

# The Place of Citizenship Education in the Primary Curriculum

SUBMISSION TO THE PRIMARY REVIEW FROM THE CITIZENSHIP FOUNDATION  
March 2007

## A. About the Citizenship Foundation

A1. The Citizenship Foundation is an independent educational charity that aims to empower individuals to engage in the wider community through education about the law democracy and society. We focus, in particular, on developing young people's Citizenship skills, knowledge and understanding. Our work includes Citizenship resources for a wide audience from teachers to young offenders, national projects for primary schools, active learning initiatives for secondary schools, nationwide training programmes, and community-based projects to develop citizenship education as a collective responsibility beyond school and college boundaries.

## B. Theme 1 – Purposes and Values

- B.1. At the Citizenship Foundation we believe that the primary phase presents an important opportunity for children to make sense of the changing society and the shrinking world they live in. While primary school teachers have never found it difficult to think about what kind of citizens they would like their children to become, the opportunities for developing the children's knowledge have, in recent years, been squeezed by the need to deliver the core subjects and the pressure of SATs. There are, at best, limited opportunities for teachers in English schools to cover social topics such as family or crime because, unlike the situation in many continental countries, there is no tradition of a social studies curriculum for this age group.
- B.2. The findings of the recent UNICEF report<sup>i</sup> underline the need to attend to pupils' social well-being. For example the UK had the lowest proportion (43.3%) of 11 and 13 year olds who described their friends as kind and helpful. We consider it of vital importance to cultivate in primary aged children a concern to act fairly, responsibly and with compassion.
- B.3. We believe that Citizenship Education is essential to individual empowerment. Not only should it be statutory, it should be a core element of the primary curriculum, integrating taught and experiential learning in a coherent way leading towards a full understanding of what it means to be a member of the community with rights and responsibilities. As part of our submission to the Education and Skills Select Committee's investigation into Citizenship Education<sup>ii</sup>, we have called for the current joint PSHE and Citizenship non-statutory framework to be accorded statutory status

- B.4. **'Every Child Matters'**<sup>iii</sup> and the **Education Act 2002** make it a duty to consult children. Children therefore need to be systematically taught and given opportunities to develop the necessary skills, language and confidence to enable them to participate fully in decision making processes. Citizenship Education provides an opportunity for broadening cultural, social and political horizons, particularly in respect to developing a sense of identity, and an appreciation of the diversity of our society. These important functions of a broad social education should not be relegated to the margins or the 'optional', as they are within the non-statutory programme of study.
- B.5. With the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility, it is important that children have the opportunity to establish a sense of social and moral responsibility and develop a clearer understanding of the nature of their legal and moral rights and responsibilities. Changing societal conditions and the earlier onset of adolescence have made it urgent for primary schools to do more by way of explicit social and moral education. For example, children are exposed to the media, and have access to the internet in a way that was not the case even at the time of the introduction of the National Curriculum. In 2003 the OECD<sup>iv</sup> placed the UK at the bottom of a league table of young people's risk behaviours, which included drinking, smoking, bullying and sexual activity.
- B.6. At the Citizenship Foundation we believe that the primary curriculum should be broad enough to provide an intellectual foundation for choice, affording children the ability to make responsible decisions at later stages of their education. Citizenship Education supports children in their personal development, equipping them to investigate the wider social and economic world, and to develop personal aspirations for it. In addition it lays the foundations for their political literacy and promotes the skills of community engagement. It provides them with an early introduction to financial literacy and agencies offering welfare support, providing them with knowledge of where to go for help which is essential, in an increasingly complex world, to the economic well-being, both of the individual and the nation as a whole.

## **Theme 2 – Learning and Teaching**

- B.7. We know that spoken language is a vital part of human learning in the first ten years of life, and that it is a strong determinant of children's ability to handle the written word. Citizenship Education is a vital component in any holistic approach to literacy and oracy, providing children with opportunities to analyse, compare, evaluate, reason, argue and justify. The work of psychologists such as Mercer<sup>v</sup> demonstrates the educational importance of exploratory talk to address shared problems. Citizenship issues are rich in such potential because they are real and relevant.
- B.8. Dunn<sup>vi</sup> has shown that attitudes and social concepts are shaped from an early age. From Key Stage 1 Citizenship Education provides an opportunity for teachers to nurture the development of this understanding in the context of a variety of issues salient to the young people themselves, developing understanding and fostering empathy before attitudes become entrenched.

It offers a context through which children can develop critical thinking skills and emotional literacy in a coherent, integrated way.

