Learning Democracy in School and Society

Education, Lifelong Learning, and the Politics of Citizenship

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This book explores the relationships between education, lifelong learning and democratic citizenship. It emphasises the importance of the democratic quality of the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people and adults for their ongoing formation as democratic citizens. The book combines theoretical and historical work with critical analysis of policies and wider developments in the field of citizenship education and civic learning. The book urges educators, educationalists, policy makers and politicians to move beyond an exclusive focus on the teaching of citizenship towards an outlook that acknowledges the ongoing processes and practices of civic learning in school and society. This is not only important in order to understand the complexities of such learning. It can also help to formulate more realistic expectations about what schools and other educational institutions can contribute to the promotion of democratic citizenship. The book is particularly suited for students, researchers and policy makers who have an interest in citizenship education, civic learning and the relationships between education, lifelong learning and democratic citizenship. Gert Biesta (www.gertbiesta.com) is Professor of Education at the School of Education, University of Stirling, UK.
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The ideas presented in this book are based on work I have done over the past decade on the relationships between education, lifelong learning, citizenship and democracy. The book focuses mainly on theoretical and policy dimensions. Empirical research which has been informed by these ideas and which, in turn, has informed the development of these ideas has been published elsewhere. The chapters in this book are informed by work that has been published before, but have been thoroughly revised for the purpose of this publication. As with all writing, this book is the outcome of many conversations and discussions I have had with friends and colleagues around the world, and is also strongly informed by conference presentations, seminars and courses I have given on these topics and on the input from many of those who have attended them. I am very grateful for these interactions. I would particularly like to thank Robert Lawy, Claudia Ruitenberg, Tyson Lewis, Maarten Simons, Mark Priestley and Charles Bingham for providing me with opportunities for developing my ideas and for constructive feedback on my work. I have also benefited tremendously from visiting professorships at Örebro University and Mälardalen University, Sweden, and would like to thank Tomas Englund and Carl Anders Säfström for making this possible and for many fruitful conversations. I would also like to thank Peter de Liefde for his support and his willingness to publish this book.

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Prologue

Learning Democracy in School and Society

Policy makers and politicians often see education as a key instrument for the ‘production’ of good citizens. This can not only be seen in the fact that over the past decades much has been invested in the development and improvement of citizenship education in schools, colleges and universities. It is also that when something appears to be wrong with citizenship – when there is low voter turn-out, when opinion polls show a declining interest in politics, or when there is an increase in so-called anti-social behaviour – politicians often tend to point the finger at education, arguing that parents are failing to raise their children properly and that schools are not doing enough in teaching the citizens of the future. The problem with this way of thinking is that it puts too much emphasis on the teaching of citizenship and gives too little consideration to the ways in which citizenship is actually learned in and through the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people and adults.

While teaching definitely has a role to play, it is far from the only factor that matters in the ongoing formation of democratic citizens. The potential impact of citizenship teaching is always mediated by what children and young people experience in their everyday lives about democratic ways of acting and being and about their own position as citizens – and such everyday ‘lessons’ in citizenship are not necessarily always sending out positive messages. The responsibility for citizenship learning and, through this, for the quality of democratic life more generally, therefore cannot be confined to families, schools, colleges and universities, but has to be seen as a responsibility of society as a whole. This points the finger straight back at policy makers and politicians, as their decisions have a crucial impact on the conditions that shape the everyday lives of children, young people and adults and thus on the conditions under which citizenship is enacted and learned.

In this book I look at the relationships between education, lifelong learning and democratic citizenship from this wider angle, emphasising the importance of the democratic quality of the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people and adults for their ongoing formation as democratic citizens. I focus, in other words, on the ways in which democracy is learned in school and in society. In the seven chapters that follow I combine theoretical and historical work with critical analysis of policies and wider developments in the field of citizenship education and civic learning, in order to highlight the particular notions of citizenship and democracy that are being promoted and the particular expectations about learning and education that are being pursued. I do this across a number of different educational domains – including schools, higher education, adult education and
lifelong learning – and with regard to a number of different geographical locations, ranging from the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence and the English framework for citizenship education to European higher education policy and research, and national and international developments in the field of adult education and lifelong learning.

My overall ambition with this book is to urge educators, educationalists, policy makers and politicians to move beyond an exclusive focus on the teaching of citizenship towards an outlook that acknowledges the learning that goes on in school and society. This is not only important in order to understand the complexities of such learning, but can also help to formulate more precise and more realistic expectations about what schools and other educational institutions can actually achieve. It can also help to highlight the particular responsibilities of other parties in the promotion of democratic citizenship and the improvement of democratic life more generally.

The line of thinking I put forward through the chapters in this book responds to a number of trends in the field. Against the idea that citizenship is first and foremost a matter of individuals and their knowledge, skills, dispositions and individual responsibilities, I argue for the need to focus on individuals-in-interaction and individuals-in-context and on the crucial role that people’s ‘actual condition of citizenship’ plays in the ways in which they learn and enact their democratic citizenship. Against the trend to see the domain of citizenship first and foremost in social terms, that is, in terms of ‘good,’ socially adaptive and integrative behaviour, I argue for the need to keep the question of citizenship focused on democracy and democratic politics. This means that citizenship has first of all to do with questions of political engagement and collective decision making and with actions in the public sphere which focus on the translation of private issues into collective concerns. Citizenship thus involves more than only doing good work in the local community but requires an ongoing orientation towards the wider political values of justice, equality and freedom. Against the trend to connect citizenship first and foremost to communities of sameness, I highlight the importance of plurality and difference in understanding and enacting democratic citizenship. And against the trend to see the role of learning and education first and foremost in functional terms – focusing on how the existing socio-political order can be reproduced and how ‘newcomers’ can be included in this order – I highlight the importance of processes and practices that challenge the status quo in the name of democracy and democratisation.

The theoretical ‘device’ I employ throughout this book is the distinction between what I refer to as a socialisation conception of civic learning and citizenship education and a subjectification conception of civic learning and citizenship education. Whereas the first focuses on the role of learning and education in the reproduction of the existing socio-political order and thus on the adjustment of individuals to the existing order, the second has an orientation towards the promotion of political agency and democratic subjectivity, highlighting that democratic citizenship is not simply an existing identity that individuals just need to adopt, but is an ongoing process that is fundamentally open towards the future.

From this emerges a view of democracy as an ongoing collective experiment. Following Ranson (1998, p. 9) I refer to this experiment as the ‘learning democracy.’
I do this not only in order to highlight that a reflective engagement with the experiment of democracy requires that we learn from, in and through our engagement with it. I also use the phrase as a reminder of the democratic potential of the wider idea of the learning society and as a warning against the tendency to reduce the learning society to a ‘learning economy’ in which questions about learning are predominantly driven by economic imperatives. While I do wish to emphasise that learning can make an important contribution to democracy and democratisation, it is important not to forget that learning can only do so much. I say this because there is a growing tendency in contemporary politics to reformulate policy issues into learning problems and thus leave it to individuals and their learning to solve problems that actually should be solved at a collective level, through structural change and government action. The rise of a strictly economic interpretation of lifelong learning which demands from individuals that they keep upgrading their skills and qualifications in order to remain employable, is an example of the workings of a ‘politics of learning’ in which structural issues concerning the global labour market are entirely addressed in terms of individuals and their learning. This should serve as a reminder that the question of democracy and democratic citizenship cannot be solved through learning but also requires attention to structural and infrastructural aspects, including the resources for and material and social conditions of people’s citizenship.

The book is organised in the following way. In chapter 1 – *From Teaching Citizenship to Learning Democracy* – I set out my case for a shift in attention from the teaching of citizenship to the learning of democracy and to the conditions under which such learning takes place. I discuss the recent history of thinking about citizenship and citizenship education, focusing on developments in Britain. Against this background I identify some of the limitations in current thinking about citizenship education and argue for a more situated and contextualised approach. Chapter 2 – *Curriculum, Citizenship and Democracy* – focuses on the role of citizenship in the Scottish National Curriculum called ‘Curriculum for Excellence.’ I identify and characterise the main trends in the Scottish approach and discuss some of the problems with the idea of ‘responsible citizenship’ as articulated in curriculum documents and policies. In chapter 3 – *European Citizenship and Higher Education* – I turn to recent developments at the European level. I analyse the ideas about citizenship and democracy that are being promoted, particularly in relation to European higher education, and raise questions about the limitations of these ideas. Chapter 4 – *Knowledge, Democracy and Higher Education* – zooms in on the civic role of the University, particularly with regard to research and the production of knowledge. In chapter 5 – *Lifelong Learning in the Knowledge Economy* – I analyse recent developments in the field of adult education and lifelong learning in order to show how lifelong learning has become repositioned due to economic demands and considerations. I argue that there is a real danger that, as a result of this, an older connection with democracy will be lost. In chapter 6 – *Towards the Learning Democracy* – I pursue this in more positive terms through the discussion of the work of a number of authors who have explored the relationships between democracy, citizenship, adult education and the public sphere. It is in the context of this discussion that I introduce the idea of the ‘learning democracy.’ In chapter 7 – *Theorising Civic Learning: Socialisation,*
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Subjectification and the Ignorant Citizen – I bring the main theoretical threads of the discussion together in order to explore the question what a viable conception of civic learning might look like. I introduce the distinction between a socialisation conception of civic learning and a subjectification conception and make a case that citizenship education needs to be informed by a conception of civic learning and democratic subjectivity that moves beyond a socialisation agenda towards and approach that can truly foster democratic agency.
Over the past decades there has been a world-wide resurgence of interest in questions about education and democratic citizenship, both from the side of educators and educationalists and from the side of policy makers and politicians (for an overview see, for example, Osler & Starkey, 2006). In new and emerging democracies the focus has been on how education can contribute to the formation of democratic citizens and the promotion of a democratic culture, while in established democracies the focus has been on how to nurture and maintain interest in and engagement with democratic processes and practices. At stake in these discussions are not only technical questions about the proper shape and form of education for democratic citizenship but also more philosophical questions about the nature of democracy and the possible configurations of citizenship within democratic societies.

