This chapter explores the complex historical, political and religious context that frames discussions around citizenship and democracy within education in Ireland, as an independent nation, and as a member of the European Union. What it means to be a citizen in Ireland will be explored. The focus is primarily on the Republic of Ireland, although issues that arise in Northern Ireland will also be covered. The chapter will focus on curriculum subject areas that touch on citizenship and democracy, past and present. The extent to which policy and practice can map onto the key concepts set out in the Council of Europe’s framework of competences for democratic culture will be explored, with a specific focus on the extent to which teachers are trained to be able to teach these subjects.
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Introduction

Citizenship is a complex, abstract topic that is not necessarily clearly defined and understood in the context of the Irish education system (SCoTENS, 2004). It is further complicated by major shifts in the status of the Republic of Ireland in the last 30 years due to population changes, the increased importance and impact of our membership of the European Union (EU) and the shifting role of the Catholic Church in the Irish landscape. Niens and McIlrath (2010) note uncertainty among teachers, for example about what role nationalism plays in citizenship education. They state that ‘Citizenship is intimately linked to liberal ideas of individual rights and entitlements on the one hand, and to communitarian ideas of membership in and attachment to a particular community on the other’ (Niens and McIlrath, 2010:74). This chapter will explore different conceptions of citizenship that have been prominent in the education system of the Republic of Ireland. It will also briefly explore issues in relation to citizenship education in Northern Ireland. The Impact of EU membership on this topic, and the current status of citizenship in the current primary and secondary curriculum, will be explored in particular. Reference will be made throughout to the extent that policy and practice maps onto the Council of Europe’s Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018). The focus will be on Values, Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge and critical understanding to see how well prepared Irish citizens are based on their educational experiences.
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Conceptions of citizenship for an independent Ireland

As the Irish Free State was establishing itself, both in the 1920s and beforehand, emphasis was placed on unique elements of Irish culture and civilisation to highlight a distinct Irish citizenship (Rami and Lalor, 2006), particularly within education: this was seen as a reclamation of an education system previously dominated by British Protestantism and whose main aim was, according to Padraig Pearse’s *The Murder Machine*, repressive (Simmie and Edling, 2016). The Irish Free State aimed to remove British colonial vestiges as swiftly as possible (Simmie and Edling, 2016), moving towards a ‘gaelic civilisation’ (Rami and Lalor, 2006). Coolahan (1981) notes a patriotic (Keogh, 2003) cultural nationalism, underpinned by the revival of the Irish language as well as traditions such as sport and music, that played a key role in how Irish education initially transmitted notions of citizenship, firmly ensnared within a nationalist viewpoint. The centrality of language to national and political identity is not unique to Ireland (Ryan, 2014). The Irish language was made a compulsory subject from 1925 (McManus, 2016), highlighting that it was essential for Irish citizens.

Another key element of Irish citizenship is the extent to which it has been inextricably linked with Catholicism (Ryan, 2014), which until 1972 held a special position written into the nation’s constitution (Finlay, 2007). In relation to education, the influence of the Catholic Church is difficult to exaggerate (Rami and Lalor, 2006). The 1937 constitution established the pre-eminent role of the Catholic Church (Ryan, 2014), which manages a majority of primary (Simmie and Edling, 2016) and secondary schools (Kerr *et al.*, 2002). The Catholic Church was seen as operating in a symbiotic manner with the state (Drudy and Lynch, 1993), with the Catholic Church adopting a paternalistic role (Irwin, 2013). Indeed, to this day difficulties have arisen for parents looking to find schools to send their children to that are not under the patronage of the Catholic Church in some form (Jones, 1996). Their influence in the field of education spreads beyond schools and into teacher education as well (Hartford, 2010). It is only fairly recently that initiatives such as *Educate Together* have been developed to provide educational opportunities that are nondenominational (Rami and Lalor, 2006). The influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland is seen as anomalous; the Catholic Church has amassed a considerable amount of resources in education (Rami and Lalor, 2006), with Eurydice (2012) noting the unusual status of schools in Ireland: a vast majority of schools are designated as privately owned (e.g. under church patronage), but fully state funded. The fact that schools are allowed to protect their ethos and spirit can create problems for employing teachers who do not share a particular faith (Simmie and Edling, 2016). This raises issues in relation to valuing cultural diversity, an important element of the *Council of Europe’s* (2018) framework for democratic culture.
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The Catholic Church has influenced what and how citizenship-related material is taught and has objected to such teaching (Kerr et al., 2002): the church took the view that such concepts should be/were taught through religious education (Gleeson and Munnelly, 2003; Keogh, 2003; Bruen, 2014). Indeed, Finlay (2007) claims that before the 1990s, the official position of both the Catholic Church and the government was that civic and religious education were inseparable. This has led to a position where citizenship education can be closely linked to indoctrination (Niens and McIlrath, 2010). This runs contrary to developments in teaching citizenship areas in the curriculum from the 1960s onwards in Ireland, which will be discussed later, but may explain the issues that arose.

