

## Unit 7 Citizenship across the School

This unit considers citizenship as learned experientially by students across the whole school when acting as members of the school community. The unit stresses that citizenship should be seen as more than a subject, and as embodying certain public values and practices which, when built into the practices and values of the school and encountered by students in their daily lives, actually shape their understanding of how society works and of their place in it. Such experiences also arguably influence students' personal sense of efficacy and willingness to become active shapers of the wider world around them.

### Creating Consistency between the taught and the experienced curriculum

The famous Chinese proverb runs 'I hear and I forget, I see and I remember. I do and I understand.' It is widely agreed that learning by and from experience is probably the most effective, certainly the richest, form of learning there can be. Citizenship learning is certainly no exception to this. According to Ofsted (2006) some schools still rely on their ethos as their sole means of instilling the values of citizenship. These models claim that students learn to be citizens by taking part in activities where they act in a 'public' way, i.e. in exactly the same way a citizen of a larger community would. How can we define such citizenly activities? What characterises a school-based 'civic' type of activity?

We might find the following criteria useful:

- acting in the wider 'public' interest, rather than solely in one's own 'private' interests (where 'public' in this case is the whole school community)
- beneficiaries of 'public' action(s) are identified by virtue of their being part of the school community with legal or moral rights and not merely personal friends, for whom one might work for reasons other than 'public' ones
- being engaged in activities which are intended to improve or change the quality of life in the school community for individuals or the community as a whole.

Some advocates of the experiential model suggest that citizenship cannot be 'taught,' only 'caught'. By this they suggest that, although we attempt to teach or encourage young people to become engaged citizens, this is unlikely to be effective if they do not have opportunities to:

- learn how to act in a citizenly manner

- have opportunities to accept responsibility for personal actions and shared responsibility for aspects of school life
- learn what it means to be an active member of the whole community,
- have good role models e.g. in teachers
- practise citizenship skills such as critical discussion, persuasion or campaigning.

In practice, we would argue, citizenship can be *both* taught and caught. We cannot rely on students catching citizenship values only, because citizens need to develop *specific forms of knowledge, understanding and skills* in order to be able to reflect adequately on their experiences and this implies the duty on schools to ensure that planned opportunities are provided where students can acquire these specialist forms of knowledge. The difficulty with sole reliance on the school ethos model is that many issues will remain undefined, unexamined and therefore unchallenged if students are not encouraged or enabled to do so.

Through explicit citizenship teaching and learning, students develop the capacities to reflect more effectively on and understand the ‘politics’, the rules, the values and practices – in short, the public life – of their school communities and are thus enabled to apply these understandings to the wider world.

In this respect, it is important that the standards of fairness and the quality of rights students experience are consistent with what they learn via the taught curriculum. In the event of inconsistency between the two, students are more likely to see their *experienced* rights as those which represent the ‘real’ world. As one head put it:

The one thing adolescents can spot at 500 metres is bullshit and I reckon schools typically are full of bullshit. The words don’t fit the music. They say one thing and immediately do another thing.

*The Business of School Councils Rowe, 2003 p 8*

So to think of the school as a ‘citizenship rich’ school (Breslin 2006) raises a number of questions which need further examination:

- what experiences or activities are ‘citizenship-rich’? What counts as a citizenship activity?
- how do these experiences or activities take place – are they incidental or deliberately provided?
- do all students encounter these learning experiences in the same way? Can the same activities or processes be positive for some students but negative for others (e.g. could school council activities serve to exclude most pupils whilst including a few)?

- what are the core citizenship values on which schools should base their practices?
- how is coherence to be achieved, binding the taught and the experienced curriculum into a consistent whole?

One way to address this last question is to consider where students are likely to learn about aspects of the key citizenship concepts.

#### **Study Task**

Think about the following citizenship concepts:

- fairness,
- justice,
- rights
- responsibilities
- equality
- power
- governance
- democracy
- community
- law (rules)

Against each of the key citizenship concepts plot situations or places where the students in your school would learn *experientially* about the nature of these concepts and how they play out in school. For example, they might learn about fairness (or unfairness) and about some of their rights through the school's behaviour policy or the conditions of the toilets. They might learn about democracy, or aspects of it, through your school's consultation procedures.

Are there any areas of your school life where you think the standards of the students' experience of these concepts might fall below the standards extolled in citizenship lessons?

One implication of this approach to thinking about schools as rich locations of citizenship learning is that, with deliberate planning, with time and attention, many of these activities can be made more citizenship-rich than they otherwise might be.

