HISTORY, CITIZENSHIP AND CONTROVERSY

— Hilary Claire

Y4 question their MP about nuclear waste policy; Y6 survey people in their community and school about a proposed casino in their town, and feed back the information to the local council; children decide to buy their Christmas presents and ask for their own presents to come from a Fair-trade source or NGO catalogue; Y5 learns about the suffragettes and how they struggled to achieve votes for women; in assembly the head talks about bullying in the playground and the children agree that it's unkind; Y2 learns about Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement and includes in their class charter that nobody will bully a person because of their colour or religion.

Which of these is about citizenship education? The answer is that some ***are,*** and some ***could be*** if they went much further!

In KS3 and 4, unlike the National Curriculum non statutory guidance for the primary age range, PSHE and Citizenship are separate. In primary, you can take advantage of the way they build on one another, but also have to appreciate the difference between them to teach the latter appropriately. At a recent meeting, Liz Craft, the QCA officer in charge of Citizenship Education said 'Citizenship is about working together to achieve positive change'. So, thinking about the example of learning about Civil Rights and modifying the class charter, and the assembly about bullying, the former takes an historical concept into policy and action; whereas the latter would *become* citizenship if following discussion about the unacceptability of bullying. Children then made some kind of policy and plan, perhaps through their School Council, to monitor and prevent bullying in a general way, not just on an individual basis. It would be even better, if they started to look at the ways in which discrimination which takes the form of bullying in school may be magnified in wider society, becomes institutionalised, so that groups of people are targeted, suffer stereotyping and prejudice. Then, children might consider what action is necessary – going beyond individual good deeds – to make life safer and more equitable for such groups.

The work on suffragettes helpfully focuses on the importance of voting, but unless the issues are brought into the contemporary world this remains an historical topic *about* a citizenship issue, and not citizenship education *per se.* They would need to move it on, with children considering, for example, the impact of the internet in facilitating direct action and how people organise on specific issues; the failure of the current system to adequately represent people between elections; why people might not vote, in other words whether representative government is working as it should.

The following diagram may help conceptualise the stages children go through towards the goal of 'active citizenship':

What are the concepts and processes of citizenship education?

As part of the revision of the KS3 curriculum, Citizenship Education has been considerably tightened up and the concepts and processes clearly delineated (www.qca.org.uk/17504.html#citnc). The primary curriculum has not been altered, but it is essential that primary teachers are not just aware of what comes next, but that they ensure that the appropriate foundations are laid for continuity.
The **processes** are:

- Developing skills of enquiry and communication
- Developing skills of participation and responsible action
- Acquiring and applying knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens with respect to the concepts.

The **concepts** for KS3 are now: justice, democracy, rights and responsibilities, identity and diversity.

Why is citizenship education inherently about controversial issues?

Broadly speaking, democracies are based on people having freedom to express their point of view, as long as this doesn't endanger someone else, and electing representatives for a council or Parliament to enact laws expressing these preferences. We have more than one party in these institutions because, even if democratic principles prevail about how society should be organised and ordered, there isn't total consensus about the specifics of policy and outcome. Minority groups are represented as well as the majority and for different issues individuals normally band together in pressure groups to have their say. Should there be a new multi storey garage or a park? Should we allow a doctor from the EU to take precedence over doctors from the Commonwealth in the job market? Should we or should we not have American missile bases in England?

Democratic citizenship is about negotiating how to move forward without violence or stalemate in situations where there are different interest groups as well as different values and attitudes. People will try to protect their interests, or look for changes which they feel will improve the current situation. Debate and negotiation between a variety of positions is built in, with the rights of minorities protected through Human Rights legislation, and acts such as the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

How can history help children work with controversy?

1. Appreciating the range of issues that has been controversial, and the possible strategies for dealing with injustice and inequality
Through history children can be introduced to the variety of issues, interests and attitudes that people have grappled with in the past. They need to move from personal

Year 2 children re enact Ruby Bridges' solitary walk through hostile crowds to her school in segregated Alabama'.
Photo copyright Hilary Claire

experience, to realise that in society there never has been, and we can't now expect consensus about every aspect of our lives. The more serious and important the issue, the more likely there will be disagreement about what to do.

History also introduces children to the particular strategies chosen in different campaigns. Learning about various significant individuals, they also learn about campaigning methods and have an opportunity to evaluate them, in the light of their own ethics and commitment as well as the outcome.