**Contemporary and political discourses around citizenship**

While traditionalist, nationalist views around citizenship, and in particular the impact of the Catholic Church, have influenced how citizenship is discussed in the Republic of Ireland, a number of other issues can be considered before citizenship and democratic concepts covered in the Irish curriculum are analysed and evaluated.

First, there has been some interesting debate about the nature of the Republic of Ireland as a republic. Ryan (2014) highlights the views of former Taoiseach Garatt Fitzgerald (2005) calling into question the extent that the Republic of Ireland is truly a republic – he argues that rather than citizens working together actively (see also Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007) for the public good, Irish citizens tend to be preoccupied with local, tribalist issues (Limond, 2010). Ferriter (2012) similarly states that earlier, more nationalist Catholic influences that informed initial Irish ideas around citizenship have proven difficult to change to a more civically oriented view, driven by a more participatory democracy (Ryan, 2014). Indeed, Bailey et al. (2005) highlight issues around the major political parties (Fianna Fail and Fine Gael) in terms of being able to distinguish between their major policies. Garvin (1977), for example, noted how unusual it was for the country to lack a major socialist party. Rather, the key distinction between the two major Irish political parties links back to the sides taken in relation to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the subsequent Irish Civil War (Gallagher, 1985).

There are also issues related to the increasingly multicultural nature of modern Irish society (Waldron and Pike, 2006), due to a reversal of the previous 150+ year trend for people to migrate from rather than to Ireland (Keogh, 2003). There are issues in citizens’ acceptance of ‘nationhood’, particularly as there are now diversity of schools (Faas and Ross, 2012). Indeed, the difficulties in migrant teachers being able to teach in Irish primary schools attests to this (Migrant Teacher Project, Online). Again, this creates issues in relation to valuing cultural diversity (Council of Europe, 2013). The fact that this persists in spite of a marked decline in the dominance of Catholic
and nationalist values in the Republic of Ireland (O’Rathaigh and O’Sullivan, 2000), and an increase in what is termed ‘nominal Catholicism’ (Irwin, 2009), is remarkable. Irish public discourse is still seen as being dominated by a ‘White, Heterosexual, Irish, Settled, Catholic’ (WHISC) mentality (Tracy, 2000).

Having focused on the impact of religion, it is also worth considering the economic influences: it has been noted, for example, that ‘since the 1960s, ‘mainstream’ Irish education has arguably placed the emphasis on engagement through work and economic citizenship rather than civic engagement through critique’ (Khoo, 2006:30). This may be severely detrimental to the type of democratic culture the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework of competences espouses. Simmie and Edling (2016), however, claim that teacher educators have tried to contain the influence of education for purely economic purposes, although this is no longer proving effective (Lynch et al., 2013; Murphy, 2006). Secondary education in particular is increasingly driven by a drive for examination success to support entry into competitive university courses (Gleeson and Munnelly, 2001).

