

Democratic Values and Citizenship: A Pedagogical Reflection about Module 1 of the New Systems of Knowledge Syllabus 2008–10

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Abstract: *In January 2006, the Senate of the University of Malta approved the new Systems of Knowledge syllabus 2008-10. Module 1 is a totally new module related to democratic values and citizenship aiming at supporting the present and future young Maltese generations to become active democratic Maltese, European, and global citizens. This paper acknowledged, firstly, that there is a lot of content that is necessary but new to most of the students. Secondly, in line with the wording of the document itself, there is a need to shift the emphasis of the aims, away from emphasising teaching content to teaching of skills as well as creative and deliberative thinking. Thirdly, this assertion is corroborated with findings from very recent empirical research administered by the author. Finally, this pedagogical reflection sets a challenge for all stakeholders to investigate whether students are able to use the content acquired during lectures in everyday life.*

Keywords: *Democracy, citizenship, deliberative thinking, active citizens, a new pedagogy.*

Introduction

This paper starts with a short reference to the aims and objectives of the new (IM 32) Systems of Knowledge syllabus 2008–10. This will be followed by a concise description of Module 1, the three different sections referring to knowledge, attitudes and values and finally skills. The research evolves mainly around the pedagogical implications of the new aims in connection with the new European and global dimension that is inherently present throughout the whole document. This is felt mostly when referring to the new project that will assess the students' attainment in that they have to show what they can 'give' as responsible citizens, citizens who are able to appreciate aesthetic values, demonstrate their responsibility as citizens when dealing with the present day environmental issues, and how they can best perceive the role of science and technology within these areas and in everyday life.

The research will initially focus on and comment about Module 1 of the new Systems of Knowledge syllabus 2008–10. This section will provide information about the new material that is found in the new syllabus, and at the same time will comment

about the new way it is presented throughout the whole syllabus document for all four modules, with all the pedagogical implications that this entails. The second section will point out that there is a need for a change in the way the lecturers perceive this module, and therefore would understand that there is a need to change the way it is taught. More emphasis should be given to the acquisition of skills rather than the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. Furthermore, this paper will seek to show that the attainment or success of the outcome of the teaching of Module 1 should not only be measured by the results that students will acquire in Systems of Knowledge when they sit for the exam for the first time in 2008, but by the more remote outcome when they 'graduate' to adult Maltese citizens in the future.

Citizenship should not be regarded simply as a status, but as a way of life where citizens show in reality that they really possess knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding that will help them in life to become truly and active democratic citizens. Nurturing democracy should be seen as the end, citizenship is the means. The present situation as to what our youth perceive and understand with respect to citizenship will be discussed in the third section, drawing information from findings from a three year research, administered by the author, at a time when the syllabus panel was discussing ways and means to develop a new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge. The last part of this paper will set a challenge to all those involved in the teaching of this new syllabus. The challenge is to become lecturers and researchers at the same time. One should not be satisfied only with the delivery of the syllabus, but the responsibility is of such a magnitude that it asks for all those involved to check whether the aims and objectives are being reached especially during the first years of implementation. Furthermore, while performing this exercise on an individual basis or as a school, the syllabus panel should be vigilant and one should be able to change and improve the same syllabus during the next four-year period.

Module 1: the document

In line with curricula and syllabi in other European countries, the new document of the syllabus for Systems of Knowledge 2008–10 is divided into distinct sections. As was pointed out earlier, the title for Module 1 is 'Democratic Values and Citizenship'. The first section refers mainly to the knowledge or content that is to be imparted during lectures as soon as the students start their first academic year. One is inclined to feel that this first module is of utmost importance not only with regards to the subject matter but also as it is the first set of lectures that the students come into contact within Systems of Knowledge. This being a new subject, unfortunately, not without prejudice and misconceptions, it is indeed very challenging for those who lecture the first module.

During these lectures students are introduced to a new pedagogy, and into a new world. It is already difficult for them to find their place as part of a bigger school, especially if they attend their post-secondary course at the Junior College. However, apart from that, they have to get accustomed to a new entitlement, which is compulsory and failing. It is not the aim and the place of this paper to go into these issues and one should hope that all this is in the past. The fact that the new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge has been accepted by the Senate of the University of Malta, at a time when most of the Maltese system of education and examination system are undergoing changes, should be taken as a sign in itself that certain issues now should be put behind us and we should start pulling up our sleeves and set our energies to work and make the best out of our time and professional abilities to meet the laudable objectives of this subject.