### Study Task

Consider the following activities. To what extent might they be thought of *locations* of citizenship learning? How can they be made more so?

- Being a member of a form group
- Taking part in an assembly
- Being a member of a school club
- Playing in the school orchestra or performing in the school play
- Being a mentor or 'buddy' to a younger pupil
- Work experience or work-based learning
- Being on the school council
- Getting into a dispute with another student.
- Being disciplined for an infringement of school rules.

Are some of these areas capable of being citizenship activities *sometimes* but not necessarily *always*? For example, a school play or drama project may aim purely to entertain but if it tackled a social issue it would have a definite citizenship purpose.

Some, but not all, of the above activities can clearly be understood as citizenship-rich. They provide opportunities where students can and do learn about how communities work, about how individuals relate to the whole, about the nature of power and authority, about who counts in an organisation and so on. Other activities are forms of 'community involvement' but not necessarily with any socio-political overtones.

There is a long tradition in this country of schools seeing themselves as value-based communities. Not infrequently, a school's motto or mission statement will proclaim commitment to a moral, social or educational value. But even where this is absent, there is often a self-conscious embracing of certain core citizenship values, most notably perhaps, democracy, justice and human rights. We shall now turn to some of the literature dealing with these themes.

### Schools as democratic and just institutions

This section briefly explores some aspects of what values and practices might spring from being based on democracy, justice and human rights.

#### *a) Developing a democratic school*

Perhaps the first thing to note in this brief discussion is that the concept of democratic schooling is contested. Not everyone agrees on what 'democracy' might mean for institutions which are themselves not self-governing, where students engaged in 'democratic' practices are not those with ultimate responsibility for the governance of the school and where at times, those with responsibility for schools might wish to

protect the school from the immature or inadequate decisions of its own members. In one study, Rowe (2003) found that even headteachers committed to the idea of student participation, were not all agreed that the term 'democracy' was the most helpful one. Some deliberately avoided it and one head even felt that many school councils actually cause disillusionment amongst students because of the council's lack of democratic power. Rowe found that nurturing healthy participative structures is a difficult and time-consuming process which needs to be constantly worked at. In addition, he found that difficult decisions need to be made concerning how school councils are set up, including:

- who gets to be involved (how can involvement be maximised)?
- how old can students/pupils be (particularly relevant in primary schools)?
- how often should a school council meet (often enough to maintain momentum and involvement yet not too often to be a burden)?
- who should determine the scope of its business (what should be 'off-limits' and how much control over the agenda should students be allowed)?
- how should the rest of the school be kept in touch with what it does (what are the best methods to feed back news of school council decisions, ensuring the whole school is aware of what the council is doing)?
- when should it meet (during lesson time, lunch time or after school – all have disadvantages)?
- what is the optimum size of a council (big enough to maximise involvement without making it unwieldy and alienating)?
- what other participative or consultative structures should there be, besides a school council? There may be other ways of enabling the student voice to be heard, such as regular feedback on teaching and learning, in addition to a formal council.

Indeed, consultation with students is now a legal obligation under the recently amended Education Act 2002. This Act also places a duty on local authorities, governing bodies and schools to 'have regard to the guidance on pupils' participation' set out in *Working Together: Giving children and young people a say*. The right to participate is also one of the so-called 'five outcomes' of the Every Child Matters framework.

There are a number of roles which students take on in schools, each of which imply a duty on the part of the school to consult them. Students can be seen variously as:

- clients – the school has a duty to serve their educational interests and consulting students will help improve this provision
- experts – the school needs to ask students about the quality of life in school e.g. about the quality of learning or about standards of behaviour which impinge on their rights

- partners – when teachers work with students as partners, for example in tackling bullying, their job in many respects becomes easier.

### **Study Task**

Read pages 81 to 91 of *Making Sense of Citizenship: a CPD handbook*.

Consider the following questions:

- Who are the main beneficiaries of student participation and in what different ways are these benefits felt? How evident is this in your own school?
- What, in your opinion, are the challenges to greater student participation (e.g staff resistance or student inexperience or even apathy) and what might be done to overcome these in your own school?
- What aspects of participation in your school can be counted as 'entitlement' i.e. available to all students, as opposed to 'enrichment' (enjoyed by a few)?
- Look at the list of topics regularly reviewed by different student councils on page 84. How effectively or how often does the council in your own school consider issues such as this? For issues which are rarely or never dealt with, what is preventing this from happening?

