

Citizenship Education in Secondary Schools in England

Diana Burton, University of Wolverhampton and Stephanie May, Liverpool John Moores University

Corresponding author: Diana Burton

Email: dmburton@wlv.ac.uk

Tel: 01902 321000

Abstract

Since the introduction of 'citizenship' or 'citizenship education' (CE) into English schools, its purpose has been widely debated. Is it a subject to be taught, so that citizens learn about our democratic political processes, perhaps as a means of instilling commitment to their nation? Is it a form of training in society's values, and cultural ethos? Is it an opportunity for community involvement and endeavour? Is it about learning how to be a good or active citizen? These questions persist. This small-scale study seeks to address them by exploring teachers' experiences of teaching citizenship in secondary schools in the North West of England. We first consider the ideological and political drivers for CE and discuss its various purposes and manifestations. Teacher responses revealed a range of delivery modes in CE, highlighted schools' inevitable pragmatism in meeting statutory requirements and exposed the need for greater specialist training and a more coherent approach to organising and disseminating resources. The status of the subject within the curriculum and notably its increased cachet if publicly examined, suggest that citizenship education, despite being confirmed as a compulsory subject at Key Stages 3 & 4 within the amended 2014 English National Curriculum, will remain a second tier subject shoehorned into an overcrowded, assessment-driven curriculum.

Key Words: Citizenship, citizenship education, communitarianism, PSHE, Crick Report, teacher perceptions, secondary schools

Introducing citizenship education in England

Citizenship education can best be achieved by *doing* citizenship, education *about* citizenship or education *for* citizenship (Arthur and Wright, 2001, p.8). CE is variously perceived as promoting 'good' behaviour through community involvement or charity work; encouraging voter participation; promoting tolerance of diversity and preventing political extremism; or educating people about the political system/constitution. Whether CE is about participation or knowledge, a specialist subject to be taught separately or as part of a broader school remit, content and process are often perceived as the same thing. CE is thus a contradiction, both conformist and promoting a sense of participation whilst also encouraging debate on contentious issues and possible dissent.

Both an opposition to extreme politics and a lamenting of the lack of political and civic engagement among young people in an increasingly diverse society was at the heart of Labour's decision to bring in CE after its election victory in 1997. In particular, the introduction of CE was a reaction to concerns about social and

political apathy (Carnegie, 2003, p. 8-9). The government-commissioned Crick Report (1998) argued for the introduction of citizenship as a statutory part of the English curriculum, defining 'effective education for citizenship' as comprising three separate but interrelated strands: social and moral responsibility; community involvement and political literacy. These three strands aligned well with the communitarian agenda which was influencing Labour thinking at the time, calling as it did for morally motivated, responsible, active and politically engaged citizens (Etzioni, 1995). It is the community involvement aspect that is most clearly consistent with communitarianism by promoting active individuals in the community (Blunkett, 2003). Kisby (2009) noted that a belief in social justice, community involvement and a desire to promote social capital appealed to David Blunkett, the education secretary, all of which are communitarian concerns. Hence, communitarianism fitted Labour's ideology and was seen as helpful in promoting policies of law and order and economic prosperity, which were so crucial to gaining popular electoral support (Dunn and Burton, 2011).

The Crick Report (1998) defined the aim and purpose of CE as being: "to make secure and to increase knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature and practices of participative democracy; also to enhance the awareness of rights and duties, and the sense of responsibility needed for the development of pupils into active citizens; and in doing so establish the value to individuals, schools and society of involvement in the local and wider community' (1998:40). In 2008, following the recommendations of the Ajegbo review (DFES 2007), 'identity and diversity' was introduced as a fourth component. So what was CE designed to teach: dispositions, attitudes, behaviours, facts or ways of thinking? The teaching of diversity and tolerance and at the same time 'shared values' is clearly fraught with contradictions and dilemmas.

