

## **Critically assess the relationship between national identity and schooling in the period 1870-1939?**

The relationship between national identity and schooling is one that has been seen as both a problem, where by the integrating of the concept of national identity into schooling is seen as the “poison” that generates “cross-national conflict” (1) and a defensive reaction to preventing and dealing with the problems that Britain faced during that epoch, where the political and social environment in Europe “provided a sort of hothouse atmosphere for nationalistic writings of the most fervent kind”(2)

“Dr Tate outlined in brief that ‘national identities depended on stories ‘and that teachers need to provide children ‘with a sense of belonging to a community which stretches back into the past and forward into the future ‘ in order to give them ‘ a sense of meaning’” (3) The idea of creating a sense of belonging for children, is one that is shared worldwide, humans I have been told, need narratives, however the use of ‘national identities’ here is used in a positive and discreet in content manner. I wonder what concepts does Dr Tate associate with national identities, and what aspects of the past and future should children be informed about?

To answer the question given I will look deeply into, the relationship between national identity and schooling, ways of introducing national identity in schooling, threat abroad and at home, the effects, the problems and questions raised by the idea of national identity in schooling.

I will begin by introducing some of the important Legislations and Codes introduced by the government as these reflect the concern of the day, and play an important role in schooling, and national identity.

The revised code of 1862 introduced a new concern arising over the education attained in schools, and thus the ‘payment by results’ system was introduced, and teachers were paid for those that achieved results. The importance of this central part of legislation was that it governed the activities precipitated in schools. These school codes were issued by the government to dictate what should be taught in schools and at what level for what age. Attendance and a uniformed standard of education were central to what the government sought to achieve in this legislation. This piece of legislation was hated so much by the teachers, and thus it was attacked by masses of teachers thus was withdrawn in 1898.

The New Code of 1871 awarded 40 hour drills per year via grant aid. The drills were seen as a form of implementing the importance of obedience into the children. The importance of obedience was seen as vital to the social stability of the school.

The introduction of additional 'specific subjects' i.e. English, Geography and History, for those who got to level five, were paid for by the government. The government attempted to widen the curriculum, thus those who couldn't pass were removed from schools, this also proves that most children didn't perform very well and may never have got to that level.

The 1875 code emphasized on the importance of punctuality, manners and cleanliness being "close to Godliness" and the 1904 Code emphasized that the purpose of elementary schooling was to create and strengthen the character of the child, to develop intelligent children, children should be taught to be good 'followers' not 'leaders', this was especially so for the working class child.

The idea of good manners in schools was characterized by the emerging importance of the rule implemented by children who found that they were to be seen and not to be heard. This is an extremely symbolic order, as it displays to us that children were dictated to, they were not to engage but to listen. This to me also shows that schools were a place of extremely important political value. After all the children of today are the future tomorrow, and thus it is logical to presume, those schools were the playground of political upbringing.

The aims of schooling during that epoch are seen to be very narrow, the relationship between the child and the teacher was one of respect, there was no real interplay of dialogue, or movement, children were to sit still during the lesson and listen, i.e. in texts like JJ Prince classes were described as "mere machines" activated by the agreement and order of the teacher.

The relationship between national identity and schooling is a definite and defined relationship. The introduction of national identity and pride is evident in i.e. the increasing features of studying of history in schooling. The type of history taught was very narrow and extremely patriotic. The emergence of history is seen by some historians, to be a design to prevent the revolutions that was so very evident in European societies. To further understand the relationship

between national identity and schooling I will write about the different ways in which schooling introduced a sense of national identity.

The history of the British Empire was an essential aspect of the history taught in schools, empire day was a national celebration, it was celebrated differently in different schools however the theme remained the same, the celebration of the expansion of British colonial rule, the British Empire.

“The schools pageant told the story of how the British Empire unfolded.

Beginning with the ‘tribal unions that laid the foundations of the British nation’. The pageant went on to tell ‘of how England began to spread her wings and then to recount the exploration, settlement and colonization that marked the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth’. Pupils read excerpts from Shakespeare, Cowper, Blake and Campbell.”(4)

The language used here is extremely proud and patriotic, Britain is seen as a powerful and overwhelming force “England began to spread her wings and then to recount the exploration, settlement and colonization”.