Citizenship and Northern Ireland

Discussions around citizenship on the island of Ireland inevitably must grapple with the thorny issue of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland remains a deeply segregated society, divided along political and religious loyalties (Duffy and Evans, 1997): Catholic/nationalist and unionist/protestant. The education system is equally divided (Cairns and Hewstone, 2002). Northern Ireland came into existence following the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, although territorial claims to Northern Ireland sat within the constitution of the Republic of Ireland until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (Kerr et al., 2002). Northern Ireland originally contained a majority protestant, loyalist population, although with a sizable, and growing, minority Catholic republican population (Kerr et al., 2002).

A prolonged period of conflict in the north between republicans and loyalists, euphemistically known as ‘the Troubles’, began in the 1960s, fuelled at least in part by Catholic civil rights protests due to discrimination being experienced (Clemitshaw, 2008). This conflict was formally brought to a close by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which, among other things recognised the right of the people of Northern Ireland to see themselves as British, Irish or both as they see fit (Smith, 2003). Membership in the EU was key to supporting this due to the shared rights EU membership entails.

Despite the general peace that has prevailed in Northern Ireland post-1998, citizenship remains a tricky issue, especially for educators. The school system remains highly segregated, with the Department of Education, Northern Ireland (2011) noting that only approximately 5 per cent of students attend integrated schools. In attempting to teach citizenship-related issues, teachers...
are wary of touching sensitive issues relating to the Troubles (Department of Education, Northern Ireland, 1999): a number of curricular initiatives designed to promote social cohesion in Northern Ireland have been attempted, but none seem to have succeeded (Wylie, 2004). Smith (2001) argues that due to a lack of common ground between the two main populations in Northern Ireland, there is the need for a broader citizenship education in Northern Ireland, focusing on human rights as a basis, although teachers would still have to be very aware of what young people may be learning at home (McSharry and Cusack, 2016), which may not support this work. However, McEvoy (2007) notes that avoiding discussion of past conflict may end up being counterproductive. Niens and McIlrath (2010) highlight the concerns that teachers have in teaching controversial issues related to the Troubles.

Citizenship and democratic practices in the Irish curriculum

Initial coverage of citizenship: civics

Civics was first introduced into the post-primary curriculum in the junior cycle in 1966 (Kerr et al., 2002). This was seen as a time of greater government interest and investment in education to support economic development, specifically linked to moves towards joining the European Economic Community (EEC: Kerr et al., 2002), an organisation to be covered within the civics curriculum (Keating, 2007). This new subject was obligatory (Murphy, 2014): it would be taught for one lesson a week. Murphy (2014) highlights commentary on this subject from the minister of education at the time. He said that the subject would not be formally examined, in line with the supposed ‘spirit’ of the subject. Kerr et al. (2002) explore the syllabus, which focused on citizenship framed within a nationalist perspective, with little or no emphasis on active citizenship. Keating (2007) notes that as the EEC developed, the concept of European citizenship began to be explored within the civics curriculum.

Jeffers (2008) has highlighted that different official sources painted contrasting pictures of civics. The formal syllabus focused on knowledge-focused learning about organisations and institutions underpinning democratic practices. Jeffers (2008) characterises this as rather dull. On the other hand, notes on the teaching of civics (e.g. guidance for civics teachers) called for a more active approach to the topic, presumably involving greater student involvement, discussion and debate. This particular interpretation aligns fairly well with the competence skills set out by the Council of Europe’s framework (2008).

The civics curriculum has been subject to a range of criticisms. Murphy’s (2014) claim that it was perceived to be a ‘doss’ class is the most striking of these. Civics was a subject taught by non-specialists (Keogh, 2003); anybody could teach civics (Hyland, 1993), with little or no preparation provided for
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staff (although an annual event for teachers of civics did run from 1969 to 1973, see Murphy, 2014). The lack of formal examination is thought to have contributed to the low status of the subject and a lack of interest in the subject in school principals (Hyland, 1993), resulting in the subjects’ timetable position being taken over by other subjects (Hammond and McCarthy, 1996). All these issues, alongside significant social and economic changes, particularly during the 1990s (Kerr et al., 2002), led to the demise of civics as a subject, which had long been deemed as dying (Harris, 2005). This would allow for a new approach to the concepts of citizenship and democracy, at both primary and secondary level.

