

**‘We’re citizens now’!: the development of positive values through a democratic approach to learning.**

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**Introduction: education for citizenship**

Education for citizenship is intrinsically bound up with democracy. In particular, the feeling that young people are citizens now (as opposed to in the future) and that democracy has to be fostered from a young age are central issues in the formal proposals put to governments in Britain by both the Advisory Group (1998) in England and the Review Group (2002) in Scotland.

There is a near moral panic in Britain (indeed in most representative democracies around the world) that young people are apathetic, alienated and disinterested in politics. In Britain, there is the example of the recent European Union election in 1999 in which, as a whole, turnout was barely above 20%, in some areas just in double figures and amongst the 18-24 year olds much lower than for the population as a whole. And, indeed, for those who felt that whatever happened in this ‘less important’ election, the General Election would hold up, June 7th. 2001 showed that this was over optimistic; turnout was under 60%, the lowest since 1918. Put bluntly, more people voted for the winner of ‘Big Brother’ on Channel 4 than voted in the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Mayoral elections combined in 1999. Even more worryingly, the Scottish Parliament, described as having the *raison d’être* of bringing interest in politics and participation closer to the people and, consequently providing a forum that would reverse the trend in terms of voting participation, achieved a sub 50% turnout in May 2003. Yet, the devolution of decision making to the countries of the UK has fuelled a debate around more open government and an idea of a participatory democracy needing informed citizens. The Labour governments from 1997 have, at least at the level of rhetoric, reversed the Thatcherite

notion of there being no such thing as society by a more inclusive notion of society; this is not to suggest that New Labour have reduced the inequalities in society per se (indeed, inequality has grown even greater since 1997) but rather that a space has opened up whereby ideas of citizenship and democracy can now be raised. Scottish Executive Minister for Education Peter Peacock's hope is that a strong education can build '...a compassionate society, an innovative society, one that is considerate, self-respecting, healthy, morally strong, that respects other people's cultures...We need young people who have a strong desire to participate in society'.

Further, whatever the voting figures may show about participation in formal politics, there is also evidence that although young people are alienated from formal politics, they are active and interested in single issue, environmental, political, developing world and animal welfare issues (Roker, Player and Coleman, 1999). Indeed the support for the fuel price protests some years ago, Globalise Resistance anti-capitalist actions and the anti-Iraq war protests at the beginning of 2003, the protests at President Bush's visit to Britain November 2003 and the suggested numbers for the G8 protests in Scotland, has shown that single issue and activity based politics is still capable of mobilising massive support. Marshall's (1950) definition of the components of citizenship per se -- civic citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship -- are still valid but now need economic and global citizenship added to be relevant in the modern world. People can have all the formal rights in the world but if they feel that they have no say in the day to day matters that affect their lives, their citizenship is fairly shallow and they quite rightly point that out to their employers, political representatives, school managers and other figures of authority. Indeed, the education for citizenship initiatives themselves can be seen as an attempt to develop a legitimacy for existing social relations; every school has citizenship and democracy in its action plan but virtually nothing tangible or meaningful is there for the pupils, not even in terms of content areas, never mind aspects of democracy.

A crucial but difficult area relating education for citizenship to schools is whether one only learns about democracy or also lives it. Are pupils in schools citizens or citizens-in-waiting? If we take the 'living' and citizens now model, then there are implications for our schools and indeed for society as a whole. Firstly, there is the difficult issue of whether democratic ideas and values can be effectively developed in the

fundamentally undemocratic, indeed authoritarian, structure of the current typical Scottish secondary school, where many teachers, never mind pupils, feel that they have little real say in the running of the school. It has been argued that it is not possible (Arnstine, 1995; Puolimatka 1995; Levin, 1998). In interviews with Modern Studies teachers Maitles, 2003), the problem was acknowledged. As one put it:

Yes, it is a bit awkward...you keep telling them that they should be questioning things, they should be challenging things and there are ways to do it...you are trying to get them to do these things and they feel they are getting nowhere, then it can be very counter-productive...no matter how patient they are, they very often feel that they are getting nowhere. So they come back to you, shrug their shoulders and say 'What's the point? We've tried what you said.' It's a pity.

Yet, most teachers interviewed felt that it could, indeed must, be attempted. One actually claimed that he used the school system as an example of democracy or lack of it and another said that: 'There will be some tension between the inevitable dictatorship of the classroom and the sort of ideas that you are preaching...it would be a good example for them of what's wrong with a dictatorship' (Maitles, 2003).

For schools, it means there should be proper forums for discussion, consultation and decision-making involving pupils. The Education (Scotland) Act, 2000 from the Scottish Parliament enshrined Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, that young people should be consulted on issues that affect them and proposes functioning pupil councils as a means of facilitating this. However, the experience of school councils throughout Britain is not yet particularly hopeful; although there are some very positive examples (Polan, 1989; Dobie, 1998; Shinkfield, 2000; Taylor and Johnson, 2002), far too many are tokenistic (Hannam, 1998; Dobie, 1998; Rowe, 2000; Mills, 2002); Chamberlin, 2003). Further, there can be major differences between the views of teachers and pupils and indeed councillors and the represented towards the value of the councils. In many cases, outlined by these investigations, the councils rarely met, and/or were controlled by senior managers and/or had narrow agendas with no financial clout at all and/or there were no report backs. It should be noted that good practice is much stronger in the primary sector.

Thus, for the individual young people, schools and society as a whole, it is important that young people's views must be actively sought and particularly it is important that

all young people are not targeted as moral panic crusades sometimes do. In the West of Scotland, for example, there has been the recent move towards generalised Anti-Social Behaviour Order curfews for young people in some areas of high crime, which happen to be also areas of socio-economic deprivation. This is not the place to go into the rights and wrongs of this particular Scottish Office (now Scottish Executive) initiative, other than to say that the one group not consulted about the proposal was those young people affected, the vast majority of whom, it is assumed, are not the trouble makers targeted.

