Conformity and the questioning of authority in the citizenship education debates

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Contextualization

There has been a strong revival of interest in citizenship and citizenship education in recent years, among academics and practitioners alike. This critical review of literature will examine one element of the debate, namely the extent to which people should conform to the authorities and existing political structures, or alternatively question and challenge them. The review will cover literature from educational and political philosophy, giving priority to discussions of the aims of citizenship education, rather than teaching methods and school practice.

Abstract: *A key question that providers of citizenship education must face is the extent to which they should be promoting either critical attitudes or allegiance to the State. While some argue that cohesion and unity are necessary for the polity to function, others observe that a conforming and unquestioning population will not choose the best governments and keep those governments democratically accountable. This paper reviews literature from three currents within citizenship education – liberal democracy, civic republicanism and approaches based on the ideas of Paolo Freire – identifying widely differing emphases within each as well as between them. Critical attitudes are seen to be compatible with feelings of shared membership, but are unlikely to be promoted by governments when there is fear of internal unrest or external threat. While critical thinking is desirable in educational and political terms, the delivery of citizenship education programmes on this basis presents substantial challenges.*

Introduction

There has been a strong revival of interest in citizenship and citizenship education in recent years, among academics and practitioners alike. Political theorists have found in the concept of citizenship a way of accommodating some of the communitarian critiques of liberalism, targeting individualistic privatism and the excessive emphasis on rights and neglect of duties (Kymlicka, 2002). The idea has also attracted the attention of governments grappling with the problems of increasing voter apathy, cynicism about politicians and the possibilities of change through conventional political activity. Continuing immigration has formed multi-ethnic states across the world which can no longer be run on the basis of mono-cultural national identity and unquestioning allegiance to historical symbols that formed the basis of traditional concepts of citizenship. In response, the British government has for the first time established citizenship education as a statutory subject, entering the National Curriculum in 2002.

This renewed interest in citizenship has by no means been confined to one part of the political spectrum. While the right wing extols its benefits for promoting civic responsibility and patriotism, those on the left rally round the same concept as a means of ensuring genuine political inclusion and the upholding of basic social rights for all. Although there are other institutions in society seen to be conducive to the development of citizenship (such as the family, Church and trade unions), there is wide agreement that school has a key role in the process.

This paper will examine one element of the citizenship education debate, namely the extent to which people conform to the authorities and existing political structures, or alternatively question and challenge them. This is one of many awkward questions in citizenship education. On the one hand, some degree of cohesion and unity (and some would argue patriotism) are necessary for the polity to function. On the other, an entirely conforming and unquestioning population will not choose the best governments and keep those governments democratically accountable.

The degree of allegiance or scepticism held by citizens is not only an interesting theoretical question, but is vital to teachers dealing with citizenship education in the classroom. Most people agree that "civic virtues" should be fostered in school, but there are, not surprisingly, widely differing accounts of what those virtues should be. It is particularly hard for educators when those virtues appear to be contradictory, as is the case with the theme discussed in this paper, and with another widely discussed tension, that between political cohesion and multicultural pluralism (Kymlicka, 1995).

There is an extremely large body of literature on citizenship education, both from political theorists and educationists, and it is not possible for this initial review to provide even a superficial view of the entire field. Certain writers have been selected on the basis of their particular influence, or their relevance to the topic in question. The issue of conformity is not in fact one that occupies a great deal of space in the literature (at least not in a direct way): many commentaries are concerned with the challenges to national citizenship from postmodernism, feminism, globalization and multi-ethnic societies, areas that this paper will not be able to address in full. While it is a vital and contentious question, I will not discuss here a justification for citizenship education in general terms, and will take it as read that school has an important influence on the development of citizens (whether or not there is legal curricular provision), and that it is in everyone's interest that attention is paid to the nature of that influence. Priority will be given to discussions of the *aims* of citizenship education, rather than teaching methods and school practice.