Compulsory CE in the UK began in September 2002 via a curriculum described as 'light touch' by Blunkett, wherein subject content was not to be overly prescriptive. Mainstream and widely shared values agreeable to communitarians are thus promoted but schools had considerable flexibility to deliver the curriculum in ways that matched their teaching strengths, their individual school's priorities and local conditions. This remains the case 14 years later and whilst there is a programme of study to follow, topics can be covered within various aspects of school life, as part of existing subjects, through Personal, Health and Social Education (PHSE), in assemblies, community activities, whole school events or in separate citizenship lessons.

Definitions of citizenship

What citizenship means and hence what citizenship education should be about will alter over time due to changing global, local and national circumstances and priorities (Kerr and Sardoc, 2002; Print and Smith, 2002). Invoking the political tradition of ancient Greece and the Roman republic, where citizens had the right to be involved in public affairs and decision-making, Crick explained that in more recent times democratic ideas led to a broadening electorate, female emancipation and freedom of the press, enabling "citizen democracy". (1998:4) While it is clear that the

intention was to develop a curriculum based on historical knowledge and representation, democracy and citizenship (Larkin, 2001), how that relates to school students who lack political capacity and “citizen democracy” is unclear. The Crick Report states that “Democratic institutions, practices and purposes must be understood, both local and national, including the work of parliaments, councils, parties, pressure groups and voluntary bodies; to show how formal political activity relates to civil society in the context of the United Kingdom and Europe, and to cultivate awareness and concern for world affairs and global issues. Some understanding of the realities of economic life is needed including how taxation and public expenditure work together” (1998:40).

The 2014 Key Stage 3/4 programme of study (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014) continues to reflect this requirement but the multiple and possibly conflicting purposes remain, with ‘a high-quality citizenship education’ described as helping: “provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, citizenship education should foster pupils’ keen awareness and understanding of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Teaching should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments. It should also prepare pupils to take their place in society as responsible citizens, manage their money well and make sound financial decisions” (p.1).

There are inevitable similarities between the goals of CE in democratic countries which broadly reflect the communitarian agenda but also inevitable but fascinating differences. An interesting example is Singapore, a British territory for 140 years until independence was declared in 1963, where the 2014 secondary Character and Citizenship Education syllabus is predicated on the inculcation of 6 core values which are ‘fundamental for a person of good character and useful citizen of Singapore’ (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2014, p.2). The syllabus is explicit about learning the difference between right and wrong and requires the development of citizenship competencies which include ensuring that people ‘stay rooted to Singapore’ (p.3). It would be interesting to explore other countries’ curricula to see the extent to which they use CE to bind citizens. Such determinism is not, on the face of it, evident in the UK.

Curriculum models

Just as definitions of CE differ, so too do curriculum delivery models. Early recommendations (QCA, 2003) based on Crick (1998) suggested that teaching could be both a discrete subject and be integrated into other subjects. Nationally CE is mainly taught through assemblies and PHSE. It is delivered as PSHE in about two thirds of schools and as a ‘discrete’ subject in about a third. Kerr et al (2007 p. 46) reported that ninety-one per cent of schools have a citizenship co-ordinator and that citizenship is the main subject the co-ordinators teach, followed by PSHE, RE, History and Geography. Clearly there is a strong emphasis on humanities subjects when teaching citizenship. Ofsted noted, “only a few schools....have created a coherent programme which pupils can recognise as an entity” (2006, paragraph 69).

The DfES fifth longitudinal report (Kerr et al, 2007) into CE reported that most teacher respondents thought CE was best taught 'through the whole school ethos', followed by (in descending order) assemblies, extra curricula activities, PSHE, as a specific subject, integrated into all subjects, integrated into specific subjects and during tutorials. The findings we report here reflect this emphasis on whole school ethos. However, by the seventh longitudinal study (Keating et al, 2009, p.12) it was noted that "Teachers have become increasingly positive towards the delivery of citizenship education in *assemblies* and through *extra-curricular activities*, as well as through *discrete slots*. All three were viewed as effective by proportionally more teachers in 2008 than in 2004. In addition, delivery through *PSHE* is now seen to be effective by proportionally fewer teachers, which may explain its declining use."

