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The construction of national identity through primary school history: the Irish case

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Much recent sociological work on education makes reference to gender, sexual, ethnic, local and political ‘project’ identities, yet there remains a need to bring the nation, and the state, back in; to also question the way in which ‘national’ identities are constructed in a context of globalisation and localisation. Through an analysis of Irish primary history curriculum statements from 1971 and 1999, I identify some key features of the state’s response to identity construction in a globalised context. They include a focus on pupils becoming skilled in reflexively producing identity, and a focus on a ‘boundless’ globalised identity. These changes are not unproblematic.

You will know all too well that Ireland is a country at war with its past—or, at least, with conflicting versions of its several pasts. But we are each of us in a struggle with those ... on a much more deeply personal level than we sometimes know. (The character ‘Sr. Mary Rose Kennedy’ in Joseph O’Connor’s novel *Imishowen*) (O’Connor, 2000, p. 42)

Introduction

Identity is a key concept in contemporary academic debate; indeed, Jenkins suggests that it became one of the ‘unifying frameworks of intellectual debate in the 1990s’ (1996, p. 7). In education too, identity has become a key concept in recent years. Much of the academic research in education has focused on the construction of layered gender, sexual, social class and ethnic identities. This reflects a broader sociological trend that has seen an increased focus on the process of constructing ‘resistant’ or ‘project’ identities. Reay is typical of much of this work when she notes that ‘class, just as much as race, gender, age and sexuality shapes ... the individuals we are and the individuals we become’ (1998, p. 259). Notably absent from this list is ‘national’, yet there remains a need to bring the nation, and the state, back in; to question the way in which ‘national’ identities are constructed. In the United States, for example,

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education has been accused of constructing ‘Americans’ in a binary opposition with the ‘other’, which is understood as the non-white and non-Western (Apple, 2001, pp. 48–49). In the United Kingdom, likewise, ‘national’ history has been criticised as ignoring, disavowing or forgetting much that is important in allowing diverse groups and countries to position themselves within the ‘national’ community (DES, 1990; Runnymede Trust, 2000).

Ireland provides an interesting case study for making sense of the changes in the way in which identity comes to be constructed through curricula and schools. Irishness has, since the time of independence in 1922, been characterised as Catholic, white, settled and Gaelic/Celtic (Tovey & Share, 2003, p. 330). However, this hegemony has been increasingly challenged. In Ireland, ‘national identity’ has been a hot topic for academic debate (for example, Doak, 1998; Lentin, 1998a, b, 2000; Mac Lachlan & O’Connell, 2000; Kirby *et al.*, 2002; Lentin & McVeigh, 2002) as well as being the subject of a public and political debate that culminated in a 2004 referendum to limit the Constitutional understanding of Irish nationality. These debates have arisen in the context of a ‘globalising’ country: Ireland is a country with very open labour, capital and product markets (Bradley, 2000, p. 25), open broadcasting and media environments (Flynn, 2002) and is a generally positively-disposed member of the European Union (EU). Related to Ireland’s experience of economic growth and globalisation has been a growth in visible ethnic diversity: while Ireland lost 358,000 people in emigration between 1981 and 1990, net immigration reached 26,300 per annum in 2001. In that year, Ireland issued about 36,000 work permits to non-EU nationals and received 10,325 applications for asylum (Department of Justice Equality & Law Reform, 2002, p. 9; Regan & Tormey, 2002). This growth in visible diversity provided a context within which the impact of Ireland’s historic sense of national identity on various identity groups, such as Irish Travellers (Ní Shúinéar, 2002) and Irish women (Lentin, 1998a), could be critiqued.

Castells points out that in late-modernity the focus of analysis moves away from the state to the super-national (global) and sub-national (local) levels, while at the same time the state works to remain a source of influence within a system of trans-national power blocs, such as the EU or United Nations (2004, p. 304). The Irish case enables us to help make sense of how the state seeks to play a role in constructing a legitimising identity in an open and globalising context. This can perhaps be more clearly seen in Ireland than in other cases because, in Ireland, the formal curriculum documents at primary level remained unchanged from 1971 to 1999. This enables a clear and dramatic comparison between the ‘post-colonial’ and the ‘globalised’ curricula.

