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‘Politics is ethics done in public’: Exploring Linkages and Disjunctions between Citizenship Education and Character Education in England*

- A comprehensive discussion of the development of both forms of education in England.
- A detailed examination of how both forms of education ought to be understood.
- A careful analysis of the similarities and differences between these forms of education.

Purpose: This article explores linkages and disjunctions between citizenship education and character education in England.

Approach: The article undertakes a theoretical discussion of what both forms of education are and involve, and a historical overview of their development over the past twenty years, utilising a wide range of primary and secondary sources.

Findings: Citizenship education programmes tend to place much greater emphasis than character education on the development of the necessary knowledge and skills that enable participation in political and democratic activities. The focus of character education is on personal ethics rather than public ethics, and the particular understanding of character education advanced by British politicians has been narrow and instrumental, linking the development of character with individual ‘success’, especially in the jobs market.

Research implications: Comparative research is now needed to examine the strengths and weaknesses of these two forms of education as they are delivered in other countries, and to explore the similarities and differences between the experiences of different countries.

Practical implications: Policy-makers concerned to ensure that young people have the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to engage in civic and political activity should focus on programmes of citizenship education rather than character education.

Keywords:

Citizenship education, character education, England, social capital, political participation

1 Introduction

The late Bernard Crick made clear in his classic study *In Defence of Politics*, first published in 1962, his view that politics is a branch of ethics done in public, in which experience plays a central role (Crick, 1992). For Crick – who chaired the Advisory Group on Citizenship, whose report (DfEE/QCA, 1998) led to the introduction of citizenship in the National Curriculum in England – politics is best defined as the activity of citizens freely debating public policy, and where differing interests in society are conciliated peacefully (see Crick, 1992; see also Flinders, 2012).¹ This article examines the development of both citizenship education and character education in England in recent years, setting out also how both forms of education ought best to be understood. It makes clear that whereas during New Labour’s years in power citizenship education came to prominence, in the period since 2010, in which the UK has seen first, a

Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and second, a single party Conservative government, citizenship education has declined in significance to policy-makers and character education has risen in importance on the political agenda.

The article argues that character education has the potential to contribute to citizenship education through the cultivation of the character of the active citizen. It also, however, draws attention to important differences between citizenship education and character education. In particular, that citizenship education, unlike character education, places, or ought to place, great emphasis on the development of appropriate knowledge and skills, not just values and attitudes, among young people; that the focus of character education is on personal ethics rather than public ethics, and with addressing important moral or political issues at the level of the individual rather than at any other level. The article argues that the particular understanding of character education advanced by British politicians is narrow and instrumental, linking the development of character with individual ‘success’, in particular, in the jobs market. It concludes that this reflects the government’s focus on pupils and students as future workers and consumers in a competitive global economy, rather than ensuring that young people are equipped to play a part in the democratic process so as to address issues of general concern through collective action.

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2 Understanding citizenship education

Citizenship is an 'essentially contested concept' and, as such, citizenship education is a contested subject (Crick, 2000, p. 3; Lister, 1997, p. 3; Miller, 2000, p. 82).² At a basic level, citizenship can be defined in terms of an individual's membership of a state or of a political community of some kind and the legal and moral rights and duties that this membership gives rise to. Citizenship then has legal dimensions, relating to both national and international law, defining who are and who are not citizens and who are and who are not accorded legal and other rights, and normative aspects, being concerned to specify how an individual citizen should behave and what it is about their behaviour that should be regarded as admirable or worthy of criticism. It can also be seen as relating to individual and group identities, to citizens' possession of particular values and virtues and their rights and responsibilities, broadly conceived.

Citizenship is a concept regularly invoked in discussions surrounding globalization, immigration, asylum and nationality. It may be seen as 'a multi-layered construct' (Yuval-Davis, 2000, p. 117, see also Yuval-Davis, 1999) – and some postmodern thinkers have been concerned to deconstruct citizenship, analysing the signs and symbols that they argue give the concept meaning (e.g. Wexler, 1990). Certainly citizenship 'is not an eternal essence but a cultural artefact. It is what people make of it' (Van Gunsteren, 1998, p. 11) and it has 'multiple meanings' (Van Gunsteren, 1998, p. 13), giving rise to a variety of different perspectives. As such, a definitive conception of citizenship must remain endlessly elusive. Nevertheless, it can be given a more concrete meaning, insofar as it is possible to understand modern conceptions of the citizen and debates about the meaning and nature of citizenship as deriving from two historical traditions: liberal and republican citizenship, with the former emphasising citizens' rights and the latter their civic duties, and there are important contemporary debates around, for example, cosmopolitan, communitarian, multicultural, ecological and feminist conceptions of citizenship, which seek in different ways to critique and/or build on these two core traditions.³

Leaving aside those who are against citizenship education,⁴ there are considerable differences of opinion regarding the appropriate content of citizenship lessons and modes of delivery to students amongst those who are in favour. The article is concerned principally with citizenship lessons in secondary schools and colleges,⁵ as opposed to primary or higher education, or to forms of citizenship education for immigrants that are designed to enable non-citizens to become citizens. Whilst empirical studies can shed important light on the effectiveness or otherwise of particular forms of citizenship education, these issues are clearly, to a large extent, normative, since any attempt to address them necessarily relies on various assumptions about what the aims of citizenship education should be and how these objectives should manifest themselves in the citizenship syllabus, the role of schools, teachers and students, and so on.

From the perspective advanced in this article, democracies need active and informed citizens, willing and able to play a part in the democratic process so as to safeguard and bolster democratic principles. Citizenship education seeks to address issues of general concern through collective action. It is important as a means of connecting young people to the political system, helping them make sense of a complex political world and thereby strengthening democracy. As such, citizenship education can be defined as a subject that is or ought to be concerned to provide students with knowledge and understanding of political ideas and concepts, and local, regional, national and international political processes and institutions; to develop students' skills so as to enable them to engage in decision-making, critical thinking, debate, and (in ways of their own choosing) to participate effectively in political and democratic activities inside and outside school; and to instil in students particular values and attitudes which make it likely they will want to engage in such activities (Kisby & Sloam, 2009, pp. 316-319). Schools can and should act as mini-polities, formative arenas for expression and civic engagement, for practice in social relations and in dealing with authority (Flanagan et al., 2007).

