

Concepts, values, dustbins, unruly subjects and submissive citizens

Cliff Jones discusses some of the background to citizenship education as advocated by Stephen Lambert in PSE 89

In 1962 Bernard Crick published *In Defence of Politics*. The belief that politics is about the inclusive discussion of and arrival at public values needed to be articulated, asserted and defended. It still does. Fifty years after Crick's book Mathew Flinders, a successor of his at the University of Sheffield, published *Defending Politics: why democracy matters in the twenty-first century*. It seems that every so often someone has to defend the notion of politics. Participatory democracy began to shrink for us in 1979 with Thatcher and from 1997 Blair tried to do government without politics. Instead he gave us Michael Barber's *deliverology*.

I drafted the last GCSE syllabus in Politics and devoted one quarter of it to how governments were held accountable to the people. Tony Blair and New Labour stood accountability on its head and tried to performance-manage the country; educators in particular were made accountable to government. Remember Barber's book *Instruction to Deliver* (2007) with its picture of a target on the cover? For me it is so depressing that journalists and politicians of all parties think that Barber set the model for how government should be done.

In 1971 the Politics Association was formed by and for, mostly, teachers of politics from every phase of education. Back then Government and Politics was a very popular subject. Bernard was a member of the Association's Executive Committee. I was on that committee from the outset for ten years. With Alex Porter, Bernard also edited the report of the Political Literacy Working Party (1978). Before becoming an academic, Alex had taught in a Sixth Form College but as the only schoolteacher (secondary modern) in both groups I sometimes felt disconnected from what seemed to me to be the ethos of a largely male senior common room theorising about a distant reality.

For Crick concepts were paramount. Teaching, however, in an area of very high unemployment, I suggested to him that kids needed to know and understand how to make the 'system' work for them, even to change it. He replied that they could get all that from reading *The Guardian*!

Yes, I did feel all this as an issue of social class bolstered by networks of the well-connected. Unlike Bernard I could not casually mention that I might resolve an issue by, for example, 'having a word with Shirley' (Williams, that is). He really irritated me when he did that sort of thing.

Some years later, as a Chief Examiner for CSE Government and Politics working in a group to decide what GCSE Government and Politics would look like, I found myself arguing with the Chief Examiner for A-level Sociology. Probably unfairly, I said that when a student of his was arrested he wanted them to be able to see this as the concept of social control at work; I, on the other hand, would want my kids to know who to phone.

Fred Ridley, who taught me, often said that it helped democracy to work if you knew who to phone up when your dustbins were not emptied. I do not dismiss teaching through and about concepts. It is stimulating, fun, and important to throw, for example, the concept of 'fairness' onto the table and to ask what it might mean and how it might be exemplified. It is not a concept to be confined to the abstract.

Fred always said that politics was about values. That did not stop him seeing how important it was to know about public administration. But which should come first - concepts, values or policies and the dustbins?

My brother Trevor was a (mainly) local government politician. I once questioned him on policies, 'It's not policies that are important', he said, it's values. They are the difficult part. If you get

them sorted and agreed the policies will follow. They are the easy part.' So, thanks to Bernard for reminding me of the meaning of politics; to Fred for linking dustbins and values; and to Trevor for telling me which comes first.

As for Citizenship, I remember being challenged for writing that we are not citizens but subjects. Was I pinching someone else's phrase? I looked it up. I was not the first. There is a chapter heading in *Mein Kampf*, 'Subjects and Citizens'. So I read it. It was gibberish. But I still think we are more subjects than we are citizens. And I am very sceptical about the desirability of being a citizen inside what passes for the UK's current body politic.

I spent so much of my early professional life trying to get rid of subjects of study called 'civics' and 'British Constitution' because I felt they induced docility and deference. Over the years they were replaced on the timetable by 'government and politics'. So I was disappointed that Bernard appeared to set aside all the work done on political education to turn back to citizenship. It felt like switching from Capstan Full Strength to Silk Cut Extra Mild.

It goes back to Kenneth Baker whose National Curriculum squeezed out Government and Politics and substituted weak citizenship as a theme that might be nodded at in passing by schoolteachers, if they even noticed it. Bernard had taught Blunkett, who gave him the task of reporting on citizenship. The Report was published in 1998. Blunkett once came to a Politics Association Conference, as did Keith Joseph, who had read almost everything we produced and did his puzzled best to engage with it.

For a while I thought we had it cracked, especially with the publication of the Political Literacy Report, but one year later Thatcher became prime minister and over the next few years the movement lost momentum. The Fat Cats of the Curriculum were those subjects on which schools and colleges were inspected. They dominated the timetable. At the same time, what we used to call alternative curriculum and assessment strategies became sidelined: they did not help with inspection: they were not easily measurable.

Recently we have seen out-and-out interference in the Politics A-level syllabus by Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister. Not only was feminism demoted out of sight but also his list of political thinkers contained only one woman, Mary Wollstonecraft. His interference was fought off by a campaign but why was it necessary to have to counter him? Why did he feel entitled to control how young people would perceive and engage with political issues and only those issues chosen by him?

In Theresa May we have a prime minister whose first Brexit thought was to reach for the Royal

Prerogative. We have a Leader of the House with no notion of how proposed legislation needs to be scrutinised. And we are still missing all those civil servants successive governments got rid of, to be replaced far too often by profit-making consultancies.

Perhaps it's just me but I don't enjoy being classified as a citizen within a regime that sees me not only as a subject but also as a commodity.

I would rather be an unruly subject than a deluded, submissive citizen.

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