'They're out to line their own pockets!': can the teaching of political literacy counter the democratic deficit?; the experience of Modern Studies in Scotland

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ABSTRACT

Nearly a decade into the new millennium, the teaching of political literacy as a strand of education for citizenship has taken on a new urgency throughout much of the world. In most developed countries there is now a feeling that young people need to develop a healthy respect for democratic procedures and consequent methods of participating to shape modern society and an understanding that real political literacy means moving beyond the strictures of traditional civics courses. The introduction into places as far apart as Scotland and Hong Kong of aspects of political education in primary schools (Cheung & Leung 1998; Maitles 2005) has itself reflected a worry (almost a moral panic) in government circles about youth alienation, albeit with some debate as to whether schools should be the places where this is developed. This paper examines the attitudes of young people towards politics, explains some peculiarities of education in Scotland and reports on research into the knowledge, interest, cynicism/trust and values/attitudes of approximately 1600 pupils – 50% of whom study Modern Studies whilst the others study history or geography. The paper explores whether those pupils studying Modern Studies have a stronger basis in some elements of political literacy than those who do not study it. The results suggest that Modern Studies students have more knowledge, greater interest and are less cynical but, that in terms of values, there is no discernible difference.

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets itself the task of trying to ascertain whether the formal teaching of political literacy in schools impacts on the knowledge, interest, trust and values and attitudes of adolescents. The methodology was to choose 1600 pupils, 800 of whom chose to study Modern Studies – a subject with political literacy as its main aim – and 800 of whom chose History or Geography instead. The first part of the paper discusses political literacy and outlines the rationale for political literacy in schools, the experiences and methods of its teaching in schools and the methodology and sample. Results from the research are then presented and discussed and some tentative conclusions are drawn.

ALIENATION TOWARDS 'FORMAL' POLITICS

Voting in elections is most often cited in Britain as an indication of alienation, a lack of political interest and apathy. For example, European Union election voting participation was barely above 20% in 1999, in some areas just in double figures,

and amongst the 18-24 year olds much lower than for the population as a whole. Although there was an improvement in 2004, it was perhaps mainly due to pilots in postal voting and a desire by people to comment on the Blair government and the Iraq war. Participation in the 2009 election fell from 2004 (38.5%) to 34.7%. And, indeed, for those who felt that the General Election would hold up whatever happened in these 'less important' elections, June 7th 2001 showed that this was over optimistic; turnout was under 60%, the lowest since 1918. And indeed in the general election of 2005, turnout did not improve significantly over 2001. Even more worryingly, the Scottish Parliament, described as having the raison d'etre of bringing interest in politics and participation closer to the people, and consequently, providing a forum that would reverse the trend in terms of participation, achieved a sub 50% turnout in May 2003 and barely over 50% in May 2007. Further, the three main political parties in Britain complain of declining and ageing membership. Whilst there may be elements of a moral panic about this sense of political alienation, it must be put in the contexts of both a long term trend to decline in the participation rates of adults in voting and party membership, and of a number of government and/or media panics about young people over the last decade – child mothers, street crime, drug use, elderly frightened to go out, binge drinking (Hall *et al.* 1998; Jones 1995; Lyall, 2007 Frymer 2007; Macdonald 1997; Rees *et al.* 1996). And, of course, moral panic is not confined to Britain (Carlon 2004; Devlin 2006; OPHA 1992)