Secondly, for schools, the legislation, based on article 12 of the UN charter, goes further than just pupil councils; it maintains that young people should be consulted 'in all matters affecting him/her and to have that opinion taken into account'. Clearly that also affects what goes on in the classroom. While for many teachers this is problematic and seen as a threat, the experiences below suggest that better learning and better atmosphere is created through treating the pupils as participants in learning at all levels rather than recipients of courses. The case study below thus ties in with the significant literature in terms of pupil voice and pupil decisions in the classroom over how they learn (Newman (1997), Osborne and Collins (1999), MacBeath et al (2001), Fielding (2001b), MacBeath et al (2003), Ruddock and Flutter (2004)). The ESRC/TLRP programme organised from Cambridge University is conducting long term major research into consulting with pupils as a central way to school improvement and it is hoped that the Applied Educational Research Scheme in Scotland will further this research. Indeed, it is important that we move in this direction rather than the school improvement agenda based on the market and strong management and discipline models so loved by OFSTED over the last decade. In a damning critique of the school effectiveness research and school improvement industries, Slee and Weiner (1998) maintain that:

while purporting to be inclusive and comprehensive, school effectiveness research is riddled with errors: it is excluding (of children with special needs, black boys, so called clever girls), it is normative and regulatory...it is bureaucratic and disempowering. It focuses exclusively on the processes and internal constraints of schooling, apparently disconnected from education's social end - adulthood.

Education for citizenship and the discussions around it raise the central questions as to what sort of education we want. That is why the debate around the subject

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is so important and valuable. We could come out of it with not just a better understanding of citizenship but a better feel for education as a whole.

In recent years there has been an extra emphasis on target setting, particularly concentrating on exam results. This has tended to concentrate minds on this aspect of the nature of schooling and has meant that the wider issues have been kept in the background, despite some welcome rhetoric on the nature of inclusive and lifelong learning. However, there is still a problem of over-concentration on exam targets as the central (sometimes it seems to be sole) measure of school success. OFSTED in England and the HMIE in Scotland have reinforced this by naming and shaming failing schools, being party to league tables and, even where formally supportive of the education for citizenship proposals, being sceptical of the participatory, democratic elements in the proposals. It was summed up by Chris Woodhead, chief inspector at OFSTED until 2002, when asked for his views on how classrooms could be more participatory, he replied ‘Teachers teach and pupils learn; it is as simple as that’ (Woodhead, 2002).

The weakness of this as an overarching priority is particularly well explained by a high school principal in the US (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994):

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness. Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education. My request is: help your students become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane.

It is this perspective that we have to encourage if education for citizenship is to mean anything. This was acknowledged by the Scottish Review Group on Education for Citizenship, who argued that the role of education for citizenship is to promote and foster individuals who are ‘thoughtful and responsible, rooted in and expressive of a respectful and caring disposition in relation to people, human society generally, the natural world and the environment. It should also be active’. (LTS, 2002)

The following case study was an attempt to promote citizenship through a democratic approach to learning in a Religious and Moral Education (RME) department in a West

of Scotland comprehensive. Pupils were given a genuine say in what affects them most – the methodology and content of how and what they learn. The key objective was to discover whether a participative learning style and citizenship curriculum content in core RME altered pupils' citizenship values.

### **Research methodology 1: action research**

The principal research style was action research, progressed as a case study. However the procedures adopted to answer the main research question, 'To what extent do participative learning style and citizenship curriculum content in core RME alter pupils' citizenship values?' cannot be described in terms of action research cycles. The measurement process was the completion of anonymous attitude questionnaires by the experimental and control groups before and after the exposure of 3I to democratic learning. Closed questions and restricted responses aided quantification and analysis of results. All questionnaires completed by pupils were given under formal conditions.

A series of action research cycles related to learning styles and curriculum content developed, often concurrently. A chronological self-critical reflective diary made the class teacher's reasoning transparent. All pupils completed a course evaluation form in December 2002 and January 2003.

Promoting citizenship implies listening to participants' voices. Interviewing pupils provided important information to evaluate the impact of interventions in greater depth. Six pupils, five girls and one boy, opted to join the focus group: the voluntary nature of membership was in keeping with the democratic approach. Ethical procedures were observed. Each member of the focus group was interviewed in December 2002 and in June 2003 using guided or focused interviews: an established framework ensured cover of crucial issues and simplified analysis while some loose structure allowed the interviewee's voice to be heard and offered unanticipated insights.

Through triangulation, parents' and peers' perceptions of development of pupil attitudes to citizenship issues and areas of individual pupil benefit from the

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democratic RME class were invited: these perceptions validated pupils’ self-evaluation.

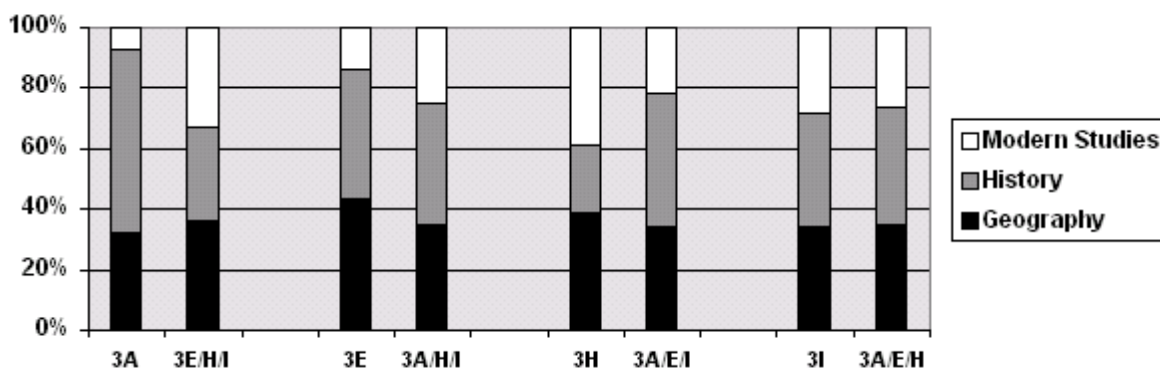
## **Research methodology 2: choosing the sample**

A thorough curriculum audit highlighted the S3 curriculum (the equivalent of key stage 4 in England, year 9 in North America, pupils of 14-15 years) as most in need of development. ‘Justice in the World’, a Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies unit within Higher Still, was identified as providing the most appropriate content: covering issues of social justice and global solidarity, it has a strong citizenship focus. Liaison with Principal Teachers of Social Subjects regarding cross-curricular links confirmed that the value of pupils studying citizenship issues in different contexts, at different stages and from different perspectives was recognised.

