Philosophical Citizens – a contradiction in terms?

There is a current drive within education agendas in Britain towards the development of Citizenship Education, yet the concept of citizenship is rarely explored critically or philosophically in the educational world because it appears to be generally accepted that educating for citizening – if there is such a word – is a good and desirable thing. However, this assumption should be challenged. In asserting, as many within education currently do, that educators should be promoting philosophical approaches and philosophical thinking with children, it seems appropriate to wonder whether the notion of a *philosophical* citizen is a contradiction in terms.

The term 'citizen' is interesting in itself. Cartledge (2002) writes of the root coming from the Latin 'civitas, civis' meaning that one was 'civilised' in Roman society as opposed to the Greek 'politeia' which is derived from 'polis'; *polis* being not a city-state as commonly thought, but more accurately a 'citizen-state' and one wherein it can be seen that the polis is a "…political community as a living corporate entity".[1] The term *citizen* nowadays takes its cue from ancient Athens and is linked closed with that of *democracy*. Democracy is today another positively regarded concept, but one we do not have space here to explore. However, the notion of citizen need not imply democracy. Originally citizens, in classical times, were not simply residents within a state. Cartledge (2002) asserts the difficulties in being a citizen in ancient Sparta; that citizenship wasn't a birthright, but instead something to be earned. In fact, as well as rights and responsibilities afforded Spartan citizens, there were conditions imposed also in terms of physical, economic and moral criteria. Sparta, it should be remembered, was a militaristic society and citizenship of that society related closely to this fact. On the other hand, if we consider ancient Athens – the accepted seat of democracy – this was a city of only 300,000 people and not all residents here were citizens. The rights of citizenship

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[1] Delivered as part of the Roberts Lectures, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

were limited to adult males of non-slave Athenian descent; women, children, slaves and 'foreigners' were all precluded from any kind of membership of the citizenry. Even those who were citizens had limited participatory functions – voting every few years and from time to time engaging in debate about public issues. The dichotomy that exists for us now, in twenty-first century Britain, is that the Government is enthusiastically promoting a citizenship agenda without paying heed to the fact that the original notion of citizenship meant that an individual was there for the will and work of the State.

Citizenship is – or should be – about something larger than the individual, something more than one's self and self promotion within society. Citizenship in education should be there to promote just that notion of working together for the good of the community, indeed, for the generation of community. Community, though, should not be understood in a narrow and naïve way; rather, it should be a state where individuals work together – certainly for a common good, *their* common good – but it should be a critical state, one where reason and reflection, argumentation and critical dialogues are fostered. This is what education should be inducting our children into, all the while allowing those recipients of formal education to be participants in the citizening of their State. In educating our young citizens – for they should not be viewed and treated as citizens of the future as they so often are – we should follow a Socratic model. Socrates undertook service to his city

> … by questioning the dominant conceptions of virtue and 'good behavior', and by maintaining rigorous moral and intellectual integrity as an individual. He did it by scrambling the traditional distinction between the 'good man' and the 'good citizen', while avoiding homiletics or edifying clichés. He did it by undermining authorities, purging opinions, and creating a general puzzlement where previously there had been a firm faith in the soundness of 'traditional values'. He did it, in other words, by enacting *thinking* in conversation (Villa, 2001, p.xii).

One cannot be blind to the irony that the push for Citizenship Education is one that has been instituted to bring the country back to 'traditional values', yet, it is this very

instrument that should, through the promotion of '*thinking* in conversation', generate a more critical citizenry; one where individuals question, challenge and engage in philosophical dialogue as a means to bettering their society and develop community.