- B.9. Current educational practice, and the emphasis on target setting has led to more individualised learning, yet Vygotsky<sup>vii</sup> has identified learning as a social, interactive process that requires discussion, exchange and the sharing of perspectives. Citizenship learning provides opportunities for participation and active involvement. It is characterised by social thinking, and cannot be isolated or atomistic, as typified by much of the learning that currently takes place. Activities involving teamwork and enquiry skills, using Wallace's<sup>viii</sup> **TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context)** model for example, build a sense of interdependence and community.
- B.10. Recent research shows that children's peers can be a powerful influence on their receptivity and motivation to learn. We also know that profound knowledge is acquired through the practical application of knowledge: we learn best through doing. Citizenship is rich in opportunities for discussion and dialogue between young people, and for applying their knowledge to make a difference to the world around them. The most effective Citizenship Education is built around pedagogical approaches that place active learning at the core.
- B.11. Researchers such as Margaret Donaldson<sup>ix</sup> suggest that concepts presented in familiar contexts enable children to grasp ideas more readily than when they are concept free, yet there is still a tendency to teach the core subjects in a vacuum. The notion of curriculum breadth needs to be critically revisited, such that breadth is defined through a range of learning experiences rather than simply a collection of subjects. We also know that children are more likely to recall matters which are important to them. Citizenship Education can satisfy both these characteristics of learning, firstly by presenting a real life framework, or 'big picture', to help children make sense of new knowledge, and secondly by tackling issues of relevance and value to them such as fairness, bullying and responsibility for the environment. Indeed, Citizenship Education can provide a meaningful context for much of the primary curriculum, particularly aspects of learning in Literacy, History and Geography. It can also afford children opportunities to demonstrate their abilities across a wide range of intelligences, including inter-personal and intra-personal, which are currently not recognised and assessed through SATs.

### **Theme 3 – Curriculum and Assessment**

- B.12. At the Citizenship Foundation we believe that primary education should try to achieve '**Excellence and Enjoyment**'<sup>x</sup> across all subjects. Currently there is a tendency to focus on 'excellence' in the core subjects while restricting 'enjoyment' to the foundation subjects in the wider curriculum, as tends to be implied by the **Primary National Strategy (PNS)**<sup>xi</sup>. A more holistic, coherent and enriched approach is needed, with the children's personal experiences, and their place and future in society, as a key focus.

- B.13. During the primary phase children develop an increasing awareness of social and environmental issues. They are entitled to opportunities to develop more informed, reflective and balanced views on these issues. The curriculum needs to be constructed in a way which promotes a higher level of interaction and cognitive engagement, as opposed to teaching with low cognitive engagement leading to pre-determined answers. Citizenship, with its emphasis on oracy, active learning, and emotional literacy can play an important role in redressing the imbalance of an overly narrow curriculum, and in providing children with the opportunities to apply their knowledge in areas such as peer mediation, school democracy and community involvement.
- B.14. Citizenship Education fosters social development and nurtures the social self, thus enriching the school community. 'Citizenship-rich' primary schools (where practices such as peer mediation, students as researchers and school councils are embedded) offer social learning activities which are shown to have maturational and behavioural benefits to the individual and for the whole school. These benefits have the potential to become widespread across all schools if Citizenship is made statutory.
- B. 15. Citizenship Education is currently under-recognised and under-developed in the primary phase. This is especially the case in Key Stage 2 where issues such as bullying, stealing, the role of the police, respect for law, and community cohesion issues are commonly addressed but not always from a Citizenship perspective or in a consistent manner. Yet this is the time when attitudes to authority figures are being shaped. Moreover, the risk is that key issues are overlooked. For example, whilst young people are criminally responsible by age ten, this significant fact and its implications, are not systematically communicated to primary school pupils as part of the statutory curriculum.
- B.16. We believe that the core concepts and skills associated with Citizenship should be more precisely mapped and strengthened, and that there should be a clear pathway of progression, with identified cross-curricular links, from the Foundation Stage through to Year 6, bringing Citizenship Education into line with and providing a sound foundation for Key Stages 3 and 4.
- B.17. With regard to formative assessment we believe that the most appropriate method of assessment at this stage of learning is one based on 'success criteria'<sup>xii</sup> which leads to more focused teaching, and enables and motivates children to judge and improve their own performance in relation to the specific learning objectives which will have been identified above, for example objectives associated with enquiry and communication skills.
- B.18. We are currently working with the QCA to develop an appropriate eight point assessment scale to support the teaching of Citizenship across the primary and secondary phases. This will be based as much as possible on the empirical work of developmental psychologists, including their work on concept and empathy development.

## **Theme 5 – Diversity and Inclusion**

- B.19. In his recent review of Diversity and the Citizenship Curriculum<sup>xiii</sup>, Sir Keith Ajegbo highlighted the need to promote understanding between communities, and the importance of combating intolerance and religious extremism. He suggests that teachers should be prepared to tackle controversial topics such as immigration and the legacy of the British Empire, and that Citizenship lessons are the appropriate forum in which children can ‘discuss and debate their identities’. Whilst his focus was the secondary curriculum, we believe that this work should begin in the primary phase.
- B.20. Indeed, from April 2007, upon the implementation of the Education and Inspection Act (2006), all schools, primary and secondary, have a statutory duty to promote social cohesion. Citizenship Education provides the logical curriculum response to this duty.
- B.21. Citizenship Education is the subject which provides the most natural forum for discussion of issues relating to equal opportunities, diversity, faith and culture. Work around topics such as ‘similarity and difference’ and ‘rights and responsibilities’ helps children develop empathy, deepens understanding and builds greater confidence to express personal views. It supports them in developing a sense of who they are, what they can do, and how they belong. Thus it helps create social cohesion, which is essential for our personal well-being, and the maintenance of strong communities.