In the Systems of Knowledge syllabus for 1997, there was only a minor reference to the concept and history of the concept of 'democracy'. Having said that when it came to the matriculation examination, there were always one or two questions in Section A about democracy and at times questions about Plato's *Apology* which were also based on the effectiveness or shortcomings of democracy in antiquity, especially with regards to the outcome of Socrates' trial. Module 1 for 2008 still refers to the history of democracy however, not only as a concept but also as a system of government that evolved through the ages, and it is still unfolding in our time. This is one of the main important issues that have to be emphasized with the students. The fact that democracy started in antiquity, that it was even seen as a failure at one point and then went into hibernation for thousands of years, until it was revoked at different times, and more so, to a certain extent, in the twentieth century.

When reflecting about the different governments of the world, one is likely to conclude that most people in the world favour democracy over other types of government. Democracy is widely considered as the best system of government available, but at the same time one has to remember its fragility and the defects that undoubtedly exist. Democracy is a system where people generally experience a 'feel good' factor. Crick points out that 'in Western traditions citizenship is part of the good life, but can never be enforced on people'.¹ This has always been the case throughout the ages. However, one can rightly affirm that in the twentieth century, new issues came into play that are still with us today, and that require a more prepared citizenry.

This is the idea behind the teaching of different types of democracy, representative, participative and direct, definitions of which are still unfolding even today. Another important issue is that of globalization. At times one gets the impression

¹ I B. Crick, 'The presupposition of citizenship education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, London, 1999, p. 337.

that youngsters in Malta and all over the world, although surrounded with all the technology that connects them to the world in seconds, still feel that their immediate 'world' is the most important one, and that one should not worry about the repercussions of what is happening around the world, whether they are political, economical, health or environmental crisis. This section in the syllabus aims at making the students more conscious that there is a local, national, European and international or global dimension to every crisis, and that we are always affected by anything like oil prices, avian flu, unrestricted depletion of the global environment, and the rest, whether we like it or not.

Another section in the syllabus is the issue of the mass media and democracy. It is very appropriate to include this section because at times instead of using the mass media to inform and make our younger generations conscious of reality, those who are in power, wherever and to whatever degree, may use the media to tamper with the real significance of the issue, and leave sections of the populations in the dark. Last but not least, one should refer to the importance of the role of human rights in the life of citizens. Human rights are now regarded as part and parcel of the citizenship agenda, especially with the continuous growth of racism and xenophobia in most societies of the world. It is not enough to state that in Malta we are a democracy and we adhere to all the conventions that promote human rights. The next step would be to teach Maltese citizens what these rights are and how to make the best and most appropriate use of these rights and at the same time show how inappropriate it is to abuse and corrupt the system, and who is likely to be the one to suffer most, probably, the citizen him/herself.

The second section for Module 1 is about attitudes and values. One has to emphasise here the importance of values in society, and that modern multicultural societies have different sets of values. The emphasis here is about the major values in a democracy such as, liberty that promotes all types of freedom, equality, justice, tolerance, participation, loyalty, and patriotism. All these values are important for any citizen to live in a democratic way. While emphasising the liberal or individual way of defining democracy and the role of the individual in society, in the last decade the emphasis has shifted towards the communitarian role where one acknowledges the importance of the individual but within the community. While before the emphasis was about what the individual can get out of society, now the emphasis is also about what the individual can give back to society. The emphasis is also about the importance of participation and the way one has freedom of expression to participate actively in the life of society.

The third section is about skills. Apart from the content, values and attitudes that create the disposition for citizens to change hopefully, for the better especially where the need arises, one should be taught how to participate or how to function as

a democratic citizen in general. The acquisition of skills is a process that is easier for some rather than for others. For those who are brought up in an environment where their opinions are suppressed, and where young citizens have to do what they are told, they will find it more challenging to start participating. Some young citizens might be coming from backgrounds that suppress their thoughts and actions into submissiveness. Some of them might find it is the first time that they can feel free to react to things that they never thought about previously.

