

Ian Davies, Gillian Hampden Thompson, Maria Tsouroufli, Vanita Sundaram, Pippa Lord, Jennifer Jeffes, George Bramley

Creating Citizenship Communities

The project 'Creating Citizenship Communities' is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and is being conducted by a partnership team from the Department of Education, University of York and the National Foundation for Educational Research. This article describes the project design and draws attention to issues emerging from data analysis. An indication is given of the actions to be taken with professionals and young people in light of the project findings. An argument is made for the need to co-ordinate work in schools by developing stronger liaison between citizenship education teachers and those responsible for whole school initiatives to promote community engagement; and helping teachers to build on young people's existing knowledge and expertise in community matters to help them understand and act more effectively in society.

Keywords

Community, citizenship, education, barriers, facilitation, empirical research

1 The Political Context for Community and Citizenship

It is clear that community and citizenship have been key factors in political debate for many years and this has been very explicitly so since at least the Clinton and Blair eras during which, respectively, Etzioni (1995) and Giddens (1994) advised about new ways of forming political frameworks or doctrines. During this period the general political climate was influenced by the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998 which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law; the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly; and a new settlement between Britain and Northern Ireland, also involving devolved government (Osler, Starkey 2006). It is not surprising in the changing political and constitutional context that affects the relationship between nations, states, individuals and social groups that there would be a greater emphasis on both citizenship and community.

References to citizenship and community signal not only the ways in which change can be understood but also the means by which society intends to achieve equality and diversity whilst avoiding uniformity and fragmentation. In other words citizenship and community are both key concepts and social practices. They are key to understanding and practice in contemporary society due in part to significant ongoing changes. Later marriage, higher rates of divorce and new family structures are relevant to debates about the

ways we have of living together. Demographic changes are also part of this changing context. In 2007, 16 per cent of the population – almost 10m people – were aged 65 and over. By 2031, it is projected that the UK population will be 71.1 million, with 22 per cent of the population aged 65 and over (British Council). The people who belong to our communities are changing. 35% of the population in London is from non-White groups. Half of the 1.2 million pupils that attend schools in London are from minority ethnic groups (British Council). While there is much uninformed comment about immigration and asylum seekers (see Pinson, Arnot, Candappa 2010) surveys tend to show a fear of alteration to existing communities; “Britons are the most anxious about immigrants, an international survey of eight European and North American countries has suggested” (BBC, 4 February 2011). All these issues need to be considered in the context of fundamental issues about the perceptions of state and nation in the UK and the realities of citizenship and community engagement (Sears, Davies, Reid 2012).

As well as providing a way to understand key concepts and practices across society as a whole, citizenship and community have been given particular meaning in educational contexts. Since 2002 citizenship education has been a part of the National Curriculum (with community involvement one of the 3 constituent elements identified in the Crick Report) and there have been wider expectations placed on schools. Alan Johnson emphasised in 2006 (in his then role as Secretary of State for Education and Skills) the need for schools to promote community cohesion. Section 21(4) of the Education Act 2002 (as inserted by section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) required schools to conform. Elsewhere in this edition of JSSE (see the article by Rowe et al.) more detailed consideration is given to this legislation but the focus on community cohesion that was promoted owed much to the following characterisation:

“By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.” (Alan Johnson speaking in the House of Commons on 2 November 2006; see DfCSF 2007, 4).

More recently, Prime ministers Brown and Cameron have signalled their support for community; the latter with an emphasis on what he has termed ‘the big society.’ This common ground on the significance of community has not always meant that there is widespread agreement about its nature or purpose. Some of the different strands of the debates about citizenship and community can easily be illustrated. The preference for the civic republican approach (emphasising responsibilities in public contexts) is perhaps more closely associated with community oriented approaches than the liberal (emphasising rights of private individuals). The location of community and citizenship is debated with Crick, perhaps the principal architect of citizenship at a time when a communitarian-influenced government was in power, emphasising Arendt’s view to assert that “A citizen is by definition a