Citizenship classes are most effective when they are underpinned by the core principles of experiential and service learning, whereby knowledge, participation and deliberation are linked together in the promotion of active citizenship (see Kisby & Sloam, 2009). Experiential learning emphasises the vital role experience plays in learning and stresses the importance of the nature of these experiences and is contrasted with more passive, didactic forms of learning. It seeks both to connect learning to students' past experiences and promotes the notion of students actively and collaboratively engaging in participative activities that address issues that are relevant to their own lives – to facilitate what educationalists have described as 'deep learning' (Ramsden 2003). The development of knowledge and skills is facilitated through performance (Kolb, 1984), enabling learners to link theory with practice, to develop their own questions and find their own answers. Service learning is concerned to develop skills for both life and work, and promotes student participation in work-based learning concerned with achieving public goods, and unlike simple volunteering, when done well, should emphasise the importance of participants critically reflecting on and analysing the activities undertaken (Crick, 2004, p. 83).

So citizenship education is not about attempting to create 'perfect' or 'model' citizens. It should certainly be very concerned with issues around rights and pluralism in the contemporary world – key liberal preoccupations. But if the aim is to promote a form of citizenship education that enables and encourages students to think critically about contemporary issues and to engage actively in political and civic participation so as to address such matters, as well as to protect and promote rights rather than to merely be aware of already existing legal rights, then it ought also to be informed by a conception



of citizenship that owes a great deal to the republican tradition, in which citizenship is conceived of primarily as an activity rather than a status (see Oldfield, 1990; Marquand, 1997, ch.2). Citizenship education should inculcate among young people a respect for others and a rejection of all forms of discrimination, for example, on racist, sexist, homophobic or religious grounds, and should involve students discussing and addressing real, concrete issues and events in personal, local, national and international contexts.

3 Citizenship education in England

The history of citizenship education in England can be traced back a long way – perhaps to 1934 and the formation of the Association for Education in Citizenship, which aimed to teach the children of ordinary people, and not just public school elites, about the merits of liberal democracy and the dangers of totalitarianism (Whitmarsh, 1974). In fact, some scholars trace political education in Britain back as far as the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to the university education of aspiring elites, which included some instruction in political leadership and patriotism (Batho, 1990; Heater, 2002; Mycock, 2004). Citizenship education became part of the non-statutory personal, social and health education framework at primary level and a statutory subject in secondary schools in England in 2000, with the statutory provision taking effect at the start of the academic year in 2002 so that schools had time to prepare. Prior to this, citizenship lessons had never been compulsory in English schools, although citizenship had been one of five non-compulsory, cross-curricular themes of the National Curriculum since 1990 (NCC, 1990a, 1990b).

The decision to introduce citizenship as a statutory foundation subject in the National Curriculum was made clear by the incoming Labour government in its first Education White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, published two months after the general election in May 1997.⁶ The White Paper announced the formation of ‘an advisory group to discuss citizenship and the teaching of democracy’ in schools (DfEE, 1997, p. 63). Later that year the then Education Secretary, David Blunkett, announced that the group would be chaired by the political theorist and commentator Bernard Crick, one of the leading figures who had been pushing for the different but related subject of political education in schools since the 1970s. However, Blunkett’s view was that political education had too narrow an emphasis (Pollard, 2004, p. 262), being preoccupied with political literacy (Crick & Heater, 1977; Crick & Porter, 1978), and that citizenship education ought to be concerned more generally with how children should be taught to be citizens, and this was reflected in the terms of reference given to the group, which was asked:

‘To provide advice on effective education for citizenship in schools – to include the nature and practices of participation in democracy; the duties, responsibilities and rights of individuals as citizens; and the value to

individuals and society of community activity’ (DfEE/QCA, 1998, p. 4).

The Advisory Group on Citizenship (AGC) published its report, *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*, in September 1998 and was one of the immediate causes of the inclusion of citizenship in the National Curriculum. The AGC’s report provided the framework for citizenship education in England. It defined citizenship education in terms of three strands – social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy:

- “1. Social and moral responsibility – learning from the very beginning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other;
2. Community involvement – learning and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community;
3. Political literacy – learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values’ (DfEE/QCA, 1998, pp. 11-13).

Citizenship education was introduced in England principally because of concerns held by a range of actors, including politicians, academics and pressure groups constituting an ideational policy network, about what they perceived as a decline in levels of social capital in Britain (see Kisby, 2007, 2012). Such individuals and groups were particularly influenced by the neo-Tocquevillian conception of social capital advanced by the US political scientist Robert Putnam, for whom the concept refers to the social networks, such as networks of friends and neighbours and organizations like trade unions, churches, and schools, and the norms and trust that such networks give rise to, which he argues allow citizens to work together to achieve collective goals (Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). Blunkett, for example, argued that the state must enable citizens to lead autonomous lives, especially through citizenship education. For Blunkett, ‘it is clear that weak civic engagement and an absence of social capital deprives democracy of its vitality, health and legitimacy’ (Blunkett, 2001, p. 26). Blunkett argued for greater civic involvement by citizens, which, for him, required action on the part of the state to enable citizens to lead autonomous lives, especially through education for citizenship (Blunkett, 2001, pp. 26-29). Blunkett argued: ‘If autonomy is dependent on education, and a fully autonomous person is also by definition an active citizen, then there needs to be explicit education for citizenship in the school and college curriculum’ (Blunkett, 2001, p. 29).