See also *The Business of School Councils (2003)\** in which Don Rowe looks at practice in 8 secondary and primary schools from the point of view of both students and teachers. Rowe suggests that best practice lies in School Councils being regarded as partnerships between staff and students rather than as 'student unions'. In other words, two-way consultation should sit alongside one-way representation on student welfare issues, which is the level at which many student councils seem to become stuck. Rowe also found evidence that many students feel infantilised by teacher practices and would accept considerably more responsibility if encouraged or allowed to do so by staff. This latter point is borne out by the achievements of the 'Students as Researchers' movement discussed below.

*\*This report is available to download from [www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk)*

### **Students as researchers**

One remarkable development to emerge in recent years is the 'Students as Researchers' movement. This movement began with a collaborative project between a Bedfordshire school and Michael Fielding, then of Cambridge University. A group of volunteer students were given training in research methods by the university and then encouraged to research aspects of school life they identified as worthy of investigation. In Hastingsbury Upper School, Bedford, where the scheme was taken up, the members of staff were resistant at first, feeling threatened in some ways and concerned about where this new development might lead.

However, after some time, anxieties began to subside: One student explained it like this:

Laura: 'We began with firstly Y9<sup>1</sup> with really small things, like we wanted to change the paint on the walls and the actual environment we're in, and that felt, we felt like we had got a lot of empowerment from doing that, and then went on to arrange events, and we helped interview the new headteacher, the new deputy headteachers, just things like that really. [...] When the NQTs come to the school, we just sit down with them and say, 'This is how the school works, and this is how the students council operates and, you know, when you work here there is a slightly different environment from a lot of other schools', so that they are aware straight away.'

[...]

When we first started doing teacher researches I think there was quite a lot of resistance from the teachers. Not necessarily resistance, but because they were quite ignorant of what we were about to do. They were quite defensive and didn't want students to come in and say 'I don't like it, the way you teach' and stuff, so we spent a long time just making the teachers aware of our intentions and explaining it wasn't to pinpoint faults within the staff, it was more to create a better working and learning environment within the school. [...] Once they saw how enthusiastic we were and how hard we worked, they actually respected us more, and they have been really supportive since then. I've had teachers come up to me and ask me to observe their lessons because they are really enthusiastic about it now.'

*Note 1: this is a 13 – 18 upper school*

#### **Study Task**

Read the transcript of Laura's interview above.

- What issues does the Students as Researchers scheme raise for you?
- The scheme is now being embedded in primary as well as secondary schools. What levels of support would a Student as Researchers scheme need a) in the first instance and b) to continue to grow in influence? Identify the main steps by which such a scheme might be introduced into your own school.

You can see an extended interview with students and the supporting staff of Hastingsbury Upper school in '*Citizenship: raising the standard*' (Rowe 2005) section 2: 'Student participation'. For further reading and information *Students as researchers, Making a difference* by Michael Fielding and Sara Bragg (2003).

#### **The school as a just community based on human rights**

As we have noted above, it is fruitful also to think of the school as a *just* community. Justice is a particularly important concept in citizenship education and in democratic societies. It is a key procedural concept against which citizens measure e.g. laws, public institutions, rights or

responsibilities. Using this key concept as a critical tool, citizenship teachers should consistently ask students to decide for themselves about the fairness of matters in the public domain e.g. whether they think a school rule or a law (such as the age of voting) is fair. Arguably, everything discussed in citizenship education can be critically reviewed in the light of the justice concept.

There is, of course, no external arbiter to say when the optimum balance of fairness has been reached, which is why so many issues of fairness are contested. And even when there is agreement about the fairness of a law, e.g. that murder is wrong and murderers should be punished, there will be disagreements about what counts as murder, how to punish murderers fairly and so on. Even in theocratic countries where the laws of the country are based on religious principles, there is always the question of how to *apply* laws fairly even in if the laws themselves are, publicly, beyond question.

So, in citizenship education, the concept of fairness is not only a *substantive* concept which can be taught and learnt (e.g. in relation to crime and punishment), it is also a *procedural* concept, determining one of the key processes of citizenship thinking. Thus, students need to be taught or encouraged to make what we might call 'justice judgements'. As Bernard Crick (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998) put it:

Respect for the rule of law is a necessary condition for any kind of social order and a necessary component of education. In a parliamentary democracy, however, *education must also help future citizens distinguish between law and justice* [our emphasis]. Such a distinction marked the very beginning of political thought in ancient Athens. Citizens must be equipped with the political skills needed to change laws in a peaceful and responsible manner.