Unlike the Spartan system of 'Similars' where individuals were comparatively equal in that they were alike in some respects but not in all, in modern western society there is a desire for equality – but this desire fails to include the notion of younger members of society and those beyond the age of majority as being equal in all things. Practically, very young individuals cannot participate in the same way as their older counterparts. This, though, does not preclude one from participating in one's society. In fact, we use the time when children are in school as a time to educate *for* citizenship (Scottish Executive, 2004). This is the mistake. Certainly we can teach *civic* education where students learn about their responsibilities, duties and entitlements as *future* citizens, but this is not what is currently happening – particularly in Britain. Citizenship Education – or, as it is now being heralded, Education *for* Citizenship (further evidence that children are not yet citizens) – lies within the domain of curricular areas such as Personal and Social Development (in Scotland) and Personal and Social Education (in England and Wales). These curricular areas are where children learn what are the accepted social behaviours and practices of adult citizens. While there may be laudable topics for discussion, it appears that there are expected right and wrong answers and accompanying behaviours. The students are expected to conform to some norm set by the teacher, the school or the Government. There is limited space for children to explore their own moral codes and values, more especially if these were to be in some way discordant with the teacher's. Lessons on drugs and sex are incorporated within citizenship classes which appear to be lessons on morality. Lawson (2001) suggests these classes should be places where pupils can raise issues of concern in order to debate and discuss them. Further, these should be issues that are of concern to pupils *now*, not when they are older individuals with all the power that entails. Somehow the citizenship classes imply some kind of control, where the accepted moral code is held to be the way forward and the route into adult life and full citizenship. Archard (1993) indicates the reasoning behind the interest in children in terms of their schooling and citizenship education;

The State may claim a legitimate interest in the welfare of children both as *current* human beings to be cared for and as *future* citizens who must now be trained for their eventual roles in society (p.112).

Russell (1932) highlights that a good individual is not the same as a good and useful citizen which leads one to educate a future citizen in a particular way and one that may prove different to the methods that may be adopted if we view the child as an individual. Plato (1987) would perhaps share this notion,

The object of our legislation…is not the special welfare of any particular class in our society, but of the society as a whole; and it uses persuasion or compulsion to unite all citizens and make them share together the benefits which each individually can confer on the community; and its purpose in fostering this attitude is not to leave everyone to please himself, but to make each man a link in the unity of the whole (519e-520a; p.263).

Rousseau (1973) correctly highlights the case that "An individual may be a devout priest, a brave soldier, or a zealous senator, and yet a bad citizen" (p.133). One is not a 'bad citizen' if one is not participating. In this instance, one is not a citizen at all since in being a citizen we are required to act. No, a bad citizen is an individual whose aims or motivations are less than those which might be of good or benefit to the community. Further, it may also be argued that the notion of a 'responsible citizen' – one that the new Scottish Curriculum (Scottish Executive, 2004) is currently promoting - is a false one since a citizen, in working for the good of the State or community in which one resides, cannot be anything other than responsible. Similarly, one need not talk of 'active' citizens since a citizen is expected to act and participate. It is precisely in being an active member of a society or community which leads to effective citizenry. Cassidy (2007) asserts that the term 'active' assumes that one is making contributions in a social context beyond simply conducting one's daily business of eating and sleeping. Contributions

may take the form of working to bolster the economy. Similarly, spending money will aid the economic growth of the society, helping others by giving time or money develops the society and perhaps, and most importantly, in order to be an *active citizen* one must participate in a different kind of manner. Cassidy goes on to suggest that one should make one's voice heard in order to be counted as a citizen that acts, an active citizen. One, she claims, "…should be interacting with others to question, challenge and give voice to alternative moral codes, justifications or reasoning. One cannot be a passive citizen, even in deliberately abstaining from voting one is acting in a mental and even physical sense by staying away from the polling station, but there is more to participation than voting" (2007, p.135). Indeed, Giroux asserts that "Critical thinking cannot be viewed simply as a form of progressive reasoning; it must be seen as a fundamental, political act" (1981, p.57). This would appear to support the notion that even in thinking, discussing and debating contemporary issues, one is undertaking citizenly duties. It could be argued that it is imperative that in taking part one should deliberate, consider, reflect and inquire into one's society or community. As Cartledge (2002) suggests, citizenship, in its original form, was realised through action, and this should hold true today, for to be inactive one is not contributing to the State in any way.

What is concerning within the Citizenship Education agenda and how it purports to engender action is that curricular documents appear to be little more than comfortable pieces of rhetoric where children will be trained for their future participation as citizens. What is worrying is the manner in which this may be taught. While teachers may be keen to promote 'responsible citizens', such as in the new Scottish curricular guidelines *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004), there is a danger that there will be criteria for such 'responsible' individuals coloured by the values of the teachers concerned – a population not wholly representative of wider society. This could easily be viewed as indoctrination.