2. The opportunity to think through your own responses to difficult controversial issues of belief and value
Because controversial issues are rooted in values, beliefs and different ideologies as well as personal interest, children can use historical analogies as the rehearsal ground for their own developing ethical and ideological standpoint. This is not indoctrination but education: they weigh up serious ethical questions and decide where they stand.

What would they advised Elizabeth I, fearing treachery from her own cousin? Would they have spent hours interviewing and gathering evidence to convince people of the reality of slavery, like Thomas Clarkson, or stomped the country like Olaudah Equiano? Would they have chained themselves to railings with the WSPU or joined the democratic, peaceful NUWSS led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett? What if they had been a young man, not a woman – where would they have stood on women's rights? Even if they couldn't write novels or articles revealing the lives of people living in considerable poverty in the midst of affluent Victorian society, like Charles Dickens or Henry Mayhew, what would their reactions have been to these revelations and what practical things might they have done? Imagine they lived in England in the 1950s, what would they have thought about the West Indian Gazette founded by Claudia Jones, and would they have worked with her to get Carnival established in Notting Hill, in the interests of confronting racism, and promoting an African Caribbean identity? Would they have joined Martin Luther King in the march on Washington or Gandhi on the salt march? Would they have supported the boycott against South Africa in the apartheid years?

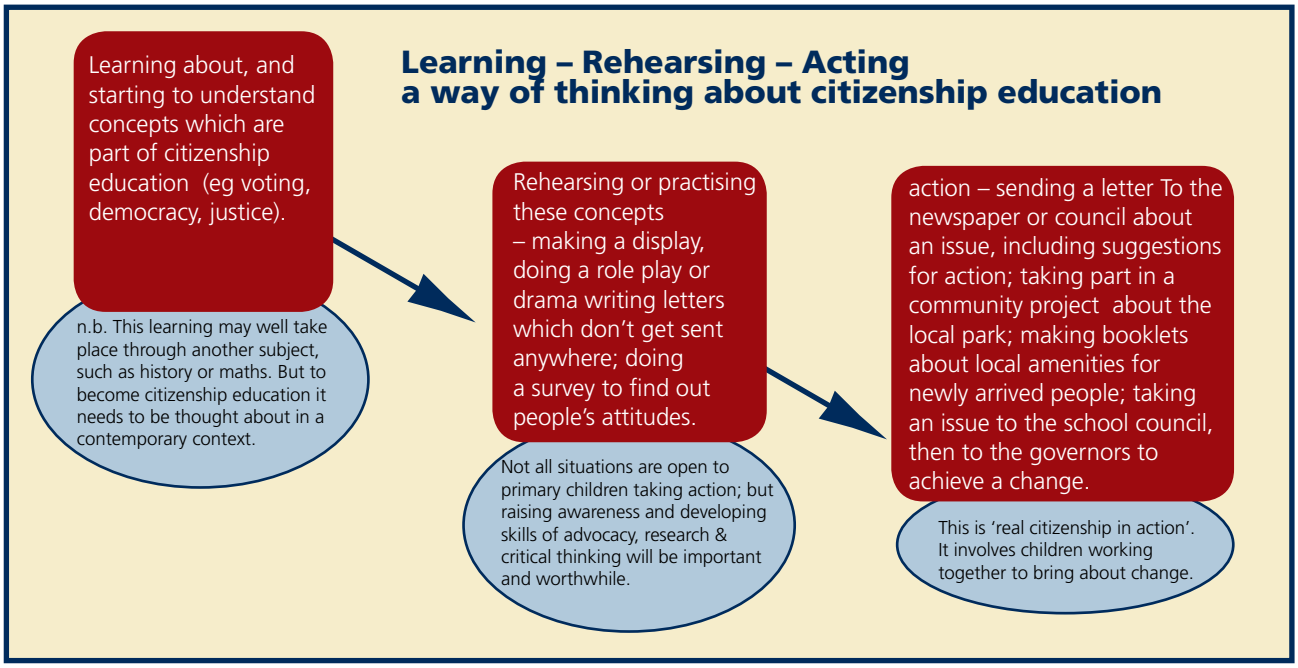
In short, history can and *should be* where children learn and practise the skills of critical thinking, evidence based rational argument and advocacy which are central to citizenship education. Here, they can be introduced to and start to come to grips with important citizenship concepts like justice, democracy, identity and diversity in historical contexts and as appropriate, address these in the contemporary world.