While concepts of ‘the nation’ can run throughout all subject areas in the curriculum, it is often the teaching of history that plays a key role in attempts to create and maintain ‘the nation’ (Phillips *et al.*, 1999). Anderson identifies history as being a ‘memory’ that creates a community by binding diverse people through producing for them a shared past they, themselves, have not experienced. For Anderson, it is in ‘history employed in particular ways’ (1991, p. 197) that the problem of boundary maintenance, in a context in which the ‘us’ shared the language of the ‘other’, is solved.

In this paper, then, I seek to reintroduce into identity debates in education an important and neglected layer—that of national identity. I focus on the attempts by the state through curriculum statements to articulate a sense of national identity within a globalised frame, rather than on the local construction of identity by actors. Through an analysis of curriculum statements from 1971 and 1999, and utilising Silverman's analytical induction method, I identify that the key features of identity construction through Irish primary school history are a focus on pupils becoming skilled in reflexively producing identity, and a focus on a 'boundless' globalised identity. These changes are not unproblematic, raising questions about what Giddens (1991) calls existential anxiety.

National identity in education

From its earliest days, sociology of education has been concerned with questions of national identity. Durkheim was, for example, centrally concerned with the way in which education gave rise to 'a sufficient homogeneity' to allow collective life to take place (1956, p. 124). For him this meant learning the national language, which would allow collective communication (Durkheim, 1956, p. 77), and also learning the values and the moral code of the family, nation, and humanity (Durkheim, 1961, p. 74). While Durkheim focused on the substantive elements of moral national cohesion, later accounts focus more on the symbolic or narrative elements that allow the nation to be imagined as a community (Anderson, 1991). Tovey and Share (2003, p. 199) suggest that this functionalist vision of education is most apparent in the United States and, indeed, Apple has charted the recent re-assertion of this tendency there through the neo-conservative attempt to impart through education what are identified as traditional virtues: patriotism, honesty, moral character and entrepreneurial spirit (2001, p. 48). However, this is not solely a US phenomenon. An emphasis on nation-building through education is no less a concern for many other states, including former colonies (Nalwamba *et al.*, 1997; Law, 2004) and former colonial powers (Phillips, 1998; Runnymede Trust, 2000).

The functionalist approach to national identity has been broadly critiqued. Giddens (1991), Jenkins (1996) and others argue that identity construction needs to be understood as an active process through which actors constitute their self-identity through reflexively ordering narratives of the self, rather than as something inscribed upon the *tabula rasa* of the new member of society (Durkheim, 1956, p. 125). Much of the recent work on identity construction in education has worked within this theoretical frame, utilising what might be broadly described as ethnographic methods and highlighting that identity construction needs to be understood as an active process through which actors work to construct their own multiple and overlapping gender, sexual, ethnic, political and local (but not 'national'!) identities (for example, Fagan, 1995; Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 1996; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Reay, 1998; Lynch & Lodge, 2002). For these authors, understanding identity construction in education necessitates exploring the processes of meaning-making and lifestyle choice in which young people in school engage.

At the same time, it remains clear that school, the curriculum and teachers (as well as the peer group network and family) are resources young people respond to in the process of constructing their own sense of self (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 1996, pp. 54–55). Since identities exist, are acquired, claimed and allocated within power relations, an understanding of identity construction should be located in a theory of power that recognises the resources for identity construction are constructed, not only in what Bourdieu (Wacquant, 1989) would call ‘the field of’ the school, but also in other fields, including the field of curriculum planning. While such documents will not determine the contours of identity construction for actors at a local level, they do remain a source of information for actors as to what identity constructions are politically constituted as legitimate. They also represent one of the fields of state engagement in identity construction work.