Since citizenship education impinges on whole school ethos, account was taken of whole school citizenship initiatives that were planned: S3 would be the year group with least opportunity to participate in these – further justification for concentrating efforts on S3.

A main focus of the methodology was the selection of a control group and experimental group to compare baseline and final comparative data. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) warn against the invalidation of research efforts caused by the existence of other extraneous variables influencing the experimental and control groups that could explain changes in attitudes.

Research comparing Modern Studies pupils and Geography pupils (Maitles, 2000) suggested that the former were more interested in and less cynical towards politics, and held more ‘positive’ attitudes to controversial issues: the subjective nature and difficulty of defining ‘positive’ was acknowledged. So, experimental and control groups were matched with regard to pupils’ social subject choice. Figure 1 shows the percentage of pupils in each of the four classes to which the teacher had access in session 2002-2003 who chose Standard Grade Geography, History and Modern Studies compared to social subject choice in the other three classes taken as a whole. In this respect, 3I as experimental group fairly matched 3A/E/H as control group and minimised the risk of invalidation.



**Figure 1: Social Subject choice of pupils in 3A, 3E, 3H and 3I, given as percentages**

In two extraneous variables, experimental and control groups were disproportionate. Firstly, 3I had the highest proportion of dyslexic pupils in S3. Their inclusion was appropriate in a citizenship agenda, as citizenship education relates to social inclusion (LTS, 2002). Secondly, there were twelve boys (40%) in 3I: in the control group boys accounted for 47.8%. Many have claimed a gender gap in emotional intelligence and attitude, effort and attainment in school, as cited in Gilchrist (2002). Data was compared by gender, not only to minimise invalidation but as a valuable strand in the research.

### Data analysis

Thorough sorting of data ensured that participants' voices influenced the direction of analysis. Content analysis was applied to text-based data. The nature of the action research process together with particular choices made by 3I pupils generated a large volume of data, the handling of which became complex at times.

The experimental group started with twelve boys and eighteen girls, one girl leaving during the session. One boy accounts for 8.5% of boys in 3I. It is essential to be aware of the limitations of this small-scale research, and difficult or dangerous to over-generalise.

### Challenges and concerns

The teacher identified several challenges and concerns.



- She met with the class for one weekly lesson of fifty minutes on a Friday afternoon when pupils can be more lethargic or overactive and harder to motivate.
- Would pupils abuse empowerment and new rights? There was a challenge in terms of taking risks with control.
- What to do with dissenters? In a secret ballot at the start of the session, five pupils voted against the idea of the democratic classroom. In a democracy, there are always dissenters who have to accept the majority decision, but it is important to listen to them. One pupil who made his reason known explained that he did not trust a teacher to carry it through.
- Would pupils’ expectations be met? Being heard is one thing, having one’s views acted upon is quite another. The democratic approach was not an easy option, and trying to meet pupils’ expectations involved extra unseen work.
- Did the teacher have the courage, the flexibility, the skills of negotiation and compromise? Would she be able to let go of decisions and outcomes and accept pupils’ independent choice?
- A substantial reason for teachers’ opposition to democracy in schools is the assessment driven nature of the education system where teachers are judged on pupils’ academic results. Admittedly, in this case study the democratic approach was piloted with a core class that was not preparing for external exams. This research was about citizenship issues rather than attainment issues.

### **Findings 1: Preferred learning styles**

One pupil explained how she felt about involvement in a democratic class:

I thought it was really good to be part of a democratic class because the teacher was letting us in on the whole learning bit. It was good but quite scary at the same time because somebody is saying, ‘How would you like to be taught?’ and we’ve never been asked that before.

Describing some barriers to learning, one dyslexic pupil stated:

If somebody is just sitting there telling you what to do, you just get annoyed with it. You won’t try your hardest. If you’ve got more of those subjects where you’re reading and writing, you just tend not to go in that day. You can’t be bothered.

Reading and writing gets boring after a while and your eyes start to hurt and your concentration goes and you're never kind of 100% for the next class. The classes that don't help you are the ones where you sit in silence. And they say that's to help your concentration, but I don't think it does. I think it drags it out.

Pupils completed a questionnaire expressing preferences about learning styles. Autocratic styles and solitary activities were unpopular. Pupils were keen to work with partners or teams of their own choice. They felt that teacher exposition had an important place, especially in small groups, but would prefer to learn from visiting speakers and videos. Independent resource-based learning, e.g. using ICT, was a popular option. 80% of 3I expressed interest in contacting pupils in other schools and countries. A lower, but significant, proportion of pupils favoured presenting their work to the class or others. Outings were requested. The survey results were shared with the class and the teacher explained that she wanted to act on what they said about how they like to learn. Progression of some of the pupil choices is described below.

### **Working in teams of own choice**

Pupils opted to choose teams and were given freedom to organise this. 'You must be mad, Miss, to let them be in the same group'; the girl who insinuated that disorder would ensue voiced the teacher's concern. Three periods were allocated to setting the tone. Teacher responsibility to ensure pupils' emotional and physical safety, irrespective of learning style, was emphasised to pupils; both teacher and pupils would need to acquire new skills if democracy was to work. This was to be a participative class, but not a permissive one. Team and class discussions explored the exercising of responsibilities that accompanied enjoyment of rights in a variety of settings including classroom. Pupils responded positively and suggested class values based on respect.

Thanks to the groundwork on ethos, there was a relaxed, open, warm atmosphere during teamwork with pupils acting responsibly. Indiscipline was rare and minor, kept in check as often by other pupils as by the teacher.

One pupil explained how her experience of being listened to in a democratic class helped improve her team working skills:

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It kind of helped me to involve people because sometimes I like to do things my way, but now I’m starting to think, ‘No, maybe (name) wants to do it a different way, or (name) might want to add this to it’. I’ve become better at talking to people and listening to their ideas.