The Study

This paper reports findings from a small scale pilot study of 8 teachers' experiences of CE in secondary schools in 2010/11. The study elicited teachers' stories about citizenship teaching, their fears and anxieties, the resources needed to do their job better and how policy might be changed to help them. The use of semi-structured interviews facilitated in-depth mining of teachers' perspectives and experiences thus producing rich data from key respondents. The benefits of such an approach are well rehearsed (Burton and Bartlett, 2009), however, as the focus was on a small geographical area, we cannot claim the findings to be generalizable nor to be representative of CE within secondary schools more broadly.

Seven teachers and one student teacher were recruited from seven secondary schools in the Greater Merseyside area. The teachers were contacted initially by letter and asked to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. The aim was to select teachers from a range of schools, both comprehensive and grammar, from a variety of subject backgrounds. Three comprehensive schools, a comprehensive science college and three selective grammar schools all in urban areas were included. Each interview of approximately 45-60 minutes was recorded for transcription purposes. We asked a range of questions to determine the teachers' roles, how CE is delivered, by whom and what it involves, and to hear of any difficulties or dilemmas teachers experienced.

All of the teachers either taught or were responsible for the delivery of CE within their school; none was specifically trained at undergraduate or postgraduate level in CE. Two teachers were trained in RE and still specialized in it, one had trained in French and Social Science and was solely responsible for the teaching of citizenship and two had trained in History and were still teaching history as well as citizenship. While one teacher had trained in ICT and one in Science, they were both responsible in their respective schools for the co-ordination of CE and PSHE delivery. None of the teachers interviewed had been recruited specifically to teach citizenship; their roles had either developed over time or they had been invited once in post to take on the additional responsibility of CE.

In one of the grammar schools citizenship teaching was delivered completely as a discrete subject by one 'specialist' teacher. In two of the comprehensives citizenship

was taught predominantly by form tutors and as part of PSHE while in a further two schools citizenship was taught both as a discrete subject usually by form tutors and integrated into other subjects. In all of these schools a short course GCSE in citizenship was offered to the pupils. In the remaining schools citizenship was taught within other subjects, as year 9 PSHE modules in one school, but not explicitly identified within any lessons within the other school and therefore not necessarily recognised by the pupils. Neither school formally assessed or examined citizenship.

Discussion of Findings

Delivery Models

A school's choice of delivery model was influenced by the extent to which CE elements appeared within its existing curriculum offer, whether there was a case for assigning a specialist teacher, and whether the subject was exam based. In our study the majority of the schools had opted for both discrete and integrated delivery. Some had conducted audits of curriculum subject topics prior to the introduction of CE and concluded that there was sufficient coverage in other subjects without an additional specific timetable slot. With some adjustments to existing curriculum topics, citizenship modules could be combined or incorporated into other subjects.

Some schools delivered CE through PSHE, which was already timetabled and delivered predominantly by form tutors from a range of specialisms. This sharing of timetable and schemes of work resulted in neither subject being clearly identifiable. Ofsted (2010) reported such provision to be generally no better than 'satisfactory' (p.24) but this route was often cited by those interviewed as the '*most appropriate*' way of implementing an additional subject. Perhaps we could replace *appropriate* with *convenient* since PSHE is generally delivered by tutors in daily 'tutor group' or 'form' time. This non-specialist approach necessitated the development of detailed lesson plans but the depth and quality of delivery varied both within and between our schools. Calvert and Clemitshaw's (2003) research explored how a group of secondary schools was preparing for the introduction of CE prior to its implementation in 2002. Several years on many of the same issues and concerns expressed by their teachers, such as timetabling, curriculum content, pedagogy and pupil representation and assessment, are still evident in our study.

The Education and Inspections Act (DfES, 2006) introduced a duty on all maintained schools in England to promote community cohesion and a duty on Ofsted to report on it. Often delivered through CE, many of our teachers felt this would encourage their students to practise 'good citizenship' through

"the caring ethos of the school, we help and support each other... it's broader, embedded across everything, form time, assemblies, in lessons and other lessons history for example".

