Educating for citizenship: Learning through the lens of exchange

The Canada/European Union Citizenship Education/Initial Teacher Education Project

Ian Davies, Mark Evans, Peter Cunningham, Gunilla Fredriksson, Graham Pike, Hanns-Fred Rathenow, Alan Sears, Felicitas Tesch, Pam Whitty

Acknowledgements
The project (reference 2000-0715/001-001 CPT-CPTCAN) was funded by the European Union and the Canadian government. During the project some separate but related work was undertaken funded by the Central Bureau for Visits and Exchanges (British Council). The universities represented in the project gave generously in a variety of ways to assist the development of our work. We are grateful for their support.

Section One: Introduction
The project was developed as a response to the increasing demand for effective citizenship education in the interdependent and multicultural societies of Canada and of the European Community. Through our work student teachers and others became exposed to new cultural perspectives on education and citizenship, and became more competent and confident in their future roles as educators of national and global citizens. There are some problematic issues to which we will refer in this paper but the overwhelming conclusion as a result of careful data analysis is that this project has achieved a great deal, going beyond what was originally planned both in the number of people involved (mobile and non-mobile) and the scope of the activities in which they became involved. We undertook three interconnected activities:

i. conferences in citizenship education (year 1)
ii. school-based teaching practices in a country other than their own (years 2 & 3) moving 75 student teachers and 8 members of staff;
iii. a programme of activities designed to increase awareness of citizenship issues and to encourage the practice of education for citizenship in their future careers (years 2 & 3).

We argued in our proposal that the experience of working in an unfamiliar cultural and educational setting would encourage participants' reflection on the nature of citizenship and that the activities will provide curriculum ideas and practical classroom and school-wide strategies. We suggested that there would be benefits for non-mobile students and others. We worked collaboratively on this project co-operating across 4 countries and 7 higher education institutions with the support of one associate institution on both sides of the Atlantic. Partner institutions included: University of Prince Edward Island, University of New Brunswick, and University of Toronto from Canada and the University of York, London Metropolitan University, Technical University of Berlin, and Linkoping University, Sweden from the European Community. Associate institutions included the Teachers' Institute, Library of Parliament (CA) and the Citizenship Foundation, UK.

A careful process of selection and recruitment was established. Extensive pre-departure preparation was organised with inputs focusing on general cultural awareness, some limited linguistic preparation, insights into the nature of education systems and issues about citizenship.
education. Dialogues were established between host and guest students prior to departure by means of e-mail. The partners agreed (individually and institutionally) to recognise that the work undertaken by students who take part in exchanges would be recognised as part of their normal programme of study.

The students were also guided before departure to produce a piece of written work that would aid their understanding of citizenship education. It was explained that the mobile teacher candidates were expected to complete a 'Citizenship Education Learning File'. This would include an investigatory project. It was agreed that in addition to a school placement for each student there would be a programme of activities that helped students to learn more about the host country, to experience general professional development and to understand more about citizenship education. The project was launched on both sides of the Atlantic by significant involvement in high profile conferences and a number of papers have already been published as a result of involvement with the project. When we invited feedback from mobile students we found that 97% of respondents awarded a grade of 4 or 5 (with 5 being the best and 1 the worst) about their overall reaction to the experience.

Section 2: The Evaluation of the Project

A qualitative evaluation methodology was adopted, influenced by the "illuminative evaluation" model developed by Parlett and Hamilton (1977) which aims:

> to discover and document what it is like to be participating in the scheme, whether as teacher or pupil; and, in addition, to discern and discuss the innovation's most significant features, recurring concomitants and critical processes (p. 10).

A variety of data were collected including the individual written applications to take part, group conversations and individual feedback. Documentary analysis was undertaken in all three years of the project. Documents were exchanged between partners in order to develop initial understandings about the aims and processes of teacher education programmes in the countries involved in the project. We analysed the written descriptions of programmes established for those who became mobile as well as the written assignments produced by students. During the period of mobility students were asked to write on three occasions (beginning, middle and end of their exchange) comments about their reactions to the experience.

