FULL TEXT

NAILING DOWN AND SHAPING A JELLY: AN OVERVIEW OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

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Greetings
Acknowledgements: MPs
Organisers

I wish to start with an admission. I have been guilty of seeing that glib phrase "citizenship education" as the easy way out, and – on the preparatory reading which I have done to date – I am far from alone in my guilt. I am tagged in today's programme as the former Chair of Parliament's Justice and Electoral Committee. Over the 6 years when I held that position, I championed a recommendation for more citizenship education in at least four reports. But, rather like our education curricula of the past, just giving the "it" a nice name and giving "it" a definition, a character and lifeblood are two very different things.

Being a politician I also wish to register a modest boast. That unlike some, but not all, here, I have written proof of a qualification (of a kind) in citizenship. It was obtained that moment in 1995 when I was tested, in writing, of my knowledge of New Zealand as part of my citizenship application. And I have, in retrospect, no confidence that I would have passed the level of testing now in place for applicants for UK citizenship or proposed by some for New Zealand.

I have planned this overview as a race and a challenge. A race because there is much territory to cover. A challenge because at every level I see a need for more clarity and activity.

I will start with definitions. Traverse what New Zealand characteristics there are in our citizenship education scene. Identify agents for change, and which groups and sectors they might target. Touch on the overseas scene – a taster for the riches to come in our live videolink - thanks to the US Embassy for that. And I reach conclusions, suggest outcomes.

"Citizenship education"

Education is comparatively simple. Informal and formal. Statutory and voluntary. It is what it is.

Citizenship has a formal, legal meaning. In a nation where one in four residents were born overseas, it is an important institution. (Although very many people live their lives here without it and do not seem to suffer outrageously). But what does it really mean in this context? It clearly means something different from civics, which is really focussed on the mechanisms of democracy.

The best attempt I could find was a description of outcomes. A 2000 international study on citizenship education for the C21st worked on a consensus model with a panel of 182 experts. They concluded that, worldwide, there were 8 skills which citizens will need to cope with future challenges. In order of importance they are:

1. The ability to address problems as members of a global society.
2. The ability to work with others cooperatively and take responsibility for ones roles and duties within society.
3. The ability to understand, accept and appreciate cultural differences.
4. The capacity to think in a critical and systematic way.
5. The willingness to resolve conflict in a non-violent way.
6. The willingness to change ones lifestyle and consumption habits to protect the environment.

7. The ability to be sensitive towards and to defend human rights. *and*
8. The willingness and ability to participate in local, national and international politics.

To bind citizenship and education together, I turn to the author James Baldwin. "The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he or she is being educated".

On that basis, New Zealand is well placed to be a lead citizenship educator. The five elements which lead me to this conclusion are as follows:

1. **New Zealand Education.** Our education system is generally considered very good to excellent. We have a universal curriculum which is well respected and redesigned as needed, from time to time. Being a migrant-dependent society, we have many residents with a thirst to learn more of their adopted country.

2. **Our national style.** As a small and isolated nation with a polyglot society, we necessarily think globally – and are inveterate travellers. And we certainly are unafraid to ask the difficult questions. Some among us – Maori – have the most distinct of identities; the nation as a whole is step by step developing an identity arising in many ways from that.

3. **The spread of power in our society.** New Zealand is a nation born of a melding between some of the most collectivist and decentralising peoples on earth – Maori – and some of the most individualist and centralising – people who felt so on the outside in that ultimate society of individuals, the United Kingdom, that they decided to emigrate. Out of that melding came temporary regionalism, centralised government, secularism, in time a strong but informal regionalism, a growing C21st decentralisation to local bodies and iwi.

4. **Our racial and age mix.** Never forget that compared to our neighbour Australia, New Zealand has a young and brown population. A younger and significantly multi-racial society, especially one born of the simplest and most elegant of constitutional documents, Te Tiriti O Waitangi, is more likely to address the emerging C21st challenges, to appreciate racial and other diversity, to adapt lifestyle to environmental challenge. As Maori potential, which is undisputed, is increasingly realised, so the values driving the Treaty will come into sharper relief.

5. **Our population size and distribution**. New Zealand is a small, profoundly urbanised society, encouraging a greater shared sense of national purpose and allowing for the comparatively easy delivery of locally focussed education.

So what is in which needs to be delivered, and by what sort of agencies?

I must start with the Ministry of Education and our education curriculum. The good news is that the future looks promising. The more complicated news is that the history has been mixed, with citizenship education being the flavour for certain periods, and desperately unpopular through others. Much within those trends can be explained by the style of teaching adopted and by competing and related matters, such as the growth of focus on cultural and multi-cultural matters in the 1980s and 1990s. At times – some way back now, thankfully - the stark gender difference approach to education was reinforced by attempts to identify different roles for female and male citizens. The question of whether citizenship education should be delivered through subjects in the curriculum or should be part of the ways schools work has essentially remained unresolved. The 1928 Syllabus of Instruction memorably stated:

"Patriotism has its roots in the love and respect of the pupil for his 9sic) home and his school, and he must be so taught that it shall be his joy and pride to play his part, however humble that may be, in the advancement of New Zealand and the Empire, and in the promotion of peace, well-bring and happiness among the nations".