This whole school ethos approach and the integration of citizenship teaching with PSHE smack of pragmatism driven by the legislative requirement to demonstrate citizenship activity for audit purposes. This teacher's response sums up the pragmatism most schools employed:

“A lot of the things that are on the Citizenship [curriculum] are covered in other areas. Those that weren’t could be covered in other areas and it could be mopped up in PSHE”.

While it is certainly the case that some of the schools in this study had developed discrete citizenship programmes, other schools were content to ‘cut and paste’ elements of other subjects, implementing CE through activities and lessons which were already part of school life. Where time in the timetable could not be diverted, the cross-curricular approach was used to shoehorn an additional curriculum subject into an already full schedule, with the addition of some ‘off timetable’ events a few times throughout the school year. A teacher explains:

“We have tried to make pupils more enthused, we have had afternoons where the whole school has been off timetable and focussed. We have had a Criminal Justice afternoon and we managed to get a lot of agencies in and there was an open day in Chester where they had the Crown Prosecution Service and they had a mock trial and people there from the Prison Service who gave a really good demonstration of what it is like in prison. We had the Police there, Community workers- Community Policing and that seemed to work really good having these people in. It really works having afternoons with a specific focus”.

Status of Citizenship Education

Any subject that is not seen to be validated by public examinations is usually accorded less status by students, parents and even teachers. In an exam based culture where significant emphasis is placed on high GCSE pass rates the addition of the short course GCSE in citizenship was considered to have given some “weight” to the subject. As one teacher explains:

“It gets better when you focus on an exam unfortunately. The Year 10 tutors are currently really focussed on getting through the scheme, working through all of the issues involved so they are a little more on the ball... unfortunately in some respects it is because there is an exam at the end of it. But...the children want to come out with something from a lesson, which has, in the past been seen to be a waste of time”.

Where CE was already fully integrated into school life and embraced by teaching staff, the introduction of the exam was less significant in terms of the status of the subject. In these schools citizenship was considered both as a subject in its own right and as part of a process that enabled critical discussion, community participation and the development of skills that would enable students to become active citizens. This ‘light touch’ approach to implementation had for some teachers allowed for the formalization of the subject and created additional time to discuss difficult issues in depth. While others agreed on the importance of citizenship teaching in general, they felt ‘overwhelmed’ by the introduction of another subject into the curriculum but, as one citizenship co-ordinator said,

“Because [citizenship] was done by form teachers it was very, very low in the hierarchy because they didn’t want to do it, they didn’t know how, they weren’t

interested...once it started to work ...as a discrete subject and being taught as citizenship ...it has a much higher profile”.

Content of Citizenship Education

So is citizenship, as one interviewee suggested “caught rather than taught”? A teacher commented that

“Schools are not simply about what is taught or examined, they are much more vibrant institutions than that; they are much more a reflection of human culture than that and something that is as tangible as citizenship”.

All the teachers in this study identified many exciting ideas/ideals of the citizenship agenda already present within the ‘ethos’ of their schools before the introduction of the citizenship curriculum. They identified aspects of CE they had been able to integrate into PSHE or subjects without significantly altering existing schemes of work. All were committed to the idea of citizenship and enthusiastic about it being an active ingredient within school society and beyond. Many saw it as a way of enabling pupil voice in the form of the school council, youth parliament, community cohesion etc. Not all schools have such structures, of course, but it might be argued, that since CE is preparation for citizenship in the future, it is *not* a contradiction to teach citizenship values to students who have no overt power in their own institution as they may still wrest power and influence in other ways. Whether or not a school has such structures, teachers felt their challenge was to ensure that *all* students are involved, to include not just those who are ‘enthusiastic’, willing or able but also the less engaged.