The impact of the concept of social capital on the citizenship education initiative can also be seen in the normative presuppositions underpinning the AGC report (Kisby, 2009). The normative model of citizenship that best corresponds to Putnam’s concerns can be described as a ‘republican-communitarian’ model, broadly of the kind developed by Michael Sandel (Sandel, 1996, 1998).



This is a model that seeks to promote both civic and political participation and which also emphasises citizens' community membership as the primary constitutive attachment upon citizens. The principal aims of citizenship education in England, as set out in the AGC report, are to teach young people to become well informed, responsible citizens engaged in mainstream political and civic activities, such as voting, and undertaking voluntary work, in particular, at a local community level.

Keith Ajebo's review of diversity and citizenship in the curriculum (DfES, 2007), published in January 2007 and welcomed by the Government (see, for example, Johnson, 2007), provided impetus to teaching about diversity, emphasising the importance of school children learning about national, regional, ethnic and religious cultures and their connections, and exploring the concept of community cohesion.⁷ The Ajebo report was consistent with New Labour concerns around patriotism and national identity and it marked an important shift of emphasis for citizenship lessons in England. The call by Gordon Brown (2006) and others for a greater focus on 'Britishness' and 'British' values (for a discussion, see Andrews & Mycock, 2008) sparked a debate about the meaning of citizenship in the UK and led to the Goldsmith report on citizenship (Goldsmith, 2008). Its reform proposals focused only on symbolic measures to strengthen British citizenship, such as citizenship ceremonies, and efforts to support volunteering, although it also led to the establishment of the Youth Citizenship Commission, which has undertaken much needed research on young people's understandings of citizenship and on how to increase levels of political participation (YCC, 2009; see also Mycock & Tonge, 2014).

The general election in May 2010 led to the formation of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, and following this it looked for a long time as if citizenship would be removed as a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum. Indeed this was the recommendation of the Curriculum Review Panel set up by the coalition government in January 2011. The panel's report was published in December 2011 and it took the very questionable view that citizenship is not a distinct subject as such and therefore its compulsory status in the National Curriculum should be revoked (DfE, 2011). Given that the stated purpose of citizenship lessons was to increase levels of civic engagement and given that the evidence clearly suggested it was having some success in this regard (see e.g. Keating et al., 2010),⁸ the logic of the panel seems rather peculiar (Whiteley, 2014, p. 531). To the surprise of many,⁹ in February 2013 the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, rejected the panel's recommendation and made it clear that citizenship would be retained as a statutory foundation subject at secondary school level (Gove, 2013), although unfortunately a great deal of momentum that had previously built up behind citizenship education was lost during the two years of uncertainty, as it was widely believed Gove did not support citizenship lessons. For example, in a speech to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers annual conference in Liverpool in April 2009,

Gove, then Shadow Education Secretary, criticised the 'politically motivated' National Curriculum, singling out specifically the requirement for schools to teach citizenship, asking: 'When it comes to citizenship, community cohesion and a sense of national solidarity, why is it that we imagine a particular subject put on the National Curriculum can address these deep and long standing challenges?' (Paton, 2009). The following year, in a speech to the Conservative Party conference in October 2010, Gove, now Education Secretary, had said:

'We urgently need to ensure our children study rigorous disciplines instead of pseudo-subjects. Otherwise we will be left behind... Our children will never outstrip the global competition unless we know our exams can compete with the best in the world...how many of our students are learning the lessons of history? One of the under-appreciated tragedies of our time has been the sundering of our society from its past. Children are growing up ignorant of one of the most inspiring stories I know – the history of our United Kingdom' (Gove, 2010).

It was widely believed that Gove's reference to 'pseudo-subjects' included citizenship education (Chong et al., 2016, p. 120). Indeed it was reported in the press in October 2012 that the government had considered removing citizenship education from the National Curriculum, but decided against this so as to avoid having to introduce new legislation to do so (Grimston & Lightfoot, 2012, p. 2). Nevertheless, despite retaining citizenship in the National Curriculum, there was a clear desire by the government to revise the Citizenship programme of study. A draft was produced in February 2013 for consultation (DfE, 2013a). This was widely regarded by citizenship education campaigners as very problematic, underpinned by a highly individualised, consumerist agenda – focusing on teaching about personal finance and financial services and products but not providing students with knowledge about public finance and economic decision-making more broadly, for example. It also seemed to regard active citizenship as entirely synonymous with volunteering and was very unclear in its guidance about human rights teaching, amongst other issues. Having successfully campaigned for the retention of citizenship in the National Curriculum, the Democratic Life coalition also managed to positively impact on the programme of study (Jerome, 2014), with the final revised curriculum clearly an improvement on what had been initially proposed, although these issues were not fully addressed (compare DfE, 2013a with DfE, 2013b).

Following the consultation, the new slimmed-down citizenship curriculum was then finalised and published in September 2013 and has been taught in schools in England since September 2014. The National Curriculum for Citizenship at key stages 3 and 4 sets out the following purpose of study:

"A high-quality citizenship education helps to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, citizenship education should foster pupils' keen awareness

and understanding of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Teaching should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments. It should also prepare pupils to take their place in society as responsible citizens, manage their money well and make sound financial decisions' (DfE, 2013b, p. 214).

And the following are the aims of the programme of study for pupils, who should:

- “- acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of how the United Kingdom is governed, its political system and how citizens participate actively in its democratic systems of government
- develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system in our society and how laws are shaped and enforced
- develop an interest in, and commitment to, participation in volunteering as well as other forms of responsible activity, that they will take with them into adulthood
- are equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions, to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs' (DfE, 2013b, p. 214).