The literature will be discussed in three sections. The first two sections relate to the two most prominent approaches to citizenship: liberal rights and civic republicanism (Heater, 1999). The former is based on the protection of individual freedoms by the State in the form of rights (civil, political and social, according to the famous analysis of T.H. Marshall, 1998) where the citizen is obliged to respect the laws of the State but in which political participation is optional. The latter, civic republicanism, has its roots in Aristotle and the Greek city-states, and sees active political participation as both essential to the functioning of the polity and the highest form of human activity. The third section concerns Paulo Freire and his followers: this group does not represent a separate approach comparable to the two outlined above, but does provide an important angle on the theme in question. First, however, the basic concept will be illustrated using the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

Challenging the state

Hobbes's Leviathan (1996) of 1651 and Locke's Second Treatise of Civil Government (1924) of 1690 are two of the most influential texts on political theory in English. While sharing some common ground, they present contrasting views on the establishment and maintenance of the State. Hobbes's premise is that human beings before political organization are in a constant self-interested conflict he calls the "state of war". In order to live in peace, people voluntarily give up some of their freedoms and join in a covenant, so as to form a State which will ensure that they live together harmoniously and that will protect their common interests. Thus far his thesis is similar to Locke's (although the latter had a much less pessimistic view

of human motivations in the pre-political context). However they part on the nature of that State. Hobbes asserts:

> The only way to erect such a common power... is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will... and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgements, to his judgement. (Hobbes, 1996, p 114)

Hobbes, therefore, proposes an absolutist State in which, once initial consent for the sovereign has been given, no further resistance is legitimate except in the most extreme cases, for example when one's life is at risk. Hobbes considered democracies such as that of ancient Athens to be ineffectual and saw strong government as the only means to peaceful coexistence.

Locke has a very different conception of the State:

> [The legislative] is not, nor can possibly be, absolutely arbitrary over the lives and fortunes of the people. For it being but the joint power of every member of the society given up to that person or assembly which is legislator.... (p 184)

The power of the people, therefore, does not end once consent has been given for a government:

> Yet the legislative being only a fiduciary power to act for certain ends, there remains still in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them. (p 192)

There is no space here to assess the exact conditions in which Locke considered it legitimate to oppose or remove the government during its term of office, nor the means by which this opposition or removal could be undertaken. What is important is the principle that citizens do not abdicate power entirely when giving their consent to the sovereign, or electing a representative.

Hobbes is vilified for his apparent support of absolutist states, and his justification of authoritarian governments and dictatorships. Yet his argument is based on a very real concern: that the destructive forces of humankind can only be controlled in the interests of all by strong government. Many today continue to support this argument, even if they present it in less uncompromising language.

In using this distinction between Hobbes and Locke, it is not suggested that writers on citizenship education follow either one or the other: there are many other elements to the thinking of these two writers that may be objectionable or appealing. However, it is proposed that all writers on citizenship tend either towards a position resembling Hobbes's – that citizens should not oppose the established state – or one resembling that of Locke, in which they have a right, and indeed a duty, to oppose the State whenever it is not upholding the interests of the people. This is not a categorical distinction, but a continuum, somewhere along which, and sometimes independently of the other elements of their conceptions of citizenship, all commentators lie.

The liberal perspective

It is not possible to present a single liberal view on this question. While right-liberals see the role of the State as primarily that of the defending property rights, with the aim of maximising

individual freedoms, left-liberals see citizens' rights as including access to basic resources, and therefore give the State a substantial role in the redistribution of income and provision of services. Liberal views on citizenship education are equally divergent.

Flew (2000), in his critique of the Crick Report[1], gives substantial attention to the idea of critical thinking. He sees the main problem of the proposed citizenship education programme as the danger of it being used by teachers as a means of indoctrinating the pupils (he refers back to the Peace Studies experience of the 1980s which "certainly constituted the then most widespread kind of politically indoctrinative teaching", pp 19-20). He expresses a number of doubts about the concepts used in the report, such as 'human rights' and 'equality', and the need for teachers and students to be clear about these. Flew's insistence on critical thinking at first sight appears to support the notion of a Lockean attitude towards the political sphere. However, it soon becomes clear that Flew's interest is not so much in critical attitudes per se, but in critical attitudes towards socialism and progressivism. While he attacks muddled anti-fascism and the indoctrinatory nature of pro-EU materials in schools, there is no sign of him encouraging a critical attitude towards the market system, private property and family values. The libertarian approach is also favoured by Tooley (2000), who makes similar criticisms of the report's bias (and its shamefully indoctrinatory references to 'concern for the environment' and 'sustainable development'), rejecting the idea of compulsory citizenship education completely.