In order to live as an active democratic citizen, one has to acquire certain skills that help one to know how and where to acquire information, and at the same time appreciate the importance of that information before participating. One has to understand that one should be informed and able to handle controversial issues. To do that one should possess critical and creative skills, apart from a set of deliberative skills. Therefore, in order to participate, one should possess multiple communication skills, debating and argumentation skills. And this is where the project is tied to the content. Students have to 'enter' into society and make sense of what they are learning during lectures. They have to understand what makes good citizenship, to understand that a person has to give and not only to take out of society. The students have to understand that they should have an experience, an experience that hopefully will remain with them throughout their life and that serves as a catalyst for more experiences. This experience is intended to encourage the students to make the leap into the real world and understand that they have an important role in this set up.

A new pedagogy

In a recent parliamentary debate in the House of Commons in the UK, in the *Select Committee on Education and Skills*, with a special reference to Citizenship, Scott Harrison Specialist Subject Advisor for Citizenship in Ofsted defined 'citizenship' as follows: '[citizenship] is about knowing and understanding about being citizens and if pupils talk without knowledge they are sharing their ignorance and prejudice. [. . . citizenship] is about enquiry and communication, and if they know how to confront the media and make sense of it and read it critically then that is a good thing. [. . . citizenship] is about participating and working together, and if they do that and learn to collaborate and share, then surely those things add up to a package of what is worthwhile'.²

The emphasis therefore, is not on the acquisition of knowledge and understanding for its own sake, but the acquisition of knowledge as an aid for students to understand their role and identity in society. One should always keep in mind what one can give rather than what one can gain from society. Furthermore, understanding one's role

²S. Harrison, *Minutes of Evidence, Education and Skills*, House of Commons, UK, Oct. 2005, p. 7.

and responsibility as a citizen who is able and willing to defend and nurture democracy if the time and the need arise in general. Some recent issues in the Maltese situation that come to mind are the issue of racism and xenophobia, and the issue of the need to reclaim the right of every individual to watch any transmission, in this case football matches during the World Cup 2006, as was normal practice without having the need to pay for it.

Mick Waters, who is the Director of Curriculum, QCA, in another sitting in the House of Commons in the UK, in the *Select Committee on Education and Skills* argued that citizenship 'should be part of the way in which students meet their growing aspirations, their growing outlooks on life and it should be in the school's interest to encourage young people to be learning about citizenship from a very early age and developing their skills of citizenship so that they have an influence on the way in which their school works, operates and runs within their local community'.³ And Tony Breslin Chief Executive, Citizenship Foundation, in the same hearing pointed out and emphasised that 'citizenship is not just a new subject, it is a new and different type of subject and it is about combining the traditional work of the classroom with real opportunities for young people to develop citizenship skills during participation and involvement'.⁴

These statements should urge one to think about what type of pedagogy one is expected to use, given that one is supposed to start looking at the subject in a different way. One has to understand that in the 21st century, students should be seen as the centre of learning, where the lecturer helps out in order for the student to be prepared to face the modern issues that are always unfolding. One cannot give just one model and one answer since most situations are different, and most of the time, young citizens have to solve problems on their own by attributing what they had learned or experienced about something else, in the best possible way. Every day is more challenging than ever before. The type of experience that a student gets during the time spent at College is moulded by so many different factors despite the fact that the subject is compulsory. Lecturers should impart a style of lecturing that allows students to see this subject as beneficial to them and that although it is not only a taught subject, it is also an aspect of life. If part of the role of the schools and colleges and even more so university, is to achieve aims for young people, which include being confident learners and being active participants within their society and the world they live in, then there should be an element of learning which is bound to be wrapped up with the agenda which takes them forward as useful contributing adults to society as well as personally satisfied people.

³M. Waters, *Uncorrected Evidence 581, Education and Skills*, House of Commons UK, April, 2006, p. 5.

⁴T. Breslin, *Uncorrected Evidence 581, Education and Skills*, House of Commons UK, April, 2006, p. 6.

