



McCowan, Tristan (2009) *Rethinking Citizenship Education: A Curriculum for Participatory Democracy*, London: Continuum.

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McCowan's book opens with several chapters which provide an unusually clear and insightful commentary on a range of debates about citizenship education and the evidence that exists regarding its implementation and effectiveness. This makes the book an excellent introductory text, but it is also a well written and enjoyable overview, which presents some interesting connections and syntheses for those more familiar with the literature. One example of the latter appeal is provided by McCowan's use of the concept of the *prefigurative* (borrowed from anarchist literature) which enables him to consider student participation as a possible "embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (Boggs 1978 quoted in chapter 4). This enables him to develop a more interesting and coherent view about the significance of forums such as school councils than that presented in some other more critical and sceptical accounts (for a recent example see chapter 4 in Garratt and Piper 2008).

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Whilst there are several significant aspects to this work, at the heart of McCowan's book is a theory of *curricular transposition* (Chapter 5), which builds on earlier publications relating to his studies of citizenship education in Brazil (McCowan 2008). His motivation in developing this approach is to focus on the area of citizenship education which, he claims, receives relatively little attention, namely the question of how to achieve citizenship education, as opposed to the broader discussions about what citizenship education is for and whether it is justified. McCowan builds on the work of curriculum theorists (Perrenoud and Bernstein) to provide a framework for thinking about policy formulation and implementation, which prompts us to think about policy in four broad stages. Whilst notions of *policy trajectories* have been used by others (see for example Power, Whitty et al. 2004) McCowan's model moves away from any notion of linear implementation and focuses on the transition from one stage to another.

The first stage in this model is the definition of the ideal citizen, which underpins the curriculum policy. The second stage refers to the curricular programme which is developed to promote citizenship education. The third stage is concerned with the curriculum which is actually implemented in schools and the fourth stage is the received curriculum, in other words, what students learn. Whilst each stage is relatively straight forward, this has certainly helped me to think about the development of policy in England, where we might think about the Crick Report as embodying the definition of the ideal citizen (in McCowan's terms a statement of ideal ends), and the subsequent national curriculum programmes of study representing the proposed model for schools to develop citizenship education (a statement of ideal means). This is then translated into school and classroom specific practice in (a statement of real means, as opposed to the official programmes of study which remain an ideal statement of means), and finally the received curriculum experience and the learning that takes place (a statement of real ends). This shifting between ideal/real and ends/means highlights the significance of the transitions between each stage so McCowan is as much concerned with the *leaps* between stages as he is with the characteristics of each stage.

The first leap therefore represents the transition from ends to means and McCowan identifies a range of positions one might identify. First, there may be *harmony* between ends and means, where democratic teaching approaches are chosen to promote learning for democratic participation, in its most extreme form McCowan recognises that there may even be *unification* between ends and means where citizenship learning takes place entirely through citizenship participation. Alternatively one might perceive *separation* between ends and means, where the only link is causal, i.e. where an argument is made that certain means will achieve certain desirable ends, but there is no concern about whether these methods actually embody the principles in the vision of outcomes. One might argue that traditional civics lessons, which are concerned with the transmission of information about democracy, fall into this third category, but if such lessons led to increased knowledge and understanding, which in turn led to an increased likelihood of participation, then this could be a justifiable educational model (there is evidence to support such an argument in Niemi and Junn 1998). This is a fairly pragmatic and utilitarian approach, and can be seen in Mary Warnock's more recent work on inclusion for pupils with special needs, where she justifies separate education provision for more pupils as the best route to achieve social inclusion and expanded life chances in adulthood (Warnock 2005).

The second leap is concerned with the implementation of the policy in schools, and McCowan discusses the diverse range of factors that influence the nature of curriculum implementation including: resources, curriculum and school structural constraints, community characteristics, and teacher beliefs. In England we might also add Ofsted, which has been present in debates about implementation overtly, through participation in Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) working groups developing guidance and through its own guidance on inspecting citizenship, but also covertly in the more subtle influences the inspection regime has had on how teachers see their work, and how they generate evidence for accountability regimes (Perryman 2006). McCowan locates his own work within the wider debate between those policy analysts who adopt a *fidelity* approach, focusing on the extent to which teachers implement the model embodied in curriculum programmes, and those who

favour an *enactment* approach, which focuses on the creative interpretations of policy in which teachers engage.

The third leap is concerned with the relationship between what teachers teach and what learners learn. Non educationalists can often assume a far too optimistic relationship between teaching and learning, whereas educators understand that this relationship is far from simple and that there is no guarantee that teaching will lead to meaningful learning, let alone that it will always lead to predictable and uniform learning for all pupils. In history education for example, whilst non-educationalists such as Anderson (2006), assign education a relatively unproblematic role in promoting nationalism, educationalists such as Wertsch and Rozin have explored the differences between *official* and *unofficial* histories (Wertsch and Rozin 1998). McCowan makes a similar point by citing citizenship research that illustrates how pupils may have learned about citizenship from their lessons but at the same time resisted any promotion of particular identities.

In his own application of this model to his research into Brazilian case studies, McCowan explores three very different approaches to citizenship education, one through the socialist *Landless Movement*, the second through an inclusive *Plural Schools* initiative, and the third through a *Voter of the Future* curriculum project (Chapters 6-8). These case studies illustrate the usefulness of his *curricular transposition* model and enable him to gain some insights into the variety of approaches adopted towards citizenship education and the varied success of each.

So far then McCowan's model for analysing citizenship education policy is a fairly convincing one, which synthesises other critical approaches to policy implementation studies, and could therefore be used equally usefully to analyse other education policies. In the final section of the book though McCowan attempts to shift from an analytical perspective towards a normative stance, using the same framework to develop a model of *seamless enactment*. This seems less successful as it promotes a model of policy development in which all three *leaps* and all four *stages* are brought into what he calls a "harmonious movement between ends and means, and between the ideal and real, both in terms of the underlying principles and the human agents involved" (Chapter 9). As McCowan himself recognises, such a state of affairs would require a process in

which teachers, learners and other members of the community were involved in the process of curriculum design and implementation, and in which, “society as a whole embodies democratic principles and provides learning opportunities” (Chapter 9). This is where the argument becomes problematic, both because it represents a radical departure from the education system as currently configured, and because it assumes it is possible to somehow eradicate the genuine differences and divisions that legitimately exist in the political sphere. Here is where the tensions show between McCowan’s interest in Crick and Freire (compared in chapter 3) and his desire somehow to achieve a seamlessness between policy and implementation and school and society. In his own case study of the *Landless Movement’s* radical attempts to fuse school learning and community life, McCowan recognises that this is itself a controversial political project which is unlikely to receive universal approval in all parts of Brazilian society. Given that such debates about the desirable outcomes of political education programmes are themselves inherently political, the achievement of seamlessness appears to be a denial of the political reality which McCowan’s earlier analytical stance engaged with so convincingly. Despite this ultimate limitation to his model, when used for normative purposes, it does provide the reader with a radical alternative vision of education and citizenship, which is itself a useful starting point for considering how to develop a critique of existing arrangements.

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