SINGLE ISSUE CAMPAIGNING POLITICS

Yet, whatever the facts above may show about participation in formal politics, there is also evidence that although young people are alienated from formal politics, they are active and interested in single issue, environmental, political, developing world and animal welfare issues (Chamberlin 2003; Deuchar 2007; Fahmy 2006; Hackett 1997; Maitles 2005; Mulgan & Bentley 1997; Print 2007; Roker *et al.* 1999; Wilkinson 1996). The appeal of single issue campaigns seems to be that '…there is a clear connection between the energies put in and the results…direct action fits many young people's aspirations and lifestyles far better than putting a cross on a ballot paper in a dusty town hall' (Mulgan & Bentley 1997: 19). Wilkinson (1996: 232) argues that young people are attracted to these issues precisely because 'they can see a direct result of their actions', as opposed to activity in political parties. Roker *et al.* (1999) researched into the attitudes of some 1160 school students towards formal politics and single issue involvement and found that young people are involved in local issues and campaigning, are keen to use new technology (particularly the internet) to become more informed and involved, are not alienated from caring about political issues *per se* but – in line with other research, such as Print (2007) – are not very interested in traditional party politics. Interestingly, they also found that some young people did make the transition from working with single issue campaigns into voting and concluded that there is a case 'to encourage greater youth involvement in single-issue campaigning on the grounds that this develops commitment to formal politics'. Deuchar (2004: 167) came to similar conclusions in his analysis of primary pupil councils, that the pupils 'seemed genuinely enthusiastic about their potential for participation', albeit he notes that it was by

no means universal even in his limited case studies. Although issues such as animal rights, the environment, third world poverty, homelessness and pollution move young people, they are turned off by 'spin' politics or committees of the Scottish Parliament or the election of the speaker of the House of Commons or membership of the Scottish Government. As Mortimore and Tyrell (2006: 281) have put it, '(young people) are unenthused by politics but are not apathetic'. Even very young children can tell you about Greenpeace or the Big Issue and indeed can explain what these types of organization are about (HMIe 2006; Holden & Clough 1998; Millennium Youth Market Assessment 2006; Save the Children 2000; UNICEF *et al.* 1999). It can be summed up that 'they are not interested in (formal) "Politics" but they are interested in (campaigning) "politics"' (Maitles 2003: 20). To adults, this can seem contradictory: don't they go together? But for many young people, the latter is about things they feel passionate about; the former cynical and boring. London mayor Ken Livingston put it that 'If voting changed anything, they'd abolish it' (Livingston 1984: 5) and many young people believe that. This democratic deficit is further exacerbated by continuing allegations of sleaze, loans, corruption and so on which, it is assumed, is commonplace amongst our politicians and has reached its nadir in 2009 with widespread allegations of expenses abuses both in Westminster and Holyrood.

Support for the fuel price protests some years ago, Jubilee 2000 debt protests, Globalise Resistance anti-capitalist actions, the massive anti-Iraq war protests at the beginning of 2003, the protests at President Bush's visit to Britain November 2003 and the activity around the G8 summit at Gleneagles in July 2005 and the G20 summit in London in 2009, have shown that single issue politics is still capable of mobilising massive support. Indeed, in the schools, the 'make poverty history' wristbands were popular and widespread. The outcry over the involvement of young people, particularly school students, in the Iraq war protests of 2003 were instructive about adult attitudes towards school students involvement in activity. Most schools and local authorities discouraged involvement, exacerbating the situation by calling participation truancy, threatening to stop bursaries and, on occasion, suspending pupils (Birkett 2003). The Secondary Heads Association advice was 'treat it as normal truancy and take appropriate action' (SHA 2003: 2). Yet, there is also a sense in which the young people involved were telling us that the war was not solely an adult war, that some 40% of the Iraqi population is under 14, that many of the victims of the war were their age and that they did not like what was being done in their name. Educational psychologists suggest that it can be healthy for children to rebel occasionally: '…we have applauded schoolchildren demonstrations in other countries. Why not our kids?' (Maines 2003: 2). Occasionally the mixture of basic political literacy and local/community issues can have interesting consequences as pupils involve themselves in protests (as happened in the south side of Glasgow over the M77 development) or 'become' vegetarian through examining animal welfare issues in schools or, as outlined above, decide that the war on Iraq is something that they need to protest about. In a Glasgow secondary school, the pupils were so angry at the deportation of a family of asylum seekers, two of whom were pupils in the school, in March 2005, that they organised a petition. This was signed by hundreds of the young people at the school and the deportation was put on hold for further review

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following this pupil intervention. The school is in an area of multiple deprivation and the Herald (2005) reported that the pupils were united in their condemnation of the authorities. This is politics and education for citizenship in action. Chamberlin (2003: 93) found that her generally disinterested and cynical school students knew how to organise a single issue pressure group campaign and 'responded to the call for action with much more enthusiasm than they had previously shown…they had confidence in their ability to achieve their aim'.

EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP

Attitudes as to what schools should do to promote democratic understanding has itself changed. Pre-war, Lay (1934: 71) was suggesting that citizenship consisted of 'when you see a motor car in the road, leave it alone; it is not yours', not to ring doorbells as a joke, to ensure that you 'never turn an open book face downwards' and, when picking flowers, 'break the stalks off close to the ground but don't pull the roots up'. Post-war, the Ministry of Education (1949: 10) suggested that ''There are forward looking minds in every section of the teaching profession ready to interpret the old and simple virtues of humility, service, restraint and respect for personality. If schools can encourage qualities of this kind in their pupils, we may fulfil the conditions of a healthy democratic society.' By the 1970s, Crick and Porter (1978: 7) were arguing that the education system should be looking towards fostering 'a person who…can understand and respect, while not sharing, the values of others'. Perhaps, in the new millennium, central to an understanding of the world are the notions of 'society' and 'change'. Our school students need a perspective on both understanding and changing the world and the skills and knowledge should be geared toward and channeled into these concepts.

In Britain, it is fair to say that education for citizenship is seen as having three distinct strands: political literacy, community involvement and the development of positive values, although it should be noted that in Scotland this has come into the schools in the more familiar context of knowledge, skills and values (LTS 2002); indeed, the Curriculum for Excellence, which will shape education in schools into the future, has 'responsible citizenship' as one of its four key aims. Added to this is an emphasis on creativity and enterprise. This is important as it stresses enterprise as something relevant to all, as opposed to a narrow interpretation, focusing on entrepreneurship (Deuchar 2007); it argues that these kinds of programmes should be related to releasing and nurturing the enterprise in all pupils rather than solely searching for the next Richard Branson. Problems, however, begin to develop as soon as the strands of education for citizenship are defined. Nonetheless, the political literacy strand has perhaps two main themes: knowledge as an understanding of the society in which we live and the consequent inequalities that arise; and skills relating to the ability to critically evaluate information, weigh up evidence and draw conclusions.

VALUES, ACTIVITY AND PARTICIPATION

Community involvement, however community is defined, can be wide ranging and can be both social and political. Occasionally the mixture of political literacy and community involvement can have interesting consequences as pupils involve

themselves in protests. We should not see these as problems but as natural developments in understanding society. As Crick and Porter (1978: 9) put it: '...if we want citizens we have to tolerate some of the unpredictable inconveniences of action and participation'; indeed, perhaps the word 'tolerate' should be changed to 'encourage' in the 21st Century. Again, there is little agreement, other than in very general terms, about the types of attitudes we would want our education system to foster. Even in something as relatively uncontroversial as 'positive' political attitudes (never mind moral values), research suggests that the most difficult thing is a definition of positive political values (Angvik & Van Borries 1997; Hahn 1998; Maitles 1998). But nonetheless, the discussion around education for citizenship can begin it.

It must be noted that there is no universal agreement in Scotland or elsewhere as to the value of political literacy , activism or pupil voice in schools *per se* (Lundy 2007; Thornberg 2008; Whitty & Wisby 2007). Rooney (2008), for example, argues that to believe that these kinds of initiatives can be developed in the current school system undermines the very nature of education and makes teachers responsible for the ills of society. For some, it smacks of brainwashing (Scruton, Ellis-Jones & O'Keefe 1985), for others it challenges the untrammeled influence of the mass media (Boal 2004). For many it is a necessary prerequisite of democracy (Advisory Group 1998; Hannam 1998; Kerr 2003; Ross & Roland-Levy 2003), yet it can lead to support for fringe organisations outside the democratic process.