Although better than the initial draft, the new citizenship curriculum still represented a significant change from the three core strands set out in the Advisory Group on Citizenship's 1998 report, with a shift away from a focus on understanding political concepts and civic and political participation towards constitutional history and financial literacy, and an even greater emphasis on voluntary work. Moreover, whereas previously the acquisition of civic knowledge was linked with the development of active citizenship, the government now promotes volunteerism instead, especially through the National Citizen Service (see <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/>). In addition, although citizenship remained a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum, Academies and Free Schools – the expansion in numbers of which has been very strongly encouraged and supported by the government – have been given the freedom to, amongst other things, opt out of following the National Curriculum. At the same time, the development of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and the focus on the EBacc subjects (English, mathematics, history, geography, the sciences, languages) has had the effect of undermining the National Curriculum and non-EBacc subjects, such as citizenship. As a result of these developments, along with, as will be discussed later in the article, the rise in prominence of character education, citizenship education in England has been sidelined to a significant extent, having clearly declined in importance to policy-makers in recent years following the change of government in 2010.

4 Understanding character education

The notion of 'education for character' can be traced all the way back to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE), who argued that the 'good life' – a life of

'human flourishing' – requires above all the exercise of virtue. Citizens can become virtuous only through the cultivation of certain customs or habits of behaviour. For Aristotle:

“Virtue of character [i.e., of *ethos*] results from habit [*ethos*]; hence its name 'ethical', slightly varied from 'ethos'. Hence it is also clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally. For if something is by nature in one condition, habituation cannot bring it into another condition...That is why we must perform the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states. It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our youth. On the contrary, it is very important, indeed all-important' (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 18-19).

Good conduct requires training to instil these habits. So, Aristotle argues, ethics is a profoundly practical discipline that is absolutely essential for ensuring that young people develop various virtuous character traits, such as truthfulness, integrity and determination. For Aristotle, the moral virtues represent a 'golden mean' between two extremes of excess and deficiency. For example, courage is a virtue, but in excess would be recklessness and in deficiency, cowardice. Such qualities, Aristotle believes, do not develop naturally in children without such training. It is important to emphasize that while, for Aristotle, the virtues – the practice of acting or behavioural dispositions to act in particular ways – require a vitally important role for habits, these habits are certainly not intended to promote among citizens lives of mindless routine. Quite the opposite. Aristotle makes clear that virtue is not concerned with passive habituation, but rather reflection and action on the part of citizens, who choose to behave virtuously. This is what constitutes good character. The point here, as Broadie says, is that:

“Forming a habit is connected with repetition, but where *what* is repeated are (for example) just acts, habituation cannot be a mindless process, and the habit (once formed) of acting justly cannot be blind in its operations, since one needs intelligence to see why different things are just under different circumstances. So far as habit plays a part, it is not that of autopilot, where we take for granted that we know (without special monitoring) *what* to do to get to the destination; rather, the moral habit is one by which it can be taken for granted *that* whatever we are going to do, it will be what we find appropriate' (Broadie, 1991, p. 109, emphasis in original).

So, Aristotle believes, education for character requires practical experience; of citizens learning through habit rather than simply through reasoning, and through this training they can come to recognise how they should live and are able to live in such a way. They gain the experience and accompanying skills that inculcate in them the dispositions of good character.

Aristotle is certainly an appropriate philosopher to discuss in this context as some forms of character education in the UK, the US and elsewhere are of a distinctly



Aristotelian nature.¹⁰ So character education is a form of education that seeks to cultivate students' social and emotional development, with schools focusing not only on the academic success of their students but also their attitudes, beliefs, behaviour, values and virtues; their students' individual characters. The notion is that schools have a vital role to play in helping develop well-rounded young people; young people of 'good character'. But how should we define 'character'? The American developmental psychologist Thomas Lickona provides the following definition:

"Character consists of *operative values*, values in action. We progress in our character as a value becomes a virtue, a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way. Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behaviour. *Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good* – habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action...When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it's clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right – even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within' (Lickona, 1991, p. 51, emphasis in original).

It should be noted that these three different 'inter-related parts' are given different degrees of emphasis in different programmes of character education that are developed by different individuals and organisations. It should also be said that various different labels have been attached to forms of education that are concerned with addressing ethical issues, the teaching of values and virtues, and the moral development of students, such as virtues education, values education and moral education. It is possible to make distinctions between character education and these forms of education. However, there are significant similarities between these kinds of education and, in the contemporary context, any distinctions that one makes are likely to be problematic and open to challenge as character education has become a rather broad field, arguably encompassing these different forms of education to a significant extent. Today, character education is very diverse, so generalisations about, say, the role of theory, ideology, the nature of pedagogical approaches used and so on are not really possible – there are forms of character education, for example, that are driven by religious and/or conservative ideologies that make use of hierarchical methods, and approaches that are much more liberal in terms of promoting individual autonomy and critical thinking among students.

One aspect that many forms of contemporary character education tend to have in common is a focus on the teaching of values that are regarded as widely shared within society. A key aim of character education is then to enable students, informed by these values, to make ethical judgements between the morally right and wrong course of action in given situations and to develop the character to do the right thing; to take the ethically correct course of action. However, as will be discussed

below, interestingly, the leading centre for the promotion of character education in the UK, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, defines character in terms of four categories of virtues, rather than values.¹¹ Character education programmes, such as those developed by the Jubilee Centre, focus on developing in young people various character traits, which are often quite wide-ranging and not focused only on moral reasoning. Traits such as perseverance, confidence and motivation (which could, of course, in practice underpin amoral or immoral as well as moral behaviour) are promoted; the notion being that such traits, sometimes described as 'soft skills', are important for success in education and work – and this latter focus has very much been that of a number of politicians and educationalists in the UK and the US, as will be set out in the section that follows. So contemporary character education is concerned then with both the teaching of good character and accompanying moral issues, and with teaching for effective learning and the instilling of traits for success in life more generally.

