

Summary Research Report 3: Teachers' Perspectives on Education for European Citizenship

Research Aims

A large part of our research has focused on teachers' perspectives on education for European Citizenship. In particular, we have been interested in investigating:

- Teachers' understandings of their roles and identities as EU citizens.
- The impact of teachers' personal and professional identities on their role as citizenship educators.
- The methods and approaches teachers use to teach citizenship and the perceived impact of these on students' learning.

Methods

In order to collect data for this part of the investigation, we interviewed eight teachers from across the three research schools in our study. The interviews were semi-structured and covered the following areas: teachers' personal and professional identities as citizenship educators and their political perspectives; teachers' attitudes to and perceptions of the EU and how these impact on their pedagogy; the perceived impact on students of teachers' citizenship pedagogy (i.e. through conventional approaches to citizenship education or through web-based materials). These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Qualitative data analysis was used to code for the themes present in the data.

Findings

CONTENT

- Teachers focus mostly on the local dimension of citizenship education as this is seen as most relevant to students' lives and interests.
- There is an important national dimension to the teaching of citizenship and a focus on national political and social issues (e.g. parliament and political system, voting, a recent child abuse and death case in London) in line with national curriculum requirements.
- Teachers focus primarily on local and national dimensions in the early years of secondary schooling. The global dimension is introduced early on but becomes more important at Key Stage 4 (14-16 years).
- Teachers give the least emphasis to teaching about Europe and the European Union.
- The global dimension is stronger than the European dimension.

- Teachers emphasise student action and engagement in community projects and local charities, thereby reinforcing the local over national, European or global concerns.

METHODS

- Teachers aim to develop discussion, debate, and the voicing of student opinions.
- Teachers emphasise a learner-centred approach in their discourse.
- Teachers like to use a variety of methods including games, activities, videos and project work during citizenship lessons, suggesting that these make learning more engaging for students.
- Teachers want to encourage students to be independent learners who can find information for themselves. Online research is seen to be ideal for this (although keeping students on task is difficult).
- Teachers believe that citizenship lessons should be active and that students should take action rather than just learning facts.

TEACHER ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

- Teachers' understandings of citizenship education vary, but most understand it as learning how to be a 'good' citizen, i.e. learning about roles and responsibilities within society.
- Exploring pupils' identities is seen as an important element of citizenship education.
- Teachers express a degree of ambivalence about teaching European citizenship, citing student indifference and the seeming remoteness of the European project to students' lives.
- Teachers find it difficult to teach about Europe and the EU, partly because of the anti-EU attitudes prevalent among some students.
- Teachers often focus on different countries and cultures rather than on the concepts and processes of the EU.
- Teachers believe that teaching about EU institutions should focus on the basic facts and philosophy behind its creation.
- Teachers associate (European) citizenship with respecting others and understanding and engaging with other cultures. They see the European dimension as a way to encourage tolerance and respect and to tackle issues such as racism and promote social cohesion.

- Teachers associate the European project and European citizenship with common economic policies; freedom of travel within the EU; a common vision of democracy and human rights; and common policies on health care, equalities and security.
- Teachers are sceptical about the idea of teaching for national citizenship (propaganda) and the emphasis being placed on national identity by politicians.
- Citizenship is seen as a difficult subject to teach, because they feel there is a lack of consensus as to what it is and how it should be taught.
- Some teachers continue to see citizenship as a cross-curricular theme rather than as a discrete subject with specialised subject knowledge.
- Teachers strongly believe that citizenship learning should be accessible to all students.

TEACHERS' PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY/ IDENTITY

- Teachers have a strong sense of their national identity, describing themselves as English or British.
- Teachers with mixed ethnic origins or family from other European countries are more likely to have multiple identities, to feel European and to describe themselves as pro-European.
- There seems to be a correlation between teachers' personal experiences of travel within Europe and their tendency to identify as Europeans.
- Teachers think they don't know much about the European Union.
- Some teachers do not have a sense of European identity or citizenship.
- Those teachers who do identify with Europe identify strongest with their local and national contexts and with Europe after that.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS

- Students have strong local and national identities and insular mentalities.

- Teachers believe their students do not feel European or see Europe as relevant to their daily lives and some students have negative views of the EU.

- Teachers describe pupils' knowledge of Europe as very poor.

- Teachers state that pupils find the topic of the European Union boring and that learning about the EU institutions is dry and complicated.

- Half of the teachers in our sample explained that there are certain students who express xenophobic and nationalist attitudes (especially when topics such as Europe and the European Union are being taught).

- Local community projects and national issues are seen as most relevant for lower attaining students, whereas questions of global citizenship are seen to be most appropriate for higher attaining students, who are considered more suited to independent research.