Linking past controversies with current ones

The skill for history teachers lies in seeing the links between the present and a controversial issue in the past and knowing where it is safe to go with it. Not all the challenges of contemporary society have historical analogies but some do, and children may be able, through the vehicle of history, to learn concepts relevant to citizenship and consider the strategies adopted, even if they don't move beyond the 'rehearsals' of putting themselves in the shoes of their predecessors.

When we teach about struggles in the past to achieve change or resist oppression, and encourage children to look for bias and perspective, we are preparing the ground for citizenship work in which they need to understand that there are interest groups who prefer the status quo, and others who want change. And it has ever been so. Primary teachers may decide not to debate specific controversies – particularly political ones – in their classrooms, but they can start to prepare children to do so in a rational way.

Sylvia Pankhurst speaking for women's suffrage in the East End of London.



The campaign to end slavery Perhaps, as part of commemorating the bicentary of the end of the slave trade in 1807 (and emancipation of British slaves in 1838) children learn first about the key figures, then take on roles as advocates in Britain for abolition, or as Jamaicans deciding to join Sam Sharpe's Rebellion in 1831. Perhaps some of them even take the dubious role of the plantation owners who tried to argue that slavery was a happy way of life for the enslaved. Through such work they will inevitably grapple with ethical issues – using concepts like 'justice', equity, 'rights and responsibilities'. Perhaps they won't learn just yet about contemporary issues such as the exploitation of sex workers kidnapped and brought to Britain, or domestic workers kept under virtual lock and key by wealthy employers. But they will later, and the groundwork will be there in the kind of thinking they have done in parallel contexts.

Opportunities through local study If issues don't seem to fit with the periods in the KS2 history curriculum, then local study may well be the vehicle for such work. At the global level, campaigns to slow down, and ultimately halt global warming have their analogies with campaigns against nuclear armaments in the 70s and 80s, which also appeared to threaten the survival of our world. The borough where I live in London was part of a major anti-nuclear protest in the 80s, because nuclear waste was being taken by rail straight through the area. There were local CND sit-downs outside the town hall (similar to the people who have camped outside Westminster protesting against British involvement in the Iraqi War). At local levels, it is easy to find historical examples which resonate with the present. Hospitals were threatened with closure; people demonstrated against racism; dustmen and fire fighters went on strike; groups organised themselves to stop a by-pass or to preserve an historic site.

'Terrorism' and religious belief Or one can go much further back into the past. Take the Gunpowder Plot. There are contemporary analogies with the people who felt so strongly about their religion that in 1605 they planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Can learning about Catesby and his fellow conspirators shed light on contemporary terrorism? Guy Fawkes was tortured, hung, drawn and quartered. The other conspirators were eventually captured and also executed. What is the children's view about this treatment for treachery? What of modern day analogies? (See Hennessy, in this issue, pp. 12-13, for exciting work with Year 6 childrenon the Gunpowder Plot, using drama.)

Child labour Take child labour, and the arguments put by its defenders – contribution to family incomes; the importance for the general economy of keeping production prices low, and the arguments of the reformers – the cruel exploitation of children; the poor wages; the profiteering. The contemporary analogies are not hard to find. Working with the testimony of children to Royal Commissioners, and efforts to pass the Factory Acts in Britain in the mid C19th can be a starting point for citizenship education, but it's not yet there. The work must move into contemporary situations, with children doing separate research about current child labour, building on the same concepts. Best of all if they move from rehearsal to action – and make decisions about whether to boycott – or protest in other ways against firms producing cheap wares for the British market, through exploitation of child labour.

Child soldiers By the end of WWII, quite young children were being enlisted in the German army. If we can teach about Anne Frank as part of this KS2 unit, can we not also consider other aspects of continental experience in this period? The issue of child soldiers is of great concern now, in parts of Africa. True, the circumstances are not identical, but there are some equivalent concepts which can start with exploration in the past, before moving to the present.

Conclusion

We know that the history we offer children is deeply embued with values – the values of those who made choices about what to include, and how to interpret the past, and the values of those who made their own decisions to challenges. If we can help children understand this about history, perhaps we can also help them understand themselves, other people and some of the possibilities in the society they live in. This is about citizenship too.

Reference

Hennessy, J. 2007, Resources for hope – engaging with controversial issues through drama, in Claire, H and Holden C, *The Challenge of Teaching Controversial Issues,* Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books.

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