citizen among citizens of a country among countries.” (Crick 2000, 138). This would certainly be represented differently by those who emphasise global and identity-based conceptions of citizenship and community. Considerations of identity link closely to debates about diversity. Osler (2003) went so far as to claim that the Crick report “contains albeit unwittingly an example of institutionalized racism in its characterization of minorities.” (Osler 2003, 49). Gillborn (2006) argued that citizenship education was essentially “a public policy placebo ... a pretend treatment for institutional racism that gives the impression of action but is, in fact, without substance or effect.” (Gillborn 2006, 83). These allegations and interpretations implicitly raise issues about who is regarded as belonging to communities that are expected to be enhanced through citizenship. The Ajegbo Report (2007) provided a higher profile for citizenship and diversity and other related developments perhaps led to the incorporation of a wider characterisation of the distinctions between private and public (Kiwani 2008). Overarching characterisations of community and citizenship are concerned with the relative emphasis that would be placed on morality generally and, more particularly, religion. Some have suggested that religion is a positive force for community and citizenship (e.g. Arthur, Gearon, Sears 2010) while others (e.g. Heater 1999) have largely chosen not to discuss it or (e.g. Crick quoted in Arthur, Gearon, Sears 2010, 2) to argue explicitly that citizenship is secular. Crick’s answer to these matters was clear: “citizenship teaching not based on moral values and reasoning would either be mechanical and boring, or even dangerous – the apparent absence of values usually hides single-truth theories of value.” (Crick 2000, 130). But, he went on to explain: “Personal and Social Education (PSE), Religious Education (RE), moral education, whatever we call education specifically for values, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for good citizenship and good behaviour” (ibid.,129). Finally, the question of action, involvement and engagement need to be considered in relation to citizenship. Citizens are often exhorted to do something and it is the community in which those things are done. This seems to be the thrust of what was suggested by Heater and Oliver (1994):

“Individuals are citizens when they practise civic virtue and good citizenship, enjoy but do not exploit their civil and political rights, contribute to and receive social and economic benefits, do not allow any sense of national identity to justify discrimination or stereotyping of others, experiences senses of non-exclusive multiple citizenship and, by their example, teach citizenship to others.” (Heater, Oliver 1994, 6).

If we want a vibrant democracy, it seems straightforward to expect people to engage. Crick (2000) argued that: “Political activity by citizens is the very essence of a free society.” (Crick 2000, 130). And yet, we need to be cautious about what is meant by that engagement. It would not be helpful to propose that rights are only available when responsibilities are enacted. The seemingly obvious positions about justice in a democracy break down very readily if this sort of exchange is accepted too easily. If citizenship and its attendant rights are given only to those who take part actively we effectively exclude many people including the very young, the very old, those with

disabilities and so on. There needs to be a clearer consideration of the nature of what has been described as micro and macro participation (Pattie, Seyd, Whiteley 2004). The former focuses on the relationship between citizens and agents of the state (health, education, local planning decisions etc); the latter is concerned with activities that can directly influence the state at the national level (e.g. voting by an individual; collective action by pressure groups). It is possible that macro participation is decreasing while the micro in a less deferential society in which a teacher, doctor, local government official and others can be approached confidently in order to garner resources for an individual or very specific community may signal greater individual expression but also be may be self regarding, inconsistent and involve a reluctance to accept costs. It would be unwise to make too simple a connection between the fact of community engagement as an expression of all types of citizenship.

How can the disparate threads of these debates be identified and perhaps understood holistically? Annette (2003) has suggested that community as a whole may be characterised in several distinct ways: as a place or neighbourhood; as a normative ideal linked to respect, inclusion and solidarity; as something based on a politics of identity and recognition of difference; and, as a political ideal linked to participation, involvement and citizenship. Perhaps all that we can say with certainty is that community and citizenship offer spaces for debates about different issues and as such it is insufficient to see an emphasis on them as a panacea for many of the challenges that face society. There are concerns about what is intended by a call to strengthen community, or not intended but actually realized. It is possible that there is an implied rejection of the 'strangers' who are not members of the community that has been identified; a possible assumption or implication that all who are members have the same interests; that there might be an authoritarian firming up of the status quo (or desire to reinvent a mythical 'golden' age). Heater (1999) has suggested that:

"Communitarianism extracts from the republican tradition the concentration on a feeling of community and a sense of duty, though omitting from its programme the strand of direct political participation and, some would argue, crucially, the central republican concern for freedom." (Heater 1999, 77).