For Giddens, identity construction through reflexively ordering narratives of the self is a distinctive characteristic of late-modernity:

The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay between the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options ... because of the ‘openness’ of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of ‘authorities’, lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity ... (1991, p. 5)

The extent to which such a diversification of identity authorities is a new phenomenon is open to question. For Durkheim, a French Jew from the province of Lorraine (a region long contested and repeatedly claimed by the victor in the various wars between France and Germany between 1870 and 1945), the ideal French nation needed to be one that encompassed non-Catholics from peripheral, contested regions. For him, the unifying core of the nation was the civic ideal of the revolutionary Declaration of the Rights of Man. He noted:

Because each of the great European peoples covers a vast area, because it is recruited from the most diverse stocks, because there is an extreme division of labour in it, the individuals who compose it are so different from one another that there remains hardly anything in common among them, except their human quality in general. (Durkheim, 1956, p. 121)

As such, Durkheim argued that identification with a national moral code could only be a step in the process of social and moral evolution, which would, by necessity, lead on to a broader self-identification with a human rights-based morality that was the ultimate measure of citizenship (1961, p. 74). In this, we can see an attempt to deal reflexively with a diversification of identity authorities in the late nineteenth century.

Castells does not engage in the debate on the newness of ‘globalisation’, but does argue that the traditional association between nation and state can no longer be thought to make sense in a context in which ‘the state’s capture of historical time through its appropriation of tradition and the (re)construction of national identity is challenged by plural identities as defined by autonomous subjects’ (2004, p. 303). For him, it is valuable to distinguish between three forms and origins that identity takes in the contemporary world: *legitimising identity*, introduced by dominant institutions of society (such as, for example, national identity in the context of a

'nation-state'); *resistance identity* generated by actors in positions devalued by the logic of the dominating identity; and *project identity*, which seeks to transform the social structure, often through political action (Castells, 2004, pp. 8–9). In this formulation, the growth of interest in local, sexual, political, ethnic and gender identities can be seen as a growing focus on resistance and project identities that happens within the context of a destabilisation of the traditional legitimising identities in globalisation or late-modernity.

What does this mean for education, and how does the state respond through education in the context of assault from below through identity projects and assault from above through its decreasing power *vis-à-vis* super-national bodies such as the EU, World Trade Organisation, World Bank and NAFTA? Some work has sought to make sense of this changing environment in an educational setting. Internationally, education, as with other institutions, has been affected by both localisation (in the form of increased local management and control of schools and curricula) and globalisation (in the form of information flows and educational resource flows across borders). Marginson (1999) highlights the way in which education has come to be seen as a key tool in fostering international competitiveness and as such has become part of a globalised policy debate (via, for example, OECD and World Bank reports and EU reports and strategies), while Gough (1999) notes that although the economic and managerial aspects of globalisation in education have received much attention, curriculum has tended to be neglected. Unlike Marginson, Gough, Giddens and (to a lesser extent) Castells, Green (1997) utilises quantitative and documentary data in his exploration of the way in which 'globalisation' fosters as many new roles for the state as it has foreclosed old ones, including a role in fostering new types of identity. Unfortunately, his quantitative methodology is unhelpful in addressing identity issues (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 1998) and, although he describes the ways in which various countries continue to see a need for education to act as a socially integrative force in a context of globalisation and he identifies the need for western countries to be proactive in this sphere, he is not in a position to address the mechanisms of identity formation other than to note the complexity of the task. Soudien (2002) also notes the need for socially integrative education in a globalised context.

Overall then, we can see that education has long been centrally concerned with the way in which the state seeks to articulate a vision of 'us' (and consequently, of 'them'). More recent sociological accounts have tended to see this process as one that takes place within a context of a destabilisation of the state through intertwined processes of localisation and globalisation, something that is said to lead to identity construction being an increasingly reflexive process in which actors engage, and to greater challenges to the state's articulation of a legitimate identity, through resistant and project identities. As a result, project or resistance identities of gender, class, ethnicity, politics and locality have received greater attention than has national identity. Of course, the state remains active in identity politics, and consequently will seek to respond to this challenge in order to retain influence. A number of writers suggest this should mean a focus on constructing a sense of shared ownership of civic

tolerance, but, as Dale (1999) points out, while globalisation may set broadly similar challenges for all states, the way in which states respond is dependent on a range of factors including their position and integration within globalised networks, their internal political structures and their history. As such, how the state actually responds in specific contexts is a question that needs to be addressed empirically.