Indoctrination is a powerful word and one which conjures up negative associations – rightly so. While there will be overt forms of propaganda and indoctrination such as in religious schools and their curricula, other forms may occur in less obvious ways. The

rise of Enterprise Education and Education for Enterprise where children are, on occasion, encouraged to participate in entrepreneurial activities is an example. While some may view this as a worthwhile activity, there are others who perceive it as promoting certain values which do not sit in accord with their own. The education agenda in Scotland is such that just this type of activity is to be open to all children throughout all years of their primary schooling. Indeed, there is an expectation that children will all, at some time in their primary school career, have the opportunity to partake in an activity that promotes these values. Children learn the values of the market place and are likely to respond to these in a manner closely in relation to that of their class teacher. This is exactly the danger of Education for Citizenship. By considering it as part of personal and social development it is inseparable from moral education where children are inducted and trained in the accepted manners, mores and values of wider society. This said, these are only the manners, mores and values of a small sector within that wider society – those of the teaching profession, or in fact, those who set the education agenda. After all, it must be granted that teachers cannot absent themselves wholly from their value systems or moral codes and that these values are transmitted via formal, informal and hidden curricula all the time. Teachers are, one may argue, undertaking the will and work of the State and in so doing are imparting skills, morals and values the State deems important and desirable. Indeed, where better to situate citizenship classes than where it is possible to exercise control over morals and behaviour.

It may be held that this prepares *future* citizens, such as those in the cities of ancient Sparta or Athens but it does not allow for children as citizens *now*, and leaves little room for disagreement with the accepted moral codes and behaviours of the day. Indeed, this potentially leads to unthinking, non-reasoning individuals who do not question or consider their situation and environment. One could go further and posit that there can be no such thing as a thinking, reasoning citizen since the role of that individual is to undertake what the State requires of him/her. After all, perhaps the greatest example of a thinking, reasoning, questioning citizen was Socrates – and there is no need to consider further how the State viewed his attempts to encourage the young to question. Philosophical citizens may be impossible to reconcile.

Not all is lost, however. Were one to accept that the State is important and that we should, as individuals, work for the betterment of the State, we may be able to move towards a more positive notion of citizenship for our children – one that accepts that children are capable of being active, participative, political and philosophical agents and that they can contribute to their community as much as any adult. This could mean that children should not be excluded from the opportunity of being citizens.

In order to maintain an effective democracy McCall (1991) suggests the need for an effective citizenry whereby;

> …as a citizen, a person must be able to think critically, to weigh different alternatives, to evaluate reasons given for particular decisions or policies which affect the community. To be an active and effective citizen requires both the disposition to reason and the skills required for effective reasoning (p.2).

It is precisely this point one should focus upon in considering how to include children into the citizenry and in what manner they can and should participate. McCall is here advocating a philosophical approach to participation and it is this element that is lacking in our adult citizen population and is often not even countenanced in our children. McCall devised a practice called Community of Philosophical Inquiry (COPI) which grew out of Lipman's Philosophy for Children (P4C) programme (2003). Prior to these practices children and young people have been engaged in Nelson's Socratic Method since the 1920s and, even earlier, the philosophy clubs of Edinburgh and Glasgow during the Enlightenment were breeding grounds for the young to consider social and political issues of the day from philosophical perspectives. It could be argued that our communities be governed by the decisions of citizens after reasoning dialogue has taken place with its constituent members. Reasoning, though, is not something we are actively encouraged to practise, and like any other skill, in order to reason proficiently one does require practice. McCall (1991) states clearly the prerequisite for being a reasoning, reflective and effective citizen,

> … a person needs to be able to make reasoned judgements concerning the views of others, and needs to be able to modify his or her view if necessary. This requires comprehension skills, which in turn requires skill in analogical reasoning as well as in recognising and evaluating analogies; identifying assumptions; recognising fallacies; being careful about jumping to conclusions; recognising part/whole relationships; always being aware of alternatives; seeking out consistencies and inconsistencies in every sphere of life (p.2).

