

# Citizenship Education and Multiculturalism: The Needs of Educators within the Contemporary Multicultural Context

Amanda Simon, Newman College of Higher Education

## **Abstract**

*Within the last decade, citizenship has emerged as a key topic of debate within social, political and educational spheres. The heightened interest in this area has been marked by the government's positioning of citizenship as a core subject within secondary education in Britain in 2002. The establishment of citizenship education within the current school curriculum came about as a result of the Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship (Crick Report), published in September 1998, and the consultation that ensued. This Advisory Group was convened amongst mounting fears for the health and stability of British democracy. At the centre of these concerns was the perceived political apathy of young people in Britain. This problem has come to the fore amidst rapid changes within the modern world that have influenced the nature of societal relationships and have shifted and strained traditional boundaries of citizenship. Despite the commendable claims of the Crick Report, the intersection of current citizenship education and contemporary theories of multiculturalism is an essentially contentious one. Since the development of the citizenship education syllabus a number of criticisms have been raised concerning the 'narrow liberal' ideologies that have been detected within the report (Olszen, 2004). It is against the backdrop of these debates that questions have arisen concerning the adequateness of the current citizenship education agenda for contemporary multicultural society. This paper is based on a piece of research that has explored the views and beliefs of citizenship educators (coordinators and teachers) and young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, concerning the citizenship agenda. In particular, this research has investigated the preparedness of citizenship educators to meet the needs and aspirations of young people from BME groups and what they feel is required in terms of training and professional development to enable them to meet these needs more effectively. The evidence gathered, indicates that citizenship as a recently developed area of study, poses a number of challenges to educators. It is important that these challenges are adequately tackled within teacher-training in order to enable educators to confidently construct a portrayal of citizenship that is appropriate for the post-modern multicultural society and can meet the needs of BME young people living within this context.*

Key Words: citizenship education, multiculturalism, equality, identity, race.

## **Citizenship Education**

The existence of citizenship within the curriculum spans a number of decades and has adopted a number of forms such as: political studies, civics, world studies and general studies (Inman and Buck, 1995). During this time there have been various calls for some form of citizenship training in schools (Lawton, Cairns and Gardener, 2000), however citizenship education itself, remained a somewhat subordinated area within the UK national curriculum (Wilkins, 2000). The emergence of citizenship within the present school curriculum, came about as a result of the *Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship*, published in September 1998. It was as a result of this report and the ensuing consultation process, that the government in 2002, granted citizenship the prevalent position it now occupies within the school curriculum.

The primary aim of citizenship education, as outlined within the current national curriculum, is to equip pupils with knowledge, values and skills that will enable them to become informed and effective citizens within local, national and global society ([www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk), date accessed:14/09/05). The particular nature of this aim is heavily related to the social climate in which citizenship education has emerged. Citizenship education has arisen against a social backdrop of considerable social and political upheaval caused by the rise of nationalism and increased disregard for 'civic virtues'. Within this climate the nation state can no longer be viewed as the given natural order (Wilkins, 2000). On a broader scale, the cause of citizenship education is further propelled by the "increasingly complex nature of our society, the greater cultural diversity and the apparent loss of value consensus, combined with the collapse of traditional support mechanisms such as extended families" (QCA, 1998:17). The combined effects of such characteristics threaten the stability of traditional citizenship and national identity (QCA, 1998). Current citizenship education seeks to confront these societal trends by reasserting the traditional liberal democratic conception of citizenship (Wilkins, 2000) and through the exploration of a number of social topics including those pertaining to race and identity.

## **The Research**

This paper is based on a recent piece of research carried out within Birmingham and the Black Country, which has explored the views and beliefs of citizenship educators and young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, concerning the citizenship agenda. The key aim of this research was to contribute to the development of citizenship educators so that they might adequately meet the needs of BME pupils.

This research sought to achieve this by investigating the perspectives of various stakeholders with regards to multiculturalism and citizenship education. In particular, this research also sought to investigate the preparedness of citizenship educators to meet the needs and aspirations of BME young people and what they thought was required in terms of training and professional development, to enable them to meet these needs more effectively. Data from these interviews has revealed that although educators were enthusiastic about the ethos of citizenship education there were also a number of fundamental dilemmas that impinged on its effectiveness. In particular, there was a certain amount of apprehension concerning the tackling of race and diversity issues. Educators' preparedness to tackle such issues was mainly related to the knowledge, experience and cultural background of the educator. It was also evident that the very notion of BME specific needs proved to be somewhat controversial.