In discussions about the state of democracy two trends can be discerned (see McLaughlin, 2000). On the one hand there are worries about the level of political participation and political understanding, while on the other there are wider concerns about social cohesion and integration. In England the final report by the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools – known as the Crick Report after its chairman Bernard Crick – not only claimed that there were “worrying levels of apathy, ignorance and cynicism about public life” (Crick, 1998, p. 8) and that the current situation was “inexcusably and damagingly bad” (ibid., p. 16). The report also argued that this situation “could and should be remedied” (ibid., p. 16).

Within these discussions there are particular anxieties about the role and position of young people. The notion that young people have lower levels of political interest, knowledge and behaviour than adults has been well documented. While some argue that this is a normal phenomenon of the life cycle and that political interest increases with age, there is evidence which suggests a decline in political interest and engagement among young people compared to previous generations – at least, that is, with respect to official politics. In response to this some have argued that young people have a different and very distinct political agenda so that a decline in engagement with official politics does not necessarily imply disengagement with social and political issues more generally. Others maintain, however, that young people do not have a distinctive new political agenda of their own.

Although the evidence about levels of political interest and participation is inconclusive, young people, seen as “citizens in the making” (Marshall, 1950, p. 25), have become a principal target of government initiatives aimed at countering the
perceived trend of political and social alienation. Citizenship education has become
the cornerstone of these initiatives. In England citizenship education was incorporated
into the National Curriculum in 1988 as one of the five cross-curricular themes and
became a compulsory National Curriculum subject at secondary level for students at
Key Stages 3 and 4 (aged 11–16) in 2002. This was complemented by non-statutory
guidelines for citizenship education alongside Personal, Social and Health Education
(PSHE) at Key Stages 1 and 2 (aged 5–11). In Scotland “responsible citizenship” was
listed as one of the four capacities all education should aim to promote and develop
in the context of the new national Curriculum for Excellence, launched in 2004 and
implemented from 2010 onwards.

While I do not wish to downplay the significance of citizenship education – not
in the least because young people themselves have indicated a lack of knowledge
and understanding in this area (see, for example, White, Bruce & Ritchie, 2000) –
the inclusion of citizenship in the formal curriculum runs the risk of masking a
deeper problem concerning young people’s citizenship. The point I wish to make in
this chapter is that the teaching of citizenship represents at most a partial response
to an alleged ‘crisis’ in democracy. This is why I argue that there is a need to shift the
focus of research, policy and practice from the teaching of citizenship towards
the different ways in which young people ‘learn democracy’ through their participa-
tion in the contexts and practices that make up their everyday lives, in school, college
and university, and in society at large.

The shift from teaching citizenship to learning democracy makes it possible to
overcome the individualistic conception of citizenship that underpins much recent
thinking in the area of citizenship education. The focus on learning democracy makes
it possible to reveal the ways in which such learning is situated in the unfolding
lives of young people and how these lives, in turn, are implicated in wider cultural,
social, political and economic orders. It ultimately is this wider context which provides
opportunities for young people to be democratic citizens – that is to enact their
citizenship – and to learn from this. The shift from teaching citizenship to learning
democracy emphasises, in other words, that democratic citizenship should not be
understood as an attribute of the individual, but invariably has to do with individuals-
in-context and individuals-in-relationship. From a research point of view this means
that it is only by following young people as they participate in different formal and
non-formal practices and settings, and by listening to their voices, that their learning
can be adequately understood. This, in turn, makes it possible to acknowledge that
the educational responsibility for citizenship learning is not and cannot be confined
to schools and teachers but extends to society at large.

I begin this chapter with a reconstruction of the discussion about citizenship and
its development in Britain since the Second World War. This reconstruction reveals a
shift away from a more comprehensive conception of citizenship that was prominent
after the Second World War towards a much more individualistic approach from
the 1980s onwards. As a result of this shift, it has become increasingly difficult to
acknowledge the situatedness of citizenship. I argue that this trend is also evident in
recent developments in citizenship education, most notably in the premise that the
alleged crisis in democracy can be adequately addressed by (re)educating individuals.
I outline the problems associated with such an individualistic approach where the emphasis is on the individual per se rather than on the individual-in-context and in-relationship. Against this background I argue for an approach to citizenship education that takes its point of departure in the learning that takes place in the real lives of young people – in school and in society at large. In the concluding section I sketch the implications of this view for research and policy and for the practice of citizenship education.

CITIZENSHIP IN BRITAIN AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, T.H. Marshall in his essay “Citizenship and Social Class” (Marshall, 1950) delineated a view of citizenship which was to inform the social liberal consensus of the post-war period up to the 1970s. According to Roche (1992, pp. 16–17), Marshall’s theoretical framework represents the “dominant paradigm” in citizenship theory in Britain and has continued to represent the touchstone for discussions about citizenship. Mann (1987, p. 34) has even suggested that in relation to Britain Marshall’s view of citizenship is “essentially true.”

Marshall defined citizenship as “a status bestowed on all those who are full members of a community,” and argued that “(a)ll those who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (Marshall, 1950, pp. 28–29). Marshall took an historical approach which focused on the development of citizenship rights in modern societies. His main thesis was that modern citizenship includes three different kinds of rights: civil, political and social rights. Civil rights, that is the rights necessary for individual freedom, such as “liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice” (ibid., p. 74), developed largely in the eighteenth century. Political rights, including the right to vote and to stand for political office, followed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Social rights, which mainly developed in the twentieth century, include “the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (ibid., p. 74). According to Marshall each of these kinds of rights corresponds to a particular set of institutions. Civil rights are protected by the court system; political rights correspond to institutions of local government and parliament; while social rights are associated with the welfare state.

Although Marshall’s analysis can be read as a description of the development of citizenship rights in Britain, his main concern was with solving the problem of how citizenship and capitalism could be reconciled. The growth in wealth created by capitalism had created the conditions for increasing social rights. Yet, at the very same time these rights posed a threat to the capitalist system since they were collectivist by nature and required increased public expenditure and taxation. For this reason Marshall argued that “in the twentieth century citizenship and the capitalist class system [were] at war” (Marshall, 1950, p. 87). Marshall believed, however, that social rights, institutionalised within the framework of the welfare state, could
ultimately mitigate the worst excesses of the market. In line with the functional analysis he was advocating, he introduced the notion of the ‘hyphenated society’, the constellation of democratic-welfare-capitalism where “the parts are meaningless except in their relationship with one another” (Marshall, 1981, p. 128). Social rights thus rendered citizenship compatible with capitalism by ‘civilising’ the impact of the market. Fundamentally, he believed that the expansion of social rights would irrevocably ameliorate and cut across class differences and inequalities. Although there was conflict and controversy in the post-war period over the type of policies that were needed to achieve the expansion of citizenship, Marshall’s ideas secured “a continued commitment to social justice and social integration through the growth of social rights” (France, 1998, p. 98). Marshall held that with the post-war construction of the welfare state, the progress of citizenship as a rounded and meaningful status was complete.

Notwithstanding the importance of Marshall’s work for the understanding and advancement of citizenship in post-war Britain, his ideas have over the past decades been criticised for a number of reasons (for a detailed overview see Faulks, 1998, pp. 42–52). One of the issues Marshall did not explore, was the possibility that the state may work in the interest of one class or group of elites, rather than function as a neutral referee – an assumption which was “naïve even in the context of 1950s Britain” (ibid., p. 44). Faulks concludes, therefore, that although Marshall argued that citizenship requires a social dimension to make it meaningful for most individuals, ultimately the social rights he advocated are “paternalistic and dependent upon the condition of the market economy” (ibid., p. 51). Marshall did not see, in other words, “that meaningful citizenship demands active participation by citizens who possess the necessary resources to facilitate participation” (ibid., p. 51). By failing to transcend the agency-based approach to citizenship, Marshall did not consider “the structural constraints which the market and coercive state place upon the distribution of the resources necessary for citizenship” (ibid., p. 51).

FROM THE WELFARE STATE TO NEO-LIBERALISM

It was, however, not the theoretical weakness of Marshall’s arguments that led to a decline in the impact of his thinking. Much more importantly, his optimistic belief in the welfare state as the impartial guarantor of social justice was overtaken by actual transformations in the industrialised world, such as the decline in autonomy of the nation state and the globalisation of production and consumption, and by related social and cultural changes. These developments have radically altered the way in which citizenship is comprehended by individuals and groups in both privileged and marginalised positions.

