

Citizenship in The Primary School: Going Beyond Circle Time

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Education for citizenship is now recommended for all primary schools. Whilst primary teachers have long covered social and moral education, they have been less likely to cover teaching about community and political literacy (including the discussion of topical, controversial issues). This paper reports research findings on current practice and identifies key areas for discussion. It argues that there is great scope for enriching and enlivening the primary curriculum through the introduction of education for citizenship, by extending current practice in social and moral education and incorporating the newer themes of community and political literacy into existing teaching.

KEYWORDS: Citizenship education; community; political literacy; primary education

If I have the right to play, I must let the others play with my things as well and so we become friends playing. (Girl, aged 7, San Sebastian-Cusco, Peru)

Circle time is not necessarily citizenship education... [Such activities] don't necessarily advance children's understanding of

social issues or rights or social rules or conventions. In citizenship education we are making moral conventions explicit (Klein in TES, 1998).

Introduction

All schools claim to teach social and moral education in some form, as teachers recognise that good social skills, including co-operation and respect, are fundamental to effective teaching and learning. Likewise, a sense of what is right and wrong is taught from the early years and will be fostered throughout a child's school career, whether in collective worship, through class discussions on moral issues or through the use of sanctions and rewards. However, to meet the requirements of education for citizenship, social and moral education must go beyond teaching right and wrong and good behaviour. Teachers will need to build on current practice in PSHE (personal, social and health education) to ensure that topical, controversial issues, both local and global, are addressed and that young people are helped to develop a values framework which will inform their judgement and actions.

This paper takes the three strands which underpin the framework for education for citizenship as laid down by the DfES, namely teaching about community, social and moral education and political literacy. It focuses on the key questions and challenges for primary teachers,

followed by discussion on how these areas might be tackled in the classroom, using teaching strategies which are interactive and collaborative.

Education For Citizenship: Current Practice

Citizenship has now been established as a statutory subject in the secondary curriculum in England and is recommended for primary schools. It has been introduced partly because of fears about the 'lack of morality' amongst young people, a perceived break down of community involvement and an acknowledgement that young people are becoming increasingly disaffected with mainstream politics. This new subject, says Ascherson (1998), has the potential to be 'radical and even subversive... turning this nation of ours from a land of passive subjects into one of active citizens'.

As yet, there is little research evidence of what is happening in primary schools. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many teachers are trying to map the requirements of the citizenship curriculum to establish what their school covers already and what still needs to be done. There appear to be many overlaps with what happens in social and moral education but other aspects of the new curriculum are not often covered, for example, teaching about democratic institutions and topical, political issues. There appears to be a tension between the demands of teaching such topics and the time currently devoted to the

teaching of literacy and numeracy in order to meet government targets. Schools which might previously have abandoned the timetable to devote a week to global or community issues (now recognised as part of education for citizenship) are often wary of losing such time from the core subjects.

A recent case study of two primary schools (one urban, one rural) indicates what may be the pattern for many primary schools. The research suggests that while both schools felt they had good programmes in place for social and moral education, the majority of teachers covered the teaching of community and topical, political issues less well. Those that did were the exception. One year 6 teacher, for example, covered 'death row' in the USA, pollution, the Bosnian war and the United Nations with her class as these issues arose in connection with other work, whereas a younger teacher said she steered clear of such issues and only 'did circle time' as she had covered this in her Initial Teacher Education and felt confident to do this. A third teacher claimed to cover citizenship in his lesson on fox hunting, but there was little opportunity for debate and for pupils to express their own opinions as the lesson was part of the Literacy Hour and the majority of the emphasis was on reading and responding (in writing) to the text (Holden, 2000). One school had a school council, the other did not. Both claimed to be actively engaged in the local community, but in all cases only some children were involved. In both

schools there were concerns about the role of parents in supporting education for citizenship.

There is thus a picture of inconsistency: some areas of the citizenship curriculum are covered well by some teachers, others remain a challenge. As in these two schools, teachers will need to look carefully at the three areas of education for citizenship to see where their provision is sufficient and where more needs to be done.