She continues to suggest that democracy or empowerment for individuals will not necessarily follow from enfranchisement alone. Rather, it will be allowing and enabling them – children and adults – to develop their inquiry and reasoning skills that empowers individuals and encourages them to "… seek for and deal with the truth – what is there" (ibid., p.38). And it is here that McCall raises a crucial issue – the empowerment of children. If we are to give children a voice socially and politically we must be prepared that we will be challenging the ways in which children are currently viewed by society and we would thus be challenging, in some way, the accepted social order.

Children are not treated as equals and as such different things are expected from them than from the adult members of society (Cassidy, 2007). However, note that the expectations are set by *adults* within society. Adults determine not only what is acceptable behaviour for an individual, but this is further extended by determining how children will – in future – participate in society; they, adults, are shaping *future* citizens. Citizenhood is perceived to be a valuable and desirable thing to possess, yet it is becoming ever more evident that for children, while they are being trained in the ways of being citizens, they are not – as children – permitted to practise their citizening skills.

The notion of citizenship and how active one is, or is allowed to be, is an issue of power and in the context of children and adults, children certainly have the less powerful status and are thus limited in the contributions they can make because of this powerful

'dominance', as Qvortrup (1997) calls it, adults have over them. So, while adult society is issuing decrees about children's rights and entitlements, adults are still very much in control, driving the issues and agendas of what children's entitlements should be and in what ways they can participate. And it is this 'adult' power that acts most effectively by not promoting the younger members of our society within the decision-making process; they are given a voice when adults see fit. Aristotle (1955) would hold that there is no place for politics in the life of children and no place for children in the life of politics. He need not be concerned.   While Citizenship Education is increasingly present in British schools, little of its content has to do with involvement in the politics of wider society. In fact, even where it does stray into this realm, children are firmly kept in their place until when it is considered that they are old enough to participate on the political stage. There is much to contend with here, yet, in allowing a space or opportunity for their views to be taken into account, the status of children may be improved upon. In being receptive to the views of this group – not even a minority group in the sense of the numbers belonging to it – true representation can be provided. Within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 12 states that children have the right to develop their own views, ideas and opinions freely without external interference with this freedom – yet, there are still restrictions in the sense that maturity of reasoning, age, ability to articulate are all heavily cited, yet these are not factors (other than age) that are confined to children. Lundy (2007) stresses four key factors in meeting this convention. She asserts that children should have space, voice, audience and influence. Archard (1993) perhaps offers an explanation for what Lundy recognises as a failing in fulfilling the Convention's aims, when he highlights exactly why children are excluded from the adult world of reason and understanding. He suggests that children are perceived of lacking certain adult dispositions such as being rational or having certain cognitive capacities – this is patently not true.

Certainly, as Locke (1976) suggests, children are expected, indeed, obliged, to conform or subscribe to an agenda or contract that is prescribed and established by adults for the governing of society, even though they are not considered as citizens. Given this being the case, children's voices, in the present climate are often somewhat tokenistic. King

(1998), in taking account of Hobbes, offers the suggestion that "… it is precisely because children cannot see the consequences of their actions that they cannot enter into a covenant" (p.77). However, one might make the same assertion in relation to other members of society, members considered as being too old to be children. Further, Cassidy (2007) suggests that while children may not formally accept a covenant – since their voices and actions are somewhat determined by external forces – children do comply with the covenant or contract. They must, by necessity, comply in order that they gain membership to society, maintain their personhood, strive towards citizenhood and 'grow' into adulthood. Because children are perceived as being unable to reason effectively, they are therefore not afforded citizenship in their own right. Faulks (2000) suggests that "Political reform must look to improve the opportunities for citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities by promoting an ethic of participation" (p.108). There is no reason to suppose that these opportunities to participate be reserved for older members of society. We must promote an ethos whereby individuals, young and old, see and understand the need for co-operation and interdependence for the creation of a community.

Issues affecting our personhood and/or citizenhood permeate all areas of our lives and within school (and outside) there should be opportunities to discuss and explore these matters. Indeed, Lawson (2000) makes the pertinent point that

> Telling pupils what to think as opposed to how to think has certain implications. The outcome may be positive for society in the short term but this approach leaves no room for real debate and does not allow for individuals to explore issues for themselves and reach their own conclusions (p.171).

