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## DIVERSITY AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE CURRICULUM: RESEARCH REVIEW

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### Introduction

In May 2006 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) established the Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review Group, headed by Keith Ajegbo, former Headteacher of Deptford Green Secondary School, Lewisham. To aid the Review Group, the DfES commissioned a small-scale research project, based on a literature review and case study research. This is a summary of the findings of the research.

The research focused on the provision of a diverse curriculum in primary and secondary schools in England, and the potential for adding a fourth dimension to the citizenship education curriculum with the specific purpose of promoting an understanding of Modern British, Cultural and Social History, British identities and shared citizenship values.

The research was carried out between June and December 2006.

### Key Findings

#### Literature Review

- The literature review indicates that more work needs to be done through the curriculum to enable pupils to understand the plurality of groups in Britain including those from Welsh, Scottish and Northern-Irish backgrounds.
- The literature review further suggests that in order to effectively acknowledge diversity in Britain, the curriculum needs to provide discursive resources to promote 'collective identities' and to challenge ideologies that construct the nation and national identity in ways that exclude minority ethnic groups. Importantly, it should allow national identity and historical events to be 'retold' in order to demonstrate the contribution of minority ethnic groups to British society.

#### Case Studies

- Pupils in multiethnic schools were more likely to experience a curriculum addressing issues of diversity, and to learn about minority ethnic groups. However, some found a diverse curriculum to be repetitive, resulting in some being bored by the curriculum, and several wanting to learn more about British people as a whole because as one pupil said 'we don't learn about different people in Britain, we just learn about people with different cultures'.
- Teachers often referred to diversity and ethnicity in a way that focussed almost exclusively on minority ethnic groups and their cultures. White ethnicity, and the extent of diversities (including White British) within this, was not considered. Pupils' responses also tended to give examples of the non-White when asked about diversity and identity.
- There was a level of uncertainty amongst White and minority ethnic pupils as to whether minority ethnic groups could be considered British.

- If Modern British, Cultural and Social History is to become a fourth pillar of the citizenship curriculum this would require extensive discussion and debate, as any definition of 'Britishness' could potentially exclude as well as include some groups (both White and minority ethnic).

## Background

In supporting the work of the Diversity and Citizenship Review Group which was formed in May 2006, this research aimed to examine the literature addressing diversity and citizenship in the school curriculum, school approaches to delivering a diverse curriculum, pupils' experiences of this, and school attitudes to adding Modern British Cultural and Social History to the secondary citizenship curriculum, and pupils' perceptions of British identities. The study also sought to comprehend how schools, through the curriculum, attempt to facilitate pupils' understanding of shared citizenship values and encourage the development of common British identities.

The National Curriculum seeks to enable schools to deliver a diverse curriculum and one that promotes and supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In engendering personal and cultural development, teachers are expected to help pupils develop a sense of, and confidence, in their own cultural identities, whilst at the same time acquiring the skills necessary to participate in a culturally diverse British society.

Citizenship education became a statutory component of the secondary curriculum in 2002. Through citizenship education teachers are expected to educate pupils to develop social and moral responsibility, political responsibility and enable them to become responsible citizens. Within this, there is an expectation that teachers will promote aspects of British citizenship pertaining to cultural identities and encourage pupils to challenge stereotypical/racist views and attitudes.

Presumed difficulties with British citizenship identity formation amongst young people underlie recent calls by the government and others for Britain's global history and the contribution of minority ethnic groups to British society to be taught in schools as a basis for promoting a common British citizenship identity, which has greater

relevance in contemporary Britain. It has been argued that in promoting a common identity:

There can be no present 'we' without a history that accounts for who we are, how we came to be, what has happened to us and what we are like. (Olneck, 2001:335)

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this research were to explore:

- how diversity is promoted across the curriculum at all ages, and
- whether/how to incorporate 'Modern British Cultural and Social History' as a potential fourth pillar of the secondary citizenship programme.

