Education for Citizenship: Languages are the Key

A Rationale for Languages Teachers

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Note: This paper has been prepared to accompany Scottish CILT Outreach events, session 2007-08. It does not set out to illustrate how citizenship education can be achieved in languages teaching and learning. A workshop activity is planned to provide opportunities to discuss this issue. Rather this paper attempts to justify the role languages have to play in education for responsible citizens.

As one of the four capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence,* responsible citizenship should be a cornerstone for future curricular structure and development in Scottish education. As with all work towards the capacities described in *Curriculum for Excellence,* opportunities to encourage and develop responsible citizenship will be identified across the curriculum, in every subject area, in class and out of class, in special and mainstream schools.

> "*The* Scottish approach to education for citizenship differs from other areas of the United Kingdom, because it has not introduced a new subject for the curricular area called "Citizenship." Instead, it is expected that all subjects will make their relevance to education for citizenship explicit, and that the purposes and issues associated with citizenship will be developed through whole school and cross-curricular activities."
> *(Learning & Teaching Scotland: online)*

What exactly *is* citizenship, and what is education for citizenship?

Citizenship means many things to many people, but essentially, most definitions converge on the following key factors:

Citizenship is about:

- the sense of belonging to a network of communities;
- active and responsible participation within those communities;
- tolerance, respect and understanding of self and all others who share our communities;
- valuing diversity.

When these factors are considered with a languages education perspective, it gives rise to some interesting questions:

- Is it possible for monolingual citizens to feel part of a community where several languages may be spoken?
- How can we actively participate in our community, global or local, with only one language?
- How can we respect and value other cultures, and our own, if we don't know anything about them?
- How can we understand each other if we only speak one language?

Consideration of these questions arguably leads to conclude that Languages not only contribute to education for citizenship – they are essential to it. We can also contend that the notion of *self* within community is essential to the understanding of citizenship. Education for citizenship is thus as much about the processes of learning as it is about its content; it should hold the "how" and the "what" of learning in equal regard.

The benefits of the Scottish approach.

Citizenship teaching as envisaged by the Scottish approach spreads the responsibility for education *across* the curriculum. Not only does this give each subject area a role in contributing to this; it offers that opportunity equally to all subjects. No one subject area can lay claim to education for citizenship. However, in the context of *Curriculum for Excellence* and the cross-cutting themes and activities in which this initiative invites us to engage, languages and education for citizenship present a particularly productive partnership.

Last year's outreach seminars looked at language teaching methodology in the context of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (see Coyle 2006 for more information on CLIL). This could be considered as a starting point for developing education for citizenship in languages. CLIL teaches languages alongside another curricular area by:

- raising the cognitive challenge of the content involved in languages learning;
- providing the learner with the opportunity to lean something of curricular value as well as language in the languages classroom;
- opening the door to education for citizenship.

The Scottish approach to education for citizenship also offers an opportunity to embed the values associated with it in all aspects of school life, and perhaps crucially, to consider our methodology – *How* we teach as much as *what* we teach. The key to education for citizenship is *the methodology.* Participation in decision–making and active approaches to

learning as well as the development of authentic community links and whole school awareness-raising activities are approaches that will lead to successful learning and teaching, for citizenship and for everything else.

So what contribution can languages make to this important purpose? Here are some starting points, some ways in which languages can offer a context for education for citizenship.

Languages, culture and personal development

Languages are a powerful tool in personal development. Think where you would be, what sort of a person you would be, what you wouldn't know if it hadn't been for the part languages have played in your personal journey. Finding out about other cultures is fascinating, life-enhancing, and can be life-changing. As languages teachers we have all enjoyed the privileges this can bring, but how much do we *really* teach about other cultures now? Do we really share our enthusiasm and love of things different with the young learners in our classrooms? Be in no doubt that they want to learn about them. In 2003, Scottish CILT organised a series of good practice conferences and part of this included a pupil survey. Pupils were asked what they most liked learning in Modern Languages. Finding out about other people and their ways of life was ranked the third most popular learning activity, but in the chart of ten types of activities they do in class, it came ninth. This is *not* to suggest we should abandon or substitute language teaching in favour of a more watered down "cultural studies" programme, but let's not overlook what the cultural dimension can bring to our language learning and teaching, especially with regard to valuing diversity and citizenship.