At the end of an exchange each student completed an 8-page feedback form that included 7 main sections: placement school; programme of additional activities; accommodation and catering; travel; budget; recommendation; preparation. There were 20 prompts across the 7 categories for the students that were intended to allow for open, full and focussed responses. There were opportunities for students to give a grade (1 for the most negative reaction and 5 for the most positive reaction) in relation to three areas (school placement, accommodation and an overall judgement about the project).

A significant amount of data was collected through interviews. The three issues of personal, general professional development for teachers and citizenship education that were used as a focus for the three extended written statements provided by students although care was taken to allow for other issues to be followed as directed by the respondent. All students were interviewed
both individually and as a member of a group. Interviews were lead either by the member of staff who visited mobile students or a representative of the home institution.

The collection of data through informal methods also took place. Extensive e-mail correspondence between staff and students, and students and students provided a rich source by which issues came to the fore. It is not claimed that all correspondence was seen by the evaluators but rather that a significant amount of material was available for analysis. (Of course, students knew that an evaluation was taking place, which would lead to data being used, and were free to copy members of staff into the correspondence or not). The issues that emerged through such correspondence and with conversations with teachers and between members of the project team came to provide useful insights into what students were doing, what qualities in relation to their role as beginning teachers and citizenship educators were being displayed and what perceptions were being generated.

During analysis of the qualitative data we used a process of category generation and saturation derived from Glaser and Strauss (1967). This process has been used frequently by others (e.g. Vulliamy and Webb 2003) and is appropriate for our approach to evaluation. Our interest in the issues of personal and professional development with a focus on citizenship education made us especially careful always to ensure an ethical approach to data collection and analysis. Four issues are particularly important. Firstly, students knew that they were involved in a process of evaluation, were encouraged to share information and comments only when they felt it was appropriate to do so and were guaranteed anonymity. Secondly, we aimed to develop a collaborative approach to evaluation in which, within a standard format for data collection and analysis, contributions were made by all members of the project staff team. All staff became involved in the agreed standard collection of data from students, and also in the provision of additional data if they felt that there were interesting probes and prompts that could be used. Discussions took place in various 'zones' (within Canada; within Europe; across the whole transatlantic team) that we hoped would allow for appropriate ‘local’ expertise to be deployed without losing a sense of overarching coherence. Thirdly, we wanted to avoid a situation in which in the process of evaluating our own work we developed comfortably positive analyses. While it was not possible for us to engage an external evaluator we were careful to invite involvement and comment from beyond the central teams whenever possible. The encouragement of the writing of an MA dissertation (with the involvement of an external examiner), the contributions made by the associate partners who were essential and valued contributors, but perhaps not as central to the success of the project as the 7 universities, and the writing of a number of pieces about the project (all of which were subject to peer review) makes it possible to argue that our results have been subject to critical external judgement. Fourthly, we were aware of the complex and at times unhelpful relationships that have been established between project staff and funding agencies (e.g. Torrance 2003). The points made above about the relationship we established with external reviewers are partly helpful in relation to this issue. However, we have deliberately built this negative possibility into our thinking and, as we are now beyond the funding point, we do not feel subject to any external influence and have not, in any case, felt subject to inappropriate suggestions about the ways in which the evaluation could develop.

Section Three: Issues Arising from Data Analysis
We will discuss a number of issues in four sections: logistics, personal enhancement, general professional development, citizenship education.

Logistics
The project has demanded a very high input by all staff and students. The total amounts available from project funding did not recognise the full costs. Furthermore the unequal arrangements for funding (only 50% for Europeans compared to 66% for Canadians) were not helpful as we experienced unequal flows of mobile student teachers.

A number of problematic issues emerge indirectly from the rather unsatisfactory financial context. Since the early 1990s in England schools have been paid by universities to mentor students. Without payment schools do not accept students on teaching practice. Although schools have been very understanding and helpful the need to explain to senior management teams that money could not be transferred in the usual way has been time consuming and awkward.

In a complex programme involving 9 institutions in 4 countries some very challenging but ‘normal’ difficulties are to be expected. We experienced staff illness and changes in school personnel as phlegmatically as possible. However, the emergence of Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 was very challenging. A complicated set of arrangements for exchanges were already in place before announcements were made by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Those careful arrangements were cancelled and then, at the last minute, put back into place. One member of staff in Sweden engaged in lengthy negotiations with schools and even allowed Canadian students to live in her own apartment when other options became difficult.