## **Speakers**

To push at the potential of pupils as responsible, independent, confident citizens, teams chose and organised seven speakers themselves, as follows:

Baptist Minister previously in local politics – *Christians challenging Injustice*

Castlemilk Churches Together Refugee Centre – *Christians helping Asylum Seekers*

Christian Aid – *Fair Trade and the work of Christian Aid*

Glasgow City Mission – *A Christian response to Homelessness in Glasgow*

Jubilee Scotland – *The problem of Debt and the work of Jubilee Scotland*

Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP) – *Social Inclusion*

UNICEF – *Absolute poverty and the work of UNICEF*

Focus group members enjoyed the responsibility of organising speakers. Some teacher guidance was appreciated:

You gave us a little starter. You gave us examples of who we could pick ... We need a little gentle shove in the right direction, gently lulling us away from someone else doing everything for us ... We’re slowly becoming independent’.

A pupil expressed her sense of control when speakers visited: ‘You’re not saying, “Oh, don’t ask that question; remember to ask this question.” You’re just kind of letting us get on with it.’

Benefits of speakers included: ‘I just seem to be taking it in more ... It’s real life’. This understanding, it was felt, could not be obtained by reading: ‘Sometimes if you’re reading a newspaper or a book, there’s still things you want to know and you can’t ask them’. Nor could teachers provide such expertise: ‘You could ask them questions that you wouldn’t be able to ask if it was only a teacher who wasn’t that sure about it’.

These responses support the recommendation of Talbot (2000) to bring citizenship to life by involving adults other than teachers. 76% of parents said that their child talked to them about the speakers.

## **E-mail friends**

The Scottish Executive (2001) recommends ICT links with pupils abroad. Cogan and Derricott (2000) advocate twinning of schools across local and national boundaries to develop appreciation of different perspectives and promote empathy. Facilitating international links was time-consuming and difficult, a catalogue of frustrating dead ends. Pupils were excited when links were successfully established with Maryvale College in Johannesburg, South Africa and Bloomfield Hall, Sahiwal, Pakistan. In addition, a link was established with a local denominational school, John Ogilvie High School in Hamilton. 31 pupils e-mailed a questionnaire to pupils in these schools, asking, among other things, their opinions about world problems and whether they intended to vote. They offered e-mail friendships.

Pupils in Pakistan shared their greatest concerns:

- I think that by taking drugs these people are not only killing themselves but also a generation from which the world expects a lot. I think that ... the parents should take action to ... go to the depth of the matter and try to understand the reason for the child going towards such a dangerous habit.
- As we people are Muslims, so we should help other Muslims. Iraq should be given complete independence and should be free to use its own reserves itself. America should not unjustly take away their rights.
- Education is the most important and valuable treasure one should have. There are many children who cannot go to school just because of poverty and are left uneducated.
- I think trade laws and world debts are two of the biggest problems but the greatest problems of the world are of peace, love, equality and honesty. What do you think? Because of these problems trade laws between rich and poor countries are unfair. That's why some poor countries don't even get the chance to progress. If you ever come to Pakistan I'll show you how poor people survive and earn for their living. It's really sad to see them working like this. They work very hard but their reward is very less. Another problem is of world debts. This problem is pretty difficult to solve. The poor countries are so much buried in debts that it might take 50 years to fulfil these debts to rich countries. What do you think?

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95% of their e-mail friends from South Africa stated that Aids was the global problem which concerned them most; they explained that 600 people die from Aids every day in South Africa. One pupil who does voluntary work to help babies and children with Aids, wrote:

AIDS has killed over 40 million people. It has already killed our brothers, sisters and our mothers. Babies are being left alone and homeless without anyone to look after them and the reason they are left alone and homeless is that their parents have already died and the fact that they have Aids means that their future is already destroyed.

The link between Stonelaw High School and Bloomfield Hall has extended to two video conferences in which pupils shared information on their respective cultures.

Commenting on the value of this contact, one of the focus group said, ‘I’ve gained an insight into the world and the life and concerns of teenagers in different countries. It’s really brought our learning alive.’ Pupils are discovering that developing friendships between young people in different countries is the key to international understanding.

## **Outings**

Arranging a ‘citizenship’ outing would meet 3I’s expectations. Apart from an Eco Committee outing to a recycling plant which some of the class joined, outings were in response to invitations to disseminate the pupils’ experience of democratic learning.

The International Development Education Association of Scotland and Glasgow University invited 3I to make a presentation at the ‘Big Day’, a global citizenship open day for student teachers. Eleven pupils, eight girls and three boys, volunteered to speak.

They felt they were impacting positively on future education:

Not only was the class helping the pupils, it was also helping other teachers because it was giving them an insight into what pupils wanted to be taught like and that will help pupils and teachers in the next generations to come ... I just thought it was a really good idea that we should be involved in how teachers should be trained.

At Jordanhill campus, Strathclyde University, two pupils joined their RME teacher to speak to the whole cohort of students (425) on the Post-graduate Certificate in Education (Secondary) course. One said:

Throughout the presentation, everyone listened carefully and did not hesitate to participate in tasks, which made me feel powerful that such a large number of people were giving us a voice. It was an amazing experience, and I felt like I was teaching them something that they didn't already know. I was also surprised that I didn't feel nervous at all. They said that we had really helped them with their studies and given them lots to think about.

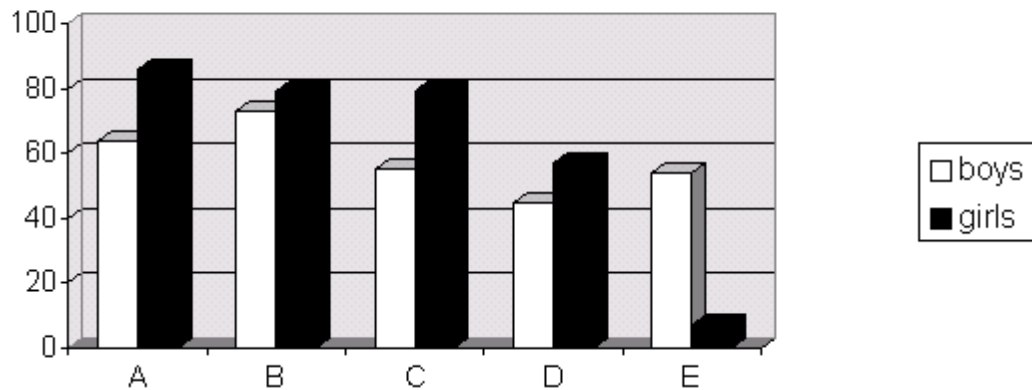
Also at Jordanhill campus, three pupils participated in presentations at a research seminar and to teachers studying for the Diploma in Support for Learning.

