FIVE NATIONS NETWORK

Promoting citizenship and values education in primary schools facing challenging socio-economic circumstances: an exploratory pilot

A Small-Scale Research Initiative between Scotland and England

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Summary of Research aims and findings

This small-scale pilot project had three broad aims:

- To identify the challenges teachers encountered in primary schools located in an area of socio-economic disadvantage.
- To explore the extent to which citizenship education (conceived broadly) was articulated as a response and viewed as a potential solution to the local environment.
- To support a teacher exchange between a primary school situated in England (English Primary School[1]) and one primary school located in Scotland (Scottish Primary School[2]).

The project found that while teachers were operating under different educational systems with contrasting policy approaches to citizenship and pupil assessment, teachers viewed citizenship education as fundamental to their work with children in schools. As a result developing active, autonomous citizens with a keen moral sense was viewed as key purpose of each school. Moreover, the type of locale (e.g. its geographical location, characteristics and amenities) was identified as impacting on the quality of experiences offered to children and the kinds of sensitive and controversial issues addressed in each school setting. In addition, policy developments in each jurisdiction and in particular education for global citizenship emphasised in the Scottish system was thought by exchange teachers to have a positive influence on children's understanding of inequality in the global context.

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[1] "English Primary School" is abbreviated to EPS in the remainder of the report.
[2] "Scottish Primary School" is abbreviated to SPS.

Research aims

Background and rationale
The connection between promoting active citizenship, citizenship education, and disadvantage is a relatively new area of interest in the field of citizenship studies. An initial review of the literature and search of data bases indicated that this remains a fairly neglected topic area in relation to primary and secondary schooling in both Scotland and England. At the European level various initiatives have addressed the ways in which promoting active citizenship may help combat inequality (see Cadaberg *et al.* 2006).

Key research questions
The research aimed to address the following questions:
- How do teachers in socio-economically challenging areas describe their approaches to citizenship education?
- How do these teachers perceive their local communities in relation to citizenship education?
- How do these teachers understand the purposes and products (the ideal citizen) of their citizenship activity?
- Were there differences between the English and Scottish cases that might be attributed to national policy differences?

Research methodology

Interviews with teachers
The main part of this project involved conducting 22 semi-structured interviews with teachers. Given the focus of this study, teachers were asked about their school and its locality, their understanding of parenting practices and attitudes, as well as the extent to which citizenship (viewed broadly) was seen as part of the solution to these issues. Teachers were also asked to explain their vision of the kind of citizens that their school aimed to produce, as well as the types of competencies and attributes children brought with them when they arrived at school.

Analysis of interview data
All interviews were recorded with the permission of participating teachers and were transcribed by an experienced audio typist. A collaborative approach to data analysis was undertaken and followed standard procedures for the analysis of qualitative data (see Barbour 2008).

The teacher exchange
The second aspect of this project was supporting a teacher exchange. The exchange involved interviewing the exchange teachers before and after their school visits, which provided additional insights into citizenship education and how it was realised in the two schools.

Sample schools and teachers

Participating schools, their recruitment and setting up the partnership
Each school was selected because they were situated in comparable localities, displaying similar socio-economic characteristics (e.g. relatively high levels of unemployment among predominantly white, working class families, and associated factors that might affect young learners, such as teenage pregnancy or substance abuse). One primary school was located in South Yorkshire while the partner school was situated in the Edinburgh area. The South Yorkshire school was approached via an advisor in the Local Authority who recommended potential schools which met our criteria. In Scotland contacts and local knowledge were used to identify a suitable primary school in the Edinburgh district.

The interview sample
The participants who took part in interviews were in the main experienced teachers and taught a range of stages across each primary school. Most teachers had more than 5 years and about half (8/17) had more than a decade of teaching experience. They varied in terms of the range and variety of schools where they had previously taught. Several had only ever worked in the case school and a few others had only worked in similar schools and localities to the case school. A minority had a wider set of experiences in schools situated in predominantly middle class areas. We interviewed two managers in each school, plus a range of teachers in terms of their current level of primary (i.e. from the nursery class through to upper primary), and some specialists (such as a Literacy Coordinator, Fair Trade Coordinator, and the Inclusion Manager).

Key findings

Citizenship and its place in the formal and informal curriculum
Citizenship education was understood to be central to both schools, and deeply embedded in school activity, running through the behaviour management policies (in both schools), such as the 'Positive Pupil Programme' (in SPS), through the 'Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning' (SEAL) agenda (in EPS), collaborative learning strategies throughout the curriculum (in SPS), teamwork (both schools), more traditional pupil council, playground friends and buddying kinds of structures (both schools), to the *HeartStart* cardiopulmonary resuscitation training (in EPS), to the link school in Africa (in SPS). Clearly, citizenship was assessed as fundamental to everyday life in each school and viewed as "up there with numeracy and literacy", "woven into everything" and "absolutely crucial".