Our teachers made clear their commitment to developing students as good and active citizens. When asked to interpret what ‘active’ or ‘good’ means in this context, none questioned the premise that citizenship teaching *is* about developing good or active citizens. Osler (2011) found that teachers emphasised action and engagement in the local community; this is reflected strongly in our findings, as these responses from separate teachers indicate:

“An active citizen is someone who tries to make a positive change for the community...voting in elections and doing something constructive for the community, taking part in possibly peaceful protests”

“A good citizen is making sure of the fact that you are aware of who you are as a person, aware of what the society in which you are living is like, aware that we are in a global village as well and the fact that you can actually take your place within... having a productive role to play”

“We often talk about being good citizens...and being good people in general and being active. I think we emphasise citizenship much, much more in terms of attitudes and values that we need to develop”

“A good citizen is somebody who obeys the law, abides by the rules. But an active citizen is a person who tries to make a positive change for the community”

“An active citizen would say “Take your feet off the seat” in a train. Whereas a good citizen themselves would not consider putting their feet on the seat of the train”

These responses seem to take as read that ‘good’ in this context is about conformity and etiquette rather than about questioning the status quo and promoting positive social change. Dunn and Burton (2011:14) explained that such acceptance is usual amongst teachers; thus the ‘apolitical’ view of one teacher, that a ‘good’ citizen, as distinct from an ‘active’ citizen, is someone who does not put their feet on train seats, is a non-controversial example that would resonate with many teachers. Many teachers would be disappointed then with the findings of a huge international study on the effectiveness of CE. Isac et al (2014) assessed student outcomes in citizenship education of 102,396 14-year-olds in 4,078 schools in 31 countries, revealing that schools have only a small influence on students’ civic knowledge and hardly any impact on civic attitudes and intended behaviour which are mainly derived from individual student characteristics and out-of-school factors. CE only made an impact if it stimulated free dialogue and critical debate on controversial political and social issues. In contrast, Whiteley’s (2014) study based on a self-report survey of 3500 young adults found a positive effect on political participation and knowledge amongst those exposed to the English CE curriculum.

There are of course a number of contextual and methodological reasons to explain these contrasting results but, in addition, if active citizenship is about the development of community, voluntary participation, attitudes or a way of being as part of school life, it may be very difficult to assess and this is compounded if particular account is to be taken of local context.

“Well how can you assess what is a good citizen? The vast majority are but we don’t pass examinations on it because we don’t need to, we just are because it is the way society functions.”

Quite apart from this ethical quandary, if definitions of CE are themselves contested and if it is delivered via a cross-curricular approach, it is debatable whether it can be accurately assessed at all.

Specialism within Citizenship Education Delivery

There are few specialist teachers of citizenship, therefore CE is taught predominantly by non-specialists. Of those interviewed only one teacher ‘specialized’ and had received some training on specific aspects but was mostly self-motivated to learn more about the complex and diverse nature of the citizenship curriculum. The lack of specialism is understandable given this was a relatively new curriculum subject; specialist NQTs numbered only 190 nationally in 2005/06 and even by 2009/10 only 220 ITT places per year were available in CE. Schools thus have little choice but to develop citizenship programmes that are cross curricular and taught by non-specialists.

At the one school where citizenship is taught by the same teacher in all key stages, the decision to change to this method and away from form tutor delivery was made after the implementation of a pilot programme, initially introducing CE in KS4. After assessment that included student feedback and evaluation, this approach was rolled out through the school. However without the motivation of this teacher to develop a specialism in CE and the support of the head teacher, it is unlikely this approach could have been achieved.

While citizenship co-ordinators were committed to the active development and delivery of CE, they were not teaching citizenship directly to all the students in their schools. Those teachers who were both responsible for developing *and* delivering the subject were confident in their own practice and were satisfied that some of the teaching staff were covering some of the topics sufficiently. They assessed this through pupil feedback, observations of lessons and evaluations of pupil coursework. They were not confident, however, that all teachers delivered to the same standards and met all expectations. It was reported that in some schools there had been resistance to the introduction of teaching citizenship, in particular where citizenship is taught in form time by form tutors, some of whom, it was reported, were resistant to the idea of teaching a subject that was outside of their specialism.

“Now basically citizenship is one of those initiatives that have come into the school and I can say that there is some resentment to actually teaching citizenship...”