Pupils also helped to deliver two in-service courses to teachers in their local education authority and contributed to presentations at the Scottish Educational Research Association conference and the European Conference on Educational Research. It is apt, but sadly too infrequent, that educational professionals hear directly from pupils who have reflected on and are the experts in their learning.

Responses on the parental questionnaire indicated which learning methods, from a list, pupils had talked to parent(s) about. In order of popularity:

- A. Speakers (76%)
- B. Team investigation and presentation (76%)
- C. Contacting pupils in other schools and countries (68%)
- D. Working in teams of own choice (52%)
- E. Use of ICT (28%)

**Figure 2 : Learning Methods discussed with parent(s)**



**Gender differences are shown in Figure 2**

It may be tempting to conclude that this shows girls perceived most learning methods more favourably than boys, but safer to interpret responses as showing girls' tendency to talk more at home about school life. Responses for 'E' were contrary to this trend, probably indicating that boys were keener than girls about learning through ICT.

**Findings 2: Course content**

Teams were given a choice of investigation topic based on the unit, 'Justice in the World'. 96% of pupils were happy that the teacher was acting on their preferences. Focus group members felt more motivated: 'I just think you try harder. It's more special to you if it's something you've picked ... It's more interesting'. One group's reason for their topic choice mirrored part of the teacher's rationale for developing a democratic classroom:

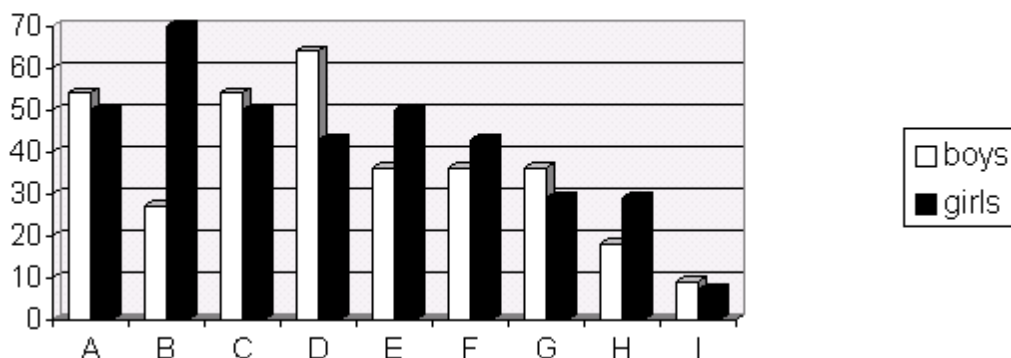
We chose to do war through the eyes of a child because children don't get listened to a lot ... and war is something that world leaders choose, the people don't get to choose these things, so children are just thrown into these things and need to be listened to.

Responses on the parental questionnaire showed which citizenship issues, from a list of those covered by speakers and/or investigated and presented by teams, were discussed by pupils at home. Order of popularity was:

- A. War and Peace (52%)
- B. Fair Trade (52%)
- C. Asylum Seekers (52%)
- D. Environment (52%)

- E. Homelessness (44%)
- F. Debt in the developing world (40%)
- G. Voting (32%)
- H. Education and health (Aids) in the developing world (24%)
- I. Religious people working against injustice (8%)

**Figure 3 : Citizenship issues discussed with parent(s)**



**Figure 3 displays gender differences with regard to issues discussed with parent(s).**

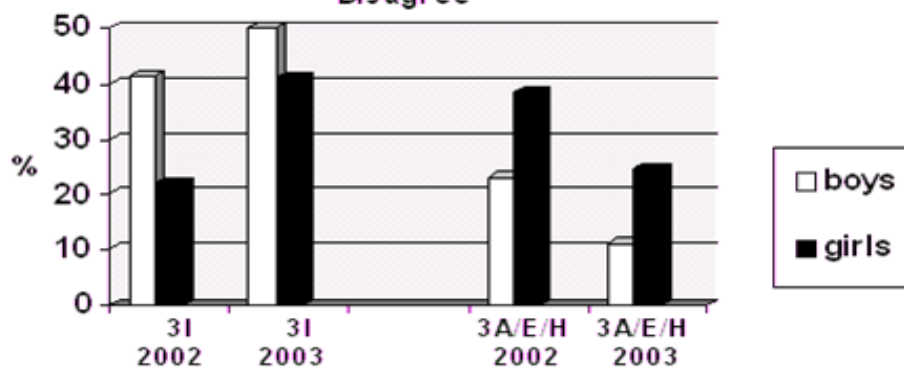
There was a clear connection between what they investigated and what they talked about at home.

### Findings 3: Citizenship values

Attitude questionnaires were examined, comparing responses of the experimental group with the control group in June 2002 and June 2003. Findings relating to attitudes and actions on a range of issues are given below.