National identity in history teaching

While notions of national identity can be embedded in any subject area, as already noted, history can often play a key role in the way in which ‘the nation’ comes to understand itself. Mirroring wider debates on identity, debates on history teaching tend to focus on both the content and process of identity construction.

The content of history can be analysed both in terms of what is deemed to be ‘known’ about the past, but also in what is ‘forgotten’ (Renan cited in Davis, 1997, p. 813). Is the Hundred Years War, for example, understood as a series of wars that pitted England against France, or is it understood as a series of wars that pitted French-speaking Anglo-Normans and their occasional allies in the geographical space currently known as France against those who claimed the kingship of a space known at the time as France? (but not coterminous with the space currently not a kingdom that is also known as France) Obviously, these two different representations of the Hundred Years War give rise to different sets of understandings of ‘England’s’ historical relationship with the European mainland, as well as to different understandings of the way in which current ‘nations’ can be said to have existed in the past. The stories that are told about ‘us’, and the ones that are forgotten, are crucial to what Barth calls our ‘struggle to appropriate the past’ (quoted in Jenkins, 1996, p. 102). Indeed, many of the criticisms of the narrowness of the concept of nation that is embedded in school history are based on such an analysis of content.

If content is readily identifiable as important in the construction of the ‘us’, a focus on historical skills and methods as central to the relationship between school history and the construction of identity is also required. Developing from the child-centred, progressive educational orthodoxy of the 1960s and 1970s, an increased focus on historical methods was part of the United Kingdom’s New History of the 1970s (Barker, 2002, pp. 31–32). Such school history is seen to have a focus on engaging in the process of being a historian, searching for and analysing evidence and identifying how truth claims have been constructed in relation to the past. Such skills of reflection on the construction of narratives are central to the process of reflexivity that Giddens has placed both at the centre of identity construction and of the late-modern experience. New History is, then, partially about equipping people with the reflexivity skills to ‘take charge of one’s life’, to construct and to reconstruct the self.

Methodology and limitations of the study

This study is based on an analysis of the text of Irish primary school curriculum documents. In 1999 a revised primary school curriculum was produced in Ireland for the

first time since 1971. The almost 30-year gap between the two curriculum statements means that changes in the way in which Irishness is articulated are shown very starkly.

The full text of both curriculum statements was reviewed, coded and analysed in detail. In the 1971 statement, this accounted for two volumes. By the 1999 iteration it accounted for 23 volumes. Particular attention was paid to the history statements, which in 1971 accounted for 28 pages of one volume, but by 1999 had grown to two volumes. The curriculum statements comprise of both a statement of syllabus content and a set of 'Notes for Teachers'. Although statements of syllabus content can be analysed in terms of what is 'remembered' and what is 'forgotten', the starkness of such lists of topics mean that it is the 'Notes for Teachers' that often carry most detail about how identity is to be understood. The method of analysis utilised was what Silverman (1993, p. 160) calls the analytic induction technique: this involves the development of propositions based on the reading of the text, which are then re-checked against the text for counterfactual data. This method seeks to overcome the perception that such qualitative data are in some way 'anecdotal' or lack rigour (Bryman, 1988, p. 77).

The 1999 (but not the 1971) curriculum documents were drawn up by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, a statutory body that operates along corporatist lines. As such, documents are signed off on by a range of committees made up of parents, teachers' unions, the Department of Education and Science, Christian religious groups and representatives of school managers. As identified earlier, curriculum statements tell us something about the state's attempts at constructing identity, particularly national identity. They will not tell us about the way in which the formal and hidden curricula are lived in the life of the school, nor will they tell us about how subject content or method is utilised by young people in the process of constructing themselves. Indeed, evidence relating to the 1971 curriculum suggests that it made little impact upon classroom practice (Waldron, 2003).

Such curriculum statements are but one of the ways in which the state will influence life in school: the late 1990s and early 2000s also saw a raft of equality legislation that also had some impact on the school environment (Lodge & Lynch, 2004). Nor was the 1999 curriculum the end of the process of curriculum renewal: in May 2005 the Government also published a set of Guidelines on Intercultural Education, based on the 1999 curriculum. Notwithstanding these other mechanisms of articulating national identity, the curriculum statement remains an important signal of intent from the Irish state as to how it sees Irishness being articulated going forward.