Throughout this research we have used the DfES Diversity and Citizenship Review Group's working definition of diversity, which is expressed as follows:

Britain is a society made up of a diverse range of ethnicities, cultures, languages and religions, which is constantly evolving. As an important aspect of 'Every Child Matters'<sup>1</sup>, students need to explore their range of identities: personal, local, national and global. Through the curriculum, students should have opportunities, in the first instance, to explore their own identity in relation to the local community. Beyond that, they need to be able to locate themselves in wider British society and ultimately to be able to understand British values in a global context. In order to appreciate not only the diversity of Britain but also its unique identity, students should:

- explore the origins of Britain and how different cultures have created modern Britain
- explore the representations of different racial, ethnic, cultural and religious groups in Britain and the world

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<sup>1</sup> *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2003) is a national policy document which places emphasis on valuing each individual child (in particular their identity and self-esteem) and improving their educational and social outcomes.

- explore the consequences of racial and religious intolerance and discrimination
- develop a critical literacy, which allows them to reflect on their own cultural traditions and those of others.

## Methodology

The research design involved the production of a literature review and the collection of qualitative data in six case study schools.

### Literature review

The review methodology included an initial mapping of the main issues relating to curriculum diversity, teaching history through the curriculum, national identity, ethnic identities, 'Britishness', British identities, citizenship education and democratic/citizenship values. Key texts were identified that best represent the knowledge and issues across these areas. Our searches provided us with a database of 300 publications on which we based the review and analysis. The texts were assessed for quality and the extent to which they met the objectives of the review.

### Case studies

Six school case studies (three primary and three secondary) were selected from five regions across England according to size (small, medium or large), ethnic diversity (low, medium, high) and location (urban or rural). We chose three predominantly White and three multiethnic schools, which were ethnically and geographically diverse.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the headteacher, the person responsible for PSHE/citizenship education and, in most cases the teacher responsible for history or the humanities curriculum. A total of 15 teachers (including the six headteachers) were interviewed and 95 pupils from Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 participated in discussion groups. Classroom observations were also conducted in five of the six schools. Documentary materials (e.g. schemes of work, curriculum and race equality policies) were additionally collected.

## Main Findings

### Literature review

#### Curriculum diversity

National Curriculum guidelines identify various ways in which the school curriculum can promote a greater understanding of diversity amongst pupils. However, the research evidence suggests that schools tend to emphasise the discourses of culture and religion to the exclusion of other aspects of diversity (e.g. social and White British diversity).

Documentation from both the DfES and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority clearly indicates that teachers are allowed and encouraged to use professional flexibility in deciding how they deliver the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4, which would allow a more direct focus on diversity. Nevertheless, some reports show that there is some concern about the extent to which teachers are aware of this flexibility.

A number of analyses of the National Curriculum have criticised the way in which it has adopted a Eurocentric approach and how it fails to value cultural/ethnic diversity (e.g. Parekh, 2000; Commission on African and Asian Heritage, 2005).

Evidence suggests that teaching about diversity is limited both by the absence or relatively low numbers of minority ethnic groups in some schools and by diversity not being identified as a school priority. Research has also raised concerns about teachers' knowledge of, and experience of diversity, and the effectiveness of teacher training in enabling teachers to cover diversity issues (e.g. Cline *et al.*, 2002; TDA, 2005). The data also point to a misconception amongst some teachers that subjects such as mathematics and science do not allow for discussion about the world and local and national contexts (e.g. Povey, 2003; Schuell, 1992).

#### British identities and promoting shared citizenship values

There is a wealth of literature on individual and British identities which indicates that identities are multiple, socially constructed and fluid (e.g. Hall, 1996). Several authors argue that people with the same ethnic or national identity should not be seen as homogeneous groups, and that national identity can marginalise as well as exclude those that are

not of a dominant ethnic group within a nation.

'Britishness' is often equated with Englishness, 'Whiteness' and also with Christianity. Equally important is that while the term may be intended to be an inclusive, all embracing category and one that is reflective of Britain's diverse multi-ethnic population, it is not necessarily regarded or experienced as such (e.g. Gilroy, 1992; Parekh, 2000). Advocates of citizenship education are concerned that incorporating 'Britishness' into the curriculum should not lead to 'indoctrination into a narrow, fixed, uncritical and intolerant nationalism' (Breslin, Rowe and Thornton 2006:21).

Ofsted (2006:13) found that 'the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding in Key Stage 3, and their origins and implications in Key Stage 4, are only rarely deconstructed to explore in any detail what this implies'. This absence was considered pivotal to understanding about Britain, 'Britishness' and the principles and procedures that underpin British democracy.

