Human Rights and Values Education in Europe: research in educational law, curricula and textbooks
D. EVANS, H. GRASSLER & J. POUWELS (Eds) 1997
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This volume, published in Germany with the support of the European Commission, is the product of a collaboration (Socrates and later Erasmus funded) which brings together nine contributors from seven countries. The project was eventually called "Building Bridges" and the book begins with a commentary on a Rembrandt painting of a bridge, which forms the book cover. The theme is broad—human rights and values education as these relate to the school curriculum and textbooks. Each writer interprets this differently, some not achieving a balanced focus. Overall, the contributions consist of a collection of progress reports: many had not completed everything they set out to do. The English style throughout is patchy but acceptable: for example the series' strap-line is "to think Europe through values looking at Human Rights".
The underlying philosophy is that issues of human values, rights and responsibilities should be at the centre of education, resulting in a Europe unified through a shared understanding of human rights and values. The book is not, however, this coherent. Each chapter is drawn from a national contribution to the project. Some focus on human rights, some on values and some on the European dimension. The result is poorly focused, confused still further by an undefended identification of the main themes with "citizenship education". Nevertheless, these project reports do provide a contribution to European debate.
In an opening discussion of values education, Pouwels focuses on identity in a context of "post-modern" instability of ideology and the disorientation stemming from the weakening of frames of reference such as provided by religion, politics and personal idealism. The drive for personal autonomy means that people are making their own choices and need guidance. Autonomy without boundaries produces "monsters of children". In a collective identity crisis, enhanced personal autonomy can mean a loss of identity and roots. This implies that values education has to address issues of nationality, freedom, democracy, human rights and identity within a European and international perspective.
This raises interesting issues. Personal autonomy without any respect for other people, of course, produces self-centredness. That may be sharpened by competitive climates which values high achievement (and conversely criticises low achievement, disadvantaging some in the school community); but education takes place within community—the school, the family, the locality, the nation. Socialisation in these communities gives boundaries, as pupils relate to each other and learn what is and what is not acceptable. Nationhood raises interesting questions: it confers a sense of identity with rituals, badges/flags and allegiances, and a national "story" (history) about how the nation has fared in the past. This package has implicit values. However, the sense of nationhood might define who is to be respected or accepted, and who is not. That is, nationhood implies insularity and narrow-mindedness. Many times in history it has also stimulated intolerance, prejudice and aggression to those outside (and also outsiders within the nation). This has been seen at its most extreme and grotesque in "ethnic cleansing", but exists everywhere as racism or national prejudice.

The task therefore is to define identity in terms which assist European and global integration. Identity is itself complex and is not static. It may involve religious allegiance (Christian, Muslim, Hindu) but not define the nature of that allegiance (fundamentalist, liberal, etc.). Secularism produces people who are Christian, Jewish, Muslim by culture but secular in outlook and ideology. A locality may become culturally mixed: the result might be harmonious or acrimonious. Education is involved with the process of people building relationships and, through an appreciation of other people's needs and aspirations, understand where the boundaries to their behaviour lie. At a national level, these interlocking cultures all have a place. A British citizen may be black or white, of Asian, European or African ancestry, worshipping in any religion; and this affects what we mean by the word "British". Each will have a different view of their identity which will combine their backgrounds with their current position. For a black British Muslim, all three words are important.

Evans (section 3.2) addresses implications of citizenship for the curriculum, or "how we educate our young people for their roles as citizens" (p. 37). This is viewed in terms of rights and duties, of values and relationships. Evans sets the problematic terms such as justice and democracy against the insistence of English National Curriculum documentation about *what* values *should* be *inculcated.* He stresses that our task is "critical scrutiny" of what values imply for the present and future world. Jan Pouwels, commenting on the Netherlands, notes that there is little encouragement in law, attainment targets or text books for values education and sets this in a historico-political setting of freedom of education which prevents government interference (but what is a "strongly pillarised society", p. 157?). He argued from tolerance: the Netherlands are internationally known for "great tolerance" and for being egalitarian. There has "never" been severe political oppression or individual exploitation in the Netherlands; therefore education in human values and rights are deemed unnecessary. Pouwels clearly discounts the Nazi years, which might have created a backlash in Dutch law. "Tolerance" is a slippery word stressing who or what is tolerated rather than what values are respected. Too much legal tolerance can be viewed as licence. Does tolerance to peoples mean tolerance of their values or does every incomer have to become Dutch? Tolerance as a legal device is not the counter to oppression. To be tolerated in a country where your identity, beliefs and aspirations are not recognised or respected and not represented in law, society or education can feel like oppression. Pouwels argues for values-orientated education (but see *'valuable* education, p. 158) to develop *identity* and *autonomy.* To these should be added *respect, relationships, social responsibility* and so on, the outward-looking values as well as the inward.

This book needed more careful editing both in terms of language and in terms of overall coherence. Interesting issues are raised about values and human rights education, much superficially descriptive. It cries out for a thorough-going debate of these important issues and principles, which it reveals as having been neglected by the contributing countries of the European Union.

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