Most commentators now agree that the nature and logic of democracy needs a politically educated population, capable at the very least of differentiating between the policies of the main political parties, with an understanding of how democratic institutions work and their importance, and with knowledge of how to vote and involve themselves in political activity if they so choose (Advisory Group 1998; Davies 1999; Frazer 1999; Harber 1987; Heater 1969). There is evidence, certainly from England (Mortimore & Tyrell 2006; Stradling 1977) but now being corroborated from other states across Europe (Angvik & von Borries 1997; Fahmy 2006; Hahn 1999; Kennedy 2007; Maitles 2000; Torney-Purta *et al.* 2001), that there is much ignorance over basic political issues amongst school students. This research suggests that the political apathy felt by many young people, the perceived decline in the moral base of society or the rebellion shown in events over the last 40 years, from student unrest in the late 1960s to poll tax rioting in the 1990s to anti-capitalist and anti-war protests in this decade, is born out of ignorance of political rights and responsibilities, that indeed socialisation requires political knowledge.

SKILLS, BIAS AND COMING OFF THE FENCE

In this context, the whole area of bias in the teaching political literacy – even if an aim is how to spot bias – has been a main worry for educators, and has convinced some that contentious political and social issues should not be tackled in the classroom; yet it has been argued that completely unbiased teaching may indeed reinforce negative values and attitudes (Agostinome-Wilson 2005; Ashton & Watson 1998; Stradling 1984). Indeed, even amongst those who feel that it is valuable to teach political issues to young people, there is often an uncertainty

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about whether the concentration should be on content or skills. It is not a new debate: in the 1960s and 1970s there were these differences about the goals of future citizenship education. For some, it was about imparting knowledge regarded by society as significant, for others developing the skills to analyse society. However, we must realize that content cannot be effectively taught without analysis and skills need content to have relevance.

Without skills of critical evaluation and decision making, then there may be knowledge about the institutions but no methods of evaluating their worth. Thus, for maximum value, the content and the skills must be closely linked. Further, a valuable, indeed vital, area of political education is to develop positive caring values, such as tolerance and empathy in pupils; These are values that are taken into adulthood, and, in a multi-cultural society, are of prime importance. The most recent studies of political and civic attitudes in Europe (Angvik & von Borries 1997; Hahn 1998; Kennedy 2007; Torney-Purta *et al.* 1999, 2001) have somewhat contradictory results. Angvik and Von Borries and Hahn found that the young people involved (14-15 years of age) had very positive attitudes towards some issues, such as voting/democracy in general and equal rights for women but were far less positive on other issues, such as voting rights for immigrants. The youth of some countries (in particular Hungary, Belgium, Finland, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic) showed a relatively high level of consent with the proposition that voting rights should not be granted to any immigrant. Also, 75 years after some countries were decidedly unhappy about refugees from the Third Reich, it was found that many young people were not keen on 'persecution at home' as a reason for naturalisation. Further, in terms of unconditionally granting full civil rights for immigrants, many, particularly from Nordic and post-communist states (excepting Croatia and Ukraine) were opposed to this. Indeed, the two volume report by Angvik and von Borries throws up some of the problems of a trans-national approach; the information is interesting and relevant but it is very hard to draw any general conclusions from the work.

The IEA Civic Education study, organised from Germany, amassed a wide range of evidence regarding this area (Torney-Purta *et al.* 1999, 2001). The changes since the first IEA study in the early 1970s have been massive. Issues such as increasing democratisation around the world, increasing movement of peoples and the development of xenophobic and racist movements, increasing youth alienation from formal politics coupled with youth involvement in single issue pressure group politics, the increasing role of women in politics, the increasingly powerful mass media and major issues relating to globalization and neoliberalism have meant that the world has changed significantly. This study throws up some of the ways that educationalists can help develop a meaningful education for citizenship course. Its reports suggest ways to strengthen the whole area of citizenship education in schools in Europe and this is very welcome. Nonetheless, Kennedy (2007) maintains that there is a scale of activism ranging from political engagement, through political rights understanding and voluntary activities to protest activities, and that schools tend to place too much emphasis on formal politics.