The natures of community and citizenship mean that they are not in themselves simply 'good' things. And yet schools and other educational institutions have often emphasized their importance. The work of Henry Morris in relation to Cambridgeshire Village Colleges (Ree 1973), the establishment of the Leicestershire community comprehensives (including high profile schools such as Countesthorpe), the urban focus in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Midwinter 1973) of schools such as Abraham Moss Community School in Manchester and the current communitarian inspired thinking of governments from the 1990s which has been referred to above. In our project we seek to understand some of the complexities associated with these matters. We suspected from the beginning of the project that there were diverse understandings of citizenship and community and very different ways of acting to make a difference. We wish to more clearly

identify what young people and professionals think and do as they act as citizens in communities. We also want in light of the issues that emerge from an analysis of the data to encourage action. In light of our point about the likely diversity of opinion and action we feel that partnerships could usefully be established and developed between professionals and young people.

2 Project Methodology

The central elements of the methodology for this project are a national online survey of schools followed by fieldwork in eight schools. These were preceded by an extensive literature review and secondary data analysis. The literature review was achieved by means of an extensive search of literature through academic data bases, analysing different types of literature (reviews, articles, reports, books and monographs, conference reports, information on current research studies and 'grey literature'), focusing on the secondary age phase (11-18) in work relevant to England. The analysis of secondary data provided some national context on young people's participation in community activities and sense of community cohesion with data taken from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) including a nationally representative sample in 2004 with waves 1 (students aged 13/14 years) and 2 (students aged 14/15 years) and more precisely relevant data gathered from questions on community cohesion in wave 5 (students aged 17/18 years).

- Survey

Some 800 schools were contacted in the online survey. A stratified sample was established with respect to urban and rural communities, the percentage of white British students and position in relation to the index of multiple deprivations. Target respondents were those staff with responsibilities for community cohesion and/or citizenship education. Four themes were pursued in line with key issues identified through the literature review and secondary data analysis. First, school context (i.e., school commitment/mission e.g. is citizenship/community central to the school ethos and characteristics of approach to citizenship/community; barriers and opportunities, e.g. student background, location, context, etc., and school-community/outreach links. Second, delivery (i.e. citizenship/community activities provided including volunteering opportunities and developing students' knowledge, skills and attitudes). Third, staff perspectives on students' experiences (i.e. students' sense of belonging to different types of community and students' motivations for taking part in community engagement). Fourth, impact (i.e. perceptions of student engagement in community and citizenship because of their school's approaches and the overall effectiveness of their school's approach). Data in the online school survey were gathered from 119 schools with 71% of individuals who responded having a curriculum responsibility; 47% school-

wide responsibility; 4% no curriculum responsibility. Seventy-four percent of the respondents saw themselves as teaching staff; 23% identified themselves as belonging to the senior management team and 3% declared that they were 'non-teaching.'

- Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted in 8 schools and was preceded by a pilot study conducted by 2 members of the project team and student researchers. The sample was drawn from a list of 39 schools in England that participated in the national online survey and agreed to be contacted to take part in the qualitative phase of this project. The selection of schools was directed by three main factors; geographical location (urban-rural), ethnic mix (predominantly white-ethnically diverse) and disadvantage (defined as neighbourhood deprivation). Sixteen focus group discussions were conducted with year 10 and year 11 students, and transcribed. We deliberately included undergraduate students to work with us during the data collection process in order to establish positive relationships and to help contribute to the validity of our interpretations. Focus group data was transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically by team members (Coffey, Atkinson 1996). The data were coded by the first author under the broad descriptive categories of the interview schedule, which were agreed by the research team through discussion as part of the collaborative team approach to analysis and in order to have inter-rater reliability (Richards, Richards 1995). It should be noted that while the research project is not completed, we are able to present some initial findings (and a series of papers may be seen at

<http://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/cresj/citizenship-communities/>).

3 Initial Findings and Discussion

3.1 The Characterization of Citizenship and Community

It is clear that schools are hugely active in promoting citizenship education and community cohesion. In the online survey 98% of teachers report they develop students' sense of social responsibility. 98% say they help young people respect and celebrate diversity; 92% emphasise developing young people's sense of social justice; and 92% work to raise participation in the democratic process. Teachers do these things through a wide variety of strategies including linkages with local businesses (91%), charities (80%) and other schools with a different school population (77%); by opening up extended schools provision to others (67%); and, by encouraging local people to participate in volunteering and creating community spaces (60%). Teachers offer opportunities to discuss difficult issues, work with young people in inclusive environments, develop enterprise activities, and teach citizenship through lessons and whole school activities such as school councils. Significant attention is devoted to volunteering both formally and

informally.