Education For Citizenship: The Three Areas

1. Social and moral education

Identified as fundamental to citizenship is social and moral education. This includes the fostering of social skills, good interpersonal relationships, empathetic judgement, person perception, and moral judgement. (Meisels *et al*, 1995). It includes teaching children the skills of speaking and listening, but must, as Klein (above) says, go further than circle time where discussions can be centred exclusively on the world of school. Rather than the teacher setting the agenda at all times, children need to be given opportunities to raise issues which are of concern to them. Griffith warns of the danger of curriculum content unrelated to experiences or interests of the pupils and to the wider social world thus 'existing without external relevance' (Griffith, 1996:209). Other teachers, believing in childhood innocence, feel that they must protect young children from the outside world leading to

what Wood (1998) has termed 'the cosy curriculum'. Yet we know that children as young as 7 have concerns about the environment, views on poverty and injustice and are aware of global issues (Hicks and Holden, 1995). Citizenship education provides a forum for discussing such hopes and fears and for raising questions on moral issues both inside and outside the school. It provides opportunities for children to take the initiative, to raise areas for debate and for action. This debate, however, must be informed so that ignorance does not debate with ignorance. The teacher's role is thus one of provider of information, of models of value systems and promoter of authentic discussion.

Central to social and moral education is the development of children's value systems. This may be done with reference to religious values if the school is church-aided, or may require the introduction of other value systems. Starkey (1992) maintains that any programme to promote values education is essentially concerned with human rights as these are 'internationally validated moral standards, universally accepted in principle in international discourse, even if they are not always enacted by governments' (p186). Human rights, he says, provide an ethical and moral framework for living in the community, whether this be local or global. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) can be used by teachers to help students understand the importance of an individual's self worth and dignity,

equality of rights and responsibility for ensuring that the rights of others are protected. Such a universal charter is useful in schools where linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic pluralism is now the norm.

Key issues for citizenship and social and moral education are:

- How can we help children to value their own work, their own identity and their own cultural background?
- How can we ensure that the social and moral issues we raise as teachers for discussion are those most relevant to children's lives?
- How can we foster in each child values that are based on truth, justice, honesty, trust and sense of duty?
- How do we deal with children who express a values system that is different from our own?
- How do we encourage values-based participation?

2. Understanding and involvement in the community

The second theme identified as central to effective education for citizenship is that of understanding and involvement in the community. This is more challenging for many schools as, whilst social and moral education has been central to most primary education, teaching about the community and community involvement has had a lower profile. Much community involvement

has centred on charity work (eg distribution of harvest festival produce, carols for the elderly) which, though laudable, does not meet the needs of the new citizenship curriculum. This states that pupils should contribute fully ‘to the life of their school and communities’ and should know about ‘their responsibilities, rights and duties as individuals and members of communities. They learn to understand and respect our common humanity, diversity and differences...’ (DfEE/QCA, 1999: 136)

The term ‘community’ is much used and yet understood in many different ways. The teacher in Tower Hamlets may see community in a different light from one in rural Devon. In the recent report, *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, the authors argue that ‘Britain is both a community of citizens and a community of communities, both a liberal and a multi-cultural society, [with] sometimes conflicting requirements’ (Runnymede 2000:ix). For most schools, there will be their own community to consider, with its own particular characteristics, and the wider community: the UK, Europe and the world.

Concern has been expressed about the lack of interest in, and involvement of, young people in the life of their community. Research findings summarised in the Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship (QCA 1998) indicate a continuing ‘political disconnection’ of young people (Wilkinson and Muglan, 1995). In the light of this, the

QCA Report [QCA, 1998] draws attention to the submission from the British Youth Council which emphasises the significance of 'democracy' and 'community' to the processes of citizenship education. Education for citizenship provides opportunities to 'help them to see where and how they fit into the community. It should help them to understand their community, its history, what part it has played in national life.'

Key Issues in understanding and being involved in the community are:

- How can children develop an understanding of the different communities to which they belong?
- How can teachers identify community members who have relevant knowledge and expertise to support children's learning?
- How can teachers and children identify issues in the community for research and action?
- How can the global dimensions of the local community be understood?
- How can the interests of minority groups be represented?

3. Teaching political literacy and the law

Some teachers have assumed that primary schools need only address the first two areas of citizenship and that secondary schools will 'pick up' political literacy. However, there is clear guidance that at Key

Stage 1, pupils should be taught to 'take part in simple debates about topical issues' and consider 'simple political issues' and at Key Stage 2, pupils should be taught 'to research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events, ... what democracy is, and about the basic institutions that support it locally and nationally' (DfEE/QCA, 1999 p137-9). This is a significant innovation, as many primary schools do not cover any aspects of political literacy, although some do teach about topical issues.

Previous attempts to teach political literacy to children in the 8-13 age range have met with resistance from teachers. Harwood, researching into teachers' practice for the World Studies 8-13 project, found that they ignored this aspect of the work and consistently rated political skills as unimportant (1984). Yet Stevens's (1982) research with primary school children indicates that from the age of seven onwards, they are 'able to take part intelligently in discussion about politics' and from nine, can discuss 'concepts of democracy, leadership and accountability of government' (p168).

