The Department of Education at the University of York, in collaboration with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), is conducting a study into Creating Citizenship Communities through new approaches to learning, funded by a generous grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The project aims to identify current thinking and practice in schools, explore young people’s perceptions and experiences and, through the development of a focussed impact strategy, encourage partnerships to be established between professionals and others. The main stages of this project include a review of literature on citizenship and community engagement, secondary data analysis, a survey of schools and eight case studies.

This research brief is the second in the series that provide a summary of major findings, and focuses on what citizenship and community means to schools. It concentrates on the survey stage of this project, which was conducted by NFER, to identify current thinking and practice in relation to community cohesion, and to begin exploration of young people’s perceptions and practice as a basis for further exploration in the case-study phase. The third research brief in this series sets out further findings from the survey, focusing on teachers’ perspectives on their students’ experiences of citizenship education and community involvement.

Introduction

The vast majority of participants reported that their school’s development plan includes specific objectives or targets on citizenship education and/or working with the community. Schools commonly had specific objectives or targets related to working with the community. However, this was not the case with citizenship education. Relatively few of these participants had specific objectives or targets which linked citizenship with the community. This suggests that more development work is needed to support schools in conceptually and practically linking citizenship education and community cohesion.

Objectives and targets on citizenship and community

Characteristics of schools’ approaches to citizenship and community

Participants reported that their school’s approaches to citizenship and community were primarily characterised by:

- developing students’ sense of social responsibility;
- respecting and celebrating diversity;
- meeting the requirements set out in the national curriculum;
- developing students’ knowledge and understanding of their individual rights as citizens;
- developing a sense of social justice;
- raising participation in the democratic process.

Strategies to promote links with the local community

The vast majority of participants reported that their school had used the following strategies to promote links with the local community:

- developed work-related links with local businesses and employers;
- developed links with local community groups and organisations;
- developed links with local businesses and employers.

Objectives and targets on citizenship and community

The Department of Education at the University of York, in collaboration with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), is conducting a study into Creating Citizenship Communities through new approaches to learning, funded by a generous grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The project aims to identify current thinking and practice in schools, explore young people’s perceptions and experiences and, through the development of a focussed impact strategy, encourage partnerships to be established between professionals and others. The main stages of this project include a review of literature on citizenship and community engagement, secondary data analysis, a survey of schools and eight case studies.

This research brief is the second in the series that provide a summary of major findings, and focuses on what citizenship and community means to schools. It concentrates on the survey stage of this project, which was conducted by NFER, to identify current thinking and practice in relation to community cohesion, and to begin exploration of young people’s perceptions and practice as a basis for further exploration in the case-study phase. The third research brief in this series sets out further findings from the survey, focusing on teachers’ perspectives on their students’ experiences of citizenship education and community involvement.

About the survey sample

A total of 119 schools in England participated in the survey. The majority of participants had responsibility for the curriculum in relation to citizenship and community, and almost half had strategic responsibilities for citizenship and community, and/or responsibilities for school-wide planning.

Projects Staff

University of York
Ian Davies
Gillian Hampden Thompson
Maria Tzouroufi
Vanita Sundaram
Yvonne Mason
National Foundation for Educational Research
Pippa Lord
Jennifer Jeffes

For more information about the project please visit our website at http://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/cresj/citizenship-communities/ or email citizen@york.ac.uk

“Schools may benefit from cultivating links outside of students’ immediate communities, as well as by building upon existing community, parent and out-of-school links to extend the reach and impact of students’ interests outside of school.”
• worked with faith groups, disability groups and charities;
• celebrated the diversity of the community with projects and similar activities;
• developed links with local schools with a different student population.

Respondents least commonly reported that their school involved parents in the delivery of curriculum and after school activities, and produced community newsletters, delivered or available in local shops, libraries, places of worship or cafes.

Approaches to developing citizenship and community cohesion

The vast majority of participants reported that their school:
• fosters a climate where students are willing to discuss difficult issues;
• creates an environment where there is mutual respect and trust among students and staff;
• provides opportunities for students to elect representatives on advisory committees or working parties for the benefit of other students;
• develops the skills and knowledge students need to be effective community members.

To a lesser extent, schools provide enterprise activities; use enrichment activities outside school hours; embed activities to develop citizenship in the wider curriculum; and provide differentiated activities to meet the needs of different groups of students to develop citizenship and community cohesion. Schools more commonly provide opportunities for students to engage in community issues and activities within, rather than outside of their immediate neighbourhood. This suggests that there are fewer opportunities for engagement in community issues and activities outside of students’ own locality. Schools may benefit from cultivating links outside of students’ immediate communities, as well as by building upon existing community, parent and out-of-school links. This would extend the reach and impact of students’ interests outside of school.

Specific activities to develop students’ skills

Respondents reported that membership of groups and participation in decision-making activities; activities to develop trust between students in school; and engagement in debates on topical issues were most commonly delivered both as part of the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities.

By contrast, the following activities were reported to be used more commonly in the curriculum, rather than through extra-curricular activities:
• critical analysis of societal issues;
• understanding the idea of justice;
• understanding the idea of democracy;
• understanding the role of the media.

Volunteering strategies

Schools employ a range of strategies to encourage volunteering by young people. Most commonly, this included responding to local and national campaigns to encourage young people to volunteer. However, less than half of participants reported that their school provides opportunities for students to consolidate learning in the classroom from volunteering. There may be a need, therefore, to explore how schools can integrate students’ volunteering activities outside of school into their classroom learning.

Good practice in delivering citizenship education and/or community cohesion

Where schools use particularly innovative models or examples of good practice in delivering citizenship education and/or community cohesion, strategies include: the use of community projects delivered as part of the curriculum; integration of citizenship education and/or community cohesion into the whole curriculum; use of external speakers and visitors; involvement in projects and Community Action days; and use of community service and volunteering opportunities.

Effectiveness of strategies to develop community cohesion

Participants most commonly reported that their school is ‘effective’ or ‘highly effective’ in identifying what needs to be done to promote community cohesion and citizenship; and in contributing to community cohesion and citizenship within the community in which it is located. However, participants reported that their schools were less effective in promoting the engagement of all students in their own community. This was particularly noticeable in respect of hard to reach groups, contributing to the cohesiveness of the wider community through developing students’ understanding of the UK community, and contributing to the cohesiveness of the wider community through Europe and globally.

These findings mirror those found elsewhere in the questionnaire, which suggest that as communities become increasingly removed from students’ school location, strength of opinion and effectiveness of community cohesion strategies appear to diminish.