and these ideals are incorporated into the new revised National Curriculum. Scrimshaw also believed that children must be able to deploy an extensive social vocabulary in a coherent and sensitive way. Chapter 3 explores the central role of language in the account of social literacy.

The School Curriculum

The school is fundamentally an agency of socialization which exerts pressures on those involved to accept its social values as their own. Engagement with learning will also result from an induction into 'educated discourse', success in which will determine future acquisition of social 'goods': for example, particular employment paths, higher education, power, status, wealth, and so on. David Hargreaves (1982: 34–35) in *The Challenge for the Comprehensive School* detailed how schools had lost their corporate vocabulary, because phrases such as 'team spirit', '*esprit de corps*' and 'loyalty to the school' had declined in favour of a culture of individualism. He berated the modern comprehensive school for not making more of a contribution to the social solidarity of society. He also believed that citizenship education must include experiential learning of the kind offered by community service. The educational goals described by Hargreaves for comprehensive schools sought to increase greater democratic participation, stimulate greater social solidarity and help resolve conflict between different communities. All three goals sit extremely well with the definition of social literacy given above. He believed that if education was to contribute to a sense of greater social solidarity then we had to revisit the questions of what sort of society we wanted and how education could help us to realize such a society?

For Hargreaves, education had become overly concerned with the cult of the individual and the content of education had increasingly moved in a technical and depersonalized direction. Hargreaves did not think that the culture of individualism in education had been an error *in toto*, only that it had become too dominant and had ignored the social functions of education, a view he summarizes as follows: 'if an excessive and exclusive

attention to social and societal needs jeopardises the education of the individual, then an excessive and exclusive attention to individual needs jeopardises those of society'. It would appear that the consequence of the modern obsession with individualism is that teachers may assume, wrongly, that the good society will be created through the education of good individuals.

One possible solution he suggested was a community-centred curriculum of which community studies, including practical community service, would be an integral part. He did not want this community-centred curriculum to become a mere appendage to the traditional curriculum, nor limited to the less able in schools. Therefore, he proposed that it should be compulsory for all and that it should consist of a core of traditional subjects organized around community studies. He argued that external examinations had far too much influence over the secondary curriculum and that this influence should be reduced in favour of increased internal assessment in schools. He believed that traditional school subjects should be more integrated with each other and that teachers should consequently develop team teaching strategies. The curriculum, in Hargreaves' model, would consist of a series of general objectives which would translate into a flexible timetable and core subjects would be reshaped into new forms and contexts.

All of this was a radical rethinking of the traditional school curriculum in an attempt to help all children, of whatever ability, to be active citizens in their communities. As Hargreaves says (1982: 144), the purpose of the school curriculum is to provide children with the knowledge and skills required for them to participate effectively in all of these different kinds of communities because 'it is when we belong to many groups and communities, and play an active role within them, that we are most likely to learn about them, and resolve, the tension between solidarity and conflict'. Schools prepare children for membership of several communities, and in anticipation of this, the school needs to offer opportunities within it for children to experience different kinds of community groupings and learn about how to resolve social conflict between them. Hargreaves admits that this is a bold vision and a daunting challenge, but believes nevertheless that schools need to increase community participation and asks: 'what other major agency apart from the school has any hope of success?'

Tom Bentley (1998), writing in a DEMOS-sponsored publication, has produced a widely publicized text on education which develops many of Hargreaves' ideas into the late 1990s. Bentley speaks of 'active, community-based learning' (1998: 30) which is aimed at developing a capacity in individuals to be responsible independent learners. He details a range of volunteering opportunities for young people, many of which are geared towards preparation for employability. He also says that young people should be given real responsibility through devolving a range of decision-making responsibilities to them so that positive learning can take place in

genuine communities. Schools, he argues, should appoint 'school–community co-ordinators' (1998: 72), and should eventually evolve into 'neighbourhood learning centres' (1998: 186) which welcome every learner and 'combine the social, cultural, financial, informational and human resources of their local communities with those of a publicly funded, professionally staffed education system'. Both Hargreaves' and Bentley's proposals for the school curriculum can be firmly located within the communitarian agenda for education (Arthur 2000). Together they are really advocating that pupils should experience two types of social experience which develops pro-social behaviour – peer collaboration and adult guidance. Pupils should be involved in setting the social norms for their schools and not simply have them imposed on them. In many respects both authors' proposals are fundamentally hypothetical and even utopian. Bentley's book fails to engage with the complexities and genuine difficulties of the community projects to which he briefly refers, while Hargreaves' is an untested framework for a new curriculum. Nevertheless, both Bentley and Hargreaves were consulted by the Crick committee.

The 1990s saw a more centralized and traditional curriculum in secondary schools which was contrary to the proposals advocated by Hargreaves. Hargreaves' approach seeks to increase the solidarities in the various communities that comprise democratic society and educate them to resolve their conflicts through a school curriculum based on community-centred studies. He is critical of the progressive individualism which has led to the ethical individualism in schools and proposes that genuine individuality must be rooted in group life and result from direct experience of community life. This would entail schools being smaller in size and engaging their students with a focus on investigating their local community. The assumptions behind these recommendations by Hargreaves are that children will feel fulfilled by discussing issues in groups, that they will be more empowered, and that they will increase their self-esteem, which together will bring out their innate sociability creating a more socially inclusive society.

How then might the National Curriculum in schools advance the child's social literacy? Should all subjects on the school curriculum contribute to social literacy, and if so, how should this be specified within the subject orders? The traditional subjects of the school curriculum focus almost entirely on cognitive aspects of teaching and learning, but the knowledge and learning processes that they impart can have a value in directing activity towards desired social ends. For example, History is, above all else, about people and has an important and unique contribution to make to social education. In the primary school, History develops certain skills which can be said to be key aspects of social literacy: the ability to reflect on evidence and draw conclusions, and the ability to consider various interpretations of the same event, developing a respect for evidence. History also develops attitudes which a social being needs: tolerance of various viewpoints; critical

approach to evidence; respect for the value of reasoned argument. The study of the past is increasingly set in a cultural and moral context, looking at law-making, abuse of power, introducing persecution and religious conflict, as well as ideas such as cultural interdependence, diversity of beliefs, and philanthropy. The children would increasingly be asked to consider political and social actions in a contemporary moral context. Other subjects within the National Curriculum can offer similar contributions to the development of social literacy, but there has as yet been a lack of any systematic articulation of what these contributions might be, except a brief reference in each of the curriculum subjects. Research by Holden (1999) also doubts whether teachers are prepared for these new social education demands. She found that teachers see social education as learning certain social skills and various definitions were offered. 'Something you do instinctively' was common and included everything from school playground to the school ethos.

Conclusion

Social literacy is both a prerequisite for and an essential facet of schooling. Every school will contribute to social education whether it plans for it or not. It involves learning a series of social skills and developing a social knowledge base from which to understand and interpret the range of social issues which citizens must address in their lives. It also requires a complex language usage before any political literacy can be built upon and a realization that knowledge by itself will not necessarily change human social behaviour. The National Curriculum remains dominated by cognate subject areas without any real attempt to articulate the values and beliefs which they help form in young people. Information is not enough. The values and beliefs embedded in the school need to be made visible, for the school is the social setting wherein pupils learn their social literacy. We would, in summary, agree with Piaget (1932: 134) who said, more than sixty years ago:

> Young people need to find themselves in the presence not of a system of commands requiring ritualistic and external obedience but a system of social relations such that everyone does his best to obey the same obligations, and does so out of mutual respect.