5 Character education in England

The history of character education in the UK arguably dates back to the ideas of key figures in the Scottish Enlightenment who believed that human character could be altered through changes to the environment in which it developed (Arthur, 2003, p. 145). Arthur emphasises the importance attached to character education by progressive political and educational thinkers, although also notes 'the activities of some conservative evangelicals in the nineteenth century' (Arthur, 2003, p. 147). He draws particular attention to the work of the industrialist and social and educational reformer, Robert Owen, and his Institute for the Formation of Character. The Institute opened in 1816 and was used both as a school for young people and to provide adult education to the working classes, and was underpinned by Owen's belief that individuals are shaped by their environment and above all by their education. Arthur also points to the work of 'the secular humanists in the late Victorian era and thence the progressives in moral education in the early part of the twentieth century', for whom 'character development' was seen 'as part of a process in reforming society' (Arthur, 2003, p. 147).

The recent history of character education in England should perhaps be traced back to the creation of the National Curriculum, following the Education Reform Act of 1988. This had helped promote the idea of universalism, of all children being taught some of the same core subjects. The Act places a duty on all state schools to promote the 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society' and to prepare 'pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life' (HMSO, 1988, p. 1). 'Character' is not explicitly mentioned, but the aim here clearly is to prepare young people for their adult lives as moral citizens. Against a background of concern about a perceived decline in moral standards, in particular amongst young people, the School Curriculum



and Assessment Authority (SCAA) convened a National Forum for Values in Education and the Community in England, which was chaired by Marianne Talbot, a philosophy lecturer at Oxford University, who later became a member of the Advisory Group on Citizenship. The 1996 SCAA conference 'Education for Adult Life: the Spiritual and Moral Development of Young People' considered how spiritual and moral development could be promoted through school subjects and through the ethos of the school (see SCAA, 1996). Arguably, this focus on the importance of values and young people's moral development impacted on the form of citizenship education introduced by the Labour government (see Kisby, 2012, esp. ch.7).

Labour came to power in 1997 and in its White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, argued that there was a need for pupils 'to appreciate and understand the moral code on which civilised society is based and to appreciate the culture and background of others'. In addition, pupils 'need to develop the strength of character and attitudes to life and work, such as responsibility, determination, care and generosity, which will enable them to become citizens of a successful democratic society' (DfEE, 1997, p. 10). A couple of years later, in the new National Curriculum 2000 for England, the government stated that it recognised 'a broad set of common values and purposes that underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools' (DfEE, 1999, p. 10), and the 'Statement of Values, Aims and Purposes of the National Curriculum for England' includes the following: 'the development of children's social responsibility, community involvement, the development of effective relationships, knowledge and understanding of society, participation in the affairs of society, respect for others, and the child's contribution to the building up of the common good'. The values underpinning the school curriculum are the 'commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty' (DfEE, 1999, pp. 10-11). Moreover, in its Green paper, *Schools: Building on Success*, the government argued that: 'Character building is a key part of an overall approach to education which values scholarship, endeavour and the idea of a citizen of the future who is self-reliant and simultaneously able to contribute to the wider community' (DfEE, 2001, p. 16). Following on from Labour's *Every Child Matters* strategy (TSO, 2003), the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme was introduced as part of the Secondary National Strategy in 2007 (see DCSF, 2007). This aimed to assist the development of social and emotional skills in schools. Evaluations of SEAL, however, suggested that at the primary level it had mixed effects on outcomes and at the secondary level it had no impact (Humphrey et al., 2008, 2010). It would seem then that the development of 'character' among young people, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, was important for Labour during its period in government between 1997 and 2010. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that this was for a particular purpose, namely the development of responsible and active citizenship, and it is important to note the discontinuities as much, if not more than, the

continuities in this area since 2010 and the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, followed by the election of the Conservatives in 2015 and 2017.

The importance of character-building for British policy-makers increased significantly after 2010. Following the riots and looting in parts of the country in August 2011, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, argued that this was 'not about poverty...No, this was about behaviour...people showing indifference to right and wrong...people with a twisted moral code...people with a complete absence of self-restraint' (Cameron, 2011a). In a speech the following month, Cameron made clear his view that 'education doesn't just give people the tools to make a good living – it gives them the character to live a good life, to be good citizens. So, for the future of our economy, and for the future of our society, we need a first-class education for every child' (Cameron, 2011b). The then Education Secretary, Michael Gove, showed some interest in the importance of schoolchildren learning 'grit'. For example, in February 2014 he claimed: 'As top heads and teachers already know, sports clubs, orchestras and choirs, school plays, cadets, debating competitions, all help to build character and instil grit, to give children's talents an opportunity to grow and to allow them to discover new talents they never knew they had' (Gove, 2014). However, it was Nicky Morgan, Education Secretary until her sacking in Theresa May's reshuffle in July 2016, and who had taken over from Gove two years earlier, who has most enthusiastically embraced character education within government, particularly as a means of promoting social mobility for those from under-privileged backgrounds. For her, instilling character and resilience 'is part of our core mission to deliver real social justice by giving all children, regardless of background, the chance to fulfil their potential and achieve their high aspirations' (DfE, 2015a).¹²

Developments in the UK have been impacted on by initiatives elsewhere, particularly in the US, such as the well-known Knowledge is Power Programme (KIPP). KIPP schools are college preparatory schools that operate in deprived areas in the US and which place character development at the heart of their ethos. In addition, in recent years a number of bestselling books by various north American authors have been published extolling the benefits of the cultivation of character, such as the US-Canadian Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed* (Tough, 2013), the American Carol Dweck's *Mindset* (Dweck, 2012), and the American Angela Duckworth's *Grit* (Duckworth, 2016), and these have also fed into the discourse of British policy-makers.¹³ Morgan made character education a key priority of hers and in December 2014 the Department for Education (DfE) announced the creation of a substantial grant scheme to encourage character-building activities (DfE, 2014). Morgan has said the development of young people's characters, including their 'grit' and 'resilience' are absolutely essential for young people's future 'success'. For her:

"These traits are key to succeeding in life and I want to ensure that we are creating the conditions for everyone to proactively gain them...That is at the heart of our drive to ensure England is a global leader in character education – helping every school and pupil to be the best they can be...we want schools to focus on this area because we know that character, resilience and grit are traits that everyone, adults and children alike, can improve and build on and that doing so will help them in later life...All young people deserve the opportunity to develop the confidence, motivation and resilience that will not only complement their academic studies, but will also prepare them for success in their adult lives' (Morgan, 2016).