We found challenges associated with the reactions of immigration officials. It was always extremely difficult to receive replies to queries made to embassies. There seemed to be unwillingness on the part of officials to answer questions that would have assisted us. When, however, advice was given it seemed to require expensive, time consuming, intrusive and unnecessary procedures. One institution following advice given by the Canadian embassy and their own university decided in the first year of exchanges to encourage students to undertake a medical examination. The experience of this procedure was such that it was not repeated during the following year. It seemed to us that the nation state is defining the sort of citizenship that is held at the very moment that our project aims for a broader frame of reference.

‘Personal’ Issues
A variety of ‘personal’ issues arose. The most concrete - and negative, for Canadians moving to Europe - of students’ experiences related to accommodation. Language learning was also a significant issue for some students, especially for those moving from Canada to Sweden or Germany. Although minimal preparation can work within Europe in ERASMUS/SOCRATES schemes that require a placement of anything up to one academic year the short placements of 4-6 weeks were inadequate for allowing for effective language learning. At times it felt to some as if we were caught between choosing students who already had appropriate language skills (with the potential drawback of not having a very significant impact upon certain individuals), or tailoring activities to the monolingual students with the possibility that some would have an unexceptional set of experiences during the placement.
Generally, and less tangibly than the specific ‘personal’ issues discussed above, there was an extremely positive reaction to taking part in an international placement. The typical response was, in the words of one European student, “rewarding and inspiring”. A Canadian commented:

the experience has had a great impact on me personally and professionally. It has broadened my knowledge in citizenship education, curriculum development, instructional strategies and teaching across the curricula. It has provided me with a greater interest into the subject of citizenship education as an area for further research that I intend to pursue in the future. It has given me a greater understanding of global education and the importance of having a global perspective in teaching citizenship education.

We also feel that it is necessary to record the reactions that students experienced towards members of their own ‘side’ of the project. A German student commented:

From the distance of thousands of kilometres we also learned a lot about our home country. We understand some things better now because we are sensitised for a different view and have a better awareness of this now.

The Canadians reflected the same perspective. One Canadian student observed:

it gave me a renewed appreciation for Canadian multiculturalism - especially in Toronto...I think the level and respect for diversity and multiculturalism significantly affects one's approach to citizenship

A final issue to be explored in the context of ‘personal’ issues relates to a potential tension within the project. Given our interests in a democratic form of citizenship education we discussed the appropriateness of providing what could be perceived as a luxury experience for already well-travelled high status adults. It is true that some of our mobile students had extensive international experience and some even had family in their host country. We were also unsure as to the future impact that the project would have on the mobile students. Were we in the business of helping to create opinion formers who would lead others towards the benefits of international co-operation or was their placement an opportunity for ‘ordinary’ people to experience those benefits at first hand? For the most part we were content to look for the positive and while not constructing artificial barriers we were concerned to act in a way that would have maximum impact. One tutor commented:

I think there is enormous potential in these exchanges. It depends to some extent upon the students, I think it’s a larger impact probably on those who haven’t travelled much and haven’t experienced other cultures and for them it can be a life changing a life enhancing experience.

**General professional development**

There are some strong views put forward by students. It was common for both Canadians and Europeans to see their own experiences at home as being far more stressful than those which affected people elsewhere. Students from England, for example, could not believe that Canadian students were relatively untroubled by curriculum frameworks and testing and that teachers were not inspected. Comments about staff rooms often included the word “relaxed” with suggestions
that there were many more leisure related conversations than they were used to. One student went so far as to write:

Schools in [place] seem to be 20 possibly 30 years behind developments in Britain. In many respects they are in need of a radical shake up. There is nothing in the curriculum that says that teachers should teach in the fashion that they do. [place] is arguably in need of a national curriculum or uniform guide that teachers’ must adhere to and probably school inspectors to make sure that such a system is being adhered to.

This perhaps suggests that some students have already come to appreciate, to a greater extent, the philosophical approaches and practical applications of their own system and that they may be unable to fully appreciate approaches and applications that exist beyond their own contexts.