Training and resources for teaching citizenship

While the instigation of detailed lesson plans had alleviated some of the concerns expressed by some subject co-ordinators, it was felt that more specific training of teachers would be of benefit. The introduction of specific teacher training in CE has been slow to generate trained citizenship teachers; certainly within this study there was no awareness of any NQT with a citizenship specialism. Furthermore, a prescribed curriculum within a climate of schooling favouring an ever more traditionalist approach, does not make it easy to tackle contentious or challenging issues. Little wonder then that our study found some reluctance amongst non-specialists. Reviewing CE teacher training in an Australian institution, Sigauke (2013) recommended a separate civics and citizenship education subject for all intending teachers incorporating ‘participatory activities at the local, regional and global community levels’ (p.137). Greater knowledge and training for teachers, both for those already teaching citizenship subjects and within teacher training courses, would, according to at least one interviewee, allow the subject to ‘*command greater respect*’ within schools.

Some of the teachers in some of the schools had undertaken training in discrete areas of CE. In addition one of the schools had conducted in-house training through workshops as part of a school teacher training day. Training on citizenship topics and workshops was thought to have an impact on teachers' confidence in delivering citizenship, in particular, the development of skills in pedagogical approaches, such as discussion, debate, circle time, etc. While some concerns about the level of training persist, not least that some of the courses were expensive and beyond the

school budget, there were also specific concerns that it was cancelled repeatedly due to low take up levels. A report by Ofsted (2010) noted that while more training is being offered by local authorities there is often a low take up rate. In our study this was compounded in two ways. CE generally had a low status within the curriculum hierarchy and thus held a low priority within the organisational structure in some of our schools which had limited the resources assigned to it.

“Well I am the Head of Department on my own, of no formal department”.

In effect the lack of a formal department limited the resources and budget with teachers commenting that resources and, by extension, the budget of a citizenship ‘department’ is dependent on the ‘priority’ the head teacher places on CE.

For many of those interviewed there was an abundance of resource information available through web sites such as QCA and the Association of Citizenship Teaching (ACT) as well as free literature, flyers, newspapers, Hansard, commercial resources and schemes of work. However some teachers expressed concerns that many resources were either limited in content or overpriced:

“I think... unfortunately a lot materials out there are overpriced and rubbish particularly when it comes to say planning materials or assessment materials or recording materials; what we have got in-house are currently better than what is out there, some of the resources around specific themes and topics are fantastic, more DVD more video that is great but some of the basic things that teachers need [such as] a planning kit; an assessment kit; they don’t exist”.

Where resources had been highly developed, subject co-ordinators reported that their teachers seemed less ‘anxious’ about the delivery of ‘controversial’ subjects. But some concerns still remained, in particular, that unlike other subjects, citizenship textbooks have a short shelf life due to the ‘*changing and dynamic nature*’ of the subject. Some schools were developing resources that could be shared amongst a network of schools such as ‘Wirral Advisory Teachers for Citizenship’.

Dealing with Controversial Issues in Citizenship Education

“One of the difficulties is that the more political aspects require specific knowledgeI happen to be interested in politics and world affairs...I am well informed but other people aren’t as well informed so that is a problem” Grammar school teacher.

Problems for our teachers seemed to lie more in the connections between a lack of training / teacher knowledge and the political controversies of delivery than in the promulgating of politically biased messages. While some interviewees believed that the introduction of citizenship teaching in schools was ‘*politically motivated*’, they concluded that the aim was to encourage students to become more politically aware, to understand legislation, as political advocates in which an ‘a-political’ and non-party political subject could be achieved. As such, these teachers felt comfortable in approaching the teaching of political issues in an academic non-partisan manner.

“The tutors basically have to be impartial from an academic point of view, the tutor is not supposed to be religious, moral, political or anything like that... and I suppose there might be occasions when you do feel strongly about something and make a point... but give the kids the opportunity to argue a different point... as long as there is an argument and everybody is putting their ideas into the pot and they come up with an overall conclusion then that is fine”.