Primary school curriculum

The subject area Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) covers areas relevant to the concept of citizenship. Guidelines on this subject area have been available to subject teachers since 2005, and it has been part of the primary curriculum since 1999 (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], Online, A), although the origins of this topic can be found in the 1970s (Eurydice, 2012). The curriculum for this subject area includes three strands:

- Myself
- Myself and others
- Myself and the wide world

It is noted that the one aspect of this curriculum area is to enable a child to ‘become an active and responsible citizen in society’ (Department of Education and Science, 1999a:2). These align well with the knowledge and critical understanding competences set out in relation to knowledge of the self by the Council of Europe (2018).

This subject aims to introduce children to their rights and responsibilities as members of society, locally and more globally. This is particularly pronounced in the ‘Myself and the wider world’ section of the curriculum. Towards the end of the primary curriculum, teaching around national, European and wider communities is introduced, including an exploration of the political processes (president, constitution, elections). Again, this anticipates elements of knowledge and understanding set out in the European Council’s (2018) Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. Cultural aspects such as Irish traditions are also introduced, alongside an acknowledgement and respect for other cultures and traditions.

Teacher guidelines for this subject area (Department of Education and Science, 1999b) highlight the active role the child plays in this subject, noting that children should:
Chapter 6 Education for democratic citizenship in Ireland experience and practise the democratic process where

- rules are negotiated
- responsibility is shared
- the opinions of parents, children and teachers are valued
- they feel a sense of belonging
- a sense of commitment to a common purpose is developed and understood.

(Department of Education and Science, 1999b:24)

The role of processes like school assemblies and children playing an active role in decision making are included. In line with this, the method of teaching in this subject area eschews traditional didactic approaches to teaching, focusing more on active learning approaches (Eurydice, 2012). Again, this can be seen as well aligned with values and skills set out by the Council of Europe (2018).

Secondary school curriculum

Civic, social and political education in the junior cycle

The subject Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) has been a core element of the junior cycle in secondary education since 1997 (SCoTENS, 2004), following piloting earlier in the 1990s (Smith, 2003). This reflects a period of time during which the minister of education looked to place citizenship at the top of the curriculum agenda (Kerr et al., 2002). This particular syllabus will no longer be in effect after 2018/19, however, and will from 2019/20 onwards be available as an optional short course within the junior cycle (NCCA, online B). The subject as originally envisioned (NCCA, 1993) is a mandatory part of the junior cycle of secondary school and should be taught for a minimum of one lesson per week, with schools encouraged to support this. The Department of Education (1996), for example, suggests timetabling CSPE teachers to appear and teach within other subjects. Also, it interestingly specifically called for particular timeslots, with the final lesson on Friday to be avoided.

As the name of the subject asserts, this subject area is inter-disciplinary in nature (NCCA, 1993), and the potential of the topic to be cross-curricular, and several aspects of it set out in the following, will necessarily interact with the nature and ethos of the school. Indeed, the Department of Education (1996) call for schools to have an awareness of how their own cultures can help to support the aims of CSPE, for example through supporting an active and engaged student council, to allow for whole school involvement in this subject area. The Department of Education (1996) highlighted the importance of
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School management to support this subject area. The likelihood of schools engaging with this, particularly when there are reported instances of schools enacting exclusionary policies to maintain reputations and league table standing (Murphy, 2001; Cahill, 2015, Irish Times, 2004), is questionable. This again calls into question the extent to which students experience ‘democratic culture’ (Council of Europe, 2018). Indeed, Niens and McIlrath (2010) note that authoritarian approaches to school management are prominent and act as a barrier to democratic practice developing in schools.

The course incorporates seven key concepts (Department of Education and Science, 1999c):

- Democracy
- Rights and responsibilities
- Human dignity
- Interdependence
- Development,
- Law
- Stewardship

This subject is taught through four units of study:

- The Individual and Citizenship
- The Community
- The State
- Ireland and the World

Again, these can be mapped onto the values, in particular the knowledge and critical understanding competences, in the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework. This format follows on from the primary Personal, Social, Health, and Economic (PSHE) Education curriculum. An aim of CSPE is to produce knowledgeable pupils who can explore, analyse and evaluate, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal, and capable of making decisions and judgements through a reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities.