Some of the Canadians were surprised at the seemingly relaxed nature of European life. Some suggested that the pressurised existence that they were used to at home did not exist. Instead they noted teachers having regular and frequent breaks and adhering to standard ways of doing things that meant not staying after school when the occasion demanded. One - admittedly unusually strong – example of a student who held to that perception seemed to suggest that the host teachers would benefit from the student teachers experience is shown below:

The skills we had to offer in schools were underused. They didn’t know what they could get from us. I felt I was very prepared and what I prepared wasn’t used. …Initially we were just observing and then when they found out what we are capable of doing they tapped into that.

The Canadian students in England had to adapt quickly to a system that, very unlike their own, is driven by the existence of a National Curriculum and national inspection agency. While new knowledge was acquired, certain misunderstandings were evident as outlined in the quotation shown below,

One of the differences would be that they have a National Curriculum but they actually have a book full of lesson plans in their entirety with the supporting pages and handouts and the equipment needed and the material needed to teach their lesson at their finger tips. So in Canada we would have to assemble all the material ourselves and in England they don’t.

It appears that she believes, inaccurately, that the National Curriculum is in force in the United Kingdom, that there is very tight central control over the fine detail of what is taught in the classroom and that teachers do not write their own curriculum materials.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students made a number of rather sweeping generalisations as a result of their school experiences. Many Canadian and Europeans however seemed to develop a common notion of 2 issues. They quickly came to claim that the Canadian school students were academically less pressured but socially more mature. This inverse relationship between ability and relationships was raised frequently. One comment from a Canadian student teacher about students in English schools is typical:

I've probably seen 12 different classes and most of them have been the same. I really feel the students here surpass my students in Canada for educational ability. They can quickly get to work
Many of the Canadian students were quite shocked at the nature of the relationships between teachers and students in English classrooms. One student provided a stark example,

Yesterday I witnessed something really distressing. If I were the girl I would be crying. They have uniforms. Shoes without platforms. You know these girls they are coming into womanhood. We’re going on a field trip to [a Church]. The students were told they had to wear flat shoes. They were told that in a letter. The girl with the shoes…I felt it was taken too far. "You are just a stupid girl for wearing those shoes". That would be completely unacceptable [in Canada]. Another example, students had to draw…some pupils did the whole page so she yelled at them. "You deserve to get a detention". She was so angry about her lesson being off. She threatened them with a detention. A girl got a detention because she didn’t bring her pencil crayons. I saw things like that. It’s a little bit of an eye opener.

One Canadian student commented succinctly and drily:

you [i.e. teachers in England] are way more straightforward with your children. Shut up and sit down! Well!

Students were able to apply these insights to citizenship education:

On a number of occasions in the course of my study of citizenship education I found myself wondering if it could be possible that the people involved truly understood the implications of what they were saying for education and society. As teachers, we must surely be aware that it makes little pedagogical sense to attempt to teach students about participatory democracy from within a system of education that is strongly hierarchical in structure, not particularly inclusive, and regulated with powerful social control mechanisms. I think that Professor Crick is quite right that citizenship education can and should be a profoundly transformative activity.

Another commented:

I have concluded that the essential challenge in providing effective citizenship education is not about curriculum and course work, but rather about making a true commitment to democratic processes and a definition of citizenship on a global scale.

Such propositions are helpful but not necessarily because they suggest some sort of 'truth' has been discovered. Rather, there is very clear evidence of students trying to make sense of their own experience. They make mistakes and say and write things that are often simply inaccurate or insensitively controversial, but they are engaging in a real and very challenging professional development exercise. It seemed clear from various statements that they made and the lively way in which they made them, that they had never before been challenged in such a fundamental manner. As such, we are not arguing that these examples of strongly held views and, at times, misperceptions are necessarily negative outcomes. As one fairly representative student remarked in her evaluation: 'I think I will realize more when I get into my own classroom how much I learned'. It may be helpful in future initiatives of this type for tutors to provide more formal attention to learning activities such as seminars or additional readings that would assist mobile students better contextualize their observations.
Citizenship Education

Prior to their exchange some students imagined that the people on the opposite side of the Atlantic are more knowledgeable and have more expertise to develop citizenship education. In England, for example, the very recent introduction of citizenship education into the National Curriculum heightened students' interest. One European student commented:

citizenship in England is relatively in its infancy and so the opportunity to see citizenship in action in a context where it is more established will be invaluable.