MODERN STUDIES IN SCOTTISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Although Scotland is a small country, Modern Studies in the curriculum has led to a singular experience. In a relatively short time, some 45 years, Modern Studies has had a marked effect on the curriculum in most Scottish schools, being seen by educators, pupils and parents as a meaningful addition to social subjects. Modern Studies is in many ways a success story, now a mainstream subject, taking its intellectual concepts primarily from politics and sociology. It is taught in over 80% of schools at some level and accepted academically on a par with the other social subjects; indeed, in most of the last 20 years, there were similar numbers of presentations at 'Higher' (the university entrance qualification) in Modern Studies as there were in History or Geography. (SQA 2008).

The content in Modern Studies includes institutional knowledge, local/Scottish/British/world affairs and knowledge of methods of participating. The content is laid down at Standard Grade (taught in S3/4 of secondary schools) and Higher Grade, although there is some scope for choice. In S1/S2 (the first years of secondary education), though, there is much more scope within general guidelines, and a recent survey of some 150 Modern Studies departments in large secondaries in Scotland found a wide variety of topics to be popular, in particular those related to the general areas of rights and responsibilities, equal opportunities, human rights, international affairs (particularly the developing world), needs and wants, the media, and representation and participation (Maitles 2008). Most Modern Studies teachers find the overall content stimulating, and the need to constantly update the material ensures that the subject is constantly challenging, although it can mean a large workload just to keep the content up to date.

Further, Modern Studies aims to develop evaluating and investigative skills, now generalised under the heading of enquiry. Evaluating is the promotion of 'pupil ability in the critical appraisal and evaluation of information about social and political institutions, processes and issues through:
- recognising lack of objectivity;
- making comparisons and drawing conclusions
- expressing support for a personal or given point of view.' (SQA 1997: 7)

These are clearly central to the development of political literacy at any level. Investigating involves the processes of planning, recording, analysing/synthesising and reporting and again is a vital skill for political literacy.

In terms of developing positive attitudes, the Scottish Consultative Committee on the Curriculum suggested that Modern Studies should develop open-mindedness, tolerance and the moral and ethical responsibilities of individuals. (SCCC 1997). This is often seen in pupil activities and course content towards issues such as poverty, the elderly, development issues and civil, human and equal rights. The Inspectors noted that many Modern Studies departments ensured a 'range of teaching and learning experiences and activities to develop active citizenship.' (HMI 2000). Where dealing with controversial issues, Modern Studies teachers should be allowing pupils to examine evidence relating to a range of views.

Modern Studies enthusiasts have tended to argue that, because of the nature of the subject, the 'how' of teaching has to be centrally linked to the 'what'. Central to its delivery have been interaction, enthusiasm and dialogue. Modern Studies teachers are aware that the content of the subject means that many pupils will be coming to the classroom with some experience that they can input to the lesson. As the Scottish Inspectorate noted: 'Most teachers encouraged a classroom atmosphere in which open questioning and challenging of opinion was common-place' (HMI 1992). The most recent large scale HMIe report on Modern Studies suggested that in some 85% of departments there was an ethos characterised by 'high expectations...a brisk pace of work...challenging tasks' and further that staff made a valuable contribution to the wider school and community 'through organising mock elections, debates, displays and excursions' (HMI 2000).

Clearly, young people able to handle complex skills, with a knowledge of political institutions and able to debate, articulate and discuss political issues should be welcomed in any democracy. Indeed it is now a defining aim of schools in Scotland, as outlined in the Curriculum for Excellence, that the development of 'responsible citizens' is a central goal of learning.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Although the subject has been on the curriculum for over 45 years, there has only been limited research into its effectiveness. An early study (Mercer 1973) suggested that even in terms of political content, students studying Modern Studies had virtually no greater knowledge than those who did not. This is perhaps understandable when we realise the geographical/historical slant that the subject had in its infancy.