## **Theme 8 – Beyond the School**

- B.21. Every staff and governing body needs to reflect on the purpose of their school, and its wider relations with the community. Active community engagement is central to the Citizenship Education programme. Citizenship Education has the capacity for building links between home, school, and the community in which they are situated. Parents and their children belong to the same neighbourhood, national and global communities, and Citizenship Education can promote meaningful intergenerational activities. When children participate in projects aimed at making a difference to their community, or become engaged in research about the views and responsibilities of people from a variety of social strata and professions, they begin to see themselves as active members of wider society

## **Theme 10 – Funding and Governance**

- B.22. When Citizenship Education is appropriately represented within the primary curriculum, it will need to be resourced and funded accordingly. At the Citizenship Foundation we believe there to be a need for a coherent National Strategy for Teaching and Learning in Citizenship, fully endorsed by the DfES and QCA, and that this can only be implemented with proper training for headteachers and their staffs. This analysis is now supported by the report of the Select Committee. Equipped with the professional expertise, teachers will be enabled to recognise, nurture and develop

particular interests, talents and capacities to make it possible for each individual to flourish in our society.

- B.23. We recommend that every school be required to establish a school council constituted largely of pupil representatives, and that pupil representatives should be invited to become associate members of their school governing bodies, in line with the new governing body regulations introduced in 2003.

### **C. Conclusion**

- C.1. Citizenship Education has the potential to create more effective learners by promoting a reflective approach, enabling connection of knowledge, developing greater facility for shared learning with others, and increasing engagement and self-direction. Above all, Citizenship Education can play an important part in developing engaged and responsible citizens.
- C.2. The Citizenship Foundation has always argued that the failure to make Citizenship Education statutory in primary schools was a missed opportunity and results in developmental delay in this area. There are examples of excellent Citizenship practice in the primary phase on which to build but we argue that that current provision (based on a non-statutory joint framework for PSHE and Citizenship) is inadequate, and deserves a much higher profile.
- C.3. We recognise that primary schools and practitioners will need support for the implementation of the above developments, and in the light of this the Citizenship Foundation is campaigning for:
- A designated co-ordinator in every school, supported by an LA adviser;
  - Citizenship to feature in a revised primary SEF form;
  - NCSL primary programmes to include a primary dimension;
- C.4. We will be pleased to discuss any aspect of this submission with the review team.

## References:

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- <sup>i</sup> UNICEF Report on Child Well-Being in Rich Countries (2007)
- <sup>ii</sup> Education and Skills Select Committee Report on Citizenship Education TSO (2007)
- <sup>iii</sup> Every Child Matters DfES (2003)
- <sup>iv</sup> OECD League Table of Young People's Risk Behaviour. Programme of International Studies Assessment (PISA) (2003)
- <sup>v</sup> Mercer, N. (2000) *Words and Minds: How We Use Language to Think Together*. Routledge.
- <sup>vi</sup> Dunn, J. (1988) *The Beginnings of Social Understanding*, Blackwell Publishing.
- <sup>vii</sup> Vygotsky, L.S. (1962) *Thought and Language* Cambridge,MA:MIT Press
- <sup>viii</sup> Wallace, B. Maher. J. et al (2004) *Thinking Skills and Problem Solving – An Inclusive Approach* David Fulton Publishers
- <sup>ix</sup> Donaldson, M. (1978) *Children's Minds*. Fontana Press
- <sup>x</sup> 'Excellence and Enjoyment' DfES (1993)
- <sup>xi</sup> Primary National Strategy (PNS) DfES (2003)
- <sup>xii</sup> as advocated by Shirley Clarke in *Enriching Feedback in the Primary Classroom*. (2003) Hodder & Stoughton
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ajegbo, Sir K. Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review (2007)

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## **About the Authors**

**Marguerite Heath** is an experienced Primary Headteacher who now directs the Go-Givers programme at the Citizenship Foundation. Go-Givers is a major new resource for teaching and learning about Citizenship in primary schools which is to be launched in June 2007.

**Don Rowe** is Director, Curriculum Resources at the Citizenship Foundation and a co-founder of the Foundation. He has published and advised widely on Citizenship Education in Primary and Secondary schools.

**Tony Breslin** is Chief Executive at the Citizenship Foundation and has published and advised widely on Citizenship Education and in a range of related educational fields.

**Ted Huddleston** is a Project Manager at the Citizenship Foundation, and currently leads on the Citizenship Manifesto programme. He has published and advised widely on Citizenship Education.

**Elizabeth Griffiths** is an experienced primary practitioner working on the development of Go-Givers at the Citizenship Foundation.

### **Contact: Marguerite Heath**

The Citizenship Foundation,  
63 Gee Street,  
London EC1V 3RS

Tel: 020 7566 4148

Email: [marguerite.heath@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](mailto:marguerite.heath@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk)