Citizenship as "informed awareness"
Broader matters of citizenship were identified as an enhanced kind of awareness, including political literacy, active participation and self governance. Citizenship was also linked to a range of basic skills related to communication and collaboration. These were identified as being able to engage effectively in teamwork and justifying and arguing a standpoint. In the EPS these were also related to a particular form of self-governance and autonomous action and involved children having confidence in negotiating their day-to-day environment in relation to resisting a range of pressures. These potentially negative influences were identified as threats to children's safety, from the internet, local drug and gang cultures, peer pressure more generally, as well as coping with stories about impending transitions and high school bullying. These competencies were also associated with more general school-based achievements (as represented by an 'achievement wall') in both schools.

Policy, local contexts and exercising choice
Similar to recent educational policy initiatives (i.e. the Curriculum for Excellence) citizenship was conceptualised as being about broadening horizons and raising awareness of a wider world. In the SPS, we found that teachers' emphasized this more in terms of a formal idea of a 'global citizen', as being a matter of awareness for its own sakes, or for its political importance. In contrast the EPS stressed it more as a matter of the pupils seeing and being aware of an alternative world – 'beyond' their local community and familial relations in which they could choose (or not) to participate. Even where SPS were doing democracy or community projects these were usually connected to the wider world in their Malawi link school. Similarly, both schools articulated ideas of awareness of responsibility for others and social justice, though in the case of the EPS this tended to be geared towards the school community, at least for the learners, whereas teachers from the SPS referred more often to considering the implications for a wider range of "others", in consumption choices, environmental sustainability and racism for example. One SPS teacher explained that:

> I do think citizenship is, that they would have an understanding of what goes on in the world. And not just in their little area. That they know that there's terrible things happening to people in other worlds and that they're lucky.

Political literacy and tackling controversial issues
Both schools reported that they had emphases on political literacies, defined as awareness and practice for changing things or more generally for contributing (i.e. to the school, local and wider community). The EPS pupil council elections were set up to mirror their local council process, using real ballot boxes, hustings and visits from the local MP. In the SPS, teachers talked of pupil lobbying and of the formal curriculum elements of teaching about democracy. Neither school indicated that they would avoid local controversial issues and the micro-politics of the area entering the classroom, and these generally arrived with the pupils. The EPS referred to the relatively recent history of deindustrialization in their community. In this locality the Miner's Strike in particular was said to generate important discussions about local politics and the strike's aftermath on cohesive social relations in the area. Moreover, the need for a focus on sex education was also highlighted by teachers due to the high rates of teenage pregnancy in the local community.

Impact and lessons learned

Evidence of impact
Due the small-scale nature of this pilot study and the limited number of participants involved, inevitably its impact to date has been fairly limited. Presently, the impact of the work has been restricted to those taking part, and in particular the exchange teachers. Exchange teachers reported that school visits generated the sharing of practice and ideas relating to implementing citizenship in schools. The exchange was also said to enhance the enthusiasm of teachers so that they returned to the classroom invigorated with a host of new ideas.

What we learned about planning an exchange visit
Planning an exchange visit required more input and support than we originally anticipated. An important factor was that the two schools and three exchange teachers were unknown to each other. As a result, we were attempting to set up a schools "blind date" where staff had had no previous contact with each other therefore relationships had to be established. This required ongoing encouragement and support from ourselves in terms of exchanging information about the partner schools through to making sure teachers were supported during their exchange visit. We found establishing a new exchange between unknown schools requires time and perseverance to get the exchange off the ground and facilitate communication between teachers. Feedback from exchange teachers also suggested that the timing of the exchange is crucial since they intimated that an exchange would have been more appropriate and helpful in the spring term rather than the summer given the amount of school trips on offer during that time.

Exploiting links with a subsequent research project
The applicants are currently undertaking another project on citizenship focusing on transitions funded by the Gordon Cook Foundation. Because there is some overlap in the focus of both projects we are planning to use a few key interview questions formulated in this pilot study in the new project. Consequently, we anticipate that it may be possible to combine one aspect of this pilot's findings with one similar area of interest in the new project.

Replicating the project
Our original application for funding suggested that there was a potential to replicate this project across additional jurisdictions in order to optimize its scope and impact. This would also help optimize the input that has already been invested in this initial project in terms of its research design (e.g. developing the interview schedule and the consent information for teachers). As is well known, designing a research project regardless of the study's projected sample size is a very time-consuming and labour intensive activity.

Future plans and intended outputs

Bearing in mind that this was a small-scale pilot it is planned that outputs will produce one conference paper plus one publication.

A conference paper
Future plans are to produce one conference paper based on the pilot project and this is likely to be at a Scottish based conference (e.g. SERA) in 2013. We are especially interested in presenting findings on teachers' constructions of young citizens, in addition to the ways in which citizenship was articulated as a response to perceived "deficits" identified in the local community.

Publications
The plan is to submit one paper to a peer-refereed, quality journal. This is currently underway and the applicants will be working towards submission in 2013.

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References

Barbour, R. (2008). *Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research.* London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
Cedaberg, M. Hartsner. N. Lingard,S. (2006) *Education Policies that address Social Inequality Thematic Report* EPASI [last accessed October 2012 http://www.epasi.eu/]