History and identity in Irish primary curricula 1971 and 1999

From 1801 until 1922 the island of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, a union that was ruled from London and dominated by England. The island of Ireland was partitioned in the early 1920s and two separate states were formed, the Irish Free State (later, simply 'Ireland'), which left the United Kingdom in 1922 after the War of Independence, and Northern Ireland, which remains part of the United Kingdom.

From the 1920s until the late 1960s, the Irish Free State (later, Ireland) placed a strong emphasis on developing a unitary nationalist consciousness through education (Akenson, 1975; Coolahan, 1981, p. 38). At this time the Irish 'us' was defined in opposition to the 'them'—the English colonial power—and Irishness became constructed as 'not-British' (Gillespie, 1998; Tovey & Share, 2003, p. 330). Where the English were identified in the 1800s as urbanising, Anglican in religion, English-speaking and Anglo-Saxon in origin, the Irish became understood as rural and connected to the land, Catholic, Gaelic-speaking, and Celtic in origin. In reality, this was not a terribly good description of the Irish at the time (or indeed of the English): over 10% of the population of the new state were Protestant (Tovey & Share, 2003, p. 393), only 17.6% were Gaelic-speaking (Akenson, 1975, p. 36), many lived in towns and cities and a small group were nomadic Travellers.

By the late 1960s, the leaders who had fought in the War of Independence were retired or dead and their cultural nationalist focus was losing influence in favour of a focus on economic development (Breen *et al.*, 1990, p. 126). At the same time, the beginning of what became known as 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland gave rise to ambiguous outcomes south of the border. On the one hand, the suffering of the Catholic population in Northern Ireland helped to reinforce the traditional nationalist image of the Irish as oppressed by the English, while on the other hand the often horrific campaign of violence of the IRA and other armed nationalist groups in the early 1970s helped to give rise to questioning of the nationalist self-image.

The 1971 history curriculum was quite explicit in its use of history as part of a cultural nationalist project. It stated that one of the aims of history was that the:

child's imagination may be fired by the habitual vision of greatness ... [which] should lead to a greater understanding of his historical and cultural heritage.

Illustration of History should not be confined to sublime examples of patriotism, courage, self-sacrifice and devotion to noble ideals ... [because everyday] life offers opportunities for the exercise of important civic virtues. The teacher, therefore, while elevating the minds of the children by directing their attention to the more dramatic episodes in our people's story, will not fail to foster a proper appreciation for those who served Ireland in humbler ways" (Ireland, 1971, pp. 88–89)

This focus was further reinforced in the suggestions for stories, which emphasised that the 'lesson to be learnt is one of moral and patriotic virtue rather than [in what was presumably a reference to nationalist violence in Northern Ireland] exaggerated nationalism' (Ireland, 1971, p. 89). This theme of patriotic virtue was further expanded upon in the Civics syllabus, which gave examples of virtuous patriotism including singing the national anthem, learning the Irish (Gaelic) language, buying Irish goods and learning how to fill in income tax returns.

The Irish nation to which the child was to be patriotic was implicitly defined as 'not-British'. The child's 'own people', for example, were stated to be those who had suffered during the course of Irish history: 'The sympathy of the generous young mind will naturally lie with the oppressed and all the more so when, in the main, its own people were the sufferers' (Ireland, 1971, p. 88). In this way, the 'us' groups was constructed as the peasant under the landlord, the Catholic under the Penal Laws and

so on. To put this differently, Norman, English, Welsh and Scots settlers were implicitly regarded as never having become part of the 'us', not our 'own people'. This reference to the suffering of the 'us' group throughout history was a common theme in the nationalist self-image of the time. It reflected part of the preamble to the Irish Constitution, which refers to our forefathers being sustained through 'centuries of trial', generally understood as a reference to the Penal Laws, which therefore implicitly associates Irishness with Catholicism. In the curriculum this association was implicit, not explicit, since the document made reference to Christian, not Catholic heritage. It also highlighted that the contribution of all creeds to the development of modern Ireland should be represented fairly and that history should be 'true to the facts and unspoiled by special pleading of any kind' (Ireland, 1971, p. 88). This Christian (Catholic?) heritage was placed central to the experience of being Irish as can be seen in some of the reading material recommended for Irish history (Ireland, 1971, p. 90):

... The Children's Book of Irish Saints. Brennan. Harrap.