Gillborn criticizes the present education system in the UK, with regards to anti-racism policies, and argues that ‘in practice citizenship education operates as a form of *placebo*: an activity that gives the appearance of addressing the issues but which, in reality, manifestly fails to tackle the real problem’.⁵ In order for the new Systems of Knowledge syllabus not to undergo a similar fate, one should understand that the real problem that is encountered while teaching Systems of Knowledge is most of the time related with the issue of passing on the amount of information available, rather than equipping the students with the skills that enable them to change that information into knowledge. Another challenge is the difficulty in trying to make students more active participants in the classroom and in society. Another further challenge is that citizenship is always evolving, and needs the commitment of the teacher to continue to research and learn. The new Systems of Knowledge syllabus has brought the subject into the 21st century and now the subject is not to be taught chronologically, from antiquity to modern times. It is mostly about modern times and at times one needs to refer to the past to trace the origins of concepts and other issues. Although there is a book in print, as guidelines, one cannot say this is what it will always be or this is what it should be. Because citizenship is so contentious it needs time to evolve as well as having faith in the process of evolution and we must have a vision that this is worthwhile.

One should be careful then that the assessment and examination do not serve as a hindrance rather than as an acknowledgment of an experience. It was a wise and timely decision for the syllabus panel and the Matsec board to introduce a new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge for 2008–10. It is for the same reasons listed above that it is not possible to provide a direction for further than that. The next four years will be laying the foundations, where the lecturers and the syllabus panel should be in direct contact to find the best way of implementing the syllabus, especially with regards to the choice, performance, mentoring and monitoring of the new project, and the new examination questions that will be set for the coming years.

Through citizenship learning as a means of passing on democratic values, one should be especially concerned to ensure that the subject comes alive for young people in the way that has been described. Furthermore, one should seek to address issues in those areas concerning political aspects of education, and the confidence to take on controversial issues during what is an incredibly difficult time for many young people as they go through adolescence. Currently, different stakeholders, but most of all, from the lecturers who will be in the field, may raise many questions. There might be a lack of clarity about the importance and role of the students who are at the receiving end. They should be guided to develop a range of knowledge,

⁵D. Gillborn, ‘Citizenship education as placebo’ in *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, London, 2006, p. 85.

skills, and dispositions. They need to know about politics, law, economics, the functioning of communities and social groups and their responsibilities in terms of these communities and groups. They also need a 'toolkit' of citizenship skills: investigative, communicating, participating, negotiating, and taking responsible action. They should do that critically, effectively and deliberatively rather than merely actively.

It has been considered normal practice by politicians and education policy makers in the Western world in the post-World War period, including the Cold War period 'to fabricate policy'. According to Lawy & Biesta, 'that best inclines young people towards a set of values and attitudes that are commensurate with a view of citizenship forged in a different era [...] there has been a more overt concern with the duties of citizenship as opposed to the emphasis on rights; also a rhetorical turn from the neo-liberal idea of the consumer citizen, precedent in the 1980s and 1990s, to a "third way" approach, within a social and communitarian attitude.'⁶ This raises questions regarding whether the new syllabus will be successful or not, depending on the way it should be implemented. What we are trying to teach and assess might not in reality be the best way to implement change. In fact most of the time, most of the teaching and assessment that takes place in our system is of the type that emphasizes achievement. Lawy & Biesta contend that 'citizenship-as-achievement represents only a narrow interpretation of the idea of citizenship, and that the notion of *citizenship-as-practice*, articulated as an inclusive and relational concept, provides a much more robust framework for elucidating what it means to be a citizen. The former is founded upon the assumption that citizenship is a status that individuals can achieve. It is associated with a particular set of claims about what makes a citizen and about the necessary conditions of that status. Citizenship-as-practice not only encompasses problems and issues of culture and identity but draws these different dynamic aspects together in a continuously shifting and changing world of difference.'⁷

It has now been the case for a long time that as long as citizens supported the nation state in times of crisis, showed respect for the law, and exercised their democratic responsibility to vote in elections, citizens could and should remain largely passive. There are commentators, even today, who have concluded that the debate about citizenship can be synthesised into an essentially straightforward and naïve discussion about mechanisms to increase the participation of young people in electoral processes. In Malta we do not currently experience this problem, because there is still a large percentage of the population that participates in the local and general elections. However, what happens after the election should really concern one and all. The electorate, young and old remain passive for five years because they are not

⁶R. Lawy and G. Biesta, 'Citizenship-as-practice: the educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship', *British Journal of Education Studies*, Oxford, 2006, p. 36.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 37.

trained to participate or else because it is convenient both for the electorate and the politician to keep things as they are.

