

Submission to House of Lords' Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Dr Neil Hopkins
Senior Lecturer in Education
University of Bedfordshire

neilhopkins22@btinternet.com

07944 870033

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1. John Rawls, the American philosopher, stated in his book *Political Liberalism* (1993) that diversity and conflict (in terms of people's beliefs, philosophies and worldviews) is something that is inevitable in contemporary liberal democracies. Rawls, as a committed liberal, believed this diversity was not something that should be counteracted by imposing or privileging a particular doctrine at the expense of other beliefs. Rawls's question, therefore, was how can we live together where such diversity occurs, ensuring citizens are free to believe and express their views without society breaking down into never-ending conflict. Rawls's potential solution was the 'overlapping consensus', a concept whereby citizens of different persuasions are able to adhere to collective attitudes, values and norms through the lens of their own religion or set of beliefs (what Rawls termed a 'conception of the good'). Rawls believed such an overlapping consensus could be achieved by citizens who adopted 'reasonable' conceptions of the good because they held respect and tolerance of other views (for example) as an important element of their own belief systems.
2. This has a direct bearing on any discussion of Fundamental British Values (as introduced by the government after the 'Trojan Horse' affair). The question to ask ourselves is: 'Is the introduction of Fundamental British Values' in schools and colleges an attempt to create or formalise such an overlapping consensus in British society?' Whilst it is difficult to argue with the central tenets of each of the five elements that comprise

Fundamental British Values, the way they have been introduced into the education system and whether they articulate 'Britishness' in any significant degree are problematic. There was not a period of public discussion and national debate on Britishness and what values (if any) this encapsulated. This lack of debate has made it difficult for Fundamental British Values to be accepted in many quarters of British society. I teach in a university that has many British Asian students on its programmes and there is anecdotal evidence that many in the British Asian communities are worried that Fundamental British Values and the PREVENT duty in schools and colleges has singled out radical Islam as a potential threat to the welfare of British citizens. It could be argued this has led to a 'drift' in thinking by many towards viewing Islam *per se* as a danger to liberal values in British society (see Qureshi (2015) and Mogra (2016)). If the Lords' Select Committee can use this call for evidence and publication of its report to generate such a national discussion on Britishness and the values this encapsulates, this can only be of benefit to schools, colleges, universities and the wider society.

3. Fundamental British Values and the PREVENT duty have become essential aspects of citizenship education in schools and colleges. This has come at a time, however, when it could be argued citizenship (as a curriculum subject) has been increasingly downplayed in school and college curricula. When the new National Curriculum was introduced in 2014, the programme of study for citizenship was very brief in comparison to other subjects. This could be seen as a means of 'unshackling' the subject from needless regulation and prescription. However, it could also be sending a signal that the subject is relatively unimportant. Evidence suggests there are very few citizenship specialists undertaking initial teacher education in secondary schools and colleges (and, likewise, citizenship co-ordinators in primary schools). This apparent lack of specialisation has led to a potential marginalisation of citizenship education in the curriculum where the subject is often allocated to humanities specialists or teachers with a religious education background. There are many instances where citizenship is not treated as a curriculum subject at all and is integrated into a school's PSHE, SMSC or tutorial provision. This provision leaves it open to the confidence and expertise of the individual teacher whether citizenship is

adequately covered and explore with the students. There is a danger with such provision that schools and colleges 'cover the bases' and 'tick the boxes' by making sure they adhere to the statute and regulations on British Values and/or PREVENT without adequately ensuring there is the time and space for students to fully debate and argue what it means to be British and what constitutes radicalisation (for example).

4. These issues inevitably lead to the question of pedagogy concerning citizenship education. It must be acknowledged that there is already excellent practice occurring in this area – the Anglo-European School in Ingatestone, Essex, for instance, has done groundbreaking work on incorporating citizenship and human rights education into the fabric and governance of the school. The practice of 'Rights Respecting Schools' supported by UNICEF have also done a great deal of work promoting citizenship and human rights in RRS schools. These examples are important because they show that citizenship should not be seen as a completely separate discipline or subject from the rest of the school curriculum. Citizenship needs to be 'plumbed into' the very structures of the schools and colleges themselves in order as citizenship is a set of practices as well as a programme of study. I have written about this extensively from a college point-of-view in my book *Citizenship and Democracy in Further and Adult Education* (2013). British schools and colleges have often been very effective in encouraging and facilitating student voice (as analysed in the work of Julia Flutter and others). It is important, however, that student voice isn't seen as tokenistic or focusing on issues that are relatively mundane and unimportant – student voice should allow (where possible) for the students to have a significant say as stakeholders in their own education. This in itself is a clear manifestation of citizenship education in action.
5. The final point I want to make regards political literacy in citizenship education. Political literacy was strongly advocated by the Crick Report in 1998 as a means of encouraging students to become active citizens in their local communities and the wider society. This means that citizenship education has to go beyond the confines of the classroom and school/college to advocacy and involvement in issues that concern students in the world around them. I think this has

proved the most difficult to achieve as teachers and heads/principals are worried about political neutrality and accusations of indoctrination. Because of this, projects involving citizenship in the wider community have tended towards 'safe' issues such as local environmentalism. It is here, however, that schools, colleges and the National Citizen Service could work in tandem to actually explore what is meant by 'political literacy' and how that can be facilitated to enable young people to become active citizens and have the confidence to be advocates for what they passionately believe in. The good practice that has been raised in the paragraph above cannot solely remain within the boundaries of the school and college – the subjects raised in schools and colleges will often extend to engage with people, groups and institutions in the community. The Youth Parliament and local councils that encourage youth representation are excellent examples of citizenship being taken beyond the classroom walls. The Inns of Court encouraging student role-play of key trials is another creative instance of facilitating the duties and practices of citizenship.

6. Political literacy, as articulated by Crick, inevitably involves questioning and challenging existing attitudes and states of affair. It also involves working against perceived discrimination and injustice. These are not things that can necessarily be kept in tidy pedagogical boxes – they are messy as democracy itself is messy (this possibly explains why many teachers are reticent to tread onto such territory). Work in the field of dialogical teaching (as advocated by Robin Alexander, for instance) offers some possibilities on how debate and discussion can be facilitated in a robust but respectful way. Indeed, many teachers who skilled in citizenship education are already using these skills with their students. Gert Biesta and Peter Lawy in their paper 'From teaching citizenship to learning democracy' (2006) take the means of dialogics further and encourage students to question 'what is a good citizen?'. Biesta and Lawy argue that citizenship education has had a tendency to assume what good citizenship is and for students to comply with this rather than challenge and analyse the concept as part of their studies.
7. This brings me full circle back to Rawls's overlapping consensus and Fundamental British Values. Biesta and Lawy's

invitation to question what good citizenship is can be extended to notions of Britishness and whether there is a consensus regarding this. The Select Committee's invitation for evidence on citizenship and civic engagement offers a welcome opportunity to refresh and extend the discussion on citizenship education in what are politically disquieting times. I welcome the opportunity to submit this evidence to their Lordships.

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