William Galston (1989, 1991) supports citizenship education, but proposes that it should not require children to question their situation. While his primary concern is the threat of liberal education to family values and culture, his arguments also apply to the relationship between the citizen and the State. He makes a distinction between *philosophic* and *civic* education, where the purpose of the latter is "not the pursuit and acquisition of truth, but rather the formation of individuals who can effectively conduct their lives within, and support, their political community" (p 90). He concedes that liberal democracies are more open to the social consequences of philosophic education than most forms of government, but that even in this case the aims of civic education are not those of the quest for truth. He goes on to state:

> [R]igorous historical research will almost certainly vindicate complex "revisionist" accounts of key figures in American history. Civic education, however, requires a more noble, moralising history: a pantheon of heroes who confer legitimacy on central institutions and constitute worthy objects of emulation. (p 91)

Callan (1997) calls this approach *sentimental civic education*, tracing it back to Plato's appeal to myth has a means of increasing loyalty to the State. With it, Galston attempts to justify what has been, as a rule, the actual practice of civic education in Europe and North America in the modern era (Green 1990), on the basis of the arguments that strong allegiance and loyalty are necessary to sustain the polity, and that the State does not have either a right or a duty to promote scepticism among children. As mentioned previously, Galston is referring not only to the citizen-government relationship here, but to the whole concept of liberal autonomy.

McLaughlin (1992, 2000) provides an alternative perspective. He makes a distinction between minimal and maximal interpretations of the concept of citizenship, in relation to the features of identity, virtues, political involvement and social prerequisites. He states:

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[1] The report produced by the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools (QCA, 1998), which was chaired by Bernard Crick.

> Perhaps one of the most salient points of contrast for educational purposes concerns the degree of critical understanding and questioning that is seen as necessary to citizenship. Maximal conceptions require a considerable degree of explicit understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures on the part of the citizen together with the dispositions and capacities required for participation in democratic citizenship generously conceived. (1992, p 237)

Here are outlined the types of qualities – "understanding", "dispositions" and "capacities" – required of the citizen in order to hold the State accountable. While McLaughlin does not explicitly dismiss minimalist notions, his analysis demonstrates a number of shortcomings of the type of approach adopted by Galston:

> The most notable of these is that it may involve merely an unreflective socialization into the political and social *status quo*, and is therefore inadequate on educational, as well as on other, grounds. (p 238, original emphasis)

Galston's approach to civic education, and particularly his claim that truth is secondary to the fostering of support for the polity, is therefore open to accusations of, at worst, indoctrination and, at best, lack of educational worth.

A number of liberals, however, departing from the communitarian characterization of liberalism, place a high value on civic virtues and the role of the school in cultivating these. Kymlicka (1999) identifies four principle virtues:

1. Public-spiritedness
2. A sense of justice
3. Civility and tolerance
4. A shared sense of solidarity or loyalty

The fourth of these (which Kymlicka points out is not often considered essential to a liberal democracy), is more than "loyalty to principles of tolerance, justice and democracy" (p81) and indicates at first glance a position similar to that of Galston. Yet explanation of the other virtues shows a commitment to more critical attitudes. Public-spiritedness includes:

> The ability and willingness to engage in public discourse about matters of public policy, and to question authority. These are perhaps the most distinctive aspects of citizenship in a liberal democracy, since they are precisely what distinguish 'citizens' within a democracy from the 'subjects' of an authoritarian regime. (p 82)

In relation to the second virtue he continues:

> To have a sense of justice does not simply mean that we do not actively harm or exploit others…. So if our political institutions are no longer functioning, perhaps due to excessive levels of apathy, or to the abuse of power, then citizens have an obligation to protect these institutions from being undermined. (p 83)

What distinguishes liberals from the civic republicans discussed in the next section is that they do not see active political participation as essential to being a citizen. Yet the above statement asserts not only that individuals have the right to contest the government, but that they have a duty to do so when a government is no longer promoting the benefits of its people.

Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education* (1987) presents a similar position:

> People who give careful consideration to the morality of laws… can be expected
> to oppose laws that violate democratic principles, and ultimately to disobey them,
> if necessary, with the intent of changing them by appealing to the conscience of
> the majority. (p 52)

In both these writers, the tension between the autonomy of the individual in relation to the State and in relation to the family is raised. As seen above, Galston considers that the State does not have a duty to promote a child's autonomy from families' culture and beliefs. Gutmann, however, sees general autonomy as necessary for making political choices, as does Callan (1997), Levinson (1997) and Brighouse (2000) who provide extensive arguments in favour of school as the best place to develop this autonomy. Kymlicka, while not considering autonomy as necessary to the practice of democratic citizenship in and of itself, sees that there will "likely be some spillover effect" (p 81), encouraging a questioning of family and religious authority. This, presumably, is what Galston is worried about.

Autonomy is clearly related to the idea of critical attitudes in citizens, yet are they identical? There is no doubt that autonomy is necessary in order to observe, judge and oppose the government, but it does not seem sufficient. Other qualities such as an interest in public affairs will also be required, as will other civic virtues such as courage, as discussed by Patricia White (1988, 1996). As Callan (1997, p 11) states, "autonomous reflection does not necessarily lead everyone to a way of life in which civic engagement has an impressively prominent place." Callan also recognizes that civic education can only with great difficulty be built on a view of the past as a moral wasteland, and that critical reason can at times promotes nihilism and "educated despair" (*ibid.*).

Commentators opposing the promotion of autonomy in schools will certainly oppose a form of citizenship education that promotes, or even merely facilitates, a sceptical attitude towards the government. Galston and others contest the Socratic principle that the unexamined life is an unworthy life, and consequently contest the principle that an unexamined government is a dangerous one. Yet as McLaughlin points out, whatever effect this may have on the well-being of the State, it is at odds with educational aims. If citizenship education, therefore, is truly to be educational, it must promote some kind of critical reflection of the governments and the political system.

The Civic Republicans

Rather than debating the details of a system already in place in most of the world, the civic republicans are proposing one which perhaps existed only in a few instances in history (for example ancient Athens, the Swiss Cantons and New England towns in the 18th century), and even in these places in an incomplete way. Even though voting is compulsory in some countries, such as Australia and Brazil, the civic republican State, in which all citizens must participate in political processes as an integral part of their lives, does not actually exist, at least not at a national level. Yet, as Oldfield (1990) makes clear, civic republicanism is an ideal, like freedom or autonomy, to which aspirations are turned and in accordance with which efforts are made to bring change to society.

The civic ideal, as discussed here, corresponds to what Kymlicka (2002) calls *Aristotelian* republicanism, in which political participation is seen as an intrinsic rather than instrumental good. As Oldfield states:

> Civic republicanism… holds that political life -- the life of a citizen -- is not only the most inclusive, but also the highest, form of living-together that most individuals can aspire to. (Oldfield, 1990, p 6)

Civic republicans, with a few exceptions, place a high importance on formal education in creating effective citizens: " 'natural' human beings, or 'non-civic' or pre-civic ones, have to be moulded and shaped for their role as citizens" (Oldfield, 1990, p 8). As civic republicanism requires the citizen to act in the interests of the State, it would suggest that education would have as its primary aim the promotion of patriotism, and therefore work against the questioning of authority. However, in this respect, civic republicans are as divided as liberals.

The different positions within civic republicanism are well illustrated by Barber's (1984) distinction between *unitary* and *strong* democracy. Both of these are forms of participatory democracy, in the sense that they do not rely on representatives, but they are different in that the former relies on a false consensus and the merging of the self with the collectivity.

> In subordinating participation in a greater whole to identification with that whole and autonomy and self-legislation to unity and group self-realization, unitary democracy becomes conformist, collectivist, and often even coercive. (Barber, 1984, p 148)

Strong democracy, on the other hand, enables genuine participation, where individual citizens retain their autonomy and come to political decisions through deliberation with other autonomous citizens in the community. Barber, in fact, does not have high hopes of formal schooling as a means towards this type of democracy, instead following John Stuart Mill and others in advocating the activity of political participation itself. He warns against the type of citizenship education seen above in relation to Galston:

> A binding set of values encapsulated as patriotism can forge a people so uniform in their interests that conflict or dissent of any kind becomes tantamount to treason. (Barber, 1984, p 233)

Civic republicans following the unitary democracy vein, therefore, can be seen to promote a citizenship education that represses questioning of government, while those following strong democracy will allow this space for criticism. Rousseau (as translated in 1968), the founding father of modern participatory democracy, with his idea of the *general will*, can be seen to fall in the first category. Examples of the second type are found in Pateman (1970), Barber (1984) and are discussed in MacPherson (1977).