Irish Saints for Boys and Girls. Curtayne. Talbot Press.

More tales of Irish Saints. Curtayne. Talbot Press.

Four Saints of Ireland. St. Margaret Mary. Chapman.

In keeping with its time, the 1971 curriculum had a focus on the use of child-centred learning. It suggested that the teacher need not always be an authority and could join the pupils in their quest for knowledge. It also indicated there would be little place for a textbook in the history class since the child should be consulting multiple sources. It noted: 'This should develop in him a sense of criticism and evaluation' (Ireland, 1971, p. 96). There was little take-up of such child-centred methodologies in practice, and, in particular, the recommendation that pupils would engage in historical research and explore diverse data sources was largely ignored (Waldron, 2003).

The 1971 curriculum was produced at a time when Irish identity was in a process of transition. Continued violence by Northern Irish paramilitary groups ensured that Irishness was increasingly questioned over subsequent years. At the same time, Ireland's engagement with the European Economic Community/EU, increased integration into the global economy and the growth of television as a trans-national medium of communication, all contributed to a questioning of hegemonic understandings of Irishness. By the mid-1990s, the previously dominant discourse of the nation was subject to constant and repeated questioning (Doak, 1998).

This process of re-imagining had an impact on the revision of the primary school history curriculum (which had, by the 1990s, long since ceased to have much real impact on classroom practice). The 1999 curriculum emerged from this process. As some might expect, based on Green (1997) and Soudien (2002), by 1999 an increased focus on both 'local' and 'global' had become part of the syllabus, with one of its aims being to 'enable the child to play a responsible role as an individual, as a family member and as a member of local, regional, national, European and global

communities' (Ireland, 1999a, p. 5). This was further clarified in relation to history to include enabling 'the child to acquire a balanced appreciation of cultural and historical inheritances from local, national and global contexts' (Ireland, 1999c, p. 12). The language of 'patriotism' and 'virtue' was gone, having been replaced with a focus on a sense of European and Irish 'identity', of which diversity was said to be a characteristic (Ireland, 1999b, p. 26):

Irish education reflects the historical and cultural roots of Irish society and seeks to give children an appreciation of the continuity of Irish experience and of their relationship with it. It acknowledges the child's right to understand and participate in the diverse cultural, social and artistic expression of that experience, and to appreciate and enjoy the richness of Irish heritage.

Reference was also made to the child's 'European heritage and sense of citizenship' (Ireland, 1999a, p. 29). The statement identified that Ireland has long been a diverse place where different groups had made an important contribution and noted there was a need to 'value the contribution of people of different ethnic and cultural groups, social classes and religious traditions to the evolution of modern Ireland' (Ireland, 1999a, p. 28). While in 1971 the history of Ireland was largely one in which the 'indigenous us' suffered under invasions, by 1999 Irish history began to equate the Celts with later waves of settlers and identified invaders as making a contribution as well as wreaking havoc:

The coming of the Normans and the plantations of the 16th and 17th centuries introduced new settlers to the country just as earlier Celtic, Viking and other migrations had done. Each new wave of settlers brought their own contribution to the rich diversity of Irish culture, but the repercussions of the later colonisations, and more important the various interpretations placed on them by different people, are still at the root of many issues in contemporary Ireland and Britain. (Ireland, 1999a, p. 22)

While the 1971 curriculum specified that history should be 'true to the facts', the 1999 statement put an emphasis on recognising that history is concerned centrally with interpretation. It continued:

The central aim of the lesson should be to enable the child to ... examine how people today can interpret incidents in the past in very different ways. If children begin to appreciate the power which people's interpretations of the past can have on their perspectives and actions today, then history will have achieved one of its fundamental purposes and will have contributed towards the resolution of many of the issues facing present and future generations of Irish people. (Ireland, 1999a, p. 22)

In addition to developing the capacity to interpret and deconstruct historical narratives, children will come to develop an understanding of these interpretations in constructing identity: 'History can also reveal how our sense of identity—on a personal level and as a member of family, national and other communities—has been shaped by the cultural and social experiences of many different people in the past' (Ireland, 1999c, p. 9). As such, history is *explicitly* concerned with the sort of reflexive identity work with which Giddens is concerned. This can also be seen in history's focus on developing the skills of empathy.