### ***Methodology***

The methodology used within this research was qualitative. The research involved semi-structured interviews and group discussions which were carried out with secondary school students, secondary school staff and community group representatives and members. The interviews and group discussions that were carried out were divided into four phases. This paper will focus on the first two research phases which consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with citizenship coordinators and teachers from eight different schools across Birmingham and the Black Country.

Schools that were selected to participate in the research were chosen by the researcher using the purposive or judgemental sampling technique. This is where the researcher selects subjects or institutions "that could not be identified through other sampling strategies. Employing judgement to ensure that the sample is selected on the basis of the information required" (Greig and Taylor, 2004:59). In the case of this particular research project, the researcher selected schools using a map of schools within Birmingham and lists of schools within the Black Country. Having had no prior knowledge of any of the schools within this area, the researcher selected schools blindly and then viewed their Ofsted reports to check the percentage of BME pupils within the school populations. Due to the focus of the research, the majority of the schools selected were those in whose reports it was indicated that BME pupils constituted a third or more of the pupil population. Two schools whose reports suggested a lesser population of BME students, were also selected for comparison purposes.

Following the selection of schools, letters explaining the focus and purpose of the research were sent to the head teachers and also copied to citizenship coordinators at the schools. These letters contained a brief outline of the project and its aims and a request for the schools to assist in the research by allowing citizenship coordinators to be involved in initial interviews. Each of these letters were followed up with numerous phone calls through which the researcher was able to confirm whether or not the school was able to participate in the research and what time would be most appropriate for interviews with citizenship coordinators. From the ten schools contacted, eight agreed to take part in this initial research phase and eight citizenship coordinators from those schools were interviewed. Following the first phase of the research letters were sent out to citizenship coordinators asking them to select teachers who was involved with citizenship education, to be interviewed for the second phase. Again these letters were followed-up with phone calls and e-mails. When the teacher had been identified, the researcher contacted them directly to establish their preferred date and time of interview. Altogether six teachers were interviewed within this second research phase.

All except one of the educators interviewed were fully qualified teachers. The one teacher who did not fit this category was undergoing initial teacher training at the time of interview. All participants were involved in the delivery of some form of citizenship education and had varied amounts of experience in doing so. This included integrated, discrete or events based provision or a combination of two or more of these forms.

Interviews with citizenship coordinators and teachers were carried out within the school setting either in an empty classroom or office with the exception of one interview that was conducted in a small café as this was most convenient for the participant. The advantage of conducting the interviews in these empty spaces is that it eliminated the risk of the participants' responses being directly influenced by the presence of other staff members. This arrangement also meant that confidentiality could be more easily maintained. Carrying out the interviews within the school environment also allowed the participants to remain within an environment, which was familiar to them. This goes some way to addressing the power imbalance that can often exist between researcher and researched.

The semi-structured interview was particularly suitable for this research phase because it allowed the participants the freedom to elaborate on the issues raised in their own way (May, 1997). This feature is particularly valuable in the investigation of experiences, concepts and opinions. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to illustrate their responses with experiences from their teaching careers. In turn, enabling the researcher to understand more clearly the point being made and the concepts involved. A strength of this type of qualitative interviewing is that it allows the interviewee the space/freedom to be self-reflexive and to evaluate experiences, situations and even their own feelings in the presence of the researcher. This can often allow for valuable data to be unearthed (Miller and Glassner, 2004).

In order to maintain ethical standards within the interviews, the researcher first briefed participants on the interview procedure and the research project focus before asking any questions. Within the briefing the interviewer assured the participant that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. Participants were therefore encouraged to speak as openly as possible. Participants were also informed that they were able to leave the interview at any time and that they did not have to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with. Following each interview each participant was given an anonymous numerical code concealing their identity. Additional measures were taken within the written research report where all codes were omitted to eliminate the matching of statements using the codes and the possible discovery of participant identity.

All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device from which recordings could be downloaded onto a regular computer or laptop. This device is small and discrete and is able to maintain a high sound quality. This was particularly appropriate for use within the school environment which was sometimes quite noisy especially if the interview was being conducted in a space near to the playground during a break time or on a noisy corridor during lesson interchange.

Following the completion of interviews with educators, recordings were downloaded and transcripts were then typed up by the project administrator. Each transcript constituted a word-for-word account of the interview recording. Whilst these may have been lengthy and tedious to compose, they allowed the researcher to gain as accurate an account as possible and therefore to gain a clear picture of the meanings and contexts encompassed within the responses of participants. When these had been completed, the researcher checked each transcript for accuracy purposes and made minor alterations as appropriate.