Bernard Crick sees himself as having both civic republican and liberal democrat tendencies, but it is the former that appears to have greater emphasis in his work. He considers an interest in politics and active political participation to be essential for the individual and for the health of the polity, and sees education as having a key role in bringing this about. Crick (1999, 2000) outlines five moral principles, or procedural values, that must underpin this education: freedom, toleration, fairness, respect for truth and respect for reasoning. While he does not include critical attitudes towards the authorities as a separate principle, the five principles as a whole can be seen to enable this type of attitude rather than a merely conformist one:

> The very project of a free citizenship education, as distinct from a would-be indoctrinating one, whether ideological or simply patriotic, must be based on a limited number of presuppositions that we called… *procedural values*…. (Crick, 1999, p 343, original emphasis)

However, he also warns against an indiscriminate rebellion against authority:

> The basic part of political literacy is to be able to distinguish between power and authority. Few types of authority can subsist on coersion alone, but then some authority is justifiable and some not. In general authority has been seen by political philosophers as justifiable when it fulfils expertly or skilfully some function widely agreed to be needed. To exercise authority is not, as such, to be authoritarian: authoritarianism is when 'an authority' seeks to exercise power beyond the admitted function. (pp 349-350)

The word "critical" does appear a number of times in the final Crick report[2], and although it is secondary to the aims of community involvement and basic political participation, there is mild sanctioning of critical attitudes towards the law:

> Respect for the rule of law is a necessary condition for any kind of social order and a necessary component of education. In a parliamentary democracy, however, education must also help future citizens distinguish between law and justice…. Citizens must be equipped with the political skills needed to change laws in a peaceful and responsible manner. (QCA, 1998, p 10)

Crick cannot be said to subordinate individual autonomy to the needs of the State, as he balances his faith in universal political participation with an emphasis on defending individual rights. However, many following, or purporting to follow, the civic republican model are easy prey for those who see the concept of universal citizenship as a potential instrument of oppression for minority or oppressed groups (Unterhalter, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The Crick report itself has been criticized for its insufficiently inclusive notion of community and nation (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999; Osler and Starkey, 2001). This oppressive form of citizenship – unitary democracy in Barber's (1984) terms – can stifle critical attitudes as much as it does difference and minority views.

Wringe (1992) provides a critique of this type of distortion of the civic republican ideal in his article on *Education for Active Citizenship*. First, he addresses provision that aims to make students "understand how jolly lucky they are to be living in a democratic society" while at the same time inculcating the Hobbesian belief "that citizens were obligated to obey whatever laws it chose to make and support whatever policies it chose to pursue" (p 31). In relation to respect for laws he recommends "not awe and reverence, but sober scepticism" (p 33) so as to avoid instances of bad laws not being repealed on account of undue respect. Furthermore:

> Almost all political reforms have been delayed until public disorder or the threat of it have forced them upon the existing regimes. To this extent judicious and controlled disorder may be a necessary and desirable part of responsible political participation, and should be represented as such in education. (Wringe, 1992, p 33)

The so-called Education for Active Citizenship that Wringe is responding to here proposes that citizens participate in the life of their community through voluntary service but without real political influence or upholding of rights. In relation to these proposals in favour of emphasizing duties rather than rights (which can also be seen in the writings of communitarians such as Etzioni, 1996) he states:

> Community is a reciprocal relationship, and all have both rights and duties. It is only in totalitarian regimes that we expect people to say little about the former. The liberal tradition is, rather, that if we do not duly defend our rights we may lose

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[2] The report was, of course, not solely the work of Crick, although strongly influenced by him.

them, and even deserve to do so. For this reason the truly active and responsible citizen in defending the rights of others may, and often does, find him or herself in conflict with the forces of law and order. However regrettable and even puzzling this may be, the educated citizen needs to have some understanding as to how and why this may come about. (p 34)

Civic republicanism, therefore, provides a framework for government to be highly responsive to the wishes of its people – in some degree to *be* the people – making critical attitudes almost unnecessary. Yet as seen in Wringe's article, mentioned above, and elsewhere this promotion of active citizenship can be used to generate a submissive population who do not defend their rights.