Overall, then, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the contrast between the curricula of 1971 and 1999. The 1971 curriculum can clearly be read as the state's attempt to 'capture of historical time through its appropriation of tradition' (Castells, 2004, p. 303). It was centrally concerned with 'boundary maintenance' (Barth quoted in Jenkins, 1996, p. 92 ff.; Anderson, 1991), with identifying who was part of 'our people's story' and who was not. Such boundary maintenance enabled the construction of the virtuous patriot. The 1999 document in contrast became an exercise in what Hargreaves (1994, p. 69) has called 'the boundless self'. The language of 'patriotism' became that of 'identity'. Boundaries vanished as the focus shifted from 'our people's story' and 'true to the facts and unspoiled by special pleading' to 'cultural and historical inheritances from local, national and global contexts' and to the 'various interpretations placed on [periods of colonisation] by different people'. In some senses, this global citizenship agenda is what Soudien and Green might have led us to expect, but the boundary-free nature of the identity to be constructed is notable. Irishness became an 'us' without a 'them', as who the 'us' is became dependent on the shifting perspectives available. As such, the state moved from legitimising itself through its ownership of opposition to the 'other', to legitimising itself through its ownership of openness and tolerance and as a necessary part of a set of interlocking and layered local, national, European and global cultures, systems and histories.

What is most striking about the 1999 statement, however, is that globalisation is also reflected in the skills and methods of history. The 1999 document identified history as an opportunity to learn the skills of deconstructing and utilising historical narratives to reflexively produce and reproduce one's own identity. This became a self-conscious project as pupils were expected to become aware of the ways in which history was interpreted as part of the project of political identities, and as such to capture for themselves the control of historical time, through their capacity to construct and reconstruct appropriate narratives of self (Giddens, 1991, p. 76). Primary school history became the place in which children gained some of the skills of 'self-therapy', deemed to be so central to the contemporary experience. This is not unproblematic: for Giddens (1991), such self-therapies are related to the reflexivity of late-modernity that makes identities more fragile and more open to existential anxiety. Both the unbounded sense of identity and the existence of such perspectival work for young children might be thought to increase anxiety and uncertainty at a time when one might be better served building a sense of trust and certainty. Of course, this may not matter, since teachers might not actually put these elements of the history curriculum into practice to any great extent. Both questions, the use of these techniques by teachers and their effect on pupils, are subjects for further study.

Conclusion

The use of the 'identity' concept in sociology and in education has tended to place a strong emphasis on the process of developing local, ethnic, gender and sexual identities. This has led to a loss of focus on education's role in constructing national identities, something that needs to be readdressed.

The processes of localisation and globalisation set challenges for how the state articulates a sense of identity, but as Dale (1999) points out, the way in which states respond is dependent on a range of factors including their position and integration within globalised networks, their internal political structures and their history. It has been suggested that the state needs to move towards legitimising more open forms of globalised civic belonging (something Durkheim was promoting a century ago). Such a move is evident in the Irish case. Notable in this move is the particular articulation of Irishness that seeks to imagine an ‘us’ without a ‘them’, an Irishness that can shift depending on one’s perspective and that is enmeshed in a European and a global heritage.

Also striking is the way in which the sort of self-consciously reflexive identity work that Giddens identifies as being a core part of the experience of late-modernity can be found reflected in primary curriculum statements. In a context of ‘the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of “authorities”’, children aged between 5 and 12 are to be equipped with the skills of choosing a personal narrative in the constitution of their self-identity. As such, the shift from the 1971 to the 1999 curriculum statement can be read as an attempt to recast the person in both the content and the methods of their projects of self, a not unproblematic activity.

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