But citizenship is relatively new elsewhere (at times the term 'citizenship education' is not used at all) and a Canadian student spoke for many when she suggested that 'answers' could be found away from her home country:

There is no compulsory citizenship education in my home province ... I am hoping that the actual defining of citizenship movements going on in the UK will help me as a citizenship educator.

Interestingly, however, some of that citizenship education occurred not through any organised programme but rather through the experience of being abroad and of making arrangements to go abroad. We have already referred above to the challenges associated with immigration. In such contexts the goal of global citizenship contrasted sharply with the experience of nationally oriented officials who seemed to be either unhelpful in their passivity concerning the provision of information or inappropriately assertive. Once their placements had begun, students had an opportunity to see at first hand the reaction to extremely controversial political issues in another country. The exchanges in 2003 took place immediately prior to the war in Iraq. The war was obviously a very significant feature of media reports. The opportunity to see not only how another country reacted to these events but also to see how one's own country was portrayed by others was keenly felt. This issue also impacted directly on school life with, for example, leaflets being distributed about a motion drafted and passed by the Trustees of the Toronto District School Board relating to the ways in which controversial issues could be discussed and inviting action by teachers and others. Issues of citizenship were thrown into stark relief. Students were very affected by these issues with assignments being written on the ways in which controversial issues were and could be discussed.

Students found it stimulating to be taken out of their own environment and placed into a very different setting. The issue of multiculturalism and multicultural education was very obviously a key issue for many of the students. Some of the Europeans remarked very positively on the multicultural nature of some schools in Toronto. The opportunity to see teachers creating simulations in which immigrants had to be attracted to a country was a welcome change of emphasis for some Europeans. It was a curious experience for some of the students from Toronto to be taken from this multicultural context and placed by project staff, who were keen to develop pluralistic understandings, into an environment where as one student remarked "[name of school] is about as un-multicultural as they come". An interesting twist on experiences with multiculturalism was the two New Brunswick students who were placed in [name of school] in London. For them this was a real experience with diversity as they come from a relatively mono-cultural part of Canada and this school's population is 100% Bangladeshi Muslims. Both students, however, commented on the cultural isolation of the school and the lack of interest of
students to learn about other cultures. One wrote, "The students at [name of school] are almost 100% Muslim-Bangladeshi, with many students interacting only in this culture both within and outside of school." Another interesting situation was the English students who noted that their host school which included a large French Immersion program and a stated commitment to teaching second language gave no indication of that in the public spaces: bulletin boards, entry ways, etc, where everything was in English. They pointed out that schools in England, at least in London, went out of their way to recognize diversity in language in these kinds of public spaces but did not teach the languages in the classroom. Perhaps in practice the project was helping to develop a sense of multiculturalism in national contexts as opposed to an untrammelled internationalism. For European students who had come from a community that was relatively restricted in its diversity, it was inspiring to be able to listen to university-based lectures in Canada about 'how to teach in a cultural context' and to visit a 'Native Elementary School'. It was fascinating for them "to see the Maliseet language and culture being preserved in a westernised setting" even though "it was clear that this was a relatively new and uncertain harmony".

Of course, multicultural education is relevant to all students whatever their local circumstances but a challenge was perceived by some students as they moved across contexts. The nature of these challenges was at times surprising to students. Perhaps the starkest illustration of that surprise related to the different sense of nationality that was perceived. Student teachers from a relatively monocultural local context within Europe were very surprised by the singing of the Canadian national anthem in schools at the beginning of each day. The European (especially English) awareness of the evils of imperialism had perhaps led them to expect simple and inappropriate associations between national anthems and national identity. It was refreshing for them to question the extent to which patriotism could be distinguished from nationalism and to consider whether assimilation, multiculturalism or interculturalism was being practised. It was of great interest to see the extent to which English naturalisation procedures are developing in a way that follows the Canadian model (Dyer 2003; Travis 2003). The UPEI students had a fascinating debate in Berlin about their being 'proud to be Canadian'. Their German counterparts said they would never claim to be 'proud to be German' due to their perceptions of its fascist overtones. It led to self-revelatory moments for the Canadians on the nature of patriotism and how cultures express it differently.