A third group of thinkers with a very different orientation and background will now be assessed.

Paulo Freire and the conscientization approach

Paulo Freire (1972, 1976), and the many educators around the world who have followed in his wake, provides a new perspective on the debate. His work, which was largely carried out in relation to adult literacy but also applies to school education, had as a defining axiom that education is always political and can never be neutral. This means, first, that citizenship education cannot be confined to a single curricular discipline but must, by definition, stretch across the whole curriculum; and second, that citizenship education cannot be impartial, but is always linked to a particular political vision.

Central to his philosophy is the idea of *conscientization*, through which learners develop an understanding of their socio-political situation in order to work for meaningful structural change:

> To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity. (Freire, 1972, p 29)

According to Freire, full citizenship involves not just rights or duties, but a particular consciousness, one that goes beyond knowledge of political institutions and towards an understanding of the underlying social and political processes. Oppressed peoples lack this consciousness due to their material and educational deprivation and in some cases to the deliberate efforts of those in power (Freire concentrates on the *oppressed* because he sees their conscientization as the key to the construction of a just society, not because he believes they are the only people who lack political consciousness).

> If the great popular masses are without a more critical understanding of how society functions, it is not because they are naturally incapable of it… but on account of the precarious conditions in which they live and survive, where they are "forbidden to know". Thus, the way out is… the critical effort through which men and women take themselves in hand and become agents of curiosity, become investigators, become subjects in an ongoing process of quest for the revelation of the "why" of things and facts. (Freire, 1999, p 105)

Despite the clear influence of Marxism on his work, he distanced himself from many previous Marxist education practices by promoting questioning attitudes not only towards capitalist society, but also towards the revolutionary movements. A true socialist society, in his view,

could only be constructed by critical citizens, not by unquestioning citizens in awe of the bureaucratic Communist state.

Freire's approach can be seen in a number of educationists worldwide, including Ian Lister (1994) in the UK and Ira Shor (1992) in the USA, and has given rise to a wide-ranging educational movement in Brazil, which gained momentum in the movements for the re-democratization of the country at the end of the military dictatorship in the 1980s. One of the initiatives coming out of this movement was the *Citizen School*, a theoretical notion first developed at the Paulo Freire Institute by the likes of Moacir Gadotti and José Romão (1997), and implemented in the city of Porto Alegre from the early 1990s. What characterizes the Citizen School is the emphasis on participatory democracy and the construction of curriculum from the basis of the reality of school and learner (Azevedo, 2002; Gandin and Apple, 2002). There is consequently no chance for a top-down citizenship education programme aiming to promote conformist attitudes, firstly since specific curriculum elements grow out of the school communities, and secondly since the State (in this case the local government) does not conceive of itself as a separate entity, and consequently has no need to protect itself from the people or force them into a cohesive whole. As stated in the manifesto of the Education Secretariat of Pelotas, a city adopting the Citizen School framework:

> Citizenship is … a political practice based in values like … disobedience towards any authoritarian power…. Education for citizenship requires the possibility of creating educative spaces in which the social subjects may be able to question, think, adopt and critique the values, norms and moral rights belonging to individuals, groups and communities, including their own rights. (Pelotas, 2004)[3]

The Brazilian Landless People's Movement (MST) is a large social movement for agrarian reform whose educational work also runs along Freirean principles. They have a view of citizenship which also involves the development of critical attitudes towards the government, media and democratic processes in general:

> Education is always a political practice, in that it either engages in a process of social transformation or conservation. But for a long time people tried to believe that education and politics should not mix…. This is, in reality, an intentional and perverse attempt to alienate people, so that they cannot think that anything can be different from the society in which they live. (MST, 1999, p 17)

Like the Citizen School, the MST has a strong conception of the school as a place for learning about individual rights and ways of defending those rights, and the need for developing a sense of justice. The values on which their educational work is based include "the feeling of indignation before injustices and the loss of human dignity" and "respect for authority that is constructed according to democratic relations and ethical coherence" (MST, 1999, p 9). When authority is not constructed on this basis, and is not upholding justice, the citizen must take direct action.