In Britain, the challenge to the post-war consensus primarily came from the ‘New Right’ from the mid-1970s onwards. It followed a sustained period of economic and political unrest and was championed by Margaret Thatcher who insisted that a culture of ‘welfare dependency’ had become endemic in society. Here Thatcher was intuitively following neo-liberal thinkers such as Frederick Hayek, in arguing that social rights and welfare state provision more generally undermine rather than support
individual freedom because they weaken personal responsibility and civic virtue. For neo-liberalism “the only way to engender good citizenship is to see as its basis the individual freely choosing to act in a responsible way” (Faulks, 1998, p. 68). This helps to explain why Thatcher sought to counter and reverse the development of social citizenship by returning to the traditional liberal idea of free markets and limited government. She did so, however, within a neo-liberal rather than a classical liberal framework. The difference between the two ideologies is very well captured by Olssen.

Whereas classical liberalism represents a negative conception of state power in that the individual was to be taken as an object to be freed from the interventions of the state, neoliberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state’s role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. In classical liberalism, the individual is characterized as having an autonomous human nature and can practice freedom. In neoliberalism the state seeks to create an individual who is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur. (Olssen, 1996, p. 340)

The idea of ‘limited government’ does not mean weak government. The state has to be strong to police and safeguard the market order. Gilmour summarises the apparently contradictory logic of Thatcherite ‘authoritarian liberalism’ as follows.

There was no paradox in rhetoric about ‘liberty’ and the rolling back of the state being combined in practice with centralisation and the expansion of the state’s frontiers. The establishment of individualism and a free-market state is an unbending if not dictatorial venture which demands the prevention of collective action and the submission of dissenting institutions and individuals. (Gilmour, 1992, p. 223)

Although the explicit individualistic rhetoric with its “valorization of the individual entrepreneur” (Hall et al., 2000, p. 464) was softened under John Major in the early 1990s, the emphasis on personal responsibility and individual choice was retained. In important areas such as civil service and government reform, the Thatcherite agenda was in fact speeded up under Major.

FROM SOCIAL RIGHTS TO MARKET RIGHTS: THE ACTIVE CITIZEN

The foregoing makes clear that one of the most central aspects of the Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major was the redefinition of the relationship between individuals and the state and hence the redefinition of the very idea of citizenship. Faulks (1998, p. 124) describes the redefinition of citizenship as a shift from social rights to ‘market rights,’ which comprise “the freedom to choose, the freedom to own property and have property protected, the freedom to spend money as one sees fit, and the right to be unequal.” At the centre of this vision stands the active citizen, a ‘dynamic individual’ who is self-reliant and takes responsibility for his or her own actions, rather than depending upon government intervention and support, and yet possesses ‘a sense of civic virtue and pride in both country and local community’
This particular form of active citizenship comprised “a mixture of self-help and voluntarism whereby competition and rigour of market relations would supposedly be ‘civilised’ by concern for one’s community and country” (ibid., p. 128). Although it was underpinned by a perceived need for shared values and reciprocal obligations and loyalties, active citizenship was in effect more concerned with the individual as an autonomous chooser and individual economic consumer in the market place, than with the promotion of community values. Thatcherism, with its individualistic emphasis, only succeeded in increasing social division, rather than creating the basis for community spirit to emerge.

By focusing on the need for individuals to take responsibility for their own actions, the call for active citizenship was based on a particular diagnosis of society’s ills, in that it was assumed that what was lacking in society were active and committed individuals. The explanation for society’s problems was thus couched in individualistic, psychological and moralistic terms – the result of a lack of individual responsibility, rather than an outcome of more structural causes such as under-funding of welfare state provisions or the loss of political control resulting from privatisation of public services. In this way active citizenship followed the strategy of blaming individuals rather than paying attention to and focusing on the structures that provide the context in which individuals act. Ironically, therefore, active citizenship exemplified a de-politicisation and privatisation of the very idea of citizenship.

CITIZENSHIP AND CAPITALISM

Many analysts see the emergence of the New Right as a radical break with the past, particularly with the social liberal consensus that existed in the first decades after the Second World War. They mainly hold Thatcher responsible for the breakdown of the welfare state and the erosion of social rights. While it is clear that Thatcher had a huge impact on British society – even though she claimed that ‘such a thing’ did not exist – and while it is also clear that successive Conservative governments had been highly effective in reshaping the political agenda, the demise of the welfare state cannot be exclusively accounted for by a change in political ideology and rhetoric forged by Conservative governments. Faulks suggests that the development of the post-war consensus that gave rise to increased and improved welfare provision and expanded social rights should not simply be understood as a victory of the working class over the ruling class. The development of social rights was also the product of the needs of the ruling class to maintain modern production. The expansion of social citizenship was, in other words, due “to the mutual benefits it secured for capital and labour” (Faulks, 1998, p. 108).

From this point of view, it is hardly surprising that social rights came under pressure when the needs of capitalism changed in the 1970s as a result of the increasing globalisation of production. The relatively brief period of managed capitalism in which production and consumption were mainly confined to the borders of the nation state gave way to a much more anarchic form of global capitalism in which governments were under pressure to offer suitable conditions to global capital in order to remain a player in the global economy. Unlike Marshall’s expectations, this created
a situation in which the ‘war’ between citizenship and capitalism returned. Social citizenship, as it had developed in the post-war era, was increasingly seen as an impediment to Britain’s competitiveness in the world economy. Viewed from this perspective the Thatcherite agenda of the 1980s can be understood as “an attempt to adjust to the new realities of capitalism by reducing impediments to capitalist investment, such as trade union and social rights, and opening up Britain’s economy to increasing globalisation” (Faulks, 1998, p. 121). The neo-liberal ideology of individualism, choice and market rights suited this situation much better than the old ideology of collectivism, solidarity and social rights.

When Labour came to power in May 1997 there were high hopes for a radical change, including the expectation that the welfare state would be rebuilt. These expectations, which were fuelled by the Labour Party itself, have, however, not fully materialised. With respect to citizenship, Labour mainly sought to ameliorate the New Right position by using communitarian ideas to emphasise the importance of social values and social responsibilities. But in key areas such as education and health care – the main pillars of the welfare state – Labour has simply continued with the rhetoric and practice of choice, delivery and accountability, thereby positioning citizens as consumers of ‘high quality’ social services, rather than as those who participate in democratic decision making about the fair distribution of collective resources (see Biesta, 2004[a]; 2010[a]). In this respect the Labour government continued the individualistic neo-liberal line of thinking that was a prominent feature of preceding Conservative governments.

THE IDEA OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The foregoing discussion of the development of citizenship in post-war Britain not only provides the factual background for my discussion of the idea of citizenship education. It also serves as a framework for understanding and evaluating recent developments in this field. What it allows me to show is that developments in citizenship education have stayed quite close to the individualistic conception of citizenship that emerged in Britain in the 1980s. Since this is only one of the ways in which the ‘problem of citizenship’ can be understood, it becomes possible to argue – as I will do below – that the idea of citizenship education as a process of making young people ‘ready’ for democracy, is only one of the ways in which democratic learning can be promoted and organised, and not necessarily the best way.

Although citizenship education is not a recent invention (see, for example, Batho, 1990), there can be no doubt that in the English context a major impetus for recent initiatives has come from Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools. The brief of this group, set up by the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, was “(t)o provide advice on effective education for citizenship in schools – to include the nature and practices of participation in democracy; the duties, responsibilities and rights on individuals as citizens, and the value to individuals and society of community activity” (Crick, 1998, p. 4). The group was also expected to produce “a statement of the aims and purposes of citizenship education in schools” and “a broad framework
for what good citizenship in schools might look like, and how it can be successfully delivered’ (ibid., p. 4).

The Advisory Group, which consisted of representatives from a very broad political spectrum, argued that effective education for citizenship should consist of three strands. Firstly, social and moral responsibility: “children learning from the very beginning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other” (Crick, 1998, p. 11; emphasis in original). Secondly, community involvement: “learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community” (ibid., p. 12; emphasis in original). Thirdly, political literacy: “pupils learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values” (ibid., p. 13; emphasis in original). Along all three lines the Advisory Group emphasised that citizenship education “is not just knowledge of citizenship and civic society; it also implies developing values, skills and understanding” (ibid., p. 13).

According to Kerr (1999, p. 79), the Advisory Group placed “considerable stress on the outcomes of effective citizenship education ... namely active and responsible participation.” What eventually ended up in the Citizenship Order (the official guidelines for the teaching of citizenship), was considerably different to the recommendations of the Advisory Group. This particularly weakened “the holistic impact of the Citizenship Advisory Group’s final report” (ibid., p. 79).

The following three attainment targets for Key Stages 3 and 4 were specified: (1) Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens; (2) Developing skills of inquiry and approach; (3) Developing skills of participation and responsible action (see ibid., p. 83).

THREE PROBLEMS WITH THE IDEA OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The framework for citizenship education in England has been criticised from a wide range of different angles (see, for example, Beck, 1998; Garratt, 2000; for a ‘temperate’ reply see Crick, 2000; see also Crick, 2007). My concern here is not with the specific content and shape of the proposals and practices but with the more general idea of citizenship education, that is, with the idea that an alleged crisis in democracy can be adequately addressed by (re)educating individuals, by making them ‘ready’ for democratic citizenship through education. I basically see three problems with this line of thinking.