Oulton et al (2004) in a study of UK teachers' handling of the teaching of controversial subjects concluded that many teachers feel under-prepared and constrained in their ability to handle this aspect of their work. They identified various approaches which teachers take to handling controversial subjects (the literature provided by government says they should show balance, neutrality and reason). They identify 'procedural impartiality' and 'committed impartiality' (2004: 491), the former referring to pretending to be neutral and the latter to stating their own opinion and yet acknowledging that others are often as valid. This distinction appears to be useful in assessing teachers' approaches to teaching these subjects. Oulton et al (2004) found that teachers were concerned about expressing their own opinions and advocated sticking to facts and the values of the school, which in turn reflected those of the pupils themselves and the local community, and also to promote balance.

Hence, it appears that what might have been implied to be the 'right' answer to political questions was a kind of consensus of what was acceptable locally, a finding that would, it seems, be fairly acceptable to the centre political parties whose ideologies strongly support just about everything that CE appears to promote. It might also be guessed that this consensus was tempered with a dose of 'what is respectable'.

While teachers seemed willing to raise potentially controversial issues, some had found it difficult to engage pupils, having tried various methods such as youth forums, re-enactment of voting in class and participation in youth parliament.

“They are not interested in politics, they do not even watch the two minute party political broadcasts... so we have discussions about how voting could be more appealing to young people...and we come up with suggestions and we actually have a vote, we have three people standing with their manifestos ...we talk about this and what actually happens when you vote”.

This issue is highlighted by findings Kisby and Sloam (2009) who reported that politics in the UK is at best of peripheral importance and at worst irrelevant. Teachers in our study perceived this as a consequence of the convergence of views of the main political parties where little difference in political activity, policies and approach may lead to general apathy not just in the young but the populous as a whole. One of the teachers based in a comprehensive school felt that the development of politics and political structures was an area that they 'lacked' within the curriculum, saying that students did not see it as a facet of CE, as there was no explicit acknowledgement of citizenship teaching within the classroom and, further, that politics as a discrete discipline was not covered significantly within any other subject areas. While this school operated sophisticated voting procedures and

systems in relation to the election of the school council, there was no overt linking of this to the citizenship curriculum.

“Each form group will elect somebody...and each form did some lessons on democracy on elections and to make it real as it were. ... but the group I was with, well they all had to produce a manifesto and give a campaign within the class and we voted, one group won the best campaign and they chose a candidate within their group to present their manifesto to the rest of the Year. So all the Year gathered together and each class presented their manifesto, each representative made a speech and then all of the girls voted for two representatives for the school council...”

But if active citizenship is about playing a part within our democracy, then an understanding of the processes that operate and drive industry, law, politics and other institutions is necessary. The practical linking of school systems and practices with wider society seems relevant and indeed many schools in this study did just that.

“The students experience [CE] in lots of different ways... we are keen on developing what I call active citizenship through school council, year councils, eco reps in every form, go for green eco committee, involvement in youth parliament and youth forums...the procedures in school enable that to happen and understand, yes, they [pupils] can make a difference”.

The teaching of politics, the institutions and structures that inform the political and judiciary systems may not be sufficient to encourage young people to vote and become active citizens, of course. However, Hahn's (1999) study of civic education in six counties, found that students that are given the opportunity to “explore and express opinions on political policy issues and to engage in decision making... appear to be more interested in the political arena, than those contexts in which they do not have such experiences” (p.246).

As well as the raising of political issues, many teachers in this study suggested that other contentious issues such as racism could be dealt with in a reasoned and ‘academic’ manner and presented as fact-based information.

“We are quite strong on community cohesion in a lot of ways, racism issue is difficult, children are repeating what they learn at home in some cases and it's up to us to change it through the school, if we don't it's not going to change for those children, it's quite a big challenge really”.

Davis et al (2009) conducted a project on young people's participation, reporting that, along with some other factors, it is through ‘the targeting of a small number of elite opinion formers (adult and young people)’ that active participation in citizenship activities can be enhanced (p.37).