But this is not the main aim of citizenship. When one refers to citizenship as a means to pass on democratic values that help one understand one's role in a democracy and to be willing, able and ready to safeguard and nurture democracy at all times, then this should be taken as the main aim and vision for the future. This is stated in view of the fact that in recent years young people have been targeted by government policies and initiatives in Europe and in Malta aimed at countering the claim that they have become alienated from the political and democratic process. Where citizenship education is a statutory subject it has been seen, as stated by Lawy & Biesta 'as an exercise in civics education and 'good' citizenship rather than as a way of developing and nurturing the social and critical capabilities of young people.'⁸

From past experiences abroad one can understand that the approach has regrettably continued to be more focused upon teaching and learning *about* and *for* citizenship, and the emphasis was on efficiency, effectiveness and the quality of teaching. Lawy and Biesta propose a system that 'would work together *with* rather than *on* young people to nurture their democratic attitudes and dispositions'.⁹ A new pedagogy should not be introduced for its own sake but with a vision. The system of education of any country has a great responsibility, since one cannot assume that society at large provides the same opportunities to all its citizens, and not all the citizens are predisposed or inclined to acknowledge and adopt what is on offer. Guiding the Maltese young generation through all this is the role of every lecturer, and of the new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge.

Research findings

In order to demonstrate the appropriateness and timeliness of the decision of the syllabus panel for Systems of Knowledge to include Module 1 about *Democratic Values and Citizenship*, this paper refers to a recent research conducted by the author. The research findings that corroborate the claim for the need for a new pedagogy are the result of a study carried out over two years between 2003 and 2005.¹⁰ The study includes three types of research to undertake and triangulate the research and the data that emerged from the study. The first part consists of qualitative research, the content analysis of twenty mock examination scripts for Systems of Knowledge. The aim of the investigation was to carry out a pilot study to test, before actually coming up with

⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰ P. Caruana, 'From Rhetoric to Reality: A Critique of the Effectiveness or Shortcomings of the Students' Understanding of the Concepts of 'democracy' and 'Citizenship' in a College', Unpublished Ed.D. thesis, University of Leicester School of Education, April, 2006.

a hypothesis, if issues which the researcher had been observing and also discussing with colleagues, about the effectiveness or shortcomings of the 1997 syllabus for Systems of Knowledge were true or false. In this way the researcher wanted to investigate whether there was enough evidence that showed the need for further study of students' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship'.

This was followed by a second stage, a quantitative method, i.e. a questionnaire that was chosen and administered to five hundred college students. The research instrument was compiled from the findings and categories drawn up as a result of the content analysis of the examination scripts undertaken in the first stage. This second part of the study was aimed at investigating the hypothesis and to check if what was observed and studied in the twenty scripts was confirmed or refuted. The third part of the research was the undertaking of eight semi-structured interviews, a qualitative method, with colleagues/lecturers of Systems of Knowledge. The choice of mix-and-match approach was undertaken with the aim of triangulating the research. The interview questions were again based on the categories that emerged as a result of the first part of the study. The aim of the third part of the study was to confirm or refute the hypothesis set at the beginning of this study, as well as to analyse the lecturers' understanding of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' and at the same time analyse the lecturers' perception of the students' understanding of the same concepts mentioned above.

For the purpose of this study, this paper will only refer to the most significant findings, i.e. a synopsis of the findings of the three research instruments, and subject them to a very short synthesis and a short discussion. The first category that emerged from the content analysis of the mock examination scripts is *defining democracy*, i.e. referring to the way students defined democracy. The majority refer to local or general elections, and this was further corroborated by the interviews, where the answers ranged around *the rule of the country* and *the ability to vote and choose a political party*. The implications of the findings in this first category are that after being taught content in the primary and secondary school, in Social Studies and PSHE, and after attending lectures at the Junior College about the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' the students have not yet grasped a wide definition of the concepts and not embraced the emerging values. This continues to show how appropriate it was for the same study to recommend a new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge, and how timely it was for the syllabus panel to introduce a new syllabus, with Module 1 about *Democratic Values and Citizenship*.