(para 2.4, page 10)

Cunningham (1992) was a headteacher who was very concerned that the rules and behaviour policy in his school should be perceived by students to be fair and just. Writing during the time citizenship was still a cross-curricular theme, he said,

...it is nonsense to aim to develop moral autonomy and democratic values [amongst students] within a rigidly authoritarian structure, and self-defeating to expect future citizens to deal fairly with the duties and rights of others unless that have experienced a model of a just society, or a determined attempt to portray one.

(page 145)

Cunningham's focus on justice was based on his belief in the fundamental value of human rights as codified in the international conventions. He

thought of his own school as a 'human rights' school and based the codes of practice of his school specifically on some of the most fundamental of human rights, including:

- No one shall be subjected to degrading treatment or punishment.
  - Everyone shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty.
  - Everyone has the right to be informed of the nature and cause of an accusation.
  - Everyone is entitled to a fair hearing.
  - Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
  - Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject only to those limitations necessary in a democratic society to protect public safety or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.
- [...]
- Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that incites discrimination or violence shall be prohibited.

(Cunningham,1992)

Cunningham in particular, developed disciplinary procedures in school that were closely modelled on public procedures. Serious incidents in school followed a process of investigation (including the use of written notes or statements which are read back to individuals), resolution (agreed by the parties, as far as possible), restitution (to provide opportunities for moral learning by the perpetrator), sanction (which must be fair and non-degrading) and communication (with parents and the victim).

At the time Cunningham was writing, the European Convention on Human Rights (based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights) was already legally binding on our government and those who work for it. Since then 16 of these fundamental rights have become incorporated into English law under the Human Rights Act 1998. These 16 basic rights are set out very simply on the government's Directgov website. Because schools are part of the state's apparatus, they are legally obliged to respect these rights and a number of interesting cases brought against schools under human rights law have had lasting changes on education<sup>1</sup>.

Recently the concept of the 'Rights Respecting School' has been gaining in currency through the work of the United Nations Children's Fund

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<sup>1</sup> The Campbell and Cosans case is a case in point. The parents of Jefferey Cosans, living in Scotland, refused to allow him to be beaten with a leather strap after a breach of the school's rules. The boy was suspended. The parents objected on principle to this form of punishment and appealed all the way to the European Court of Human Rights. The court found that the school had breached the boy's right to be free from such an 'inhuman and degrading' punishment. It also ruled that the parents' right to have their child educated according to their philosophical beliefs had been breached. As a result of this ruling in 1982, corporal punishment in all state schools was banned.

(UNICEF UK)<sup>2</sup>, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the parallel work of the Canadian educators Covell and Howe (2001). The latter have developed and researched the effectiveness of an approach called Rights, Respect and Responsibilities which is strikingly similar to the UNICEF approach. Starting with the primary school, children are explicitly taught about their rights under the UNCRC. Studies and anecdotal evidence report that even young children can utilise these concepts actively and teachers report improved classroom behaviours and school ethos.

### **Study Task**

Read *The Case for Rights, Respect and Responsibility* by Ian Massey (appendix 2). Massey has been an adviser (now a consultant) in Hampshire and was responsible for introducing experimentally the Canadian rights-based approach into a number of Hampshire primary schools. Following its success in improving behaviour and school ethos the programme has been rolled out across Hampshire (including secondary schools) and through its own publicity and the parallel work of UNICEF UK, it is being taken up in many schools across the country.

- How does the RRR project link classroom teaching to whole school approaches? What pedagogies are recommended by the project? Why are they claimed to be effective?
- How far do you agree with Massey that classroom-based programmes (e.g. on Human Rights education) have had a tendency to be unrelated to whole school approaches?
- How far do you think your own school would see its practices as based explicitly on those of the UNCRC, the UN Declaration of HR or even the Human Rights Act? Given the religious diversity in our schools, how far do you agree with the view that these international agreements, ratified by most governments in the world, can form the basis of a 'shared citizenship'.

The highly respected behaviour management specialist Bill Rogers (2006, 2007) also emphasises the importance of basing classroom discipline strategies on the values of fairness and respect for all (both teachers and students) and the importance of removing the basis of classroom discipline from being the arbitrary power of the teacher who can impose what rules or standards he or she chooses. Rather, Rogers argues that teachers should make it explicit that their authority and power to discipline rests on the need to protect everyone's rights and responsibilities through the use of fair rules rather than respect-undermining tactics such as sarcasm, put-downs, critical or caustic

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<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.unicef.org/uk/tz/teacher\\_support/rrs\\_award\\_schools.asp](http://www.unicef.org/uk/tz/teacher_support/rrs_award_schools.asp)

language or verbal or physical hostility which ultimately destroy positive relationships with difficult students even if they succeed in the short term. Rogers over the years has painstakingly developed a whole range of practical strategies which show the achievability and effectiveness of this approach. In doing so, he argues that school disciplinary practices should be seen as capable of much more than controlling unwanted behaviour but as a positive method by which young people, still learning about the effects of their behaviour on others, can develop the internal moral controls which are the basis of mature adult behaviour.