**Figure 4 shows that during the session 3I pupils became significantly more accepting of asylum seekers in Britain: pupils in the control group became less tolerant.**

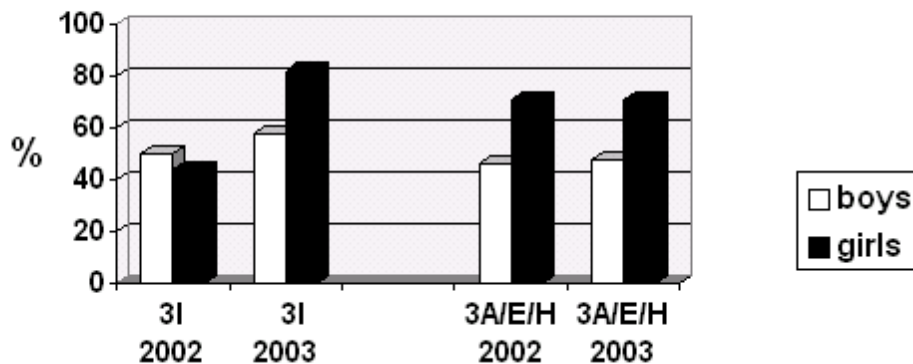
**Figure 4 : "Asylum seekers should be sent home" - Disagree**



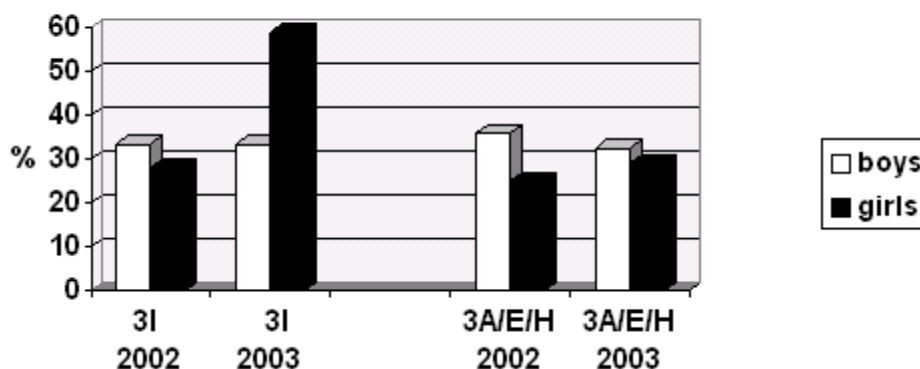


Trends regarding purchase of the Big Issue (figure 6) reflected trends in attitudes to homeless people (figure 5). The significant changes were among 3I girls, 38% more of whom disagreed that homeless people had only themselves to blame and should sort themselves out and 31% more of whom bought the Big Issue. In December interviews, the main attitude change stated related to homeless people, changing from 'the stereotypical view ... that it's all their own fault' to a sympathetic understanding that they should be given more help: 'People ... need to see it from their point of view'.

**Figure 5 : "Homeless people have only themselves to blame and should sort themselves out" - Disagree**

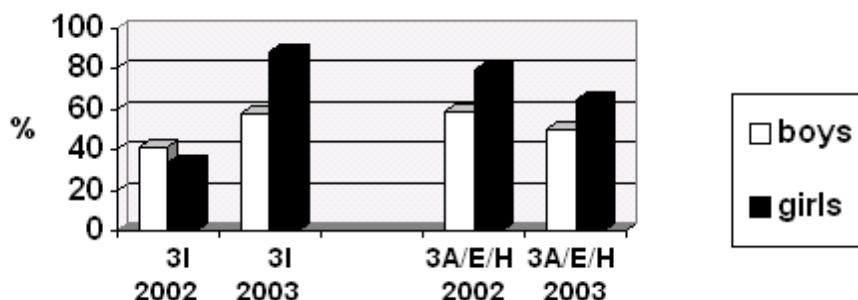


**Figure 6 : "Have you bought the Big Issue?" - Yes**

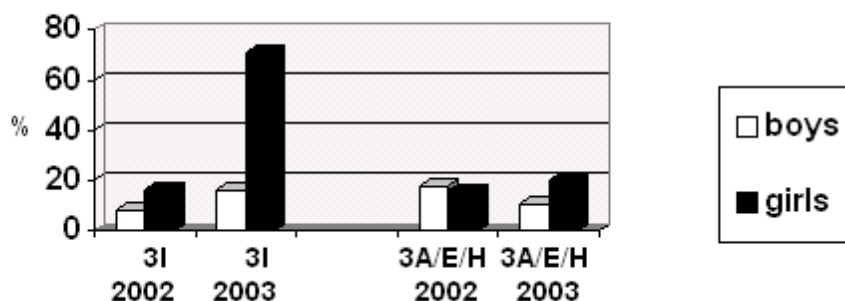


Attitudes and actions related to the developing world were also measured.

**Figure 7 : "The British government should give more help to developing countries" - Agree**



**Figure 8 : "Have you made an effort to buy Fair Trade goods?" - Yes**



Pupils in the experimental group developed a more positive stance to the British government giving more help to developing countries (figure 7), while the stance of pupils in the control group became more negative.

The clearest and most significant positive attitude change in relation to poverty in the developing world and consequent consumer action was among 3I girls (figures 7, 8). During the session, 54.5% more girls in 3I tried to buy fairly traded goods. Focus group girls reflected this enthusiasm: two encouraged others to follow suit and intended writing letters to shops about stocking 'Fair Trade'. They recognised the need for education: 'I forget that not everyone knows about it, they haven't had the chance.'

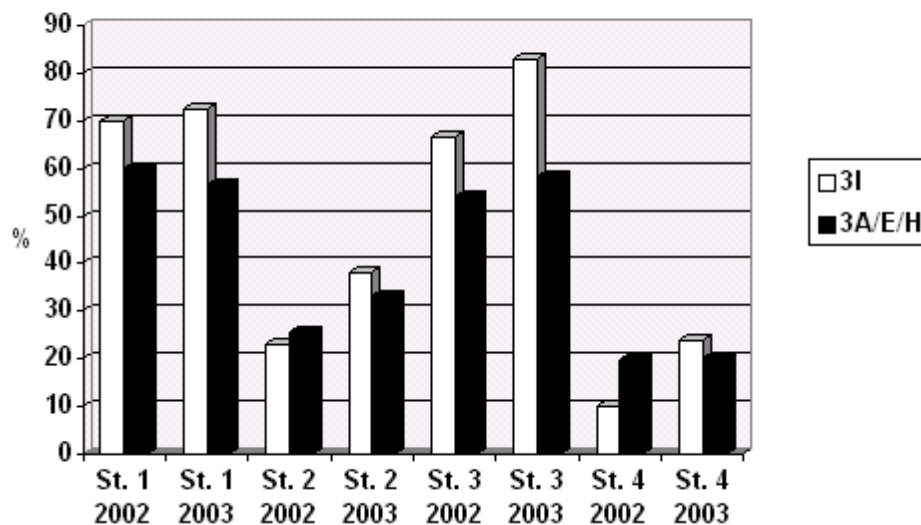
Their growing interest led to the establishment, along with pupils in other year groups, of the Stonelaw High Fair Traders, a pupil-run, fair trade co-operative business whose sales exceeded £5,000 in the first five months. They initiated a joint project with pupils in the local denominational and Special Needs secondary schools and raised awareness of ethical trading by setting up a fair trade stall in the local shopping

centre. Pupils decided unanimously to distribute all profits among projects that provide education for children in developing countries.