The second category that emerged related to *the power of the people*. The majority of the students again referred to the power of the people in general elections. Some referred to the responsibility of each citizen to guarantee the continuance and smooth running of democracy, in the sense that the citizen is there for the system and not the other way round. It therefore makes sense to have students who opt to participate or

who are encouraged to participate as part of their project, in the running of local councils and other agencies, because the findings make one aware of the apathy that reigns among the students. On the other hand one must also keep in mind what Crick affirms, 'that not all volunteering involves citizenship. [. . .] Volunteering becomes citizenship when the volunteers are well-briefed on the whole context, given responsibility about how to organise their actions, and debriefed afterwards [. . .] whether the task could have been done better, or was even worthwhile at all. [. . .] Volunteers are free citizens acting together, they should never be canon fodder, however worthy the organisation they work for, however time-tested – or ossified.'¹¹

With respect to the responses for the category *numbers in a democracy*, the findings show that the respondents grasped the issue that in a democracy votes and numbers take most decisions. What is of concern is the fact that respondents refer to the electorate who vote for their favourite leader. However, one has to qualify 'favourite', does it refer to 'good' or 'who convinces easily? Others referred to numbers in a democracy as a form of control, or as the last resort to decide disputes. The implications that emerge from the findings of this category refer to the importance attributed to elections and the belief that numbers decide certain issues. The problem remains in the fact that citizens are not often called to decide about their future on a local or on a national level.

The next category is *direct and representative democracy*. Most respondents show that they have grasped the difference in the meaning but then in the questionnaire, 10.8% still are of the opinion that Malta is a direct democracy. This percentage raises concern because these were students who had explored this topic during lectures. One wonders what other young Maltese students who did not receive the same lecture content actually think of these issues, or whether they think at all about them.

With respect to the category *democracy in practice*, respondents emphasised the importance that democracy gives a sense of organisation. However they did not refer to the fact that it might create bureaucracy and may even lead to corrupt practices. Respondents did not emphasize the importance of the responsibility that every citizen has to participate when there is a national issue that calls for that duty. In fact only 15.8% were ready to participate in an active campaign; the rest would criticize, sit and watch or had no other choice in mind. This is very worrying and confirms what Miller points out that 'citizenship is not something that people learn spontaneously'.¹² Kerr argues that 'the worrying signs of alienation and cynicism among young people about the public life and participation [leads] to their possible disconnection and

¹¹ B. Crick, 'Why Citizenship at all?', in B. Linseley and E. Rayment (eds.), *Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Active Citizenship in 11–16 Education*, London, 2004.

¹² D. Miller, 'Citizenship: what does it mean and why is it important?' in N. Pearce and J. Hallgarten (eds.), *Tomorrow's Citizens*, London, 2000.

disengagement with it'.¹³ And furthermore, one should refer to the duties of every citizen as Oliver & Heater affirm, that 'a good citizen is one who enjoys freedom and is vigilant to defend it against the abuse of power, and participates as effectively as possible in public affairs, especially in the local community.'¹⁴

The next category is *majority and minority rule*, and the results show that most of the respondents did know the difference between majority and minority rule. Here however there is no reference to the problems faced by refugees and the inequalities experienced by other minorities in Maltese society. The majority think that the minority has no real power and only 20% think that the role of the minority is to pressure the majority.

The next category is connected to the previous one since it refers to *equality in participation*. But here again, the emphasis was on the equal right to participate in an election. Then the emphasis shifts on who has the right to decide. According to the respondents, only representatives have the right to decide, and only a few referred to the duty and responsibility of every citizen to participate equally in the government through active campaigns that show disagreement where needed.