It must be remembered that these are approaches adopted by local governments, where the other levels of the State have not necessarily adopted the same approach, and by social movements. It is another question whether a national government, with responsibility for internal and external security, could or would promote "disobedience" or even this level of critical awareness. The MST promotes critical attitudes of the government, but it is another matter whether they would promote a questioning attitude towards the movement itself: the

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[3] Translations of documents from the Pelotas Secretariat of Education and the MST are the author's.

constant threats from the landowners mean that internal unity and cohesion is essential. It seems that however much a political organization values individual autonomy it will tend to repress that authority in favour of cohesion if faced with an external threat of competitor. This was the experience of the Sandinista revolutionary government in Nicaragua, who implemented Freire's ideas in the national literacy campaign, but where the need for unity (faced with external aggression) was eventually stronger than the goal of conscientization (Arnove, 1986; Miller, 1984). The Freirean approach, therefore, provides a strong framework for critical attitudes in the context of solidarity and a commitment to social equality and justice, yet may be problematic at the level of the nation-state.

Final observations

This paper has presented some of the opposing views on the issue of critical attitudes towards the government as an element of citizenship. While critical thinking is desirable in educational and political terms, building a citizenship education programme on this basis is not a straightforward task. The dilemma is well presented by Callan:

> A civic education that is rational rather than rhetorical and morally critical rather than moralising is not obviously a powerful instrument for the arousal of those political affections whose maintenance seems especially difficult in large, pluralistic democracies whose present and future are overshadowed by a morally ambiguous past. In fact, it might be suspected that this spirit of untrammelled social criticism is commonly corrosive of such emotions…(1997, p 102)

Yet, as Kymlicka (1999) makes clear, shared membership is not necessarily antithetical to critical attitudes towards the authorities. It depends on the understanding of membership and allegiance, whether in relation to an abstract concept of nation or ethnic group, or to the well-being of the people based on principles of justice. What is incompatible with critical attitudes is not shared membership, but the Hobbesian fear of civil unrest and the consequent need for obedience and unquestioning allegiance.

Given that there are considerable differences within civic republicanism and liberalism, and even among those normally considered as being on the left or the right of the political spectrum (there are authoritarian communists and fascists for example) what is it that distinguishes those who promote questioning attitudes from those who do not? To some extent this might be explained by the level of external threat presented to a community, as seen in the case of the MST. Yet equally important is the fear of internal threat.

Callan (1997), I believe, gets to the heart of the problem by attributing Galston's endorsement of sentimental civic education to "pessimism about the ability or desire of ordinary citizens to understand the rational grounds for the political institutions under which they live" (p 102). The Hobbesian position is basically the result of a more pessimistic view of human capabilities than that of Locke, who does not believe that people need to be protected from themselves to such an extent.

It is clear that the word "critical" is frequently used in an unashamedly partisan way, and this is true of the right as well as the left. If we aim to promote critical attitudes in schools, we must be sure to cultivate a genuinely questioning mind, and not one that questions only one political viewpoint, or only the prevailing political viewpoint. This does not simply involve reflecting on and judging the ruling party of the day, but the whole form and structure of the State. We can therefore identify two levels of critical political skills. First, that of the ability to judge the merits of the different political parties competing in elections in order to vote effectively. This is a basic requirement for individuals in a liberal democracy, without which

even the most minimal form of democratic government cannot exist (Kymlicka, 1999). Second, there is a more substantial form of critical political thinking, where the individual can apply the same judgements to the *structures* of the State, seeing that the political organization, institutions and philosophy underlying it can be adapted or replaced if needs be. Political institutions of any one time are supposed to be the manifestations of a system of justice, and are only valid as long as they uphold that justice. What citizens need, therefore, is above all to develop a sense of justice, and act constructively on it. How that may be achieved, and the role of schools and citizenship education programmes in the task, is the crucial question that must be addressed.

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