#### Findings 4: Attitudes related to conventional and single-issue politics

Figure 9 summarises responses for all pupils. The attitudes measured relate to a cynical stance to politics through responses to statements as follows:

Figure 9 : Cynicism towards conventional politics



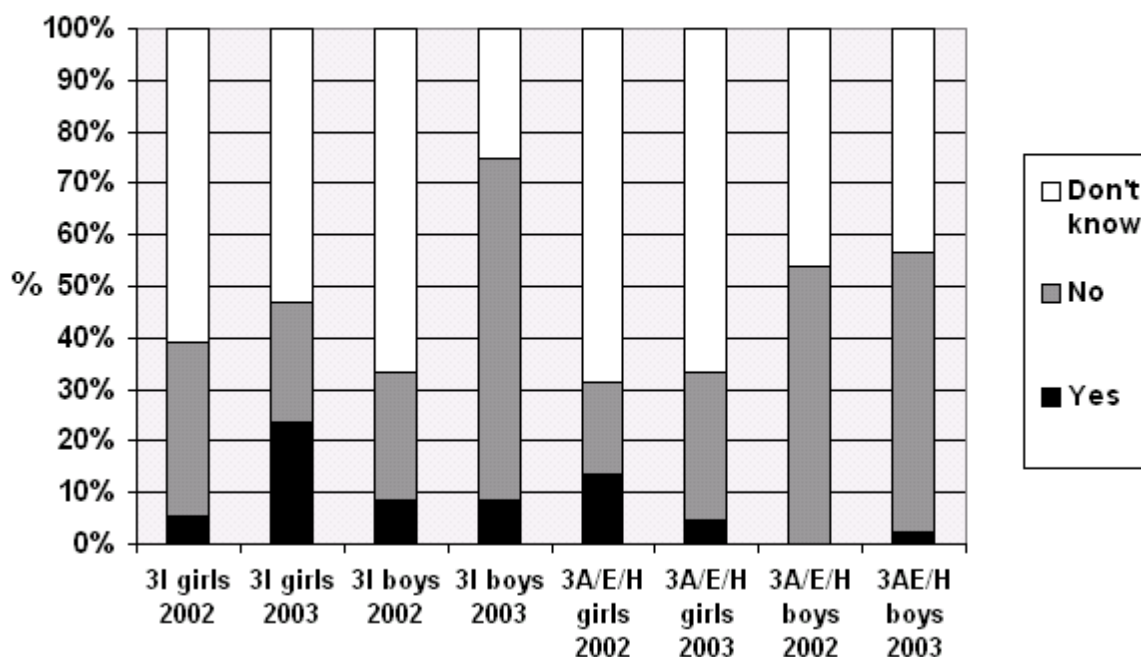
- Statement 1: The government is interested in what young people think – No.
- Statement 2: Scottish politicians are only interested in themselves – Yes.
- Statement 3: Politicians promise things just to get your vote – Yes
- Statement 4: Voting is a waste of time – Yes.

By June 2003, 3I pupils had become more cynical than 3A/E/H pupils in response to all statements. The experimental group’s growing scepticism mirrors the rise in public distrust of the government: Baldwin and Kelland (2003) cite an ICM poll in the Guardian that shows public trust in the Prime Minister dropped in each of the preceding three months to 37% in July 2003. This finding suggests that cynicism about conventional politics, a concern highlighted by the Review Group (LTS, 2002), may be heightened rather than reduced by citizenship education. As the pupils become more convinced of the need to act on issues, then the immediacy of campaigning can become more relevant than conventional political activity.

Despite increased cynicism, pupils’ intention to vote remained virtually unchanged at 73% in 2002 and 72% in 2003. One pupil said the course confirmed her determination

to vote: ‘I want my voice to be heard, because if it’s heard in class I hope it would be heard in the outside world as well’. These findings, that extent of cynicism did not affect intention to vote, were mirrored by responses from pupils in international school links. Although only 8% of pupils in Pakistan compared to 59% of pupils in South Africa thought their governments were interested in what young people think (10.5% of 3I pupils thought so in June 2003), 71% of respondents in both countries intended voting. It is interesting that although 72-73% of the experimental group, who were 15 years old, intended to vote, this does not as yet reflect the current trend in actual voting practice, where 18 to 24 year olds have a lower than average turnout. Nonetheless, the experimental group, although more cynical, are also more interested, and that means that they are potentially more likely to vote.

**Figure 10 : "Would you be more willing to join a single issue campaign group than to join a political party?"**



Regarding the likelihood of joining a single-issue campaign group rather than a political party, figure 10 shows an increase of 18% in 3I girls and a decrease of 9% in 3A/E/H girls. 3I boys had a 41.5% swing from not knowing to disagreeing. Focus group members tried to account for this gender difference. The male focus group member suggested, ‘Maybe (girls) are sympathising more with the issues that we’ve learned... It’s just the whole maternal kind of thing.’ Girls felt they were more likely

to be listened to and effect change in single-issue groups than in politics. One suggested,

It just tends to be girls that want to be involved in issues where they can be independent rather than politics in big groups ... There’s more men in the political world than women so maybe girls are a bit intimidated by that and they’d rather put in a stand for themselves.