Languages, self and community

Language learning has to be set in a context that makes sense to children. A meaningful context for their learning is needed if this is to be achieved. In order to do this, links need to be created as closely as possible in two directions: outwards and inwards. Inwards to engage with the learners and make their learning real, to personalise their learning by trying to explicitly connect with other facets of their lives; and outwards to the foreign community, in a way which teaches them to value a sense of difference or otherness.

There are many well demonstrated ways by which links are established and maintained with the 'foreign' community, which need no explanation here. It may be helpful to remember that elements of 'foreign' communities can be included in learning via film, music and visitors from local communities who may have something helpful to share with young learners. They may be native speakers of the languages being

learned and taught, but equally they may not. Lesser – spoken community language speakers can also provide an insight into rich cultures and linguistic backgrounds which exist, often unseen and unappreciated, within our own communities.

To return to the *linking inwards* idea, we, as languages teachers can help develop the sense of self and worth in the young people we teach. At face value, this should not be a huge problem, given the amount of focus on 'the self' in the early stages of language learning, but do we really take full advantage of this opportunity, or is it more a case of superficially fulfilling the requirements of a syllabus created solely with the purpose of an examination in mind? And when we stop to think about the language involved in many of the conversational exchanges we aim for, we must make consideration of the often socially divisive spotlights under which our pupils are asked to perform. Is it really helpful for young adolescents to have to explain the intricacies and complications of often tangled family structures? Is it fair for them to have to detail the type of house in which they live, or the contents of their bedrooms?

There seems to be a strong argument to suggest learners need to know and identify themselves as part of a community for effective education for citizenship to take place. Having a sense of their own identity will help in the appreciation and understanding of other cultural identities. For many pupils, their world awareness is such that *speaking* and *English* are one and the same thing. This point is well illustrated by a teacher who worked in mainstream and special school, where she explains her rationale for offering modern languages Access 2 to her pupils:

> *My pupils began with only the haziest understanding that they live in a country called Scotland and they speak a language called English. Only after investigating a country in depth did they begin to move towards a notion that there might be lots of other countries. It was only when we began to look for a second country to investigate that the notion of Europe and Scotland/ Britain within Europe could be addressed in any meaningful way. (Life in another Country: Access 1 and 2: Support for Teachers, LT Scotland, page A15)*

Just think how exciting it must have been for those pupils when they realised there were lots of different countries for them to find out about! Have we lost a bit of that magic, the sense of otherness, not forgetting the sense of belonging and the value-added education for citizenship that we can build into our subject?
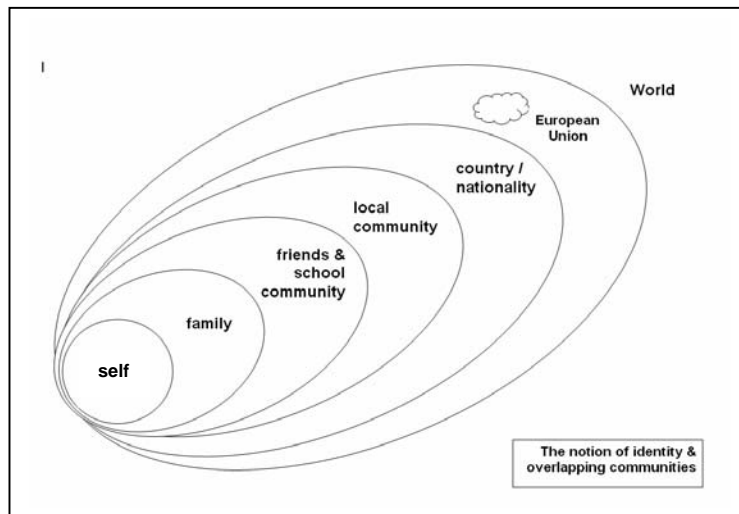
Adapted from SOEID 1997 publication Europe, Language Learning and Special
Educational Needs. Thanks to Hilary McColl for diagram