(NCCA, Online C)

The child, as a result of learning within this curriculum area, should have self-confidence, independence, and a high level of social literacy.

(Rami et al., 2006:3)

As with PSHE, the focus is on active learning:

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Its employment of active and co-operatively structured learning methodologies enables and empowers the pupil to become an active and participative young person.

(NCCA, Online C)

This is clearly reflected in the assessment tasks for this subject, with 40 per cent of the marks awarded from this subject examination based, and 60 per cent based on the production of action projects. These projects allow students to focus on contemporary issues, both social and political. This is a very deliberate choice:

The form of assessment/examination and certification which is most fruitful to this goal one which is primarily focuses on the ongoing development of the civic, social and political student.

(NCCA, 1993:23)

Again, this can be seen as well aligned with the skills, knowledge and critical understanding set out in the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework of competences. In guidance, it is further specified (State Examinations Commission, Online) that the action project should touch on one of the seven key concepts of the course (set out prior). It should also engage with issues relevant to human rights and social responsibility, further developing key skills (Council of Europe, 2011). It must incorporate an active component and include reflection on this action. Within this action project, students are encouraged to engage with communities. The report may be submitted in audio format or as a video report.

There has been some interesting discussion over the last 20 years about CSPE. Some aspects (Kinlen et al., 2013) were quite well received, particularly the action project aspect. These action projects often focus on important real world themes, with topics around human rights being quite popular (Wilson, 2008). Eurydice (2012) notes that these action projects can involve in-school activities such as carrying out mock elections, as well as field trip visits, to county council offices for example. This type of activity can certainly support the development of competence attitudes related to civic-mindedness (Council of Europe, 2018).

Kinlen et al. (2013) also highlight the positive reception towards the more considered approach to citizenship education. Keating (2009) for example notes that this model marks a shift from traditional models of the past in a way that is termed post-national and cosmopolitan, in that it aims to avoid focusing on nationality and patriotism, focusing instead on more general universal values. This avoids issues with citizenship education acting as a form of nationalist indoctrination (Faulks, 2006). Again, clear links can be made to the values and the attitudes captured by the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework of competences. As Hammond and Looney (2004) note, these
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universal values are drawn from key UN documents, such as the *UN Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Convention*. However, this abstract and ahistorical approach may prove counterproductive; for example, describe the consequences of the curriculum in Rwanda avoiding discussion around the genocide that occurred in the 1990s – a failure to cover the topic in the formal curriculum can lead to children learning about it through other means, via family or other politically motivated channels, in a way that clearly can have negative consequences. An ahistoric approach is also not necessarily aligned to the broader aim of this subject area to be active and engaged with contemporary issues; the current debates around the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is clearly a contemporary topic of great political significance due to Britain exiting the EU.

CSPE as a subject area has encountered challenges, however. Jeffers (2008) highlights that the specified minimum amount of time devoted to this subject area, one lesson a week, does not provide time for this unit to be fully explored and that the active teaching approach in particular does not benefit from such a short amount of time being devoted to it: rather, the rhetoric of citizenship and its importance is not necessarily matched by the reality of what goes on in the school, particularly in comparison to other subjects. In addition, the lack of a follow-on curriculum area in the senior cycle (NCCA, 2006) is seen to further devalue this subject area. In other words, while a case can be made that the competences set out in the Council of Europe’s framework can be seen, students are not necessarily getting the support to achieve and fully demonstrate these competences.