But QCA (1998) warns that it is not merely a return to the teaching of the British constitution that is needed. The report emphasises that young people are interested in particular political issues (e.g. animal rights and environmental issues) and in improving their local community and recommends that we equip pupils with 'the political

skills needed to change laws in a peaceful and responsible manner' (p10) with regard to both local and national issues.

This approach reflects some of the principles endorsed by Huckle (1996), a long-standing advocate of the need for political education. He cites protests over road construction and live animal exports as examples of 'the appeal of cultural politics amongst the young and its power to build new alliances in changed times' (p34).

This is not to argue that we should only relate politics to the current interests of pupils. They need to be informed about local and national democratic processes but, at the same time, debate areas of particular interest to them. It is about 'relevance and independent-minded critical engagement, not commitment or unquestioning loyalty to a party' (Crick 2000, p175).

Key issues in teaching political literacy are:

- How do we help children acquire knowledge and understanding about systems of government and decision making?
- How can we model democratic processes in the teaching of democracy?
- What can we learn from democracies in the past?
- How can we help children to debate and discuss simple political issues?
- How do we select what to debate?

Implementation in practice

This paper has so far looked at each of the three areas and from this drawn up key issues or questions for teachers. If citizenship is to encourage children to be articulate and participate, then the methods used by definition must be interactive, encouraging debate and discussion of values. Moreover, if citizenship has respect for the rights of others at its heart, then the methods used to teach it must respect the voice of the child and must indeed allow children to set the agenda for some of the time. Thus teaching methods are advocated which draw on the pedagogy of Rogers (1983), Fisher and Hicks (1985) and Richardson (1990). Typically, such methods might include roleplay, debate, simulation activities and co-operative learning. Such an approach is:

.... committed to experiential and participatory learning because it achieves both the best results for children and the most appropriate model for the subject matter in question. Didactic and passive methods do not encourage discussion and debate, reflection and critical thinking. Since active learning gives some measure of ownership to the pupil, it is more likely to result in a high level of interest and commitment, and to be challenging and fun. (Hicks and Steiner, 1989: 128).

The difference, however, between the teaching in the 1980s which drew on these methods (and was found in the world studies and global education movement) is that we now have a new context. There is an increased focus on political literacy, community and the global challenges of the 21st century, and there is a need to take advantage of new technologies and communications. The content of discussions will also be different to reflect the concerns of young people today. We need teaching approaches which will:

- advance children's understanding of social and moral issues
- help children realise there are many sides to an argument
- help children understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities
- allow children some choice over aspects of personal research
- help children see community as constantly changing
- provide opportunities for role-play or group discussion
- link politics to issues which interest young people
- deal with topical and controversial issues, both local and global.

Opportunities exist for teachers to incorporate many aspects of citizenship into their existing teaching by extending and adapting what is already taught. Thus an English topic on persuasive writing might be extended to include a study of different newspapers' perspectives on asylum seekers and, in science, children can look at topical issues such as GM crops, cloning and energy from windfarms.

A study of distant locality in geography might be extended to include activities on fair trade, looking at the controversial issue of child labour. A local history and geography study can provide opportunities for action in the community, with children voicing their own concerns and looking at ways of making improvements. In one school, for example, Year 5 and 6 children interviewed the public, contacted the local press and visited a local council member in a bid to solve the town's graffiti problem (BBC, 2000). A local study can also provide a chance for children to engage with older people or with newcomers to the community as the lesson below (fig 1) indicates.

Insert figure one here

There may be some areas of the citizenship curriculum which need to be covered in separate sessions, for example, teaching about parliament and democratic systems and teaching about rights and responsibilities. Such topics may merit a lesson or series of lessons in their own right to ensure that there is adequate coverage and time for genuine discussion. Figure 2 illustrates how children might be encouraged to look at rights as well as duties, and how these **link** to tenets from world religions. This activity also encourages discussion of universal human rights with all the possibilities this brings for values education.

Insert figure 2 here

Circle time provides a good starting point for many of the social and moral issues which are linked to citizenship. In order to allow for more structured opportunities to discuss and deliberate controversial issues, some schools have developed thinking circles, based on the work of Fisher (2001). This moves beyond circle time as it allows for more in-depth group conversations and models the processes of deliberative discussion. Using a thinking circle provides teachers with the opportunity to discuss moral issues from the past as well as current issues.

Whole school approaches to citizenship may involve the setting up of a school council or even a school parliament where children help to participate in the democratic running of the school (Clough and Holden, 2002). Peer mediation and other systems where children take responsibility in the playground all contribute to education for citizenship as young people are learning responsibility and conflict resolution.