Rowe (2006) also argues that many school behaviour policies unhelpfully send out mixed messages about behaviour by confusing the important *moral* standards required of orderly communities with conventional standards such as school dress codes. Rowe argues that strong links should be made between schools' behaviour policies and the citizenship curriculum not only because of the need for standards and values to be consistent but also because the curriculum provides a space in which students can usefully reflect on the values and practices of the school in the light of some of citizenship education's central concepts, rights, responsibilities and justice. Many schools argue that their aims are to promote self-control and responsible citizens whilst often employing discipline policies which are morally ambiguous, confuse moral and conventional standards and which employ strategies which tend to infantilise students, denying them opportunities for the very moral growth they claim to nurture.

Osler and Starkey (2005) discuss some of their own research that confirms that young people are quite willing to engage with responsibilities as well as their rights in discussing school discipline:

They acknowledged that they shared a responsibility with teachers for ensuring that the school was an orderly place where everyone had an opportunity to learn, and were eager to develop their own skills and capacities to resolve conflicts and to participate more fully in decision making processes [...] In particular, pupils highlighted that if schools are to ensure the greater participation of young people in decision-making in line with the provisions of the *CRC*, schools must not only provide structures for participation (school councils, class councils etc.) but also equip children with the skills to participate (e.g. advocacy, counselling and listening skills, conflict resolution). Pupils saw structured opportunities for exercising their participation rights as a fundamental part of a well-disciplined school. [ p166]

## **Whole school policies for Citizenship**

The logic of the thinking above leads us to consider in what ways we can develop policies for citizenship as delivered both by the taught curriculum and the 'experienced curriculum'. If we accept citizenship

education as ‘not so much a subject, more a way of life’ we are led to consider the question of developing policies across the whole school which are consistent with, and even seen as part of the wider citizenship ‘offer’.

What policies might be seen as tied into this whole-school citizenship approach? If we follow Cunningham we should include the school’s behaviour policy to which we could add the policy on equal opportunities, race equality, disability discrimination, participation and consultation, environmental responsibility, community involvement and, most recently added, community cohesion.

Tony Breslin, in the conclusion to *Developing Citizens* (Breslin and Dufour, 2006) speaks about schools which are ‘citizenship-rich’ and suggests that this implies that:

- citizenship is clearly represented in the taught curriculum as a core and through ‘carrier subjects’
- teaching is characterised by skills-based and learner-centred teaching
- citizenship *learning* takes places across and beyond the school
- the school itself encourages participation by students, teachers, parents and the wider community in its day-to-day activities
- the school models the citizenship principles it teaches.

Breslin then goes on to suggest that citizenship-rich schools should develop a public statement for internal and external use about the school’s citizenship offer, which he calls a ‘manifesto’. This differs from the school’s citizenship policy – an internal management and organisational tool – in that a manifesto sets out for students, parents and the wider community what students will be able to do and be encouraged to do as they progress through the Key Stages and engage with the life of the school and the wider community.

### **Study Task**

Read ‘The Way Forward: building the citizenship-rich school’ by Tony Breslin in *Developing Citizens* pp 342 -351.

- Breslin suggests that schools which value effectiveness, justice, inclusion and achievement should embrace citizenship both intrinsically and as a tool to achieve these other ends. How convincing do you find these arguments and what obstacles might need to be overcome to convince senior management teams of this?
- Breslin quotes the typology developed by Kerr *et al* (2004) of

schools as progressing, focused, implicit (or minimalist). What are the characteristics of such schools and where would you place your own school within this framework? If it is not a 'progressing' school in what ways do you believe the school falls short? This work will relate to the Portfolio task of conducting a school self-evaluation.

- Consider the concept of the 'citizenship manifesto' as described by Breslin in this chapter. How useful would such a tool prove for your own planning purposes and in raising the profile of citizenship within your school to students, parents and the wider community?

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## Appendix 1 The Human Rights Act (1998)

### Human Rights Act 1998

**Citizens of the UK now have certain basic human rights which government and public authorities are legally obliged to respect. These became law as part of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

The Human Rights Act 1998 gives legal effect in the UK to 16 of the fundamental rights and freedoms contained in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). These rights not only affect matters of life and death like freedom from torture and killing but also affect your rights in everyday life: what you can say and do, your beliefs, your right to a fair trial and many other similar basic entitlements.