Also the recognition and informed learning of people like “Shakespeare, Cowper, Blake and Campbell” is symbolic, as it concludes that those who are celebrated are linked to the British Empire, they are important because they are British, in the sense that they are to be celebrated as what it is to be British, is to be important, successful and famous.

Visual references and performances were displayed i.e. “At Chuckery Senior Girls School, the head teacher and her staff had a devised pageant in which the various Dominions became linked up with Britannia, seated on her throne, ‘with streamers of red, white and blue’, whilst the figure of peace with wings outstretched, gave the gathering her blessing. ‘England’ and ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ were sung.”(4)

The use of the flag in this display at Chuckery Senior Girls School represents a symbolic and important patriotic display, flags represent different countries, and the British flag used here is a visual patriotic display that excludes other countries to what they associate with England. England is personified and glorified the use of visual displays represent perhaps the psychological belief that children are more conscious of visual images “I don’t think there is anything to compare with allowing them to portray the colonies and dependencies”(5)

Another element of empire day that was the importance of fitness, fitness was seen as an attribute to the Empire i.e. at “Chuckery Senior Boys School a short musical program was accompanied by a display of physical training” (4)

What is the importance of empire day, and how it is that one day can have an enormous impact to the relationship between national identity and schooling? This is explained by “where careful preparation” was vitally implemented to the commemoration of Empire Day ‘it formed a lesson of lasting educational influence’ (?) (Get from (There’s no place like home, Education of History 28, pg 236, quote number 2)

There are many questions and queries that the celebration of empire day arises to historians today, due to the lack of primary sources, the effect of Empire Day on, children, teachers and parents are limited.

The use of images in i.e. ‘race –thinking’ are extremely profound as they symbolize how children were taught to think about different races, “a black persons teeth are usually white, so are the whites in his eyes” (4), the fact that this is an extract taken from 1939 by a twelve year old boy shows that even at this stage in time, children were still unaware or ignorant and uneducated about different races, different races were alien to them.

This however may not be the case for all children; it may just be to a particular school or even child. The two extracts displayed in There’s no place like home, Education of History 28, pg 237 are extracts taken from children in 1939 and were part of a ‘school survey collected by Mass-Observation for an anti-Semitic project. Mass-observation believed that childhood was a critical stage in the formation of attitudes toward minority groups (4).

I am unable to say that such race thinking as these were formed specifically under the influence of the school, or that these ideas were specifically shaped by the curriculum, however there are many documents that enable me to believe that the schooling of children influenced and encouraged children to be proud of their national identity, and influenced the children to view other nations in a naive and almost aggressive nature. Joanna Bourke, wrote about how schooling taught children that “Frenchmen were a lot of frogs and were a little sissy as they had a great pull with the opposite sex’ ...that Germans had square heads, crew cuts, and fancy braces, and were totally without initiative...the violence of Chin Chin Chinamen” was fearsome. (6)

The type of the text books used at schools can convey to us the type of i.e. history and geography that children were taught according to W.E.Marsden "The assertion that history and geography text books have exercised a negative influence on attitudes towards other countries is of long standing. It manifestly drives from conceptions of nationhood, national character and national identity, which have in turn spilled over into aggressive forms of nationalism, and have injected their 'poison' into social and political attitudes , and thence into the educational system." (1)

However many queries that are raised by historians about the influences of the textbook, include questions about the effectivity of the textbooks, the number of school, classrooms, or even pupils that had access to such books. The format of the lesson and the way in which the books were used? Etc

The features of national identity are clearly defined by A.D.Smith as national identity is seen as a concept that affects the political community, 'a single code of rights and duties, and a social space and territory' (7)

This perhaps explains why the approaching years leading to the First World War "saw a flood of nursery tales, recitation materials, and children's books, juvenile literature and historic novels, which faltered the British and stereotyped the world's non-white populations. (8)

The approaching war affected the schooling of children during that epoch to such an extent that "In the boy's public schools, where it was presumed that many pupils would be considering the armed forces as a career, military and political history was granted some priority"(9)

The link between national identity in schooling, and war, was seen as so important that some of the more popular newspapers of the day argued schools should wholly integrate the education about war beyond specific subjects and "that the topic of war, on the successful conclusion of which the future of the race depended, should be approached through the whole curriculum, and not through individual subjects."(10)

The use of stereotype to identify national characteristics is clearly evident in this piece of "Orwell's celebrated essay on boys weeklies published in 1939. They are as follows:

FRENCHMAN: Excitable. Wears beards, gesticulates wildly.