This research project seeks to examine areas of knowledge, political interest and trust amongst young people to be aware of and try to assess 'positive' attitudes; and within the context of comparing pupils who have studied Modern Studies in S3/4 and those who have not. The test items for the questionnaire were devised by the author. For the knowledge questions, a range of Scottish, British and international issues were identified. The interest, trust and values and attitude sections were drawn up in line with international surveys conducted in the 1990s (Angvik & van Borries 1997; Hahn 1998) and the tools of the IEA study on attitudes in 28 countries (Torney-Purta *et al.* 2001). The positive attitudes part was particularly hard to devise and then analyse as 'positive values' *per se* are so hard to define. For example support for European integration and currency can be seen as positive but so might a desire to reject European integration and currency; again, for some, denominational schooling is positive, for others only secular education has positive features.

Rather than concentrate on knowledge or attitudes *per se*, this research has compared students aged 14-15 studying Modern Studies with those not. It involved approximately 1600 students, 792 doing Modern Studies and 816 History or Geography. The study was conducted in 2006-7. All the students were in Standard Grade classes at the beginning of S4 (equivalent of last year of Key Stage 4 in England) and care was taken, in consultation with teachers in the school, to ensure that similar ability classes were chosen in each school. 80 schools were chosen in total, 25% of the schools were denominational (Catholic)

schools, there was an ethnic mix in some of the schools chosen and there were two private schools. The schools were located in 10 different Scottish local authorities, ranging from the Borders to the Highlands, although the majority (60 schools) were in the central belt and there was a mixture of urban and rural schools. To enhance objectivity, a research assistant, administered the anonymous questionnaires, which were completed in classes or school hall under exam conditions (i.e. individually) without peer or teacher influence. There is thus a major plus and caveat with the study; it guaranteed anonymity for the participants, facilitating honest answers to some controversial issues but had the negative side of making it impossible to follow up individual responses.

RESULTS

In the first questionnaires (Table 1), the Modern Studies pupils were more knowledgeable than their colleagues studying History or Geography. The questions were generally relating to basic political processes, for example: a picture of Alex Salmond and Tony Blair and David Cameron and George Bush and the pupils asked to give their job; a question about the White House; questions about European institutions. The results suggest that Modern Studies is developing knowledge of political issues and the political process. This comparative strength notwithstanding, it is still disappointing to find Modern Studies pupils (indeed all the pupils) demonstrating only limited knowledge about European issues. This has been a contentious area for some time with evidence that some Modern Studies departments do not study this topic area as it is perceived as 'boring' (Maitles 2008).

Table 1: Knowledge (percentage correct)

	Modern Studies (n=792)	**History/Geography (n=816)**
Scottish issues	68	49
British issues	47	27
Europe	31	23
International	47	34

Our second area sought to measure the extent to which Modern Studies and History/Geography pupils are interested in politics. Modern Studies pupils polled less highly than their peers on one question, 'do you watch current affairs on TV at least once a week?' with only 16% answering in the affirmative compared to 26% of History/Geography pupils; further investigation of this revealed that geography pupils had included wildlife/planet documentaries within this category and that might explain a relatively higher positive response. On all other measures Modern Studies students exhibited a far greater degree of interest. 85% of Modern Studies pupils watched the news on TV at least once a week compared to 80%, 48% read a newspaper at least once per week against 30%, 58% talked about politics at least once in a while as against 34% and finally 36% of Modern Studies pupils deemed themselves to be interested in politics compared to 12% of History/Geography pupils. Again, however, we may be

struck by how few students registered interest in politics in either group, despite the more positive readings for those studying Modern Studies. There is, however, a caveat to the results; the higher interest in politics found in Modern Studies pupils may be a reason why the pupils chose Modern Studies in S2, rather than any function of the teaching or the subject. This needs further investigation.