The first problem with the idea of citizenship education is that it is largely aimed at individual young people. The assumption is that they, as individuals, lack the proper knowledge and skills, the right values, and the correct dispositions to be the citizens that they should be. This not only individualises the problem of young people’s citizenship – and in doing so follows the neo-liberal line of thinking in which individuals are blamed for their social malfunctioning. It also individualises citizenship itself, most notably through the suggestion that good citizenship will follow from individuals’ acquisition of a proper set of knowledge, skills, values
and dispositions. One could, of course, argue that citizenship education can only ever be a necessary, but never a sufficient condition for the realisation of good citizenship. This is, for example, acknowledged in the Crick Report, where it is emphasised that “(s)chools can only do so much” and that we “must not ask too little of teachers, but equally we must not ask too much” (Crick, 1998, p. 9). Yet the underlying idea is that schools “could do more” and, more importantly, that they “must be helped” (ibid., p. 9). The latter point suggests that even when the wider context is taken into consideration, it is first and foremost in order to support the effective ‘production’ of the good citizen.

The second problem I wish to highlight, concerns the assumption that citizenship can be understood as the outcome of an educational trajectory. The idea of citizenship-as-outcome reveals a strong instrumental orientation in the idea of citizenship education. The focus is mainly on the effective means to bring about ‘good citizenship’ rather on the question what ‘good citizenship’ actually is or might be. The instrumental orientation clearly comes to the fore in Crick’s contention that “(t)he aim of the new subject is to create active and responsible citizens” (Crick, 2000, p. 67; emphasis added). Indeed, the overriding concern has been about how to best engender a particular species of citizenship amongst young people. It has been to find the ‘best’ and most ‘appropriate’ methods and approaches of teaching citizenship to young people – of achieving what is regarded to be a common goal that they can aspire to. I therefore agree with Hall et al. (2000, p. 464), that the “contemporary political and policy discussion is for the most part much less concerned to critically interrogate the concept of active citizenship, than it is to debate how such a thing might be achieved.” I wish to suggest that a continuous interrogation of the possible meanings of citizenship, a continuous “public dialogue about rival value positions” (Martin & Vincent, 1999, p. 236) should not only be at the very centre of democratic life, but also at the very centre of citizenship education.

The idea of citizenship as outcome is also problematic because it is fabricated on the assumption that citizenship is a status that is only achieved after one has successfully traversed a specified trajectory. I suggest that citizenship is not so much a status, something which can be achieved and maintained, but that it should primarily be understood as something that people continuously do: citizenship as practice (see Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Citizenship is, in other words, not an identity that someone can ‘have,’ but first and foremost a practice of identification, more specifically a practice of identification with public issues, that is, with issues that are of a common concern. This implies that a culture of participation should be a central and essential element of democratic citizenship.

As long as citizenship is conceived as outcome, it places young people in the problematic position of not-yet-being-a-citizen. Indeed, as France has argued, citizenship “is generally understood as an adult experience” and, as a result, being young is only seen as “a transitional stage between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’” (France, 1998, p. 99). Such an approach, set alongside my concerns about citizenship as outcome, fails to recognise that young people always already participate in social life; that their lives are implicated in the wider social, economic, cultural and political world; and they are not isolated from these processes. In effect, being a citizen
involves much more than the simple acquisition of certain fixed core values and dispositions. It is participative and as such it is itself an inherently educative process as it has to do with the transformation of the ways in which young people relate to, understand and express their place and role in society.

This is precisely the point where the question of learning arises – which brings me to the third and final problem with the idea of citizenship education. One obvious problem with any educational strategy, including the teaching of citizenship, is that there is no guarantee that what young people learn is identical to what is being taught. Proponents of the idea of ‘effective’ education may want us to believe that it is only a matter of time before research provides us with evidence about the teaching strategies that will guarantee ‘success.’ Yet apart from the question what counts as ‘success’ and who has the right to define it, they seem to forget that what students learn from what they are being taught crucially depends on the ways they interpret and make sense of the teaching, something they do on the basis of a wide and diverge range of experiences (see Biesta, 1994; Bloomer, 1997). Education is a process of communication, which relies upon the active acts of meaning making of students and it is this unpredictable factor which makes education possible in the first place (see Vanderstraeten & Biesta, 2001; Biesta, 2004[b]). Moreover, young people learn at least as much about democracy and citizenship from their participation in the range of different practices that make up their lives, as they learn from that which is officially prescribed and formally taught. Even where a school includes exceptional internal democratic arrangements – such as a school council or other ways in which young people are enabled to participate meaningfully in the collective decision making about their educational experience – this still only represents a small proportion of the environment in and from which young people learn. They learn as much, and most possibly even more, from their participation in the family or leisure activities, from interaction with their peers, from the media, from advertising and from their role as consumers – and they often learn different and even contradictory things (see also Biesta, Lawy & Kelly, 2009).

All this suggests that the learning of democratic citizenship is situated within the lives of young people. The way in which young people make sense of their experiences – including their experience of citizenship education – depends crucially upon their own perspectives which are, in turn, shaped by the outcomes of previous learning and meaning-making (see Dewey, 1938[a]). But young people’s perspectives – and hence their learning and action in the area of democratic citizenship – are also influenced by the wider cultural, social, political and economic order that impacts upon their lives. It is at this point that the individualistic approach to citizenship education and the individualistic understanding of citizenship itself reveals one of its main shortcomings as it tends to forget – or at least downplays the significance of – the situations in which young people live and act. As France (1998) has argued, it is not enough to expect or to enforce young people to become active citizens.

As a society we have to recognise that young people need a stake in the society or community in which they live. During the last 15 years this has been reduced by the erosion of social rights and the expression of social power by certain
adults. This has led to fewer opportunities in both the community and employ-
ment for young people to move into the adult world. It is important therefore
to recognise that without these opportunities many young people will not feel
any desire to undertake social responsibility either to their local or national
community. (France, 1998, pp. 109–110)

I agree with France that the ‘problem’ of citizenship is misunderstood if it is con-
ceived as an abstract unwillingness of young people to become active in social and
political life. The problem always has to be constructed as one of young-people-in-
context, which means that it is as much about the young people as it is about the
context in which they live and learn. It is, in other words, the actual condition of
young people’s citizenship which has a crucial – and perhaps even decisive – impact
upon the ways in which young people can be citizens and upon the ways in which
they learn democratic citizenship.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM TEACHING CITIZENSHIP TO LEARNING DEMOCRACY

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the evolution of the theory and practice
of citizenship in post-war Britain. Against this background I have discussed recent
initiatives in citizenship education in England, focusing on the general thrust of the
idea of citizenship education. Although I do not wish to argue against citizenship
education – schools can make a difference – I have suggested that the prevailing
approach to the teaching of citizenship is problematic for two related reasons. On
the one hand this has to do with the fact that the ‘problem’ of citizenship is mainly
understood as a problem of individuals and their behaviour. On the other hand it is
because the response to the ‘problem’ of citizenship so conceived focuses mainly
on individuals and their knowledge, skills and dispositions. I have argued that the
problem of citizenship is not about young people as individuals but about young
people-in-context which is why citizenship education should not only focus on
young people as isolated individuals but on young people-in-relationship and on the
social, economic, cultural and political conditions of their lives. This suggests a
different direction not only for citizenship education itself, but also for research
and policy. My case for a shift from teaching citizenship to learning democracy is
meant as a marker of such a change in direction.

One of the main implications for research lies in the need to focus on the ways
in which young people actually learn democracy. It requires research which aims to
understand the various ways in which young people can actually be democratic
citizens and learn from this. It asks, in other words, for a contextualised understanding
of the ways in which young people learn democracy, one which gives a central role
to their actual ‘condition of citizenship’. It is only by following young people as
they move in and out of different contexts, practices and institutions and by trying
to understand what they learn from their participation, or non-participation, in these
contexts, that we can actually begin to understand what is going in the lives of young
citizens in Britain today (for an example of such an approach see Biesta, Lawy &
Kelly, 2009).
The shift from teaching citizenship to learning democracy also has implications for policy makers and politicians. If policy makers and politicians are really concerned about young people’s democratic citizenship, they should pay attention to and, even more importantly, invest in the actual conditions under which young people can be citizens and can learn what it means to be a citizen. What I have in mind, here, is not only investment in economic terms, although the resources that make real and meaningful participation of all citizens, including young citizens, possible, are of crucial importance for the ways in which young people can learn democracy. Policy makers and politicians also need to invest in a different way, in that they need to think very carefully about the impact of their policies and strategies on young people’s perceptions of democracy and citizenship. What, for example, do young people learn from the fact that the government’s interest in education only seems to be about test-scores and performance in a small number of academic subjects? What do young people learn from the fact that the government supports an educational system where those with money have a much better chance of success in life? And how does the experience of unemployment, poverty and bad housing impact upon young people living under these conditions? There are powerful ‘lessons in citizenship’ to be learned in everyday life which means that the educational responsibility cannot and does not stop at the point where an effective system of citizenship teaching is in place. The educational responsibility extends to the very conditions of young people’s citizenship, because these conditions define the context in which they will learn what it means to be a democratic citizen.