In the field work it was revealed that young people's understanding of community varied within and across schools. Community was understood as a group of people with a shared identity, common purpose, interests and strong ties. Schools, youth clubs, face-book, sports teams, friendship groups, neighbourhoods, gay/lesbian, religious/ethnic groups and the police were described as communities. Groups of people coming together for a single event (e.g. the Royal wedding or the Olympic Games) were also described as communities. Notions of community were associated with civic engagement and the sustainability of a peaceful society. However, some young people felt that communities should not always be associated with 'do good' behaviour and good causes. Although all young people expressed strong beliefs against racism, some understood racist groups as communities because of their shared beliefs and practices. There were examples of limited understandings or perhaps defensiveness about the nature of community in practice. There were some tensions in the views expressed by young people and some differences between their views and those of teachers. Most young people felt they belong to their immediate communities, including the school and local communities. Young people in deprived areas and disadvantaged schools did not feel a sense of belonging to their school or their local communities. Young people's sense of belonging to the European, international and even the British community was very weak and strongly associated with parental influence and education, socio-economic status and the schools' strategies for citizenship education and community cohesion.

3.2 The Implementation of Education Related to Citizenship and Community

Schools recognise that they face significant challenges in helping young people to understand and become constructively engaged in society. Emerging from the online survey was a range of interesting findings. Parents/carers were involved in the curriculum only in a third of schools. Only approximately two-fifths of respondents reported that they work with a preapproved list of organisations that provide opportunities for volunteering, and undertake outreach activities with the community to identify potential opportunities for students to volunteer. Only just over one-third of respondents (35%) have in place policies and systems to respond to opportunities provided by organisations that directly approach their school. Just over one-quarter of respondents (28 per cent) have in place policies and systems to support students to undertake volunteering opportunities they have identified themselves. Schools feel that young people are not widely involved in planning such activities and they lack the skills to do so. A substantial minority (two-fifths, 43 per cent) reported that only 'some' of their students feel valued as contributors. Less than half (42 per cent) reported that 'most' of their students think teachers are good at facilitating their ideas for community cohesion activities and a further two-fifths (40 per cent) reported that only 'some' of their students feel this is the case.

The fieldwork also suggested that interpretation and delivery of citizenship education varied across schools and was strongly associated with teachers' views, expertise and commitment, as well as the geographical location, socio-economic status and ethos of schools. Most young people reported that citizenship education focuses more on the curriculum and less on building relations with the community. Young people's experiences of citizenship education clearly demonstrate emphasis on discussion of topical issues (e.g. racism, cultural and religious diversity, health attitudes, the 2011 riots and civic behaviour); some attention to extra curriculum activities, field-trips and projects, particularly in schools in affluent areas; and very rarely action in the community, such as visiting an old people's home or taking part in international festivals aiming to celebrate diversity and difference. Active engagement of parents and families in community action and support for disadvantaged students was weak in nearly all the schools that participated in the qualitative phase of the project. This might indicate a need of schools to expand their strategies for engaging families, parents, local communities and also for providing support to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

3.3 Taking Part

The above difficulties of characterising and implementing citizenship and community may be further explored in relation to who is seen as an active participant. In the online survey the vast majority (78 per cent) of respondents reported that their high achieving students are more likely than their peers to do voluntary work or take part in community activities. 71 per cent reported that this was the case for their high ability students. Respondents reported most strongly that students from a disadvantaged background are less likely than their peers to do voluntary work or take part in community activities (38 per cent reported that this was 'less likely'). That said, over half of schools proactively work to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds through, for example, engaging mentors and roles from students' communities (71%), working with organisations with expertise in engaging disadvantaged young people (63%), and subsidising transport so that young people can take part in community based activities (52%).