The DfE defines the 'character traits, attributes and behaviours that underpin success in education and work' as: 'perseverance, resilience and grit; confidence and optimism; motivation, drive and ambition; neighbourliness and community spirit; tolerance and respect; honesty, integrity and dignity; conscientiousness, curiosity and focus' (DfE, 2015b). It argues that: 'Character education aims to allow pupils to emerge from education better equipped to thrive in modern Britain' (DfE, 2015b).

Interestingly, politicians from across the political spectrum in the UK have embraced character education. One of the most prominent supporters has been former Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt. Like Morgan, he has also expressed his commitment to schools seeking to develop young people's characters, and indeed Hunt has set out a vision for character education rather similar to Morgan's. In a speech in February 2014, Hunt made clear that Labour wants,

"young people who are confident, determined and resilient; young people who display courage, compassion, honesty, integrity, fairness, perseverance, emotional intelligence, grit and self-discipline. We want our young people to have a sense of moral purpose and character, as well as to be enquiring, reflective and passionate learners' (Hunt, 2014a).

As such, Hunt argues, 'we should encourage all schools to embed character education and resilience across their curriculum' (Hunt, 2014a). For Hunt, the development of young people's 'characters', alongside a focus also on 'literacy', 'numeracy' and 'creativity' by schools, is essential for success 'in an ever more competitive global market-place' (Hunt, 2014a; see also Hunt, 2014b).

It is important to note that much of the focus of British politicians then has been on the promotion of traits like 'resilience' and skills for 'success' in education, work and life. Although clearly not entirely unrelated to the notion of character development advanced by Aristotle briefly sketched out above, neither is such an emphasis entirely coterminous with the Aristotelian notion of human flourishing either. As summarised above, the DfE's list of key character traits is rather broader than simply 'resilience' or 'grit', but politicians have tended to promote a rather narrow, instrumental notion of character development, consistent with the discourse of

advocates of the KIPP schools and of various high profile authors writing in this area. Nevertheless, the understanding of character education advanced by some individuals and organisations, such as the Jubilee Centre, is broader than that advanced by Morgan, Hunt and others. The Jubilee Centre defines character as 'a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct' (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, undated), and it identifies four main categories of good character: 'Moral virtues, including courage, justice, honesty, compassion, gratitude, humility and modesty; intellectual virtues, such as creativity and critical thinking; performance virtues, including resilience and determination; and civic virtues, such as acts of service and volunteering' (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, undated). The Jubilee Centre proposes a much more unambiguously Aristotelian understanding of character education. It advances a virtue ethics approach in which the development of character is an end in itself, not simply a means to some other ends.

6 Exploring linkages and disjunctions

6.1 Linkages

Character education has been subjected to a range of criticisms, although some of these can be dismissed fairly quickly and easily since they rest on caricatures, stereotypes and unjustified generalisations (Kristjánsson, 2013). For example, character education has been criticised for being a form of indoctrination, for being driven by a religious and/or right-wing political agenda, and for utilising hierarchical teaching methods. Character education can be done in such a way that amounts to little more than a form of indoctrination, but then, so can citizenship education too. If done well, character education should help young people to think critically and to think for themselves. Character education can be driven by a religious and/or right-wing ideology, but this is not necessarily inherent within character education. Again, character education can be taught using hierarchical methods or it can promote autonomy. The simple point is that character education can be done well, or it can be done badly, as with other forms of education, such as citizenship education.

The notion of teaching good character in schools will sound rather Victorian to some. The extent to which it is even possible for schools to successfully teach character is open to question. Some psychologists argue that personality is largely genetically determined. But arguably personality and character are not the same and character is more open to change. Nevertheless, many argue that character is best 'caught' indirectly rather than 'taught' directly in schools, through activities such as school sports. Still further, some critics of character education do not reject the idea that character can be shaped but argue that the role of parents is far more important than schools. Yet schools inevitably promote values (Lickona, 1991, pp. 20-21; See & Arthur, 2011, p. 144). As such, they inevitably, directly or indirectly, engage in character development, so the question then becomes not: should

schools teach character? But rather: how best can they do this? Moreover, arguably, since character education is concerned with important ethical issues and with relations between people, it relates in a significant way to citizenship education (Davies, Gorard & McGuinn, 2005, p. 343).

Both citizenship education and character education have been presented by policy-makers, in a British context, as a means of addressing perceived crises (Davies, Gorard & McGuinn, 2005, p. 342). In the case of citizenship education a concern about levels of social capital, and in the case of character education a concern about the moral outlook and behaviour of young people. Earlier in the article, citizenship education was defined as a subject that is or ought to be concerned to do three things. First, to provide students with appropriate knowledge and understanding and, second, skills, that enable them to participate effectively in various political and democratic activities inside and outside schools. Third, attention was drawn to the need for particular values and attitudes to be instilled in young people such that it is likely they will want to engage in such activities. It is this third strand – the cultivation of the character of the active citizen – that character education has the potential to contribute most significantly to citizenship education. Knowledge and skills are not enough for the development of active citizens. As stated earlier, in order for citizenship education to be delivered successfully, it is vital that it is underpinned by the core principles of experiential and service learning. Knowledge and skills must be connected with participation and reflection by young people on these experiences. Service learning can be used in both citizenship education and character education, providing young people with useful participatory experiences and aiding in character development. Through discussion of difficult and controversial political and moral issues and through civic and political participation, and critical reflection on such social action, students can develop the habits of active citizenship.