Finally, the shift from teaching citizenship to learning democracy also has important implications for citizenship education itself. One implication is that questions about the definition of citizenship should not be kept outside of citizenship education, but should be part and parcel of what citizenship education is about. What constitutes ‘good citizenship’ is not something that can be defined by politicians and educationalists and then simply set as an aim for young people to achieve. This does not mean that citizenship education should only be about the exploration of the possible meanings of citizenship. If learning democracy is situated in the lives of young people, then citizenship education should also facilitate a critical examination of the actual conditions of young people’s citizenship, even if it leads them to the conclusion that their own citizenship is limited and restricted. Such an approach would provide the basis for a much deeper understanding of and engagement with democratic citizenship than what lessons in citizenship might be able to achieve.
Curriculum, Citizenship and Democracy

In the previous chapter I have highlighted that recent thinking about the relationships between education, democracy and citizenship is strongly individualistic in outlook. This is not only reflected in the way in which politicians and policy makers tend to see the problem of citizenship as being first and foremost a problem of individuals and their attitudes and behaviours. It is also visible in educational initiatives that focus on the transformation of children and young people into good and contributing citizens. I have indicated several shortcomings of this way of thinking, both with regard to the conception of democratic citizenship that underlies this approach – a conception which I have characterised as ‘citizenship-as-status’ – and with regard to the views of education that are at stake – which are captured in the idea of ‘citizenship-as-outcome.’ Against this background I have argued for a shift in research, policy and practice from the teaching of citizenship to the many ways in which children and young people learn democracy through their engagement in the practices and processes that make up their everyday lives. This view is informed by the idea of ‘citizenship-as-practice’ and emphasises the crucial role of the actual condition of young people’s citizenship for their formation as democratic citizens. While the teaching of citizenship may have a role to play in young people’s democratic learning, this learning is always mediated by what children and young people experience in their everyday lives about democratic ways of acting and being and about their own position as citizens – experiences that are not always necessarily positive.

In this chapter I wish to continue the analysis of the theory and practice of citizenship education by looking in more detail at recent developments in Scotland. While much attention has been paid to the introduction of citizenship in the English National Curriculum, far less is known about Scotland. The main reason for focusing on the Scottish case is because, unlike in England where citizenship has become an additional curriculum subject, the new Scottish National Curriculum has citizenship as one of the four capacities that are supposed to permeate all educational activity for children and young people of all ages. The approach to citizenship in the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence is therefore less about teaching and more about experiences that are relevant for the formation of democratic citizenship. While this has the potential to bring educational practice closer to the ways in which children and young people learn democracy, much depends on the views on citizenship and democracy that inform the Scottish curriculum. In this chapter I therefore provide a critical analysis of the views of citizenship and democracy that can be found in the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence, not only in order to highlight the choices that
have been made but also to show some of the limitations of the more integrated or embedded approach taken in Scotland.

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence lists ‘responsible citizenship’ as one of the four capacities which it envisages that all children and young people should develop. “Our aspiration,” as it was put in the foreword by the then Minister and Deputy Minister for Education and Young People to the 2004 Curriculum for Excellence document, “is to enable all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society” (SE, 2004, p. 3). Curriculum for Excellence provides the overall framework for this ambition by enlisting the values, outlining the purposes and articulating the principles for curriculum design that should inform all education from the age of 3 to the age of 18. In the document responsible citizens are depicted as individuals who have “respect for others” and a “commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life” and who are able to “develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it; understand different beliefs and cultures; make informed choices and decisions; evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues; [and] develop informed, ethical views of complex issues” (ibid., p. 12).

Scotland has not been unique in its attempt to put citizenship on the educational agenda although compared to other countries it can actually be said to be rather late in doing this (see Andrews & Mycock, 2007). There are, however, aspects of the Scottish trajectory and approach which are distinctive – particularly the fact that Scotland has not chosen to make citizenship education into a separate curriculum subject and the fact that Curriculum for Excellence depicts citizenship as a ‘capacity’ – and these warrant further exploration. This can not only help to better understand the specific character of the approach taken within Scottish education for citizenship but can also shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of this particular approach. The main purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to analyse and characterise the conception of citizenship education articulated in the context of Curriculum for Excellence and to locate this conception within the wider literature on education, citizenship, and democracy. This will make it possible to investigate the assumptions informing the Scottish approach and to highlight the choices made. The view on citizenship pursued in the context of Curriculum for Excellence is, after all, not neutral or inevitable – it is not something that ‘just is’ (Ross & Munn, 2008, p. 270) – but rather represents a particular position within the available spectrum of conceptions of democratic citizenship and citizenship education.

EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP IN SCOTLAND

Although there has always been attention for the role of education in the development of citizenship – the Modern Studies curriculum from 1962, for example, encompassed current affairs and the development of political literacy (see Andrews & Mycock, 2007, p. 74) – the field received a new impetus as a result of the establishment
of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Early on the Scottish Executive announced five National Priorities for schools in Scotland. Priority number 4 focused on values and citizenship and “echoed developments in England” but “with a distinctively Scottish interpretation, not least the emphasis on education for citizenship, rather than citizenship education” (Blee and McClosky, 2003, p. 3; see also Mannion, 2003 on the distinction between education for and education as citizenship). In 1999 the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (now: Learning and Teaching Scotland) set up a working group to focus on education for citizenship. The group produced a discussion and consultation paper in 2000 (LTS, 2000) and a more detailed paper “for discussion and development” in 2002 (LTS, 2002). The then Minister for Education and Young People endorsed the latter paper “as the basis for a national framework for education for citizenship from 3 to 18” (LTS, 2002, p. 2) and commended it “for adoption and use in ways appropriate to local needs and circumstances” (ibid.). In 2003 HM Inspectorate for Education published a follow-up document intended to assist schools in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of their provision for education for citizenship (HMIE, 2003).

In 2004 the Scottish Executive published A Curriculum for Excellence (SE, 2004) which, as mentioned, presented the capacity for responsible citizenship as one of the four purposes of the curriculum from 3–18 (SE, 2004, p. 12). In 2006 HM Inspectorate for Education published a “portrait” of current practice in education for citizenship in Scottish schools and pre-school centres (HMIE, 2006a), followed by a similar report on provision in Scotland’s colleges (HMIE, 2006b).

I consider Learning and Teaching Scotland’s 2002 paper Education for Citizenship in Scotland: A paper for discussion and development the most central publication of this list, not only because it is the most detailed in its account of what citizenship is and how education can contribute to the development of the capacity for citizenship, but also because it became the official framework for further developments in the field, and clearly influenced the positioning of citizenship within Curriculum for Excellence. The contributions of HMIE are, however, also important, most notably because of the fact that education for citizenship in Scotland is driven by rather broad outcomes and not by specified input. As a result the Inspectorate is likely to have a much stronger influence on educational practice as it needs to judge the quality of many different operationalisations of the outcomes, than in those cases where its main task consists of checking the implementation of a pre-specified curriculum. This, in turn, highlights the importance of the particular interpretation of HMIE of the framing documents. The Curriculum for Excellence document occupies a middle position in all this. It is less detailed on citizenship than the 2002 Education for Citizenship paper because it had to cover all purposes and outcomes of education. Its specific interpretation of earlier documents is, nonetheless, significant because of its role as a framework for Scottish education from 3 to 18. What, then, is the particular view on citizenship and education for citizenship in the 2002 Education for Citizenship document, and how has this been taken up and further developed in Curriculum for Excellence and HMIE reports and activities?

The foreword to the Education for Citizenship document summarises the central idea of the paper as “that young people should be enabled to develop capability for
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thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life” (LTS, 2002, p. 3). This is said to depend on the development of four aspects: “knowledge and understanding, skills and competence, values and dispositions and creativity and enterprise” (ibid.). This, in turn, is related to two ‘core themes.’ The first is the idea that “young people learn most about citizenship by being active citizens” (ibid.). This requires that schools should model the kind of society in which active citizenship is encouraged “by providing all young people with opportunities to take responsibility and exercise choice” (ibid.). The second is that the development of capability for citizenship “should be fostered in ways that motivate young people to be active and responsible members of their communities – local, national and global” (ibid.).

These sentences reveal in a nutshell what I see as the four defining characteristics of the Scottish approach to education for citizenship. The first is that there is a strong individualistic tendency in the approach, exemplified in the fact that citizenship is depicted as a capacity or capability, based upon a particular set of knowledge, skills and dispositions and understood in terms of individual responsibility and choice. The second is that the approach is based on a broad conception of the domain of citizenship which encompasses political, economic, social and cultural life. The third is the emphasis on activity, both with regard to the exercise of citizenship as active citizenship and with regard to the ways in which citizenship can be learned, viz., through engagement in citizenship activity. The fourth is a strong emphasis on the (idea of) community as the relevant environment or setting for the exercise and development of citizenship. I will discuss the first two characteristics in some detail and will then make more brief comments about the other two.

INDIVIDUALISM

The individualistic take on citizenship and citizenship education is clearly exemplified in the 2002 Education for Citizenship document. It opens by saying that “(s)chools and other educational establishments have a central part to play in educating young people for life as active and responsible members of their communities” (LTS, 2002, p. 6), thus reiterating the idea that citizenship resides first and foremost in a personal responsibility. The document depicts citizenship responsibility as the corollary of citizenship rights. Citizenship involves “enjoying rights and exercising responsibilities” and these “are reciprocal in many respects” (ibid., p. 8). The document emphasises that young people should be regarded “as citizens of today rather than citizens in waiting,” an idea which is linked to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that children “are born with rights” (ibid.). The individualistic tendency is also clearly exemplified in the overall goal of citizenship education which “should aim to develop capability for thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life,” a capability which is considered to be rooted in “knowledge and understanding, in a range of generic skills and competences, including ‘core skills’, and in a variety of personal qualities and dispositions” (ibid., p. 11; emphasis in original). The document seems to hint at a distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions for citizenship, arguing, for example,
that “being a capable citizen” is not just about possessing knowledge and skills but also about “being able and willing to use knowledge and skills to make decisions and, where appropriate, take action” (ibid., p. 11). Similarly, “effective citizenship” is not just about having the capacity and dispositions to be active, but it is also about “being able to take action and make things happen” (ibid.). Capability for citizenship is therefore said to depend on a number of literacies: social, economic and cultural and also political (see ibid.). In doing so it pursues a common way of thinking about the possibilities of education for citizenship, namely one in which it is argued that education can work on (some of) the necessary conditions for citizenship, but, on its own, will never be sufficient for the development of effective and involved citizenship. This is why “the contributions of formal education need to be seen alongside, and in interaction with, other influences” from, for example, “parents, carers and the media and opportunities for community-based learning” (ibid., pp. 9–10).

