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England's citizenship education experiment: state, school and student perspectives

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BOOK REVIEW

England's citizenship education experiment: state, school and student perspectives, by Lee Jerome, London, Bloomsbury, 2012, 208 pp., £75 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-4411-2224-7

At a time when Michael Gove has decided that citizenship education will continue to be a national curriculum subject in England (in the secondary education phase), it is useful to reflect on its development in terms of public policy, the experiences of teachers and its impact on young people. This important book by Lee Jerome, who is the Programme Director for Secondary Initial Teacher Education at London Metropolitan University, reviews the 'history' of this experiment in citizenship education between 2002 and 2012. One of the strengths of the book comes from Lee Jerome's broad range of knowledge in political theory, public policy analysis, educational policy and the analysis of teaching and learning.

I was impressed by the concise and deft explanation of the debates in political theory that influenced the development of the new subject in England. While recognising the importance of democratic liberalism, Lee Jerome does well to consider the influence of both communitarianism and civic republicanism on the New Labour government, which brought about the new national curriculum subject. He does very well to appreciate the differences between communitarianism and the more participatory and deliberative civic republicanism of David Blunkett and especially Bernard Crick. Readers would do well to reread Crick's seminal *In Defence of Politics* (1982) which provided an Aristotelian backdrop to his key report in 1998, 'Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools'. Note that what was being proposed was not only a concern with good citizenship but also a curriculum for developing democratic citizens.

Building on the previous work of Dina Kiwan and Jessica Pykett, Lee Jerome offers an insightful analysis of the political and policy context that led to the establishment of citizenship education by David Blunkett in 2000. It is important to remember that this was achieved in what was the New Labour government of the 'communitarian' Tony Blair. I found his Table 3.1 (pp. 60–61), which outlines the main elements of 'New Labour's citizenship programme', very useful. He highlights the communitarian concerns with 'rights and responsibilities', the civic

republican concerns about ‘participation and the democratic deficit’ and the issues of national identity and concerns about ‘community and diversity’, as key elements in the debates about citizenship that led to the establishment of the new national curriculum subject. From the Crick Report of 1998 to the Ajebo Review of 2007, Lee Jerome expertly considers the policy debates and the curriculum changes of the period.

One of the strengths of this book is the analysis of the problematic implementation of the national curriculum and the challenges it posed for schools, teachers’ education, pedagogic practice and the learning experiences of students. He states that, ‘Translating any educational initiative into classroom reality involves a range of bureaucratic, managerial, financial and pedagogical hurdles with the potential for misunderstandings and reinterpretations at each stage’ (p. 97). One of the concerns that needed to be addressed was the ‘light touch’ framework for this new national curriculum subject. This was probably the result of David Blunkett’s concern about being overly prescriptive as a Government Minister and his recognition of the importance of the professional expertise of the teachers. This did lead, however, to real challenges in the development of the subject and to establishing its place in schools as a core subject, which was meant to be more than a ‘cross-curriculum’ subject. Perhaps the author could have considered more fully the excellent work of the QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) in guiding the development of the subject in this period. One of the biggest challenges facing the implementation of this new subject that Lee Jerome explores was one of teacher education and the need to create qualified specialist teachers.

Perhaps the real strength of this book is the case studies that the author undertook to supplement the important national research that the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) accomplished under the research leadership of David Kerr. In subsequent chapters, he also utilises insights from the IEA CIVED survey in 2002, the ICCS one in 2010 and other studies. Using his own research and national and international research findings, the author provides important and insightful analyses of the experiences of teachers and students involved in citizenship education in England in response to the key areas of ‘rights and responsibilities’ (chapter 8), ‘community and diversity’ (chapter 9) and ‘active citizenship’ (chapter 10).

In his final chapter, Lee Jerome poses the question, ‘To what extent did New Labour’s intentions succeed?’ In considering how New Labour took the contested construct of citizenship and attempted to implement it as part of the school curriculum, he discusses ‘staff and school variation’, ‘subject status’ and ‘curriculum policy’. He is particularly insightful when considering the issue of central control versus local accountability. After considering the many challenges that faced the development and

implementation of this new national curriculum subject in England's schools, the author ends on an optimistic note. If you listen to teachers and students and if you carefully consider the range of research findings, there is still an important place for citizenship education in the national curriculum as part of the broader political project to maintain democratic citizenship.

Reference

Crick, B. (1982). *In defence of politics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

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