The interview data collected during the initial phases of the research was analysed using a thematic analysis technique. The researcher first began by reading over the completed transcripts in order to revisit the interview situations and familiarise herself with the issues and concepts encompassed in each. The researcher then proceeded to label the transcripts identifying the various themes contained within the responses given. After all arising themes had been identified, the researcher placed all dialogue relating to each theme into separate documents. Preceding this, each interview had been colour coded, so that when these documents were compiled, the responses of each participant could be easily identified. There were no limits placed on the number of times a single section of dialogue could be pasted into different documents, so sections of dialogue that pertained to more than one theme were pasted into each theme-based document to which it applied. The documents that resulted from this process, were closely examined by the researcher, in order to decipher the dynamics contained within each theme.

### ***Perceptions and Needs of Educators***

It was clear that educators on the whole had an ambivalent view of citizenship education. On one hand educators clearly had a general enthusiasm for citizenship and the potential of the subject. Educators also demonstrated a distinct recognition of the importance of citizenship education both in the immediate term and in the future lives of pupils. All educators viewed citizenship to be generally effective, engaging and inclusive and expressed an appreciation for both the structure and content of the subject. On the other hand, educators also acknowledged that successful delivery of the subject within the multicultural classroom was hindered by certain factors. There were certain needs and concerns that were implicated within educators responses that revealed the scale of the challenge of teaching citizenship education within the multicultural setting. This was particularly detectable within the debates surrounding certain foundational terms and concepts. Responses within this area revealed three key themes, these were: general apprehension surrounding teaching of race and identity; perceived neutrality of citizenship education and the problematic notion of equality.

Preparedness of educators to tackle race and identity issues was largely based on their own personal attributes such as their ethnic background and experiences. The knowledge of the educator was also an important attribute. The following teacher expresses her fears as a person from a white background, having to address issues related to BME communities:

*[T]here's always a feeling isn't there, that if I'm white and I'm teaching to a group of mixed white, black Asian, other minorities I sometimes would feel conscious, do they think I'm siding, am I siding with the other white people in this room or, if I'm teaching a group of only black girls would I feel like I knew what I'm talking about or if they would feel 'how come Miss knows about this all of a sudden?'. That worries me a bit that the other minorities might feel that I was siding.*

This teacher was concerned about how BME pupils would respond to her as a white person. In particular she feared that she may be perceived as 'siding' with the white pupils, simply because she herself is white, or that she may be perceived by pupils being unworthy to teach about certain culturally related issues because of her perceived lack of knowledge.

The following teacher speaks particularly about the effects of the perceived training deficit on the capabilities of staff members to handle the sensitive yet critical issue of race. The suggestion here is that a lack of training has caused a lack of confidence amongst teachers, which in turn has resulted in apprehension or even avoidance in dealing with race issues:

*As I said before I think some teachers are frightened to even get into issues, or they are worried that if they talk about a race issue they are not being politically correct. I think they are so worried about saying something wrong or saying something: I think it's to do with training really, and not having that fear of 'is this something I should be talking about, will I get into trouble?', or 'should I be encouraging pupils to speak up like this?'*

The views expressed by the above teachers are particularly concerning since these apprehensions are strongly related to the very foundations of identity exploration within the classroom. The above statements indicate that these teachers are failing to allow for any kind of significant discussion within the areas of race, diversity and identity because they are hindered by these initial hurdles.

On the other hand, some educators also proposed that there were certain universal topics and other aspects within citizenship that cause citizenship to be a universally relevant subject in and of itself, a highly problematic viewpoint.

*I mean citizenship really, as far as I can tell, is about how to be a responsible, good citizen isn't it, and how the country and the wider politics work, so that doesn't really...that's just the way it is, I don't think it's really that bad for different cultures.*

*I think here, all groups respond to it whether they are white, black or Asian, I can't see any great differences between how they understand ...generally all groups of people respond in the same way, from my experience of teaching groups of people. Generally they are all relatively the same I think, I can't see any great differences.*

The first teacher suggests that citizenship is in itself, a universal subject, something that all pupils could relate to by default. Here, citizenship is viewed as standard given when in reality it is a complex and multifaceted notion that is negotiated on a number of different levels and within differing contexts. The second teacher also perceived that the citizenship curriculum was universally applicable because in his view, all students generally had the same understandings irrespective of cultural or ethnic background. These perceptions can be somewhat detrimental in that there is a risk that educators will become less proactive in implementing inclusive measures due to their own view of the homogeneous classroom and an over reliance on the perceived 'naturally' inclusive nature of citizenship education. Such perceptions lack due consideration for the active role of the educator in the teaching of citizenship education that is suitable for the multicultural setting. The very concept of 'inclusive' employed by these educators is concerning since it seems not to consider the differing cultural interpretations of the same topics despite their seeming neutrality.