The 2002 Education for Citizenship document analyses the capability for citizenship in terms of four related outcomes which are all seen as aspects or attributes of individuals.

Knowledge and understanding is concerned with “the need to base opinions, views and decisions on relevant knowledge and on a critical evaluation and balanced interpretation of evidence” (ibid., p. 12). Knowledgeable citizens are aware “of the complexities of the economic, ethical and social issues and dilemmas that confront people” and “have some knowledge of political, social, economic and cultural ideas and phenomena” (ibid., p. 12).

Education for citizenship involves developing a range of skills and competencies “that need to be developed along with various personal qualities such as self-esteem, confidence, initiative, determination and emotional maturity in order to be responsible and effective participants in a community” (ibid., p. 13). Being skilled and competent means “feeling empowered [and] knowing and valuing one’s potential for positive action” (ibid.).

Values and dispositions: Education for citizenship also involves “developing the ability to recognise and respond thoughtfully to values and value judgements that are part and parcel of political, economic, social and cultural life” (ibid., p. 13). Also, education can help to foster “a number of personal qualities and dispositions rooted in values of respect and care for self, for others and for the environment” and promoting “a sense of social responsibility” (ibid., p. 13).

Being an ‘effective citizen’ is also supposed to entail the capacity for “thinking and acting creatively in political, economic, social and cultural life” and “being enterprising in one’s approach to participation in society” (ibid., p. 14).

Finally, the document mentions the need for the development of “the integrative ability that is at the heart of effective and purposeful citizenship” (ibid., p. 14) so as to make sure that the four outcomes are not developed in isolation.

While all this points towards a strong emphasis on individuals and on citizenship as an individual responsibility and capacity – something which is further exemplified by the strong emphasis on the development of values such as “respect and care for people and a sense of social and environmental responsibility” (ibid., p. 11) – there are some other aspects of the 2002 Education for Citizenship document which
point in a different direction. Most significant in this regard is a passage in which it is acknowledged that “(w)hilst all individuals share the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, regardless of status, knowledge or skill, it is clear that citizenship may be exercised with different degrees of effectiveness” (ibid., p. 9). This variety is attributed both to personal and to social circumstances. Here, the document refers, for example, to homelessness as a factor which may impede (young) people from exercising their citizenship rights, just as “poverty and other forms of disadvantage” may impact on the capacity for effective citizenship. The document therefore concludes that it is in the interest both of individuals and of society as a whole “that rights and responsibilities of citizenship are well understood, that young people develop the capability needed to function effectively as citizens in modern society” and “that structures are provided to enable them to do so” (ibid.; my emphasis). Within the 2002 Education for Citizenship document this is, however, one of the few places where the possibility of a structural dimension of citizenship – and by implication a responsibility for citizenship that does not lie with the individual but rather with the state – is being considered. The general thrust of the document, however, is on the individual and his or her actions and responsibilities.

This line of thinking is continued in the Curriculum for Excellence document where ‘responsible citizenship’ figures as one of the four capacities which the curriculum from 3–18 should enable all children and young people to develop (SE, 2004, p. 12). Curriculum for Excellence is explicit and upfront about the values which should inform education. It reminds its readers of the fact that the words “wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity ... are inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament” and that these “have helped to define values for our democracy” (ibid., p. 11). Hence it is seen as “one of the prime purposes of education to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based and so help them to establish their own stances on matters of social justice and personal and collective responsibility” (ibid.). Therefore, young people “need to learn about and develop these values” (ibid.). To achieve this, the curriculum “should emphasise the rights and responsibilities of individuals and nations”; “should help young people to understand diverse cultures and beliefs and support them in developing concern, tolerance, care and respect for themselves and others”; “must promote a commitment to considered judgement and ethical action” and “should give young people the confidence, attributes and capabilities to make valuable contributions to society” (ibid.). Although the Curriculum for Excellence document acknowledges what we might call the situated character of citizenship, its depiction as value-based, its articulation in terms of responsibility, respect and commitment to responsible participation, plus the fact that it is embedded in capacity-based conception of education all highlight the strong individualistic tendency in the conception of citizenship and citizenship education.

One of the most interesting aspects of the 2006 HMIE publication Education for Citizenship (HMIE, 2006a) is that it combines ideas from the 2002 Education for Citizenship discussion and consultation paper with the Curriculum for Excellence framework. The result is a view of citizenship and citizenship education which is (even) more strongly individualistic than was the case in the two documents upon which it is based. This is first of all because the HMIE document argues that the
other three capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence framework – confident individuals, effective contributors and successful learners – are a precondition, or at least an important part of, the development of the capacity for responsible citizenship (see HMIE, 2006a, p. 1). Secondly, it is because the HMIE document gives a prominent position to the development of citizenship skills which, by their very nature, are ‘tied’ to the individual – an idea which becomes even more central in the HMIE paper on Citizenship in Scotland’s Colleges (HMIE, 2006b). Thirdly, the HMIE document presents education for citizenship as a form of values education (see HMIE, 2006a, p. 3), and in this context emphasises the importance of the development of personal values which, in the document, encompass political, social, environmental and spiritual values (see ibid.). Finally, the document emphasises that education for citizenship “must enable learners to become critical and independent thinkers” (ibid.), something which it also links to the development of “life skills” (ibid.). The framing of the approach presented in this document is therefore strongly focused on individuals and their attributes, skills and values. This is not to suggest that the document only pays attention to these aspects of citizenship. In the ‘portraits’ and ‘examples of effective practice’ there is also discussion of such things as the involvement and participation of children and young people in decision making, both with regard to their learning and in the context of pupils’ councils, the importance of the school ethos, engagement with community and voluntary organisations, and attention for global issues. There is also a strong emphasis on environmental issues and on the Eco-Schools scheme as providing important opportunities for citizenship learning.

THE DOMAIN OF CITIZENSHIP

Whereas the conception of citizenship as a capacity based upon responsible action of individuals is clearly individualistic, and whereas the emphasis of the educational efforts on the development of knowledge, skills and dispositions has a strong focus on individuals and their traits and attributes as well, this is mitigated within the Scottish approach by a strong emphasis on the need for experiential learning within the domain of citizenship. All documents agree that the best way to learn citizenship is, as it is put in the 2002 Education for Citizenship document, “through experience and interaction with others” (LTS, 2002, p. 10). “In short, learning about citizenship is best achieved by being an active citizen.” (ibid.) This idea is one of the main reasons why the approach proposed in the document “does not involve the creation of a new subject called ‘citizenship education’” (ibid., p. 16). Instead, the document takes the view “that each young person’s entitlement to education for citizenship can be secured through combinations of learning experiences set in the daily life of the school, discrete areas of the curriculum, cross-curricular experiences and activities involving links with the local community” (ibid.). The ethos of education for citizenship is therefore explicitly “active” and “participatory” and based on opportunities for “active engagement” (ibid.). This view, which is further supported by the idea that young people should be regarded “as citizens of today rather than citizens in waiting” (ibid., p. 8), raises a crucial question, which is about the kind of communities and activities considered to be relevant for citizenship learning. What, in other
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words, is considered to be the domain for citizenship and, hence, for education for
citizenship and citizenship learning.

The first thing to note is that most documents denote this domain in broad terms. In the 2002 Education for Citizenship document the overall purpose of education for citizenship is defined as “thoughtful and responsible participation in political, economic, social and cultural life” (LTS, 2002, p. 11; see also p. 3, p. 5). A similar phrase is used in Curriculum for Excellence where responsible citizens are individuals with a commitment “to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life” (SE, 2004, p. 12). This is echoed in the HMIE document (HMIE, 2006a) where the purpose of education for citizenship is described as “to prepare young people for political, social, economic, cultural and educational participation in society” (HMIE, 2006a, p. 2). Whereas several of the documents include questions about the environment in their conception of the domain of citizenship, the HMIE document is the only document discussed in this chapter which makes mention of spiritual values alongside political, social and environmental values as the set of values that education for citizenship should seek to promote (see ibid., p. 3), albeit that a reference to religion is remarkable absent in the discussion.

The broad conception of the citizenship domain represents a clear choice on behalf of the authors of the 2002 Education for Citizenship document. The document starts from the assumption that everyone belongs to various types of community, “both communities of place, from local to global, and communities of interest, rooted in common concern or purpose” (LTS, 2002, p. 8). Against this background citizenship is said to involve “enjoying rights and responsibilities in these various types of community” (ibid.). The document then adds that this way of seeing citizenship “encompasses the specific idea of political participation by members of a democratic state” but it also includes “the more general notion that citizenship embraces a range of participatory activities, not all overtly political, that affect the welfare of communities” (ibid.). Examples of the latter type of citizenship include “voluntary work, personal engagement in local concerns such as neighbourhood watch schemes or parent-teacher associations, or general engagement in civic society” (ibid.).