We now turn to consider the changing nature of belonging, or
community, as a child progresses from infancy to adulthood. With this in
mind, it is worth noting that the SOEID graph above shows a parallel in the
early stages of this progression from self, to family, to friends and school,
with the way we learn and teach languages. In the early stages of
language learning, like in the early stages of identity, the focus is on the
self (citizenship areas: who am I?), progressing to family and friends
(citizenship areas: caring and sharing) sometimes to our town or
community (citizenship areas: responsibility for our immediate
environment) but beyond this point, the parallel seems to weaken.

Horizons continue to broaden for the developing citizen, to local
community (the role of the citizen), country, nationality (political
awareness) then to Europe and as the young citizen reaches adulthood,
he or she has ideally the knowledge and understanding to become a
citizen of the world. Sometimes it seems that language learning gets stuck
at the transition from friends and school community to the local
community. When that happens, progress seems to work only in one
dimension, where the learner seems to do little more than 'collect' a series
of similar topics (food and drink; sports and hobbies; places and directions
in town etc). Although the learner's *vocabulary* increases, the lack of
depth (and sometimes also lack of cognitive challenge) inhibits the
overall *linguistic competence* of the learner.

Languages and global citizenship

It is in the process of developing from local citizens to global citizens that
the benefits of multilingualism become most obvious. International trade is

increasing and movement of people over borders is taking place on a previously unprecedented scale. Even in the most literal of interpretations, the need for languages to facilitate this increasing movement is clear and needs little explanation. At curriculum level, issues of sustainability, poverty, debt, disease and conflict are reported in the media on a daily basis. These issues are addressed and discussed at many levels, in many primary, secondary and special schools, but it seems that the languages classroom or lesson is often not perceived as an appropriate forum for holding these debates. Environmental studies, modern studies, geography, history and PSE have all laid their claim to the citizenship agenda. So often, languages have been, or have let themselves be overlooked. What can be done to make this link? When teaching the language to describe the home, for example, instead of focussing on the (often socially divisive) description of one's own home, a comparative study or investigation of homes in different countries is a possible way to open up a global dimension and learn something meaningful alongside the language. A similar approach could be adopted with the language of daily routine, and consideration should also be given to the role languages can play in whole school activities, such as year-group activities as exemplified by the John Muir award for conservation and sustainability, described at a recent Scottish CILT outreach event, Fairtrade Week, Christian Aid Week, or other days dedicated to particular charities.

In Conclusion

Learning in the context of developing responsible citizens is as much about the method as it is about the content. At Scottish CILT outreach events this session you will have the opportunity to discuss how to make a start in education for citizenship in the context of language learning. We will discuss the *how* aspects of learning, and look at *what* we can teach, and collaborate to devise some useful activities for you to use in your classrooms. Education for citizenship is, however, primarily about *values*, and its success will stand or fall on how those values are understood, adopted, demonstrated and communicated to Scotland's young learners. We will not be awarding GCSE certificates in citizenship to those young learners; let us hope we can do much better than that. Let us make citizenship, as we understand it, an integral part of their lives.

References:

Learning and Teaching Scotland website, Education for Citizenship page:
http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/citizenship/index.asp

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http://www.scilt.stir.ac.uk/SLR/Issue%2013/SLR13%20Coyle.pdf

Scottish Executive (2003), SEED *National Conferences on Good practice in
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Learning and Teaching Scotland (1997), Life in another Country: Access 1 and 2:
Support for teachers

SOEID (1997) Europe, Language Learning and Special Educational Needs

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Other useful links for citizenship can be found on the Scottish CILT website:

http://www.scilt.stir.ac.uk/What%27s%20New/citizenship.htm