

Summary Research Report 4: Pupils' Perspectives on Learning for European Citizenship

Research Aims and Methods

A large part of our research focused on pupils' perspectives on education for European Citizenship. Five focus group interviews were conducted with pupils across the three schools in our study in order to elicit information on pupils' views on learning about Europe and learning for European citizenship. Pupils were asked a variety of questions, focusing on the following areas:

- How well informed do you think you are about Europe and the EU?
- Would you like to know and understand more about Europe?
- From what sources do you think you learn most about Europe?
- What did you think about your citizenship lessons on the EU?
- How effective have your citizenship lessons been in informing you about Europe?
- What are your attitudes to Europe/ the EU?

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Qualitative data analysis was used to code for the themes present in the data.

Summary of Key Findings

- Students believe they are very ill-informed about Europe and the European Union. Generally speaking, they do not understand what it means for Britain to be a member of the EU.
- In general, students are largely indifferent to Europe. Some students, largely from School A, expressed xenophobic and racist attitudes when discussing the EU/ Europe. There was some hostility towards other European nations and cultures, particularly to Germans, expressed through the lens of the Second World War.
- A few students believe that their lack of knowledge is attributable to the fact that they are simply not interested in finding out about Europe and the EU. They don't make any personal effort to investigate these topics.
- Students were generally not interested in learning about the EU and most did not want to know more about it as they feel it does not affect their daily lives. Only one group of students in School A (which has predominantly white British middle-class students) expressed wanting to know more about how the EU benefits them so that they could understand their parents' conversations. A couple of students in School C also wanted to know more about the EU.

- Some students are interested in other EU member-states and what the life and culture is like there. Study of these is more appealing than learning about the history and functioning of European institutions.
- Students in School C believe they do not learn much about Europe at school, whereas students in School A identified a number of school subjects through which they learn about Europe and the EU: history, geography and citizenship. Students in School B believe they gain most knowledge on Europe from TV and sports, and news, although school also plays a part.
- Students believe that their teachers want them to know more about Europe and the EU but that they don't have time to teach about it thoroughly because of other priorities in the curriculum.
- In general, students believe they learn most about Europe and the EU through media (especially TV and news sources including the Internet), from travelling, and from their parents.
- Students explained that most of what they learn about Europe is through history lessons which focus on Germany and the Second World War. They are aware of other past European conflicts, such as the Spanish Civil War.
- Students stated that their citizenship lessons focus on what it means to be a good citizen and involves some local charitable activities. They recalled that there is very little coverage of contemporary Europe politics or the EU.
- Students said that the WebQuest lessons did not promote learning because they simply copied and pasted their answers from the texts they read into the answer boxes.
- Students found the WebQuest lessons too complicated and detailed and found them unengaging, particularly as they were so heavily focused on reading and writing large amounts of text.