What is important to acknowledge about this articulation of the domain of citizenship is that citizenship encompasses participation in political processes but is not confined to it. Thus, the Scottish approach is based on what we might call a social rather than an exclusively political conception of citizenship, one which understands citizenship in terms of membership of and concern for the many communities that make up people’s lives. This includes the more narrowly political domain of citizenship, but extends to civil society and potentially includes any community. This is why “active and responsible citizenship” is said to have to do with “individuals having a sense of belonging to, and functioning in, communities” (ibid., p. 9). The question this raises is what the role of the political dimension in the Scottish conception of citizenship actual is. This not only has to do with the extent to which citizenship is related to questions about the (democratic) quality of collective decision making, but also concerns questions about the relationships between citizens, the relationships between citizens and the state, and the role of the state more generally in relation to its citizens. It is at this point that the documents begin to diverge.
The 2002 *Education for Citizenship* document is the most explicit about the political dimensions of and rationale for education for citizenship. It explicitly links the need for education for citizenship to the “advent of the Scottish Parliament” which has encouraged a ‘fresh focus’ on the importance of people living in Scotland “being able to understand and participate in democratic processes” (ibid., p. 6). Here citizenship is connected to the functioning of a democratic society and education for citizenship is brought in connection with concerns about “disaffection and disengagement from society” (ibid.). It is therefore concluded that education “has a key role to play in fostering a modern democratic society, whose members have a clear sense of identity and belonging, feel empowered to participate effectively in their communities and recognise their roles and responsibilities as global citizens” (ibid., p. 7). The need for education for citizenship is also linked to the development of “a healthy and vibrant culture of democratic participation” (ibid., p. 9) and within this context the document emphasises the need for understanding “that perceptions of rights and responsibilities by individuals in different social groups are sometimes in conflict” (ibid., p. 8), so that education for citizenship must help young people “develop strategies for dealing effectively with controversy” (ibid., p. 9). This is explicitly linked to democratic skills and dispositions such as “negotiation, compromise, awareness of the impact of conflict on the overall wellbeing of the community and the environment, and development of well-informed respect for differences between people” (ibid., p. 9).

Awareness of the political dimensions of citizenship is also clear in the description of the ‘knowledge and understanding’ dimension of education for citizenship as this includes knowledge and understanding of “the rights and responsibilities underpinning democratic societies; opportunities for individuals and voluntary groups to bring about social and environmental change, and the values on which such endeavours are based; (...) the causes of conflict and possible approaches to resolving it, recognising that controversy is normal in society and sometimes has beneficial effects” (ibid., p. 12). The ‘values and dispositions’ outcome makes mention of a disposition to “develop informed and reasoned opinions about political, economic, social and environmental issues” and a disposition to “understand and value social justice, recognising that what counts as social justice is itself contentious” (ibid., p. 14). When the document begins to address “effective education for citizenship in practice” (ibid., pp. 16–31) the emphasis on the more political dimensions of citizenship begins to be replaced by a conception of citizenship as having to do with inclusive and participatory ways of social interaction in a range of communities, but not necessarily or explicitly in the context of political and democratic practices and processes. Here, citizenship begins to veer towards active involvement in environmental projects and community service – a form of ‘good deeds’ citizenship – where the political dimension and purpose seems to have become largely absent. The 2002 *Education for Citizenship* document moves from a more political to a more social conception of citizenship, and although it is clear about its choice for a more encompassing conception of citizenship which includes the political but extends to the social, it is far less clear about its rationale for why community involvement, doing good deeds and, in a sense, being an obedient and contributing citizen,
constitutes citizenship – or to be more precise: constitutes good and desirable citizenship.

Although the Curriculum for Excellence document is shorter and far more general than the Education for Citizenship paper, and although, as I have shown above, it does locate questions about citizenship within a wider, political context, its articulation of the abilities involved in responsible citizenship lacks an explicit political and democratic dimension and is predominantly at the social end of the spectrum. Responsible citizens are depicted as individuals who have “respect for others” and a “commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life” and who are able to “develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it; understand different beliefs and cultures; make informed choices and decisions; evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues; [and] develop informed, ethical views of complex issues” (SE, 2004, p. 12).

The social orientation is even more prominent in the HMIE Education for Citizenship document (HMIE, 2006a). Although some reference to democratic processes, the Scottish Youth Parliament and issues “such as social justice and human rights” is made, citizenship is depicted predominantly in relation to society at large, with a strong emphasis on the involvement of pupils in decision making at school level and, to a lesser extent, the wider community. This reveals that from the perspective of HMIE the school is seen as the most relevant and prominent citizenship domain and the most important citizenship ‘modus’ is that of active involvement and participation. What is mostly lacking is a connection of citizenship with the political domain, both in terms of the ‘scope’ of citizenship and in terms of the way in which relevant learning processes are understood and depicted. The HMIE document thus represents a strong emphasis on the social dimensions of citizenship and is therefore even more strongly located at the social end of the citizenship spectrum.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Although the social dimension of citizenship and an emphasis on participation and active involvement are not unimportant for the development of citizenship knowledge and dispositions, and although an emphasis on the social dimensions of citizenship is definitely important for the preservation and maintenance of civil society, an almost exclusive emphasis on these aspects runs the danger that the political dimensions of citizenship, including an awareness of the limitations of personal responsibility for effective political action and change, remain invisible and become unattainable for children and young people. There is the danger, in other words, that citizenship becomes de-politicised and that, as a result, students are not sufficiently empowered to take effective political action in a way that goes beyond their immediate concerns and responsibilities. There is a similar danger with regard to the third aspect of the Scottish approach: the strong emphasis on activity and active citizenship. On the one hand, the idea of active citizenship is important and significant, both with regard to understanding what citizenship is and entails and with regard to citizenship learning. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the most significant citizenship learning that takes place in the lives of young people is the learning that follows
from their actual experiences and their actual ‘condition’ of citizenship. These experiences, which are part of the lives they lead inside and outside of the school, can be said to form the real citizenship curriculum for young people, which shows the crucial importance of opportunities for positive experiences with democratic action and decision making in all aspects of young people’s lives. In this regard I do very much agree with the claim made in the 2002 *Education for Citizenship* document that “young people learn most about citizenship by being active citizens” (LTS, 2002, p. 3). But the crucial question here is what young people’s active citizenship actually entails.

As I have already argued in the previous section, this depends partly on the domain in which citizenship activity is exercised. But it also depends on the nature of the activity. In this regard it is important not to lose sight of the specific history of the idea of active citizenship which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was introduced by conservative governments in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a way to let citizens take care of what used to be the responsibility of the government under welfare state conditions. While it is difficult to argue against active citizenship, it is important, therefore, to be precise about the nature of the activity and the domain in which the activity is exercised. Active citizenship in itself can either operate at the social or at the political end of the citizenship spectrum and can therefore either contribute to politicisation and the development of political literacy, or be basically a- or non-political. Given the different views on the domain of citizenship it is, therefore, not entirely clear how political and enabling active citizenship within the Scottish context will be, although the tendency seems to be on a form of active citizenship located towards the social end of the citizenship spectrum.

COMMUNITY

The fourth and final characteristic of the Scottish approach to citizenship and education for citizenship is a strong emphasis on community – and it is perhaps significant that in the 2002 *Education for Citizenship* document the word ‘community’ is used 76 times and the word ‘communities’ 31 times, while the word ‘democratic’ is used 9 times and the word ‘democracy’ only once. The 2002 *Education for Citizenship* document, as I have already mentioned, opens by saying that “(s)chools and other educational establishments have a central part to play in educating young people for life as active and responsible members of their communities” (LTS, 2002, p. 6). The point I wish to raise here is not about the fact that citizenship is depicted in relation to (local, and sometimes also global) communities, but concerns the particular way in which communities are conceived within the documents. In all documents ‘community’ is used as an unproblematic notion and generally also as a positive notion. The documents speak about young people and their communities, suggesting not only that it is clear what these communities are, but also suggesting that young people’s membership of these communities is obvious and taken for granted. An important question, however, is what actually constitutes a community and what the difference might be between a social, a cultural and a political community.

As I have argued elsewhere in more detail (see Biesta, 2004[c]; 2006) there is a strong tendency within the literature on communities to think of communities in
terms of sameness, commonality and identity. This may be true for many cultural and, perhaps to a lesser extent, social communities – and it seems to be the conception of community implied in most of what the documents have to say about community. But whereas cultural and social communities may display a strong sense of commonality and sameness, this is not how we should understand political communities. One could argue – and many political philosophers have argued this point – that the very purpose of politics, and more specifically democratic politics, is to deal in one way or another with the fact of plurality, with the fact that individuals within society have different conceptions of the good life, different values, and different ideas about what matters to them. Ultimately, political communities are therefore communities that are characterised by plurality and difference (see Biesta, 2004[c]), and it is precisely here that the difficulty of politics and ‘political existence’ (Biesta, 2010[b]) is located. Whereas, as I have shown in my discussion of the domain of citizenship, there is some awareness within the documents, particularly the earlier parts of the 2002 Education for Citizenship document, of the particular nature of political communities and political existence – most notably in the recognition of the plurality of perceptions of rights and responsibilities (see LTS, 2002, pp. 8–9) – the predominant conception of community in the documents is that of the community as a community of sameness (for a similar conclusion see Ross & Munn, 2008). Again we can conclude, therefore, that the Scottish approach to citizenship and education for citizenship operates more at the social than the political end of the citizenship spectrum.

WHAT KIND OF CITIZEN? WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY?