There has also been criticism of content, with Jeffers (2008) highlighting researchers such as Wylie (1999) focusing on the individualistic and mainly procedural focus of the content. Jeffers (2008) also cites former taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald as saying that the CSPE curriculum was ‘remarkably timid in relation to its political component’ (Jeffers, 2008:14). Jeffers (2008) further critiques the curriculum as being broadly conservative in how it approaches the topics of rights and the representation of marginalised groups such as the travelling community (Bryan, 2007). This rather brings into question whether valuing cultural diversity (Council of Europe, 2018) is actually achieved within this curriculum. This also does not seem in line with the notion of the student becoming an active, engaged, socially literate citizen. There are also questions about the extent to which it truly involves co-operation between school and community to achieve its aims in relation to active citizenship (Redmond and Butler, 2003).

Politics and society in the senior cycle

Keogh (2003) noted that extending the general subject area of CSPE into the senior cycle was being explored. Eurydice (2012) noted that an elective
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subject area Politics and Society has been developed. The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) (2016) noted that this would be phased in from September 2016. The NCCA (Online) currently note that the subject will be available to all schools from the beginning of the 2018/19 school year, although some aspects of the course still seem to be under construction.

Politics and Society again highlights the concept of active citizenship, informed by the principals of social and political science (NCCA, Online D). The subject area includes four units, with two key topics within each unit (see Table 6.1).

*Table 6.1 Units and topics in Politics and Society.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1: Power and decision making</td>
<td>Topic 1: Power and decision making in school&lt;br&gt;Topic 2: Power and decision making at national and European level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2: Active citizenship</td>
<td>Topic 3: Effectively contributing to communities&lt;br&gt;Topic 4: Rights and responsibilities in communication with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3: Human rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>Topic 5: Human rights and responsibilities in Ireland&lt;br&gt;Topic 6: Human rights and responsibilities in Europe and the wider world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4: Globalisation and localisation</td>
<td>Topic 7: Globalisation and identity&lt;br&gt;Topic 8: Sustainable development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unit 2 is said to involve a strong focus on debate and discussion, with the skills that underpin this needing to be explicitly taught (NCCA, Online D); students will be given competing ideas to critically contrast and evaluate. This would certainly support the development of skills set out by the Council of Europe (2011).

There will also be a citizenship project – presumably similar to the types of action projects in CSPE in the junior cycle, although it seems it will only account for 20 per cent of the grade in this instance (NCCA, Online D). Projects will be informed by annual briefs which set out potential topic areas. In this unit (and elsewhere), there is also an expectation that issues will be explored at all levels from local to global (NCCA, Online D). Specifications call for one double class a week for this subject area, or 180 hours in total (NCCA Online D), broken down to 30 hours teaching per unit, 30 hours for revision of strands and 30 hours to support the project. It will be interesting to
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see if this specification addresses some of the concerns set out in relation to CSPE in the junior cycle.

Teacher training for civics, CSPE, politics and society in secondary schools

How well trained are Irish teachers to support the development of the competences in the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework? Lynch (2000) noted that expertise was a foundational necessity for subject teachers. Starting with the introduction of civics as a subject in the 1960s, there is little or no evidence of teachers being able to access coherent training to ensure they are able to deliver this subject, particularly before the introduction of the subject (Murphy, 2014). Once the subject was introduced, annual seminars and regional courses were conducted (Hyland, 1993). Receiving training after the course has been introduced inevitably means that courses are taught by teachers without appropriate expertise, contradicting Lynch’s view on the need for expertise as a prerequisite for teaching.

For the subject area CSPE, the same issues in relation to training remain. The NCCA (2003) called for the introduction of in-service teacher training resources and specific training resources. Most information on teacher training in relation to CSPE seems to focus on in-service rather than pre-service. It has been reported that no specific qualifications for this subject area exist, although Kerr et al. (2002) recommended the development of such a qualification. Similar concerns have been raised about the lack of qualifications and trained staff for the new Politics and Society subject in the senior cycle (Eurydice, 2012; Irish Human Rights Commission, 2011).

Returning to in-service support, an Eurydice (2012) report noted that a specific support team within the Professional Development Service for Teachers organised workshops and spent time in schools between 1998 and 2008, as a form of support for teachers of CSPE. The focus of their in-service seems to have been on the active pedagogical strategies called for by this subject and the development of resources. The Irish Human Rights Commission (2011), however, noted concerns about funding cuts leading to a significant diminution of the services and resources available to teachers of CSPE.