Several authors have written on the salience of developing an understanding of diversity and shared values as a way of encouraging unity in culturally diverse societies (e.g. Banks *et al.*, 2005). They have also identified potential challenges and problems to dealing with 'difference'. For example, Davies (2001) argues that 'difference' needs to be recognised and validated and inequality challenged.

## **Case studies**

### Curriculum diversity

The case study schools were at different stages of incorporating diversity in the curriculum, with the multiethnic schools being more experienced. Those schools that had developed a diverse curriculum were much more likely to focus on the global than the British.

Many pupils were in favour of a diverse curriculum, but were concerned by the repetitive nature of some elements, the stereotyping of minority ethnic groups by some teachers and the fact that teaching about particular faiths often presented 'ideal types' of behaviour and practice that did not match with their own or their families' religious practices.

In some schools there seemed to be a disjuncture between the 'right' discourse on diversity and tolerance of 'difference' as learnt in school and some pupils views and experiences outside school.

### British identities and shared British values

Most of the case study schools did not specifically explore White British diversity, White British identities or shared citizenship values, and pupils in mainly White schools were less likely to have been taught about minority ethnic immigration to Britain, and the contributions of minority ethnic groups to British society.

We found that some pupils have a strong local identity, which holds greater significance than a national identity, and that some indigenous pupils experience of identity issues in the curriculum is that they have a deficit British/English identity. Indigenous White British pupils in multiethnic schools seemed less confident to talk in lessons about their White British heritage. It was also noticeable that few pupils had experienced lessons where they talked about things that people in Britain share. Nonetheless, all of the pupils expressed a willingness to learn more about indigenous and non-indigenous British people.

### Modern British Cultural and Social History

We were asked to ascertain the views of teachers and headteachers on the possibility of including shared British values and British identities, Modern British Cultural and Social History (MBCSH) within a potential 'fourth pillar' of the citizenship curriculum. There was widespread consensus that such a move was problematic, and would require considerable discussion and debate. Any definition of 'Britishness' would inevitably be controversial and might well leave some pupils, both from minority ethnic groups and from some White groups, feeling that they were not fully included in the term. It was suggested that any definition would be likely to vary from school to school, and this would tend to defeat the presumed object of the initiative.

It was also evident that if the citizenship curriculum is to be broadened to include MBCSH it would be necessary for schools to explore the breadth of British identities, immigration to Britain and the contributions of diverse groups to modern Britain.



## Approaches that work

We noted four characteristics of school and curriculum practice that appeared to lead to good practice. These were:

*Strong and effective leadership* in the area of diversity/identities in the curriculum, and support for teachers to feel a sense of 'ownership' in this area.

*Planning and guidance:* effective planning is needed so that pupils do not repeatedly study the same groups and religions in different years and become bored, and also explicit guidance for teachers teaching citizenship, and for teaching about diversity in mainly White schools.

*The use of pupils' own experiences* when talking about diversity and identities, which can help reduce idealisation and stereotyping of particular cultures by some teachers (and pupils).

*The use of pupils' idealism:* There was a perception of generational differences in acceptance and tolerance of people from diverse ethnic groups, and in attitudes towards racism. This shows an optimism and idealism that might be useful in developing teaching strategies that encompass diversity and identities.

## Conclusion

In summary, if a more diverse curriculum is to be delivered in schools it will be necessary for schools and teachers to consider precisely what is meant by 'diversity' and how this can be achieved through the curriculum. Without a wider understanding of British identities, in particular, that they are 'more diverse and pluralistic than is normally imagined' (Parekh, 2000:36), schools will also find it difficult to deliver a citizenship curriculum that supports the development of common British identities. Diversity and identities in contemporary Britain are changing and kaleidoscopic. We all have multiple and sometimes hybrid identities. The curriculum needs to allow pupils' to understand and appreciate diversity (including White British) and its values, and that they have their own identities within this diversity. The citizenship curriculum appears to be the most appropriate place to locate this. Teaching in areas that are controversial and sensitive requires particular skills and courage: all teachers need to be trained and supported to deliver these

effectively.

## Recommendations

Further guidance is needed for delivering a diverse curriculum, and opportunities provided in initial teacher training and continuing professional development for teachers to develop effective diversity and citizenship practice. Guidance is also required to aid the implementation of citizenship education in primary schools.

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