We cannot consider moral issues by simply doing as we are told by the power or authority in charge. An effective citizenry is one where members generate 'community spirit', by undertaking activities and work within the community to maintain and promote some form of reciprocal relationship within wider society, the reciprocity being that

these individuals are afforded particular rights for their citizening behaviour. We should take care not to confuse the idea of 'community spirit' with the controlling of behaviour and moral codes. Instead, the notion of community should be concerned with the sharing of ideas and opinions in order to better society as a whole. 'Better' needing to be defined through dialogue, discussion and debate as the members of a society may not – indeed, probably will not – all agree on how they may define the 'betterment' of society. This dialogue, one might assert, is essential in actually working towards a notion of community.

Policy makers and educationists, in considering Education for Citizenship, might have something to learn from Socrates who encouraged the young to philosophise. While neither the UNCRC nor Lundy (2007) do not overtly advocate children philosophising, this approach may be seen as a natural way to accommodate hearing children's views and enabling them to have a voice. Cassidy (2004) would claim that philosophy with children, would give children the necessary tools to listen, discuss, debate and change their views and the views of others. Socrates' perspective on children is considered by Matthews (1998); he suggests that

> Socratic questioning, we could almost say, began as philosophy for children. ... Certainly it included philosophy for children from the first. Socrates himself seems to have found it entirely appropriate to engage children in philosophical discussion; moreover, he clearly respected children as philosophical discussion partners (p.12).

Children, Lipman (1988) would argue, are as capable and competent of commenting and reflecting upon the 'serious business of life' – as Callicles suggests in the 'Gorgias' - which ultimately affects their existence and functioning. McCall developed Community of Philosophical Inquiry (COPI) – a structured, practical, non-technical philosophy – and philosophising in within the structure of a COPI might be the best method or approach available to us for allowing or enabling children to participate as citizens within society, for dealing with the 'serious business of life'.

McCall (1991) asserts that

> …the nature of reality, or truth, or justice or beauty… are basic issues and anyone, no matter how little knowledge they may have can think about them, can reason about them, and can engage in philosophical inquiry on these issues (p.19).

Very often Communities of Philosophical Inquiry involving eight or nine year old participants will raise the same questions, issues and arguments as a Community of participants in their forties, fifties or sixties. Having lengthy life experience or a broad ranging vocabulary does not preclude one from finding it difficult to say what one wants to say or say what one means.

McCall's point that traditional philosophical and psychological definitions of rationality may exclude many adults from the category of rational beings is one that is often overlooked, or rather ignored, in the argument that children are not adept reasoners. Psychologists such as Piaget who advocate stage maturation theory have done little to support the idea that pre-adolescents are able to reason competently. However, the likes of Matthews (1980), McCall, (1991), Lipman (2003), Kennedy (2006), Cassidy (2007) and others working in the field of Philosophy with Children would rebuke this notion and would share in asserting that even while very young we, as humans, are able and competent reasoners. They would similarly attest that it is through one's usage of these skills that one becomes more adept the use of one's reasoning, reflection and analysing skills. In advance of these practitioners, Mill (1985) acknowledges that "The mental and the moral, like the muscular, powers are improved only by being used" (p.122). And this is vital in considering how children are perceived and in what ways they are permitted to be part of society.

The structure devised by McCall of the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (COPI) facilitates reasoning in participants – whatever their age. Indeed, McCall (1991) points out that

> … seeing the children agreeing and disagreeing with each other, adding to the ideas of others, even explaining to other children what they might have been thinking of - all of these behaviours stand as counter-evidence to the assertions of some cognitive psychologists that children are egocentric. Both in the sense of only being willing to consider their own point of view (a characteristic which they would share with adults), and in the sense of being unable to perceive another point of view (p.26).

Children are, like their older counterparts, empowered by participating in a COPI. Although, as children, opportunities to directly bear influence on policy making, are extremely limited, given the opportunity to exercise the skills of inquiry, thinking and reason they could participate and engage effectively as citizens in the wider community. COPI would support the development of these skills. Within the structure of COPI children would "…learn how to listen to alternative viewpoints, how to posit alternative viewpoints – even alternatives to what they currently hold – how to build upon previous arguments and develop them whereby they can demonstrate their application in the wider world" (Cassidy, 2007, p. 217).