Our third means of assessing the effectiveness of Modern Studies involved measuring the extent of political cynicism and trust prevalent among pupils studying Modern Studies and History/Geography. The pupils were given a series of statements with a 3 point Likert scale; the answers were translated into trust/cynicism categories using a tool developed by the IEA (Torney-Purta *et al.* 2001). Table 2 suggests that more Modern Studies pupils exhibited political trust – 43% compared to 29% of their counterparts – while they also betrayed less cynicism; 38% of the Modern Studies pupils were found to be cynical compared to 51% of the History/Geography students. This latter finding was supported by the responses of pupils to assertions such as 'European politicians promise things just to get your vote' and 'Scottish MEPs are out to line their own pockets'. Once again, though, a caveat is necessary: we need to be aware that the greater trust exhibited by Modern Studies students could be the reason why they chose the subject in the first place rather than a function of the subject.

Table 2: Political Cynicism and Trust

	Modern Studies	**History/Geography**
Cynicism ratings	38	51
Trust ratings	43	29
Some examples (% agreeing)		
European politicians promise things just to get your vote	56	73
Scottish MEPs are out to line their own pockets	22	40
The way people in Europe vote is important in deciding how things are run in Europe	66	40

More complex were the results of our 'Positive' Attitudes Research into pupil views on controversial issues. We questioned Modern Studies and History/Geography pupils on such matters as immigration, increased police powers, fair trade, nuclear power and equal rights (Table 3). We gave a number of statements, using a 3 point Likert scale. The reporting in the table below lists those agreeing/disagreeing. Where the numbers are low, there was a large number of 'undecided'. While fewer Modern Studies students agreed that the police should receive more powers and more of them disagreed this than did non-Modern Studies pupils, Modern Studies pupils were at the same time more hostile to the suggestion that goods from developing countries should have a minimum price. Similarly, while Modern Studies students were more likely to disagree with measures to reduce immigration into Scotland, they were at the

same time more hostile to European integration and monetary union. Of course these issues are distinct and a 'liberal' view on one of them need not imply a particular position on another, but either way there were no neat lines drawn across agendas. Furthermore, we received broadly similar responses to questions concerning women's rights, the death penalty for convicted terrorists and arming the police. Modern Studies pupils generally opposed the proposition that refugees should be 'sent home' more strongly than their colleagues, while being similarly hostile to the suggestion that black people should only be granted British citizenship rights on condition of acceptance of British culture. They were, further, more inclined to hold that homosexuality was not 'unnatural'. Overall, though, we may conclude at the very least that studying Modern Studies was not a reliable indicator of a 'positive' attitude towards contentious political issues, if by 'positive' we mean socially liberal and informed by internationalist concerns.

Table 3: 'Positive' Attitudes

% voting against	Modern Studies	History/Geography
Immediately close down nuclear power stations	27/19	31/20
Limit speed and private traffic	54/9	42/15
Reduction of wages in Scotland to finance investments in poorer countries	5/56	12/52
Full equality for women	70/2	64/10
Use of European army to stop war	47/7	54/13
Reduce immigration into Scotland	29/19	34/25
Minimum price for Third World goods	16/22	19/17
Increased powers for the police	44/18	53/12
European integration and currency	16/23	30/23
End religious segregation in education	39/20	47/14
Death penalty for convicted terrorists	36/26	39/30
Arm all police	25/40	35/41
Immigrants are a threat to our culture	23/64	23/49
Homosexuality is unnatural	45/43	53/26
Refugees should be sent home	28/44	39/35

Black people in Britain should have full rights only if they accept British culture	27/53	40/37
The world would be a better place if more women were world leaders	25/20	26/28
Equal rights for women has gone too far	22/60	28/42

Finally, there was a question designed to find out how positive these pupils might be in terms of their perceptions of Europe in 40 years time; this is important as a recent UNICEF report comparing young people's aspirations suggested that young Britons have a generally poorer view of happiness and expectations than most other industrialised countries (UNICEF 2007). Our students (both those studying Modern Studies and those not) were generally pessimistic – particularly in terms of the environment -- (Table 4) and again, as in the section on values, in some areas Modern Studies students were more optimistic ('democratic'), in others Geography/History were more optimistic ('prosperous/wealthy').