The next category is again connected with the preceding one, *women in politics*. The findings refer to the role of women in society and in politics. In fact the findings show that respondents give the impression that women have the same rights as men and that in reality there are no gender issues in the Maltese society. However then only 51% argue that democracy reduces gender discrimination, and the reasons given in descending order are, that males still dominate the world, there is a need for cultural change and because of cultural restrictions. Enslin & White argue that 'women's socialization into the idea that it is natural for them to assume domestic responsibilities, and an accompanying assumption that the public realm and politics is more suited for men, makes participatory involvement an intimidating prospect.'¹⁵

The last category that is in line with this study is *freedom of expression* in a democracy. This is a fundamental right in a democracy, where the constitution and the government itself create and/or support provisions and institutions that help the citizens express themselves freely, even if it is against the government that instituted the provisions. The responses showed that the students know about the provisions, and argued that citizens can practice this freedom mostly through the media, trade unions and courts of justice. Plurality in broadcasting was referred to by the respondents in the semi-structured interview as an important aspect of democracy. However then there emerged the issue whether the citizens are prepared to use this

¹³D. Kerr, 'Citizenship Education in England: the making of a new subject', London, 2003 [ON-LINE Jan 2005].

¹⁴D. Oliver and D. Heater, *The Foundations of Citizenship*, London, 1994.

¹⁵P. Enslin and P. White, 'Democratic Citizenship', in N. Blake, P. Smeyers, R. Smith, and P. Standish (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*, Oxford, 2002.

freedom, or if they are willing to participate or not. It is one thing to have the laws and the provisions but it is another to actually make them function properly.

The implications presented show that the respondents appear to be conscious about the criticism of democracy but regrettably they fall short of taking an active role in society and participating fully as democratic citizens. This attitude creates concern since the respondents do not really understand and value the positive elements of democracy, mainly rights, and they do not see a different way forward or the possibility of changing the situation from the current state. If the latter is the case, it is no wonder that youngsters are ready to adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude and forgo participation in political decisions.

Educators and researchers

The reality outlined above shows that teachers have a new role with further responsibilities apart from adopting a new pedagogy in supporting students regarding their own role in a democratic society. John Potter in his 'The challenge of education for active citizenship'¹⁶ sets about outlining the challenge not only of citizenship education but also of education in general. Potter's observations about education in the UK are easily attributed to other countries in the world, among them Malta. The challenge refers to terrorism, the erosion of social capital and the role of young people. Potter also asks if democracy is under threat and he refers to the low turnout in many countries in national elections. He refers mostly to the Crick Report presented in 1998, as guidelines for the government in the UK and the Third Way values. But then at one point, Potter asks whether schools will effectively meet the requirements of the programme of study as presented in the Crick Report. In a similar manner, this paper asks, will schools effectively meet the requirements of the programme of study as set in the new Systems of Knowledge syllabus for 2008–10? Will it support young people to be motivated and energised to become informed and active citizens? Will the new syllabus help in achieving a change in the political culture of our country, by first and foremost achieving a change in the way young people look at themselves and their responsibilities towards their country?

Sears argues that 'citizenship in a modern pluralist society is complex and shifting and that educating for citizenship will require much more nuanced and sophisticated approaches than have dominated in the past.'¹⁷ Schools that will be most successful in teaching democratic values and citizenship will be those that link the content with their wider vision and mission; those schools that recognise that quality education brings together academic standards with education inspired by values; those that

¹⁶ J. Potter, 'The challenge of education for active citizenship', in *Education and Training*, Vol. 44, No. 2, London, 2002.

¹⁷ A. Sears in a book review in *Theory and Practice in Education*, London, 2004.

emphasize student participation; treat students as part of the solution to any challenge and promote continuing professional development into teaching and learning methods that emphasize active learning. Finally, schools will be successful in teaching democratic values and citizenship when they build long-term partnerships with the local and wider communities.

In line with all this stands the emphasis on an interesting and relevant project and classroom learning that enables students to develop a real sense of personal achievement. This is why as a result of the new syllabus, students can choose a project in connection with one out of four modules, that really interests them most, and that also makes them feel fulfilled apart from acquiring knowledge. That is why it is important to check that what students are learning during lectures, may also be used in everyday life. What is learned theoretically should be tried and proved in practice. In that way students would feel they are adding meaning to theory and putting the latter into reality.