6.2 Disjunctions

Character education is not the same as citizenship education. Nor does it represent a superior alternative to citizenship education, if we are seeking an answer to the question: how best can schools prepare young people for their roles as citizens in the contemporary world? Character education has a part to play in schools and has a part to play specifically in supporting citizenship education, in particular, in helping facilitate the development of attitudes conducive to civic and political participation. But while knowledge and skills are certainly not enough, an understanding of political institutions and processes, and the development of the skills of political literacy, for example, the ability to critically engage with political ideas and messages, remain vitally important. As noted above, generalisations about character education are problematic because there are different programmes with different aims and objectives. Nevertheless, whereas forms of citizenship education, when done well,

have the cultivation of political knowledge and skills at their heart, such concerns are, at best, peripheral in character education programmes, which, as noted earlier, tend to have a significantly different focus.

While several of the criticisms commonly levelled at forms of character education are unfair, there remain significant grounds for concern. In particular, even the more sophisticated forms of character education that are put forward fail to distinguish between the good person and the good citizen or, as this article prefers to put it, the active, effective citizen, which, as argued earlier, is what citizenship education is or ought to be primarily concerned with developing. For example, for the Jubilee Centre, in addition to the focus on individual morality and resilience, the concern of character education ought to be with 'acts of service and volunteering' rather than active citizenship (Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, undated). One way to bring out a key difference between citizenship education and character education is to reflect on the task the liberal political philosopher, the late John Rawls, set himself in his well-known book, *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971), where he sought to shift the question from: how should I live? to: how can we live together in society given that there are different answers to the question: how should I live? Whatever the shortcomings of Rawls's magnum opus, this latter question ought in my view to form an important part of the framework within which citizenship education is delivered in modern, highly diverse, pluralistic, liberal democratic societies (see Suissa, 2015, pp. 106-107). It is not that the former question is not also very important, of course, and, as noted above, schools are necessarily in the business of promoting values of one kind or another, whether or not they explicitly deliver lessons in character. But the point is that character education is rather more concerned with the former than the latter question because the starting point for its advocates, such as the Jubilee Centre, is virtue ethics, not liberal pluralism or republican active citizenship. As such, the clear focus of character education is on personal ethics rather than public ethics, and with addressing important moral or political issues at the level of the individual rather than at any other level.

The focus on the individual is problematic for two reasons. First, it is very weak as a means of making sense of the world. Second, it places sole responsibility on individuals for their position in society. In relation to this first claim, let us take as an example a major world event in the last few years: the global financial crisis of 2007-8. Now, without wanting to understate the role of agency as part of an account of why the crisis happened, it is important to emphasise that an adequate explanation needs to do rather more than just highlight the moral failings of bankers.¹⁴ Such an analysis needs to examine a whole range of factors, such as the roles of and relationships between markets, bankers, central bankers, governments, regulators and credit-rating agencies, as well as the ideas driving actors, the institutional cultures within which they operated, the role of incentivisation schemes within banks, and so on; in other words, various



structural as well as agential causes. There is a clear danger that very simplistic understandings of significant events can arise when the focus is placed largely if not entirely on personal ethics.

In terms of the second claim, it should be said that it is absolutely essential that society's problems are not turned into purely individual problems. The narrow and instrumental form of character education advocated by various British politicians, most notably former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan, has been linked with the promotion of social mobility. While focusing on developing 'grit' and 'resilience' can be empowering for some, concentrating on questions of individual character in relation to student 'success' is clearly problematic, ignoring entirely the enabling or constraining role of social structure. Simply exhorting those from underprivileged backgrounds and/or who have suffered forms of discrimination to be confident about their life chances, when their experiences in life have taught them otherwise, is unhelpful. Structural inequalities – affecting, for example, the way resources or opportunities are distributed – based on gender, class, ethnicity, disability etc. need to be seriously addressed. As regards economic disparities, unless really meaningful action is taken by the government to tackle issues of poverty and wealth and income inequality in British society then, given the very well established negative impact of these factors on social mobility (see e.g. Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010, esp. ch.12), statements about the need for students to learn to be resilient, at best, ring hollow, and at worst are insulting, liable to be interpreted by many as suggesting that poor people would be fine if only they were more virtuous.

7 Conclusion

Education for democracy is or ought to be a key aim of education (Crick, 2004). Citizenship education emphasises the importance of students becoming well-informed about political issues, as well as being public spirited, critical and independent-minded. This article has argued that the cultivation of character is necessary, but far from sufficient, for the preparation of young people for their roles as citizens in the contemporary world. Character education can support citizenship education, but even the more sophisticated forms, such as that advanced by the Jubilee Centre, are not appropriate as an alternative because of the focus on personal rather than public ethics, which can lead to the individualisation of important social problems. And this is precisely the direction that the British government has taken character education in. The particular understanding of character education it has advanced, especially when combined with the most recent changes that have been made to the citizenship curriculum, is consistent with a more general trend over the past few decades towards a responsabilization of citizenship (Lister, 2011), with successive governments arguing for the need for citizens to take increasing personal responsibility for their own individual educational, health and welfare needs, and for a significantly greater role to be played by the

community (or communities) rather than the state in addressing various societal challenges. And the recent context here, of course, is dominated by austerity and significant cuts to public spending in the UK since 2010.

The article has argued that the understanding of character education put forward by British politicians is narrow and instrumental, seeking to link the development of character with individual 'success', in particular, in the jobs market. It emphasises the individual, moral dimension of issues rather than the collective, social side. It psychologises problems, rather than politicising them, aiming to instil 'grit' and 'resilience' in young people. The form of character education advanced offers a depoliticised notion of good citizenship, reflecting the government's focus on pupils and students as future workers and consumers in a competitive global economy (e.g. Cameron, 2013; Gove, 2011), rather than ensuring that young people have the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to engage in civic and political activity so as to address important issues of concern to them. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that for various British politicians, and others, the idea is not that young people should learn how to bring about social and political change, but rather that they should be compliant. They should simply accept things as they are, and focus on their 'subjective well-being' (Suissa, 2015, p. 107). The message seems to be: be resilient. Put up with things. Don't be political. Don't try and change the world. Change your attitude, your perspective. Change yourself instead.