The data from the fieldwork suggest that although teachers' practices and school policies aimed at fostering a sense of community and promoting community cohesion, young people's experiences suggest that citizenship strategies were not always effective. Some young people discussed tensions and divisions among some ethnic and religious communities in schools with a diverse student population. When prompted to discuss their views and experiences further, most young people reported lack of interest and knowledge of diversity and difference in schools and the wider British society. Many young people felt that community cohesion on a local and national level is weak and incompatible with the diversity of languages, religions and ethnicities in Britain. This might indicate a need for schools to continue to explore and promote citizenship education and community cohesion strategies for positive interactions and a sense of togetherness

among young people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

4 Conclusions

It seems clear that citizenship and community are key terms in contemporary society and allow for discussion, debate and action. They are complex terms but teachers and young people are familiar with them and recognise that there are possibilities of constructive personal, social and political engagement. Generally, we need to know more about a series of key issues and questions of which three are given below.

First, we must be clearer about the sorts of engagement that are occurring. It is possible that citizenship and community are currently characterised as legitimated participation. It is possible that the full extent of young people's understandings and engagements are not being considered as having educational potential. We have data that require further analysis in relation, for example, to the meaning and extent of volunteering, to what extent local involvement in the form of activity outside the family and other close personal networks can be seen as only part of the picture of engagement and whether virtual participation is a strong feature of young people's experience.

Secondly, we need to know more about who is taking part. Our initial analyses of data suggest that lower status students are perceived to take part less frequently than others generally and perhaps especially in relation to school organised activities. We must be careful not to interpret these data simplistically. There is some evidence that urban youth from deprived neighbourhoods already make contributions to – and have a detailed and highly specialized knowledge of – their local communities (Alexander 2008; Atkins, Hart 2003; Flanagan, Faison 2001). But allied with the findings that disadvantaged communities do not facilitate community engagement as effectively as other contexts, some research has suggested that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in particular, may be less likely to engage in civic action (Andrews 2008; Kahne, Middaugh 2008) and we are minded, currently, to concur.

Third, we need to explore further issues in our data about why people engage in the community. Some of our respondents suggest that students feel disempowered. The question of why people engage may be considered in relation to a wide variety of factors including individually framed social and altruistic tendencies, preferences for civic action in which issues are identified and acted upon and more entrepreneurial approaches in which participants are attempting to develop particular skill sets and generate advantage in relation to potential future opportunities in education and employment. Engagement is generally felt to occur if resources are available to the young person (in terms of time and money) and, in relation to what has been referred to as civic capital, “whether or not the young person has the knowledge, networks, and skills to be able to act upon a civic issue of concern.” (Cremin et al. 2009). Perhaps common to engagement is a sense of personal efficacy (ibid). If a young person feels that they can make a difference then it would not be unreasonable to expect engagement to

follow.

Fourth, the above leads us to suggest that more work is needed to explore the barriers and facilitation to engagement. Our data suggest that there are obstacles facing both young people and professionals. There may be broad societal factors that may help to explain this. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (see Halsey, White 2008), for example, have shown that young people are negatively – and inaccurately – perceived in relation to responsibility for crime (adults think that young people are responsible for half of all crimes whereas the figure is actually 12%). In this context, it might be tempting for teachers and others to feel that reform of young people is needed rather than a continuation of positive action by them. It may be necessary to explore the strategies and tactics that may help in the engagement of more people (e.g. Whiteley 2004; Davies, Flanagan, Hogarth, Mountford, Philpott 2009; Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004; Sinclair 2004; Keating et al. 2009).

What then are our overarching conclusions? Clearly there is much good work already being done both by young people and by teachers and other professionals and there is clearly much still to be understood and acted upon. In relation to the specifics of our initial analysis of data in the wider context of relevant literature we wish to highlight two challenges. Firstly, there may be a lack of connection between work in schools and the lives of young people beyond school. Young people know a good deal about their communities but this may not be taken fully into account by teachers. Secondly, there may be a lack of co-ordination between the citizenship education teacher and those in the school charged with the responsibility for strengthening community involvement. In the survey, the vast majority of schools declare their commitment to both citizenship education and community cohesion but respondents less commonly reported that their schools had specific objectives or targets which *linked* citizenship with the community: just under two-fifths (39 per cent) indicated that their school had specific objectives or targets around citizenship and/or working with the community reported that these linkages are made. We intend to continue our exploration of the data and to develop initiatives that will be of use to professionals who aim to educate young people and to help young people directly as they continue to understand and contribute to their communities.

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