SPINIARD, MEXICAN etc.: Sinister and treacherous.

ARAB, AFGAN etc.: Sinister and treacherous.

CHINESE: treacherous. Wears pigtail.

ITALIAN: Grinds barrel-organ or carries stiletto.

SWEDE, DANE etc.: Kind hearted Stupid.

NEGRO: Comic, very faithful.

(11)

The use of such stereotypical views of the characteristics of the people due to their place of origin, is so profoundly blatantly in compliance with the writings of F.L. Hagendoorn and H.Linssen “widespread and irresistible inclination to attribute personality traits to certain nationalities”(12)

Religious, political and social bias in text books contributed to the implementation of a national identity within schooling, as the link between wider social and political change and the school curricula.

Governments were extremely aware of the importance of schooling to the social stability of Britain in the future. They were constantly reminded of the civil unrest in countries dominated by the influx of unsatisfied citizens who wanted to change the way that the authorities governed society, and thus revolution were the results, and the fear of War lingered. British authorities constantly feared a revolution, and constantly saw the dissatisfaction of i.e. the poor laws, the conflict over the price of bread and corn and the industrial revolution and its consequences on society and the law brought about via demonstrations, campaigns, attacks on factories and machines, attacks on legislations and Acts introduced by the government. Thus the education in schools, which were constantly being dictated to by the governments via the national curriculum and legislations was taken extremely seriously, this can be shown by the financial administration of schools by the government, and the introduction of mass compulsory schooling and legislations brought forward by the government.

Schools are seen as places of functionalism, they have a purpose to help society to operate, and it is inevitable not to say that they are places of influence, where ideologies and political beliefs are constantly in the air.

But whose ideologies do the children pick up, who are they influenced by, and to what extent do school children they accept the ‘national identity’ that they learn about in i.e. history and geography lessons?

The clear cut definition of what is it to be a good citizen is so entirely embedded with the ideologies of firm patriotism and pride in the empire, and thus it is thought that the purpose of education is to shape children into good citizens. However how effective is it to believe in this, according to Paul Goalen “ there is little evidence beyond the assertion of some politicians and administrators that the history curriculum is capable of turning children into ‘better citizens’” (13)

Marxism histories would argue that national identity is a form of social control, created to keep the social and economical order of society. Perhaps if school children in Britain were integrated with their fellow ‘rivals’ then perhaps they would see that indeed ‘it is not the differences between people that is the difficulty but the indifferences’.

Education has been romanticized as a heroic force with the ability of “saving the world, in the cyclically repeated expectation that this can realistically be achieved by educational means” (1) However The relationship between national identity and schooling, and the critical way in which it has been used quite clearly as a weapon for and nationalism to such an extent as racism during that epoch, has encouraged me to believe that the studying of national identity in a bias manner in schools can easily become dangerous and provocative.

#### Reference:

1. (W.E.Marsden, Nationalism, propaganda and war and peace, pg29-47)

2. (P.M.Kennedy, 'The decline of nationalistic history in the west, 1900-1970', Journal of Contemporary History, 8 (1973)88.)
3. (History today, History and national identity in the classroom, pg 6)
4. (There's no place like home, Education of History 28, pg 236-237)
5. (1 Mass Observation Archive FR878)
6. (J.Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960. Gender, Class and Ethnicity (London: Routledge, 1994), 186)
7. (A.D.Smith, National Identity, London, 1991, p.9-11)
8. (J.M.Mackenzie, Propaganda and Empire. The manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960 Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 176.see k. Castle, Britannia's children. Reading Colonialism through Children's Books (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1990)
9. (T.Hearl, 'Military education and the schools curriculum 1880-1870, History of Education, 5 (1976 ), 261)
10. (Anon., 'The war from the school-room window', Supplement to The Times (14 January 1916), 2.)
11. There's no place like home, Education of History 28, pg 246, extract 54)
12. ( F.L. Hagendoorn and H.Linssen, 'National characteristics and national stereotypes: A seven-nation comparative study ', in Nationalism, Ethnicity and Identity : Cross National and Comparative Perspectives, edited by R.Farnen (New Brunswick , 1994), 103-26)
13. (Paul Goalen, History Today,47, (June 1997).p.6)