The rights are not absolute – governments have the power to limit or control them in times of severe need or emergency. You also have the responsibility to respect the rights of other people – and not exercise yours in a way which is likely to stop them from being able to exercise theirs.

Your human rights are:

- the right to life
- freedom from torture and degraded treatment
- freedom from slavery and forced labour
- the right to liberty
- the right to a fair trial
- the right not to be punished for something that wasn't a crime when you did it
- the right to respect for private and family life
- freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- freedom of expression
- freedom of assembly and association
- the right to marry or form a civil partnership and start a family
- the right not to be discriminated against in respect of these rights and freedoms
- the right to own property
- the right to an education
- the right to participate in free elections

If any of these rights and freedoms are abused you have a right to an effective solution in law, even if the abuse was by someone in authority, for example, a policeman.

Source: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/RightsAndResponsibilities/Citizensandgovernment/DG\\_4002951](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/RightsAndResponsibilities/Citizensandgovernment/DG_4002951)

## Appendix 2

### **The case for Rights, Respect and Responsibility**

**Ian Massey**

Inspector for Intercultural Education,  
Hampshire County Council  
September 2003

(source: <http://www.hampshiredaat.org.uk/caseforrrr.doc> - accessed 6th June 2007)

Historically schools have accepted responsibility for promoting essential values in children and teaching what is expected of them as adult citizens to produce socially responsible behaviour. Citizenship in all but name has always been part of schooling.

This whole area of teaching and learning about values and morals which are aimed at producing such socially responsible attitudes and values has always had mixed effects, some disappointing. There have been programmes on social and moral issues, which have taken place in a kind of valueless vacuum and resulted in moral relativism. There have been behaviourist techniques which reward students for the adoption of certain prescribed values but contain a limited cognitive component and no critical thinking. Variations to the above have been programmes based on Kohlberg's cognitive development approach. Here teachers advocate certain values in a limited way – but provide issues which require the development of moral reasoning for students who will pass through several stages towards values based on universal principles of justice and human rights. Many of these issues are now part of the Citizenship curriculum

One problem with current Citizenship is that it is often taught as a series of fragmented modules covering the whole field of social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy. A second problem is that specific skills are taught which are not always transferred into other areas and thirdly there can be a negative orientation, as with some Human Rights work. Content tends to emphasise issue related information. Skills such as problem solving and reasoning feature to promote certain values but there are no underlying concepts and principles which can be linked to wider expectations, children's lives and rights.

A lot of work that goes on in PHSE/Citizenship is undoubtedly good but there is a lack of consistency and coherence and also a lack of rigour about why we approach some issues the way we do and concern over effectiveness.

One approach still common in primary schools is for teachers and heads to read stories which illustrate certain human values. such as honesty, perseverance,

triumph over adverse circumstances, kindness, courage etc. The assumption being that these 'virtue stories' will inspire others to admire or emulate the central characters values. However there is no valid reason to assume that children will take on board the intended moral lesson nor is there any theoretical or empirical justification for why they should. In fact, Narvaez (2002) points out that children will actively construct meanings through their prior knowledge and may interpret the story differently, even negatively.

Some programmes such as anti-racist and human rights work may focus on bad behaviours and how to prevent or control them. Despite how the work is constructed it can have a negative orientation. Activities contain obvious messages which essentially result in children being told that they must not be discriminatory, engage in conflict, be selfish, not care about others in distant lands etc. This is rarely a very effective strategy with young people, as many parents come to realise.

For students it can be difficult to provide the motivation needed to promote more social responsible behaviours as the situation may be distant from pupils and seem so awful that they feel powerless to change things for the better. In the development of these programmes there seems to have been little consideration of;

- the need for whole school approaches
- age appropriateness
- how the promotion of democratic values and behaviours may need to link to the process of identity formation
- wider agreed national/international values .
- that children need a context in which to coordinate and reconcile their values, behaviours and knowledge.
- the existing citizenship status of the child with a focus on citizenship preparation

### **School and class codes of conduct**

These are often developed with children but articulated in terms of do's and don'ts, even when worded more positively. They seem to be separated from some parental and wider community values and can sometimes appear to be in conflict. There is rarely any connection to wider national or international codes of social and moral responsibility, unless they are a faith school where these values will be found in holy books. Codes in a secular context can be effective in guiding behaviour but are sometimes used in connection with rewards and punishments from adults. On the other hand Codes based on globally agreed values such as the UN Convention developed with pupils into a 'Rights and Responsibilities' class charter have a more positive effect.