### **Validation of results through triangulation**

Clarification of results was sought regarding the main research question, ‘To what extent does participative methodology and citizenship curriculum content in core RME alter the values of pupils re citizenship issues?’ The triangulation process, obtaining peer and parent evaluations, revealed a clarity and consensus that the course had a positive impact on citizenship values of at least twelve 3I pupils - in itself encouraging and a mark of success. Yet as table 1 suggests, at least twenty-one pupils probably developed a more positive citizenship outlook.

<b>3I girls (no.)</b>	<b>3I boys (no.)</b>	<b>Pupil assessment: “My attitude to an issue has changed as a result of the lessons”.</b>	<b>Outcome of triangulation (peer / parent evaluation)</b>
7	5	Agree	Consensus
2	2	Agree	Partial agreement
2	0	Don’t know	
4	1	Don’t know	Other evidence suggests pupil more positive than claimed
1	3	Disagree	
1	0	Don’t know	Unsubstantiated  (lack of evidence)
0	1	(Absent)	

**Table 1 : Triangulation of results re pupil attitude change**

All parents who completed an evaluation thought it was a good idea for pupils to have a genuine say in what and how they learn in RME.

## Findings 5: Dispositions

When asked to identify benefits to themselves and peers from involvement in RME this session, positive dispositions were highlighted, in particular increased confidence. Five of the focus group identified one girl, usually painfully shy, as surprising them by her enhanced confidence. One pupil linked her growth in confidence to being shown respect:

I think when you're with kids they can be cruel and they'll laugh at her or whatever, and that happened to her in Primary School. It wasn't very funny. It put her down a bit so she doesn't really talk out any more. (In this class) nobody laughs at your opinions or anything.

Enhanced respect from the teacher and pupils was a feature of the class according to four of the focus group: 'Because of the democratic classroom we can open ourselves up and know that the rest of the class will understand and the class is more relaxed now and we all support each other'. One pupil admitted the change in herself: 'If somebody's talking and I'm not really finding it interesting, I'll listen ... I used to shut off entirely and be ignorant about it. But I'm not like that anymore.'

The girl who volunteered to join the focus group at the end of the session was also identified by a peer as having particularly benefited:

Before, I didn't think she was that bothered or that serious about things. I thought she was just sitting there and having a laugh. But now she really tries hard. ... I just think she has changed a lot ... I think (this class) has brought her out of her shell more ... If you'd said to her last year I don't think she would have stood up there and spoke the way that she spoke.

Six boys, others noticed, seemed more mature, respectful, tolerant or confident. One mother said of her son,

He has gained in self-confidence and is more willing to state what he really thinks even if this does not fit in with his peers. It has helped him in making personal choices – always a difficult area particularly for teenage boys.

Twelve girls, it was claimed, had gained confidence. In addition, enhancement in independence, conscientiousness and/or respect was claimed for eight of these girls.

Most of the focus group felt the democratic experience in RME had helped them in other subjects: three cited Modern Studies, two cited English, one cited Drama and Religious Studies. Areas in which they had been helped were knowledge and understanding of content and confidence to speak out. A principal teacher whose subject was not cited by any pupil, naming four pupils in his Standard Grade class, volunteered:

I can see the benefits of RME in group work and presentations. I can see a difference in confidence between pupils who have been doing this course (i.e. 3I RME). There’s a marked difference in confidence in speaking. A lot of (subject) is about empathy and a lot of that is coming through.

One of the focus group stated, ‘the class is more relaxed now and we all support each other. There’s not this barrier between us, because we’ve not been sitting writing, we’ve been involved in the class in discussions and interacting.’ When asked by the teacher how she would feel if the teacher abandoned the democratic class and went back to an autocratic style, she said, ‘Gutted. Now that you’ve opened us up, if you just shut us off, it would not be a good idea.’

These findings suggest that genuine democracy in the classroom may well be the most effective way to develop some of the life skills widely acknowledged as vital. This thinking is in line with that of Menter and Walker (2000) who advocate opportunities for young people to develop emotional literacy skills as an important requirement for effective citizenship.

## **Conclusion**

While acknowledging the inadvisability of over-generalisation, it is significant that this small-scale study rooted the theory of the democratic classroom in reality, showing it to be possible, practical and rewarding. Despite previously adopting an autocratic style, the teacher gradually relaxed into the democratic teacher role, and derived a great sense of fulfilment from the transformation, confirmed by a pupil: ‘I thought we’d still get, ‘Do this, do that’, but we don’t. It’s like a vote on everything. It’s not, like, just whenever you feel like it ... it’s just democratic all the time.’ One of the focus group stated that her expectations about the democratic class had been met; five felt that expectations were exceeded. ‘You get so involved in it, so wrapped up in

what you're doing, you forget it's just a class'. The teacher felt that the democratic approach communicated informed values appropriately and effectively. This is supported by Brandes and Ginnis (1995), 'Values may be communicated more through method than content ... they must ooze from the methodology'.

Findings demonstrated that a participative leaning style and citizenship curriculum content in core Religious and Moral Education had a largely positive impact on pupils' citizenship values, also improving their dispositions, motivation and interest. 87% of pupils agreed they were learning better because the teacher was trying to involve them. It is instructive to note that the pupil attitudes towards issues such as fair trade has not just been short term but has maintained; the pupils involved have, since the end of the research project, approached local secondary and primary schools and have taken the issue into the local community in a significant, organised and political campaign.

It must be stressed that the democratic approach is not an easy option. Prerequisite to its success are mutual respect and trust. Trying to meet pupils' expectations involved a great deal of unseen work, so its introduction, where considered appropriate, should be at a manageable pace. It would be damaging to pupils' perception of democracy if teachers embarked on it half-heartedly and empowerment was not delivered. As Alexander (2001) points out, 'If they dismiss citizenship education as a sham, it may simply add to the cynicism about politics and participation in public life'.

Finally, there is the nagging worry that, although feasible and clearly beneficial to the pupils and staff, a hierarchical, fundamentally undemocratic educational establishment and structure will not allow the development of independent critical thinkers in a democratic setting. As the government in London and the Scottish Executive in Edinburgh bows to a neo-liberal agenda, it ensures that our young people in schools develop as shallow learners, are often bored, are compliant and are cynical towards formal politics. The task of educationists is to challenge that agenda.



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