There is great potential for effective education for citizenship in our primary schools: but there are also many challenges. To reach this potential, teachers will need to be encouraged to build on the good work they already do and will need time to think and plan creatively. The DfES currently supports education for citizenship - but it also wants improved SAT results and prescribes the literacy and numeracy

hours. The one does not preclude the other, but a truly democratic school must have both children and teachers who feel a sense of ownership, who feel they have a voice in what they want to teach and learn and how they are best able to do this.

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Figure 1: activity to link history, geography and citizenship

Causes and consequences: people on the move

Purpose

- To help children understand that people have always moved from place to place
- To show that there are many different reasons for people moving
- To illustrate how their own community, like all communities, is constantly changing
- To recognise the rights of newcomers and the responsibilities of the host community.

Preparation

You will need information about some of the main migrations to the local area in the last 100 years, and the reasons for this movement. You also need information on groups currently arriving in the local area and information about who is working to help these groups.

Procedure

In pairs, **children** discuss who in their immediate family has moved (e.g. parents, grandparents, aunts) and then whether any close friends have moved. They select 3 or 4 examples and record the reasons for these movements. (This might involve some research at home).

Then call the class together and put 5 headings on the board:

- economic (moving for a better job or promotion)

- social (to be near family and friends)
- environmental (to be in a different kind of environment, e.g. countryside or city)
- political (to escape war and persecution)
- other.

Ask the children for examples (from their work in pairs) to go under each heading. Discuss:

- What are the main reasons for people moving?
- What methods of transport did they use?
- What would have happened to these people if they had not been allowed to move?
- How would our community have been different?
- What do you think these people felt like when they first moved?
- How might people have helped them?

Then provide information about some of the principle migrations to the local area in the last 100 years, and groups arriving now. After further discussion in small groups draw the class together.

Plenary

- What people are moving into this community now?
- What difficulties may they face?
- What could we learn from them?
- How could we help them as individuals and as a school?

Possibilities

Children could interview elderly citizens (witnesses to change) and those whose families have moved into the community more recently. They can also use interviews as a way into looking at the quality of life for the different groups of the community.

Interviewing members of the community: some ideas

- What are the things you like about living in this community?
- Do you feel comfortable living in this community?
- Do you have any problems living in this community? What are they?
- Do you think that the national and local governments understand your problems?
- What would make your life in this community easier?
- What do you remember about going to school? Is it different for your children or the children in your community?
- How many languages do you speak? What language do you usually sing and dance in?

Figure 2: activity for teaching about rights and duties (links with R.E.)

If I have the right I also have the duty...

Purpose

- To promote positive behaviour
- To encourage reflection on rights, ethics and responsibilities
- To help **children** appreciate that with rights also come duties
- To introduce a tenet fundamental to many world religions

Preparation

You will need to have done some work on needs and rights and have a list of what the children consider the rights of the child: e.g. the right to play, to go to school, to have friends, to have fun.

After some discussion of what is meant by ‘children’s rights’ you can **introduce a** copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (www.unicef.org/crc/fulltext.htm). Make sure that the copy of the Convention is written in accessible language.

Procedures

Write the basic principle on the blackboard:

What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others

Or in positive terms:

What you wish done to yourself, do to others.

As a whole class discuss the meaning of this. You could link this to the Christian tenet 'Do unto others as you would have them do to you' or to similar tenets from other religions. Make sure they understand the difference between positive and negative terms (as in the two statements above). A good example is the difference between do not lie/be honest, because the positive statement implies a lot more than not lying.

Then put children into groups of 3 to 4. They can work with some of the rights they have identified earlier or select a few (3 to 5) articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In their groups they must copy out each right they have selected and then decide on the duty that goes with the right. A few examples are:

If you have the right to life, you also have the duty not to kill.

If you have the right to clean drinking water, you also have the duty not to waste drinking water.

These examples are correct but children can then be encouraged to write their duties in a more positive way, referring to the opening principle. (See quotation at the beginning of this paper). The examples then become:

If you have the right to life, you also have the duty to respect life.

If you have the right to clean drinking water, you also have the duty to see everybody uses just enough and doesn't waste any.

The children should then come back together as a class to share their work.

Plenary

- What did you learn about the rights of children?
- What do you think are the most important of the duties written by each group?
- How could we help each other to be responsible and carry out these duties?
- What would happen if we demanded our rights and did not think about duties?
- What organisations are working world wide to encourage people to act responsibly?

Possibilities

This activity can be used as a basis for making class or school rules: it encourages a positive approach towards rights and responsibilities rather than a list of rules headed 'you must not'. It also helps children find new ways to resolve problems and challenges as it encourages a positive, responsible approach.

These activities are adapted from Clough, N and Holden, C (2002) Education for Citizenship: Ideas into Action. Routledge/Falmer.