Table 4: I think Europe in 40 years time will be…

% agreeing	Modern Studies	History/Geography
peaceful	18	18
overpopulated	51	62
prosperous/wealthy	31	37
democratic	56	42
polluted	75	81
torn by rich/poor conflict	40	39
torn by ethnic conflict	34	34

We are now in a position to tentatively begin to determine whether or not Modern Studies is effective in developing political literacy. We need to take into account that although this is a fairly substantial number of school students –1600 – it is a small proportion of those pupils in S4 in Scottish secondary schools; therefore we need to be careful not to over-generalise.

Nonetheless, it is worth observing at the outset that there is in fact more knowledge in terms of political literacy among all pupils than we might have thought, although a significant difference emerges when S3/S4 Modern Studies pupils are contrasted with pupils taking other subjects. Meanwhile, Modern Studies students exhibited a greater degree of interest in political issues than other pupils. This may come as no surprise since the pupils perhaps envisioned that the subject would correspond to their prior interests. But interestingly there was less political cynicism and more trust amongst our Modern Studies pupils, backing up research from Deuchar (2007), Maitles (2005), Print (2007) and Roker *et al.* (1999). Overall for these 'trust' results, we need to be aware that this research was conducted before the 2009 revelations about MPs expenses and we

might consider that if these questions were to be asked presently, the results might be markedly poorer.

There is no generalised or significant difference in terms of 'positive' moral-political values and attitudes between pupils studying Modern Studies and their colleagues in other subjects. We may hypothesise that this is due to History and Geography aiming to develop positive values themselves. It may therefore be that Modern Studies teachers perhaps make bigger claims about their role in terms of developing positive values than is perhaps the case.

A final observation concerns classroom strategies and approaches. Modern Studies teachers may have to reassess the means by which they develop open-mindedness amongst pupils who come to them with closed ideas. Indeed, a greater emphasis on democratic participation within schools may be of use in this context in terms of the active learning experiences it would provide, which for young people has value in and of itself.

CONCLUSION

There is much to be positive about. World-wide, there is the desire to ensure effective education for citizenship; further, it is accepted that political literacy is a central component of citizenship and there is the fact that political literacy education does seem to have an impact in terms of the political knowledge base of the students and has some impact on their interest and attitudes. Also, it is acknowledged that teachers seem to go out of their way to avoid showing bias in the class. However, the lack of general political knowledge and positive attitudes in many areas is worrying as is the general lack of rights given to young people in general, both within and outwith schools (Hannam 1998; MacBeath & Moos 2004; Maitles 2005). In particular there is now growing opinion that pupils do not just learn about democracy but rather must live it; they learn about democracy through democracy (Arnstine 1995; Dobozy 2007; Levin 1998; Maitles 2005; Print 2007; Puolimatka 1995) and this has major potential repercussions for many Scottish schools which, together with significant numbers of parents, do not yet see effective pupil participation and decision making as a high priority. It must also be noted that the influences from outwith the classroom play an even greater role than many teachers currently acknowledge and that teachers may need to play a greater role in challenging negative views that surface in the classroom, although this itself can lead to conflict between the school and individual parents. Further, it is necessary to keep a realistic perspective on the influence of political literacy education and citizenship in schools. It is not a cure for the ills of society. Finally, while Modern Studies may be able to perform a role in terms of developing issues relating to political literacy in our young people, it is far from alone in transmitting values. In the cross-curricular context of Education for Citizenship the attempt to entrench respect for human rights and democracy cannot therefore be left to Modern Studies alone.

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