The social studies curriculum has always been significantly soaked through with elements of citizenship. It arose from the 1944 Thomas report, which moulded the curriculum for the post-war world. But a chronic weakness in this and other curriculum areas has been the lack of adequate resources to take citizenship education beyond a style and mood and into the specifics. And there has not always been an acknowledgement, let alone an understanding, that citizenship education is as much about school policies and governance, and the lace of the school in its community, as it is about the curriculum. But the new proposed curriculum has risen to the challenge. It is the child of an era in which a range of cross-curriculum matters need to be tackled. Citizenship education, literacy, numeracy, education about a sustainable environment, education for self-awareness and education for a society based on new technology sit side by side. The 2006 draft curriculum used powerful language to describe one of the key outcomes sought:

"Citizenship: Students explore what it means to be a citizen. Through their participation in learning experiences in the school or community, they learn how to become active, informed and responsible citizens who know how to contribute positively to the development and well-being of the society in which they live".

We will be hearing more of this as the morning progresses. And I strongly commend the paper: "Civics and citizenship education in New Zealand" distributed to all of you with today's papers.

The other agencies charged by their mission to work on citizenship education (sometimes by implication rather than name) include adult education, Parliament, local government, the Electoral Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Immigration Service, Internal Affairs, Youth Affairs and the other population-focussed Ministries. None lead on it, all make some attempt, much is captured on websites. It all lacks interaction, unless one regards variety and diversity as a supreme strength in this area.

So who is citizenship education aimed at?

We are indebted to the Centre for Citizenship Education for much, including the identification of seven priority aspects of citizenship education. They focus on young people, newly arrived migrants and refugees, on communities with distinct cultures, on employees in the workplace and on the wider community of Pacific Island states. My sole comment on that collection of groupings is that it leaves out that mass of New Zealand humanity – maybe 15% of the total population – who fail to vote and have very low levels of participation. They generally lack strong cultural identity, may find life a financial struggle, are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. Developing that theme a little further, there are highly accessible communities such as our prison inmate population who have – from my experience as a regular if short term and two-way visitor to prisons in my electorate role – low citizenship identity, high alienation and great if challenging potential.

Returning to those communities identified by the CCE, the new and more tangible education curriculum addresses at least some of the needs among young people. The Immigration Service have in recent years taken on significant settlement education responsibilities and, hand in hand with the Ethnic Affairs Ministry, are much closer to communities of refugees and migrants than Government has managed in the past. I have regularly delivered the civics element of such programmes in Christchurch, and am impressed by the energy of those being educated and the close integration with complementary social and community development opportunities. Maori are implicitly if not explicitly identified in the CCEs approach. The concept of "citizenship" is, I would suggest, a little different to peoples with an iwi identity of ever increasing clarity and relevance. One of my most fascinating task as Justice Select Committee Chair was helping to mould the legislation creating a link between electoral roll registration and iwi affiliation, a vital element if Treaty settlements are to be sustainable and democratically valid. There is much work yet to do in this area as a distinctive New Zealand approach to citizenship education is defined.

Local Government should be particularly commended for a growing focus on this area. Youth Councils usually have a close relationship with their local democracy. I know from having chaired two reviews of local body elections that the significantly low turnout in local body elections – 50% rather than the 75% average for General Elections – does create concern about democratic accountability. In the UK this lack of local democratic intervention – even deciding on bodies delivering a much greater range of services than here in New Zealand – has led to chronic concerns and great inventive energy in how to encourage voting.

I could if time allowed talk about overseas developments in citizenship education. Suffice it to say that many countries which we like to compare ourselves to have created Commissions of Inquiry, or the equivalent, to focus on this area. In general they have more tangible and integrated programmes to report.

In conclusion, there is clearly an energetic level of activity in New Zealand around the very broad definition of citizenship education. Politicians are keen on the idea, but I suspect we are often talking about the narrower concept of civics education and are driven by very personal and understandable fears that low turnouts create volatility and unexpected electoral results, which do not always help incumbents. Going back to the broader picture, the new education curriculum focus is obviously helpful. But unless existing resources are better identified and more coherently organised, I fear that the concept of citizenship education will remain in the vague category. And to reach the level of focus in the United States – about which we are shortly to learn more – will, I submit, require some tough decisions on the tangible areas of national identity. Four tangible examples are a distinctively New Zealand flag, a domestic system to choose a head of state, working through the implications of the Treaty in terms of our national institutions, and the creation of a written constitution. And those are questions which I emphatically don't intend to explore further today!

My conclusion? That significant work remains to be done in the areas of resources, opportunities, coordination, the Maori viewpoint, and structures to guard and develop this thinking in the New Zealand context.

Enjoy this special opportunity to focus on matters which are world-spanning and also very personal.

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