Involvement in school programmes helped students to explore these issues further. Those students (especially those from Germany) who had expressed an interest in Holocaust education were able to continue to develop their understanding in Canada. The interlocking histories of the nations represented in our project were explored, most notably by those who became involved in site visits. One Canadian student had the good fortune to be invited to accompany students on the school field trip to the World War One battlefields. She writes about the excitement she felt as they approached battlefields upon which Canadian troops had fought. After visiting Vimy Ridge, she commented:

As we walked around the trenches and the memorial, several people gathered around me to share in my reactions. I have never been so proud to be Canadian. One of the teachers put out the question as to why Colonials seemed to be sent out on the more dangerous missions, rather than British troops. Some students correctly guessed that they were deemed more expendable. There was a true community of learning taking place in that scarred and pitted landscape.
Students also commented on their introduction to a number of extra-school organizations directly involved in citizenship education. Many were very impressed with organizations like the Citizenship Foundation in London and War Child Canada in Toronto. This kind of connection, between schools and NGOs, was one that some students felt brought more attention to the role of civil society in citizenship education and ought to be infused more explicitly.

The very broad interpretation of citizenship education could be problematic (Sears 1996). A narrower (or some would say more focussed) version of citizenship education might require a more explicit identification of political concepts that would provide a context within which students could learn and practise. Two possible consequences of characterising citizenship broadly seem to us to require further exploration. Firstly, students' thinking about citizenship shifted at times without any real sense of coherence; or, more positively, students were being allowed to explore different notions of citizenship without being led dogmatically to one predetermined model. The following quotation from a student shows perhaps the strengths and weaknesses of this loosely focussed approach revealing as it does the struggle for meaning that is ongoing (see Ofsted 2003 for a more broadly based account of some of these challenging issues):

I was thinking its [i.e. citizenship education] is about how to vote, everything that makes you a god citizen, all about how you make friends with people all the aspects of citizenship education. I was talking to the lady who did citizenship education [in the placement school] and she was talking about smoking, sunburn, you tell people to use sun lotion. I was so surprised, it was friendship and another theme and loneliness and air pollution. So I have been doing some research, looking for articles for her. So I was a bit surprised about sun-screen and about pollution.

Some greater clarity is needed for this student for her to be able to make sense of these sorts of shifts.

Secondly, in a broad characterisation of citizenship we feel that the relative significance of classroom or school ethos is heightened. There were some extremely positive results of this approach. Students from Canada, for example, wrote intelligently and insightfully about the work of the [name of school] in Sweden where democratic practices are observed. The student wrote about the very liberal atmosphere within the school in which rules are not imposed and drew attention to very positive work with asylum seekers. This, wrote the students, provided "the experience of a lifetime". However, the comments made about the atmosphere in English schools (quoted above) left some Canadian students with different impressions. Some of the English students were concerned that in some Canadian schools they "observed lessons where over one third of the students are not engaged in the lesson. They are either listening to their headphones, asleep or feigning sleep". The criticisms of a more relaxed social approach left some feeling uncomfortable:

I have found the students are much more aware of topics such as tolerance, respect and discrimination than are their British counterparts. They have a very strong sense of right and wrong which is what I believe contributes to their generally respectful attitude towards each other. However, it can also be limiting as they find it hard to think outside narrow concepts of 'good' and 'bad'. In one class I observed on the Russian revolution a student asked who the good guys were between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. In addition the students are not given the opportunity to question or to think round topics as much as they are in Britain although they are perfectly capable of this when encouraged. Teaching seems to take a consensus approach to history and be delivered in the style of lectures and copying notes. I have also found it strange to work without schemes of
work or any form of public exam system. Whether a student 'passes' a course at the end of a semester depends wholly on the discretion of the teacher.

We do not have answers to these challenging issues but feel that the project has allowed a useful, professional exploration.

Conclusions

The ‘Promoting Citizenship Education through Initial Teacher Education’ project has been an exhausting and challenging process. We have succeeded in moving students and staff across the Atlantic in a way that allow them, generally, to grow personally as well as in terms of professional development and in relation to citizenship education. We are convinced that the experience of the project will be of great benefit to all participants. One Canadian student, not used to travelling on her own, expressed this positive outcome succinctly:

Personally, this experience has allowed me to see, think and feel differently. I've grown with this experience, since I'd to make my own decisions and know what will work best in certain situations.

List of references