There is evidence of Community of Philosophical Inquiry with primary and early secondary school-aged participants discussing topics such as death, love, marriage, the existence (or not) of God, terrorism, bigotry, prejudice, truth and justice. Similarly, in adult groups, these subjects have emerged and often the self same issues come out in the inquiries, but the children are less inclined to try to stick rigidly to a particular perspective in order to persuade than some adults. They (the children) seem to be more willing to engage fully with the dialogue without the distraction of what they 'know' about how the world external to the COPI functions.

COPI is by design an egalitarian process. Each individual participant is as free as any other to make a contribution to the dialogue and the merit of one's participation is not gauged by the quantity of contributions; there is a shared search for meaning that relies on the collaboration of the rest of the constituent members of the COPI. It is likely that even the quietest members of a COPI follow the line of argument, reflect on the contributions and ultimately take something from the dialogue that will have some bearing on their lives outside the Community and potentially the way they live those lives in relation to others. Consequently, the individual not only has the potential to change as a result of the inquiry, s/he has the potential to change the environment, institutions and other individuals around her/him. Morrison and McCulloch (2000) suggest that

> In developing new means by which children can be heard, politicians should themselves find more effective, appropriate ways of communicating with children/young people, providing opportunities for them to participate directly in debate and decision making (p.7).

One approach that may meet this recommendation is through the use of COPI. As Lundy (2007) suggests, children's voices cannot be viewed tokenistically, action must follow as a result if we are truly engaging in what Article 12 of the UNCRC advocates.

In order that children are able to develop their own beliefs and understanding, that they come to some awareness of their own values, that they are able to challenge received wisdom and even to be protected against Citizenship Education that is indoctrinal or propagandist, it is crucial that encouraged to inquire and inquire in depth. It is for these reasons that COPI may be of use to all members of society, not just those younger members; it should be acknowledged that everything is open to question and scrutiny. Training and practise of reasoning, for citizens of any age, might be promoted and facilitated through COPI. This would allow and support their full participation in society's policy and decision-making processes. It would certainly be a shift in the running of society were young voices, as well as those more practised and established voices, and their associated views aired and accorded weight. It would be desirable in the

promotion of an effective and inclusive citizenry that all voices were accorded equal space, to use one of Lundy's (2007) factors in considering children's rights.

Participants in COPI, whatever their age or experience, are encouraged to reason, reflect and inquire and it is from this that society and its constituent members could draw. The notion of our society requiring and desiring critical thinkers, individuals who are adept reasoners and who are receptive to the reasoning and ideas of others is promoted by Siegel (1988). It is in facilitating and engendering these skills that will shift society towards community. It is this drive to create critical, reasoning and reflective citizens that Community of Philosophical Inquiry – and other forms of practical philosophy - aims to promote. Siegel (1988) sees critical thinking as an ability to reason and use such reasoning skills to justify

> …beliefs, claims, and actions. A critical thinker, then, is one who is *appropriately moved by reasons*: she has a propensity or disposition to believe and act in accordance with reasons; and she has the ability properly to assess the force of reasons in the many contexts in which reasons play a role (p.23).

Siegel's definition of a critical thinker does not preclude children. Cassidy (2007) suggests that "A much more inclusive society – a community perhaps – is needed where all individuals have a platform to speak from and be heard in order that their views may influence policy and practice". Children, it would appear, are constrained by their social status.

Perhaps adults do not want children to question and reason because in taking account of their views, ideas and opinions they (adults) may have to alter their own. Childhood could be seen as a period of indoctrination, the time when young humans are socialised into how one is expected to be in society. Yet now that the Government (certainly in Britain) and society's educators are talking in terms of Citizenship Education, a more participative model of society is required. We are breeding citizens, but this begins when young; individuals have their reasoning skills facilitated and honed in order that they may

contribute to the emergent community. As in the COPI, individuals are important, but individuals *as* individuals, not because they possess a certain age or status. Community of Philosophical Inquiry is a positive model for our society and how the younger members of that society are treated and it may be through a practice such as this that true citizenship – philosophical citizenship - may be enacted and one that may be further removed from that perpetuated in classical Sparta or Athens, one that may see philosophical citizens as a contradiction in terms.

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