“I think the biggest issue we have is when it comes to discrimination and racism...certainly as soon as we start talking about anything to do with racism,

prejudice and discrimination we can use examples from Nazi Germany or South Africa and the conversation will develop”.

By using their broader knowledge as this teacher recommends, teachers felt able to counter the lack of knowledge at the root of many racist statements. Indeed detailed information was cited as one of the keys to promoting understanding of contentious issues.

Conclusions

It seems that CE is largely about teaching or instructing shared values, predominantly those of the majority middle ground. Policy makers have a moral agenda in favour of community contributions and political participation whilst individual schools determine how citizenship is taught, presented and incorporated into school life. Since CE is tethered to political drivers which change over time, it is a ‘dynamic’ subject which changes continuously. It can be argued that the development of specialist teachers, national schemes of work and comprehensive training for any teacher involved in CE could have benefits for students. Some researchers (notably Oulton et al, 2004) have found that a lack of training for teaching controversial subjects has impacted negatively on the quality of delivery. Our study suggests that a lack of training impacts on teachers' confidence levels, noting a correlation between the topics teachers feel least confident about and the ones that students feel are least relevant to their lives, for example, the EU and voting. Teachers often lack experience both in the subject matter and the teaching of it. This is perhaps particularly so because teaching political and social issues has largely been absent from UK education provision in a way that is rather unusual internationally. In France, where there is a long tradition of Republican national culture based on the principles of ‘freedom, equality and solidarity and human rights’, civic education was introduced in secondary schools in 1990. Here CE is seen as *“crucial to the whole notion of state schooling... it is the school through its curriculum that is entrusted with the mission of defining what it means to be a citizen and ensuring that there is a common understanding of the rights and obligations of citizenship”* (Starkey, 2000, p.42).

As guardians of even-handed debate, teachers are generally assumed to be tolerant of nearly all but the most extreme anti-social views. However, lack of training and weak subject expertise may leave some citizenship teachers vulnerable to political bias. We found little evidence of a particular political agenda being openly pushed, other than that implied by the constraints on what shared values are taught. Environmental concerns are often promoted as good or active expressions of citizenship behaviour, i.e. topics in which the accepted opinion is ahead of what is done in practice and so they are at once radical and yet uncontroversial. Teachers might feel, in promoting such concerns, that they are embracing a wide range of political views, both radical and non-radical, when in fact they are simply purveying a set of seemingly radical views that are actually consistent with government priorities for change and with wider public opinion.

If there is controversy about the inclusion of CE in schools, we found that the issue was not that the subject is taught, but rather who teaches it, when, and how it is delivered and assessed. Where citizenship was clearly defined as a subject or activities within the school, assessment was seen as less troublesome. Some schools had developed assessment and resource information that other schools could benefit from and, while there was some inter-school sharing of resources, a dedicated site for such information would clearly benefit many schools.

The training of teachers in CE would appear to be of fundamental importance if citizenship education is as prized as the politics around it suggest. With training comes understanding, confidence in subject matter and confidence in the teachers' ability to interpret the subject matter for students, which in turn may translate into greater understanding and appreciation of the subject by the students.

If the goal for CE nationally is to establish it as a thriving, content-based, subject, it seems that schools will need to integrate it fully into the curriculum as well as making the values of the subject integral to the school ethos. For this to be successful, CE would need to be accorded a more central place in the national curriculum, a clear assessment process and greater support from policy makers and senior management. Without greater status within an assessment driven education system CE will only ever be a 'frill'. However, despite much political rhetoric, this may actually suit both policy makers and educators since to pursue the competing goal for CE, i.e. to truly encourage democratic debate, free thinking and community action, which can be extended very quickly and effectively by social media, is to risk engendering extensive controversy and potential anti-establishment action, particularly in a climate of social and economic unrest.

With an election imminent, it will be interesting to see whether the neo-liberal approach to education policy which has essentially prevailed for over thirty years, will persist or whether the rise of neo-conservatism in UK politics will alter the balance and lead to citizenship education being deployed more overtly in unpalatable ways.

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