In the previous sections I have tried to characterise the particular take on citizenship and citizenship education that has been developed in Scotland over the past decade. The question I wish to address in this section focuses on the choices made or implied in this approach. After all, the idea of citizenship is itself not uncontested, and neither are views about the ways in which education might and can support citizenship. The question this raises, therefore, is what kind of citizenship is represented in the proposals, frameworks and inspection documents and, in relation to this, what kind of conception of democracy is pursued as a result of this – hence the title of this chapter. In order to do so, I will map the Scottish conception onto existing literature on citizenship and citizenship education. Before I do so, I wish to mention that there are remarkably few traces of philosophical or empirical literature in the framing documents for Scottish education for citizenship. As a result it is quite difficult to glance what has informed its authors, both in terms of their normative orientations and in terms of the empirical basis for their claims. Surely, it is not easy to come up with a framework for education for citizenship that can gain support across a broad political and ideological spectrum, which is often a reason why such documents are rather implicit about their normative orientations and political choices. Nonetheless there are real choices to be made – choices with important implications for educational practice and ultimate for the quality of citizenship and democratic life itself.
In order to locate the Scottish approach I will make use of a framework developed by Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne which they developed from their analysis of educational programmes for the promotion of democratic citizenship in the United States (see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Westheimer and Kahne make a distinction between three visions of citizenship that they found as answers to the question “What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society” (ibid., p. 239). They refer to these as the personally responsible citizen; the participatory citizen; and the justice-oriented citizen. Westheimer and Kahne claim that each of these visions of citizenship “reflects a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals” (ibid., p. 241). They emphasise that these visions are not cumulative. “Programs that promote justice-oriented citizens do not necessarily promote personal responsibility or participatory citizenship.” (ibid.) What, then, characterises each of these visions of citizenship?

The personally responsible citizen “acts responsibly in his or her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, obeying laws, and staying out of debt. The personally responsible citizen contributes to food or clothing drives when asked and volunteers to help those less fortunate, whether in a soup kitchen or a senior centre. Programmes that seek to develop personally responsible citizens, attempt to build character and personal responsibility by emphasizing honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work” (ibid., p. 241).

Participatory citizens are those “who actively participate in civic affairs and the social life of the community at the local, state, or national level. (...) Proponents of this vision emphasize preparing students to engage in collective, community-based efforts. Educational programs designed to support the development of participatory citizens focus on teaching students how government and community-based organizations work and training them to plan and participate in organized efforts to care for people in need or, for example, to guide school policies. Skills associated with such collective endeavors – such as how to run a meeting – are also viewed as important (...). (P)roponents of participatory citizenship argue that civic participation transcends particular community problems or opportunities. It develops relationships, common understandings, trust and collective commitments [and thereby] adopts a broad notion of the political sphere” (ibid., pp. 241–242).

Justice-oriented citizenship – “the perspective that is least commonly pursued” (ibid., p. 242) – is based on the claim “that effective democratic citizens need opportunities to analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic and political forces” (ibid.). Westheimer and Kahne refer to this approach as ‘justice-oriented’ because advocates of this approach call explicit attention “to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice” (ibid.). “The vision of the justice-oriented citizen shares with the vision of the participatory citizen an emphasis on collective work related to the life and issues of the community. Its focus on responding to social problems and to structural critique make it somewhat different, however [as they seek] to prepare students to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices. (...) These programmes are less likely to emphasize the need for charity and voluntarism as ends in themselves and more likely to teach about social movements and how to effect systemic change.” (ibid.)
Westheimer and Kahne sum up the differences between the three approaches in the following way: “(I)f participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover.” (ibid.)

Although educators who aim to promote justice-oriented citizenship may well employ approaches that make political issues more explicit than those who emphasize personal responsibility or participatory citizenship, Westheimer and Kahne stress that “the focus on social change and social justice does not imply emphasis on particular political perspectives, conclusions, or priorities” (ibid., pp. 242–243. They do not aim “to impart a fixed set of truths or critiques regarding the structure of society” but rather “want students to consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address root causes of problems” (ibid., p. 243). From a democratic point of view it is fundamentally important that the process respects “the varied voices and priorities of citizens while considering the evidence of experts, the analysis of government leaders, or the particular preferences of a given group or of an individual leader” (ibid.). Thus “students must learn to weigh the varied opinions and arguments” and must develop “the ability to communicate with and learn from those who hold different perspectives” (ibid.).

When we look at the Scottish approach to education for citizenship against this background, it is obvious that there are elements of all three orientations. This, as I have shown, is particularly the case in the 2002 Education for Citizenship document although already within that document we can see a shift which is taken up, more explicitly in later documents – most notably in the HMIE Education for Citizenship paper – towards an emphasis on personal responsibility. What emerges from the analysis, so I wish to suggest, is that the conception of citizenship informing the Scottish approach is predominantly that of the personally responsible citizen. Within the documents there is also a strong emphasis on participation. Although this shifts the conception of citizenship towards a more participatory approach, I am inclined to understand this mainly in relation to the approach to educational processes aimed at promoting citizenship, than that they are central to the conception of citizenship pursued. It is, in other words, important to make a distinction between the conception of citizenship and the conception of citizenship education in the documents, and my suggestion is that the conception of citizenship veers more towards the personally responsible citizens, whereas participation is presented as a key dimension of how students can become such citizens. This is, of course, not all black and white, but I hope to have presented a sufficiently detailed reading of the documents to warrant this conclusion.

By mapping the Scottish approach onto the categories suggested by Westheimer and Kahne, it is possible to get a better understanding of the specific position presented in the documents analysed in this chapter. It makes it possible to see, in other words, that the Scottish approach represents a particular choice, and that other options are possible. As such one could argue that this is all that can be said, as this is how education for citizenship in Scotland is conceived. But the further question that can be asked is whether the choice presented in the Scottish approach is the ‘best’ choice. Answering this question all depends on how one wishes education
for citizenship to function and, most importantly, in what way and to what extent one wishes education for citizenship to contribute to a particular – democratic – configuration of society. At this point I wish to briefly discuss some of the concerns expressed by Westheimer and Kahne about the first conception of citizenship in their model, that of the personally responsible citizen which, according to them, is actually the most popular approach (see ibid., p. 243).

Westheimer and Kahne make it clear that in their view the emphasis on personal responsibility in citizenship is “an inadequate response to the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry” (ibid.) Critics of the idea of the personally responsible citizen have noted “that the emphasis placed on individual character and behavior obscures the need for collective and public sector initiatives; that this emphasis distracts attention from analysis of the causes of social problems and from systematic solutions” and that “voluntarism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy” (ibid.) The main problem Westheimer and Kahne see is that whilst no one “wants young people to lie, cheat, or steal” the values implied in the notion of the personally responsible citizen “can be at odds with democratic goals” (ibid.). “(E)ven the widely accepted goals – fostering honesty, good neighborliness, and so on – are not inherently about democracy” (ibid.; emphasis in original). To put it differently: while many of the values and traits enlisted in relation to the personally responsible citizen “are desirable traits for people living in a community (...) they are not about democratic citizenship” (ibid.). And, even more strongly: “To the extent that emphasis on these character traits detracts from other important democratic priorities, it may actually hinder rather than make possible democratic participation and change.” (ibid.). To support their point, Westheimer and Kahne report on research that found that fewer than 32% of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted in the 1996 presidential election, but that “a whopping 94% of those aged 15–24 believed that ‘the most important thing I can do as a citizen is to help others’” (ibid.). In a very real sense, then, “youth seems to be ‘learning’ that citizenship does not require democratic governments, politics, and even collective endeavours” (ibid.).

CONCLUSIONS

The main problem, therefore – and I have hinted at this already in passing – is that a too strong emphasis on personal responsibility, on individual capacities and abilities, and on personal values, dispositions and attitudes not only runs the risk of depoliticising citizenship by seeing it mainly as a personal and social phenomenon. It also runs the risk of not doing enough to empower young people as political actors who have an understanding both of the opportunities and the limitations of individual political action, and who are aware that real change – change that affects structures rather than operations within existing structures – often requires collective action and initiatives from other bodies, including the state. To quote Westheimer and Kahne once more: the individualistic conception of personally responsible citizenship rarely raises questions about “corporate responsibility ... or about ways that government policies can advance or hinder solutions to social problems” and therefore tends to ignore “important influences such as social movements and government policy
on efforts to improve society” (ibid., p. 244). An exclusive emphasis on personally responsible citizenship “apart from analysis of social, political, and economic contexts” may therefore well be “inadequate for advancing democracy” as there is “nothing inherently democratic about personally responsible citizenship” and, perhaps even more importantly, “undemocratic practices are sometimes associated with programs that rely exclusively on notions of personal responsibility” (ibid., p. 248; emphasis in original).

This, then, is the risk that comes with a conception of citizenship and citizenship education that focuses too strongly on individual responsibility and individual traits, values and dispositions. While the Scottish approach is definitely not one-dimensional, and while what happens in the practice of education covers a much wider spectrum of possibilities, the available frameworks for understanding and promoting citizenship in and through education raise concern and could do with more attention for the political dimensions of citizenship and the promotion of forms of political literacy that position democratic citizenship beyond individual responsibility. Such an approach, as I have suggested in this chapter, does imply a particular, more political conception of citizenship but does not require a particular party-political choice. In this respect a broad consensus about education for citizenship can also be built around a view in which citizenship is more explicitly connected with wider social and political action and with a view of democracy as requiring more than just active, committed and responsible citizens.