Our thinking has been influenced by recent research on teaching programmes in Nova Scotia, Canada which have been based around the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under the directorship of Dr Katherine Covell and Dr Brian Howe, the Children's Rights Centre based at University College of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, has been working to address the issues raised by the Convention. Through a well-researched and evaluated project the Centre has produced a new resourced curriculum aimed initially at Grade 6 and 8 pupils (Year 6/7 and 9) and also at Grade 12 and undergraduate students.

The pack of teaching material contains a variety of lesson plans with activities aimed at enabling pupils to understand their rights and make the connection between rights and responsibilities. It includes critical thinking skills, positive peer interaction and the teacher modelling the rights being taught. It involves participatory learning, critical thinking skills and promotes higher levels of oracy. Findings included:

- adolescents showed higher self-esteem and also felt valued;
- those who received the rights curriculum perceived their classmates to be more accepting of ethnic minority children and perceived greater levels of peer and teacher support. (Perceived teacher support is related to achievement and expectations and perceived peer support correlates with psychological well being);
- children were more optimistic about their future;
- children's increased knowledge about their rights improved behaviour and their understanding of the importance of rights for all, (e.g. in post tests, of those that had received the rights curriculum 47% felt that children had a right to education, compared to only 6% of those who had not experienced rights teaching);
- teaching children's rights necessitated more democratic, egalitarian styles of teaching;
- when teachers model rights the atmosphere of classrooms is perceived to be more supportive;
- teachers reported a real impact on classroom behaviour (more time spent on teaching). Much more positive atmosphere;
- the research suggests a 'contagion' effect, in that learning about one's own rights results in support for the rights of others, including adults and teachers right to teach;
- the more teachers used the rights curriculum the higher they rated it (this included those who were instructed to use it and not just volunteers);
- student support for the rights of adults, ethnic minorities and those with disabilities, were significantly related to their teacher's support for children's rights.

We have therefore explored this work further and some Andover schools have trialled the approach with very similar results.

We can now answer the following question with some confidence.

## **Why the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a basis for learning?**

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a standard and framework that describes the global consensus on societal values for all children. It promotes universal principles of the need to promote and protect the rights of all children which applies to the various aspect of Citizenship.
- Children learn they have rights – now, solely because they are children. They are not earned or awarded at a certain age. This is of much greater interest to them than being prepared for what they may acquire later in life.
- In learning about rights they learn that all children have these same rights, unconditionally. This allows for the development of a sense of connectedness with other children.
- In learning about their rights children also learn about their responsibilities which are the corollary of rights as others rights have to be respected. (Covell and Howe 2001). This helps to maintain a positive tone to any work. It contributes to developing a positive and socially responsible identity which is more likely when children believe in and feel good about themselves (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996).
- Children come to realise that they have a responsibility to themselves to ensure that they take the opportunities that their rights offer.
- It avoids any tendency towards moral or cultural relativism in any discussion of social and moral dilemmas.
- The realisation that there are many situations where rights appear to conflict, promotes the development of higher order thinking and reasoning skills.
- Difficulties faced by children can be seen s rights violations rather than individual weaknesses or failures
- Direct teaching can focus and appeal to pupils self interest linking work to current realities and enables work to have a positive tone.
- It avoids the teachers or the schools values being seen as isolated examples of political correctness. It demonstrates, for example, that codes of conduct are not unique to each school, but come from principles that are world-wide and expressed in the UN Convention

## **Pedagogy**

For many teachers' children's rights is a sensitive topic. This may stem from a misunderstanding of 'rights 'based teaching with a fear that this undermines a teacher's authority. Teachers who have no opportunity to have these anxieties addressed can undermine or subvert programmes. These fears of involving and listening to pupils more have to be overcome sensitively. After all it is clear from

the research that for a rights-based approach to be successful there has to be a participatory pedagogy.

Covell and Howe (2003) identify the 3 essential components of children's rights education. They are:

1. Democratic teaching
2. Cooperative learning
3. Rights reflection.

#### *Democratic teaching*

It is essential that classroom management style respect the rights and dignity of each child. The Teacher is supportive, recognises accomplishments and encourages participation. Teachers have to model rights of the Convention. A democratic classroom does not mean a situation where children are given decision-making power – it is about age appropriate participation in decision-making.

There are 5 characteristics of a democratic classroom,

1. Systematic opportunities are provided for children to participate in decisions, which affect them.
2. Children can think freely about and express their views
3. There is a Classroom climate which allows for different perspectives and views, opinions to be expressed without loss of dignity
4. Fair and equitable treatment
5. Children learn how to be active contributors to class, community and society.