For this reason it is recommended that teachers do not feel that they are the suppliers and students, the consumers. In a globalised world it is easy to look at education as a market economy where the classroom becomes the place for the exchange of supply for demand. Teachers should be encouraged to become researchers in a way of acquiring feedback about what they are teaching, if this is easily grasped or not, and what can be done to improve the methods used. The first years of the implementation of this syllabus should be taken also as a continuous longitudinal research that provides feedback to the syllabus panel from the teachers who are in the field. Research should focus on the effectiveness or shortcomings of the new syllabus and of the methods being used and one should have the courage to adapt and change methods and practices whenever the need arises.

Conclusions

In conclusion one can rightly affirm that the choice of including the first module in the new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge, i.e. *Democratic Values and Citizenship* is an appropriate move to usher the subject into the twenty-first century. It is right and timely that it is actually the first module, followed by the others because it could serve as a foundation and also a guide for the other modules. Citizenship, aesthetics, science and technology, and the environment are all fast evolving fields that generate issues that need explanations in a fast evolving world.

This claim is founded on the belief that there is a need to shift the emphasis of aims, from purely teaching content and individual fulfilment, to teaching of skills, creative and deliberative thinking to students who if not continuously updated, might find themselves lost when in contact with the realities that they form part of. Our young generations should be encouraged to feel that they are evolving and improving as individuals but also as part of a community, and they should also be encouraged to

understand that in more ways than one that they might be called to contribute in different ways to the well being of their country.

The concise synopsis of the findings of the recent study administered by the author of this paper at the Junior College of the University of Malta further corroborates the need for this change. If we do not start immediately to change old habits that promote passivity, our system will not be able to support the development of our younger generations into democratic, Maltese, European, and global citizens. In fact, one of the recommendations that emerged from the abovementioned study was the need to change and update the Systems of Knowledge syllabus, preferably including a module on democratic values and citizenship. Furthermore, the change should also occur, where needed, by also encouraging educators to become researchers. Most of the time teaching citizenship education has to be based on a type of trial and error method, and one method that is effective with one class might not be so with another.

The author acknowledges and wishes to demonstrate, at the same time the magnitude of this change in the Systems of Knowledge syllabus. This is not a cosmetic change but it is a fundamental change that demands a change in culture. The change is even more challenging as it gives a statutory democratic values and citizenship entitlement to post secondary students who intend to continue their studies at the tertiary level, but this entitlement is only to be implemented at the post secondary level. More may have been gained if this 'change' was part of a national strategy for citizenship education. Although citizenship is taught in Maltese schools as stipulated by the Maltese National Curriculum, one feels that it is not properly defined. It is also important to note that since 1999, the aims have experienced a lot of change worldwide. Students still depend on 'good' PSHE teachers or teachers of other subjects who have teaching and discussion at heart. If changes are not implemented, our system of education risks to act as a 'placebo' (Gillborn above) and we will only become conscious of the situation when it is too late. Our system could in fact be undemocratic when in actual fact; it is supposed to be teaching democratic values.

This paper proposes that while the new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge 2008–10 is implemented, apart from the research proposed earlier regarding the effectiveness and shortcomings of the content and methods used for Systems, one should also consider a national research aimed at coming up with an acceptable definition and a national strategy for citizenship in the Maltese System of Education, and short-term and long-term amendments to the system. In the words of the Maltese Minister of Education, Youth and Employment, Dr Louis Galea in his Official Opening Speech for the European Workshop *Citizenship an Educational Challenge 2005* (Malta 14–18 March 2005): 'democracy can only function if citizens are well informed, active, responsible and possess analytical skills and share democratic values. Education is essential in promoting values of human rights and democracy, rights

and responsibilities and in equipping young people with the competences for life so that they are ready for living democracy. Learning democracy is a lifelong process.’¹⁸

Let us hope that this will be the vision for future policies in education if one envisages a society consisting mainly, of active democratic citizens, ready, willing and able to act and participate on the local, national, European, and international level. Let us hope that the new syllabus for Systems of Knowledge 2008–10 will serve as a catalyst for this important change in the Maltese system of education and in Maltese culture itself.

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