These sentiments are grounded in the perception of the classroom being a homogeneous entity where sameness between pupils is valued and desired. According to Young (1986, 1990, 1995, 1997) this perception of a universal, standardised citizenship that serves to express or create a general will that transcends group differences, actually results in excluding groups deemed incapable of adopting that general viewpoint (Olssen, 2004). Young promotes the notion of "differentiated citizenship" which advocates the public recognition and

acceptance of irreducible differences and the coexistence of these differences with “common procedural commitments” (Olssen, 2004:182) contained within the communication processes that operate across differences. This particular structure of political life preserves minority group differences through the institutionalisation of mechanisms and minority group representation (Olssen, 2004).

Closely connected to this issue of universality was the problematic of the notion of equality. This was mainly revealed through discussions surrounding the needs of BME pupils. Within this area educators particularly emphasised the need for pupils to interact with other ethnic/cultural groups and also the need for educators to incorporate real and relevant issues that pupils can relate to. Not all educators however, accepted the notion of BME specific needs and this again emerged as an area of some controversy. This notion was considered by a minority of educators, to stand at odds with the ethos of equality. This is again concerning since the understanding of pupil needs inevitably affects the manner in which citizenship education is delivered, particularly within the topic areas of race, diversity and identity.

Whilst most educators appreciated the importance of relevant subject matter in the engagement of pupils from BME backgrounds, some struggled with the concept of making conscious efforts to engage pupils from these groups or to meet their specific needs:

*The key to me is once we come to school we are on a level platform and I don't think we should necessarily be starting to do too much focussing on this group and focussing on that group and making it that it's a big issue and big problems with certain groups of people in this area. For me it would be much better to deliver that this is how it is.*

*There are no particular needs here we can observe, because they're not in any way differentiated here, and do not appear to be differentiated by ethnic origin. It's something that we don't even consider because our assumption is that they're all human beings who are able to express and share and are accepted by everybody else in the community.*

*I don't think they need to be told any more or any less than any other pupil in the classroom, because they should technically all be equal. So no I think the needs would be the same.*

In the above extracts the notion of BME specific needs is seen to stand in conflict with the ethos of equality. Within this view point equality is equated to the sameness and standardisation of pupils, a highly inflexible view which fails to take into account the more specific needs of pupils. These considerations, coupled with the uncertainty and apprehension surrounding the teaching of race and identity related issues, raises serious concerns as to the competency of educators within this central area of citizenship education.

### **Conclusion**

The evidence gathered, indicates that citizenship as a recently developed area of study, poses a number of challenges to educators. It is important that these challenges are adequately tackled within the teacher-educator context in order to enable the confident construction of a portrayal of citizenship that is appropriate for the post-modern multicultural society and can meet the needs of BME young people. In light of the multi-ethnic make-up of contemporary society, it is vital that citizenship educators develop more complex conceptions of foundational notions such as equality and inclusion and that they adopt a sufficient sensitivity towards the possible differences between pupils from differing ethnic communities. The conceptualisation of key terms will inevitably affect the manner in which citizenship education is delivered and thus its appropriateness for certain pupil groups. It is also important that educators are competent and confident in the tackling of race and diversity topics within citizenship as there is a real danger that pupils who sense a lacking in these areas, will become disillusioned. The implementation of such measures will require the realisation of the complex, multilayered nature of citizenship and the delivery of citizenship education in a way that reflects these attributes. This may involve engaging pupils in the critical debating and evaluation of citizenship aspects as opposed to attempting to present a standardised model of citizenship. All of these elements are integral to the delivery of citizenship education that is comprehensive and meets the needs of all pupils.

## **References**

- Greig, A. and Taylor, J. (2004) *Doing Research with Children*. London, California and New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Inman, S. and Buck, M. eds. (1995). *Adding Value?: Schools responsibility for pupils personal development*. Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd.
- Lawton, D. Cairns, J. and Gardener, R. eds. (2000) *Education for Citizenship*. London and New York: Continuum.
- May, T. (1997) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. Second Edition. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Miller, J. and Glassner, B. (2004) 'The Inside and the Outside Finding Realities in Interviews' in Silverman ed. (2004) *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition: London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi. Sage. pp.125-139.
- Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (1998) *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (Crick Report). London: QCA.
- Olssen, M. (2004) 'From Crick Report to Parekh Report: Multiculturalism, Cultural Difference, and Democracy – the Re-visioning of Citizenship Education'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol.25, No2, pp.179-192.
- Wilkins, C. (2000) 'Citizenship Education' in Bailey, R. (ed), *Teaching Values and Citizenship Across the Curriculum*. London: Kogan Page.

## **Websites**

Department for Education and Skills Citizenship:  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/citizenship>  
Date accessed: 14/09/05