Evidence is compelling (see Covell and MacIntyre 1999 for summary) that children with democratic teachers have more positive attitudes towards school, more respect for others, more successes and higher aspirations. Also those children who have experienced meaningful participation in their classroom develop improved communication and decision-making skills and increased social and interpersonal respect and responsibility. (Alderson 2000)  
There have been many studies which have demonstrated the link between a positive classroom climate and positive outcomes for children.

A positive classroom consists of, a caring atmosphere, respect for self and others, each student experiencing success, opportunities for democratic citizenship, teachers supportive of child, allowed to express feelings. The classroom climate is a key predictor of student behaviour and values. Older students who perceive their classrooms to be respectful and supportive, report higher levels of civic tolerance and political interest. The evidence from Cape Breton and Andover indicated that these perceptions were generated by the children's rights work.

### *Cooperative learning*

This requires small group work to communicate ideas, listen to and respect others views, resolve conflict and share in a final outcome. The peer interaction that occurs plays a central role in the development of ethical reasoning. (Berndt 1987)

Many teachers are familiar with activities involving role-playing techniques and the discussion of often-controversial issues. This encourages critical thinking but it is important that students have a context for these discussions. Critical thinking from a democratic values base such as the Convention is essential.

### *Rights reflection*

It is clear that rights work has to be taught. In addition the teacher's role as facilitator is also essential in encouraging student participation in the first instance and to reflection in relation to the issues under consideration and the conventions aims. In particular dealing with Rights conflicts and resolution contributes to this reflection, especially on those based on areas of interest to children.

A considerable amount of attention has to be given to age appropriate teaching which at the same time also challenges children. We know from our own work in Hampshire that this can be introduced from an early age. The work and activities arising out of the 'First Steps' project will provide teachers of 4- 7 year olds with ways into this approach.

Torney -Purta suggests middle childhood is the optimum time to introduce a more explicit rights education as the values of 7- 11 year olds are not yet determined. Cognitive capacities are also more advanced to allow more abstract understanding of rights and the impact of rights violations. This is followed by more development work, especially on rights conflict in adolescence to link with identity development and interests and so more fully understand the implications and responsibilities of rights education. This age allows for the role taking ability to be expanded, i.e. assuming the perspective of a third party and anticipating how others may react. Empathy at this age for situations and for others does not always need direct experience. The promotion of rights respecting behaviours is more likely in this context.

### **The importance of self-interest**

A feature of the approach is that it is linked to children's self interest. A common misunderstanding is to equate self-interest with selfishness. What has been forgotten is that self-interest is the key to understanding and promoting empathy with others. Children need to know it's OK to be concerned about themselves, to protect their self-interest as well as others.

Issues need to be linked, where possible, to children's own interests so it is meaningful. This is the starting point which gives the power to change attitudes and behaviours. When then moving pupils outwards in their thinking there is a

sense of connectedness with the situation and the feelings of others and so empathy can be developed. From becoming aware that they have 'rights' children are soon aware that others have rights and, in order for their self interest to be realised, respect and responsibility have to be exercised towards others.

The child needs to integrate what is being learnt into their sense of self, so these values become part of their core identity from an early age. A rights based approach gives a framework to interpret experiences and make decisions.

### **The 'contagion' model**

The evidence from the Cape Breton studies and from Andover has been quoted elsewhere. It is clear that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that appropriately designed children's rights education has the potential to affect the child's values and identity. Covell and Howe argue that a 'contagion effect takes place.

As children learn they have rights, within the context of a democratic classroom, the value of rights spreads to support for the rights of others. Children become more responsible and begin to demonstrate more rights respecting behaviours to peers and adults. One of most important findings has been that the adult like understanding of rights gained and that responsibilities are inevitable corollaries of rights.

One factor noted in the research in Canada and the experiences in Andover has been the reduction of behaviour which infringes the rights of others, including bullying and challenging behaviour. It does not stop it occurring. Rather, teachers report less frequent examples and children exercising more control over some of their outbursts of challenging behaviour. In addition other children have become more assertive about the way their rights are being infringed when inappropriate behaviour occurs, including their 'right to education'

What makes this approach to Children's Rights work different is that it starts from the point that children are citizens now. It begins with their self-interest as legitimate. When it is taught well it has the power to engage and empower the child. It impacts on the Child's sense of self. Evidence suggests that it will improve children's sense of responsibility to others and themselves and produce rights respecting behaviour with more socially responsible young people.

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