This article concludes by returning to Aristotle, a key figure for many advocates of character education because of his view, as discussed earlier, that the good life requires the exercise of virtue. However, let us recall one of the best known of Aristotle's sayings – that people are '*zoon politikon*' or 'political animals' or 'political beings'. Aristotle does at times suggest that individual, private reflection on truth represents one way in which humans can realise their highest rational nature. Yet elsewhere he is clear that citizens are necessarily social creatures, not simply engaging in contemplative activities but rather that in order to live well they must live in public, political relationships with others.¹⁵ Certainly, for Aristotle, the good citizen must also be a good person.¹⁶ But he argues that it is through their civic activities in the *polis* that citizens organise society, or at least are capable of organising society, according to their views about how just and rational particular social arrangements are, and it is here that they exercise their supreme capacities.¹⁷ It is citizenship education rather than character education that best addresses *this* Aristotelian perspective.

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Endnotes

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1. Whilst Crick's approach has many merits, politics should be defined more broadly than his characterization allows for. In particular, Crick's definition does not incorporate the feminist insight that the 'personal is political'. In my view, 'politics' should be defined as being concerned with the expression and resolution, or at least mitigation, of significant differences between people – differences of opinions, ideas, interests and values, for example, and about finding ways of co-operating to achieve collective action and decision-making. Politics relates to what happens in a wide range of institutional and non-institutional settings, and formal and informal groups and organizations; to activities in both the 'public' sphere of the state and civil society and the 'private' realm of personal relations, and arises because of the inevitability of disagreement about profoundly important matters, relating to how lives should be lived, how societies should be organized, how resources should be allocated and so on. Politics is concerned, in particular, with issues around power and the consequences for individuals and society of the distribution and exercise of power. For a discussion, see Hay (2002, pp. 2-5).

2. For a discussion of essentially contested concepts, see Connolly (1983 ch.1).

3. Due to limitations of space, it is not possible to discuss here the relationship between liberal and republican citizenship or differences within each tradition.

4. For a free market libertarian critique of the state imposition of such education, see Tooley (2000, pp. 139-160). For an effective rebuttal, see McLaughlin (2000).

5. In England this refers, since September 2015, to compulsory schooling for 11-18 year olds. Between September 2013 and September 2015 schooling was compulsory for 11-17 year olds, and prior to this education had been compulsory until age 16 since 1972.

6. For a discussion of the recent history of citizenship in the National Curriculum in England see Kisby (2012) and Moore (2015).

7. The report is not without its problems, however. For a cogent critique, see Jerome & Shilela (2007) who argue that by focusing on individual identity and cultural issues rather than connecting citizenship to inequality and discrimination, the report in effect denies some important structural levels of analysis, thereby depoliticising these issues.

8. For more recent analysis, see Keating & Benton (2013) and Whiteley (2014).

9. It wasn't a surprise to leading members of the Democratic Life coalition who had been told by Gove in a private meeting that citizenship would remain in the National Curriculum (Jerome, 2014). Democratic Life brought together various individuals and groups to campaign for the retention of citizenship in the National Curriculum. These included politicians such as David Blunkett and the Liberal Democrat peer Andrew Phillips, and some 40 organisations, with the Citizenship Foundation and the Association for Citizenship Teaching as key partners.

10. See, in a UK context, for example, the various publications produced individually and collectively by members of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham – <http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk>

11. It is possible to distinguish between values and virtues in the following way. 'Values' can be said to refer to those norms widely shared within a given community or society, for example, conformity or competitiveness, while 'virtues' are more individualistic, referring to a particular person's character traits, and are often said to be more universally admired, such as bravery or truthfulness.

12. At the time of writing, it remains unclear to what extent there will be continuity or change in this area under Morgan's replacement as Education Secretary, Justine Greening. It should also be noted that, following the 2017 general election, the minority Conservative

government is reliant on support from the Democratic Unionist Party on motions of confidence, the Queen's speech, the Budget and other finance bills, and on legislation relating to the UK's exit from the EU and national security.

13. Morgan referred approvingly, for example, to the KIPP in a *Times Educational Supplement* article in February 2016 (Morgan, 2016), and has endorsed Tough's book, stating: 'There should be no tension between academic success and character education – the two are mutually dependent. Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed* offers an important contribution to the debate around the role of character education in schools and, in particular, the value it can have for disadvantaged pupils. I want all children, no matter what their background, to leave school well rounded, with a range of interests' (TES, 2016). Former Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt, has also referred approvingly to Tough's book (see Hunt, 2014b).

14. On this point, I find Bell & Hindmoor (2015) rather more persuasive than Blyth (2013), who goes as far as arguing (2013, pp. 21-22) that 'you could have replaced all the actual bankers of 2007 with completely different individuals, and they would have behaved the same way during the meltdown: that's what incentives do'.

15. Compare Aristotle's *Politics* (1998) and his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1999). And this also takes us back to Crick whose republican perspective on politics and citizenship was strongly influenced by Aristotle's ideas – see e.g. Crick (1992).

16. More precisely: 'Aristotle had not envisaged a situation in which a good citizen was not also a good man' (Ignatieff, 1995, p. 62). And 'man' is, of course, what Aristotle had in mind, given the exclusion of women, as well as slaves and those deemed 'outsiders' to the community, from the privileged position of citizen.

17. For different perspectives on this compare Honohan (2002, p. 23) and Ignatieff (1995, p. 56).