The overall impact of in-service for CSPE teachers remains unclear. The research of Niens and McIlrath (2010), for example, noted the strong likelihood of citizenship being a neglected, ‘Cinderella’ subject. It is seen to be a low status subject (NCCA, 2003; Kinlen et al., 2013), often taught by teachers with little to no training or interest in the subject area. Shannon (2002) also notes that attendance for inservice sessions in this topic was an issue. Jeffers (2008) notes a potential link between the status of the subject and teacher turnover. This echoes issues experienced by its predecessor. Niens and McIlrath’s (2010) research also raised questions about continuing
professional development (CPD) and formal qualifications available for
citizenship teachers, noting that it was often the case that people teaching this
subject were not particularly interested or motivated – it is added to their
timetable, but did not necessarily reflect their backgrounds and interests.
Turnover in the teachers covering this area has also been highlighted (Kinlen
et al., 2013). The NCCA (2003) has already identified this as an issue: teacher
turnover can mean that whatever training is provided to CSPE teachers does
not have a long-term impact, as so many quickly stop teaching this subject
and are replaced by new teachers, who in turn will require substantial in-
service training. Without properly trained and motivated teachers, it is
unlikely that the competences set out by the Council of Europe (2018)
could be achieved, based on teaching of CSPE in Ireland.

Citizenship and EU membership

As noted, EU membership has helped address some of the tensions arising on
the island of Ireland. This impact is noteworthy:

As Ireland approaches the twenty-first century, a strong sense of
European citizenship increasingly complements a robust Irish identity.
Ireland’s links with Europe have deep historical roots. This European
tradition, in Irish affairs, is reinforced in modern times through Ireland’s
membership of the European Union and its full participation, in
partnership with the other Member States in policy-making at European
level. Ireland’s development is now linked in an integral way with the
development of Europe. This poses no threat to our national identity.
Rather it offers significant opportunities for growth and development in
the broader European context.

(Government of Ireland, 1995:215)

Stoer and Cortesão (2000) have noted how the EU has underpinned a broader
shared identity and citizenship that unites the member states of the EU; this
is supported by initiatives focused on engaging citizens (Murray, 2008),
although such initiatives have not always proved successful (Keogh, 2009).
In a modern context, it is seen that citizens can engage with multiple identities
that complement each other (e.g. Cederman, 2001), although any formal
movements towards acknowledging an European identity have been tentative
at best (Keating, 2009).

The European Union has also, as noted, had an impact on the content of
citizenship-focused teaching in the Irish curriculum. The United Nations
Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013) notes that
schools and curricula can play an important role in supporting political and
cultural integration to support the European project. Indeed, the curriculum
has at times been criticised as too Eurocentric, without much attention focused

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on the rest of the world (Keating, 2009). SCoTENS (2004) makes a similar point, calling for EU citizenship, which has gained increased significance in the Irish curriculum (Keating, 2009), not to dominate in relation to citizenship education. It must be noted, however, that the EU in and of itself does not directly provide input into the curricula of individual member states (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). Jefferis (2008) notes that as laws such as the European Convention on Human Rights become Irish law, this has an impact on Irish curricula: the curriculum must adapt and be updated to ensure these concepts are fully covered. However, as Keating (2009) notes, an active approach, focusing on ‘education through citizenship’ rather than ‘education about citizenship’, which is in line with what is espoused in relation to the current Irish curriculum, helps ensure that issues such as these are addressed.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the complications that arise for students, teachers, schools and teacher trainers when grappling with how to provide input on complex concepts such as citizenship and democracy. In the Irish context, historical and religious issues impinge on the extent to which honest conversations can occur and the extent to which teachers have the freedom to fully explore challenging topics. While it is clear that the aspirations set out in a range of Irish educational policy documents support the development of the types of democratic competences set out by the Council of Europe’s (2018) framework, the reality on the ground seems to be that teachers are not always in a position to ensure that students fully develop these values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding.

References


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