

Introduction

This document contains short notes on the following key background topics:-

- (1) Why community involvement is an essential strand of citizenship education.
- (2) The distinction between community service and “community service learning” (community involvement).
- (3) The three strands of citizenship education.
- (4) The purposes and characteristics of community involvement.
- (5) The school context.

(1) Community Involvement

An Essential Strand of Citizenship Education

The aim of citizenship education is to equip pupils to engage in public life through informed discussion and positive social action.

Community involvement is an essential part of citizenship education. The Crick Report on citizenship education and the teaching of democracy in schools stated that *community involvement*, alongside *political literacy* and *social and moral responsibility*, is one of the three core strands of citizenship education.

Schools are expected to promote these three strands by providing young people with opportunities to develop their citizen knowledge and understanding through developing the skills of:

- enquiry and communication
- participation and responsible action

The distinctive feature of citizenship education is that it requires learning to take place beyond as well as in the classroom. The expectation that pupils and students will acquire the insights, dispositions and skills of citizenship through contributing to the life of their school and its communities is a new and distinctive feature of citizenship education in the revised national curriculum.

Effective strategies for citizenship education through active learning in the community require a clear understanding of the purpose of community involvement and the success factors that underpin quality practice.

(2) An Important Distinction

Community Service vs. Community Service Learning

Community service has a long and honourable tradition in British education. Large numbers of young people have greatly benefited their communities, their schools, colleges and universities through voluntary activity to benefit others.

Community service learning, often simply called service learning in many parts of the world, links service with learning and learning with service. It is in significant respects different from traditional forms of community service.

A simple example makes this distinction clear:

Young people engaged in a clean up campaign in their neighbourhood will do useful service, but they may learn little or nothing from it. Students in a south coast Community College linked their litter campaign with a piece of real learning. They undertook simple research, made videos, and presented their case to their peers and to the local authority. In doing this they tackled the problem at its roots. They also added significantly to their knowledge and ability to make good things happen.

By linking learning with service and service with learning, schools, colleges and universities can devote serious energy and resources to activities that have real learning outcomes.

Active learning in the community (or service learning) is a strategy that can make a significant contribution to making Britain a learning society. It also contributes to the three strands of citizenship education and promotes school improvement, the school ethos and the relationship between schools and their communities.

(3) The Three Strands of Citizenship Education

The Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship set the three strands of citizenship education in the context of its aim and purpose.

Aim and Purpose

“The purpose of citizenship education in schools and colleges is to make secure and to increase the knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature and practices of participative democracy; also to enhance the awareness of rights and duties, and the sense of responsibilities needed for the development of pupils into active citizens; and in so doing to establish the value to individuals, schools and society of involvement in the local and wider community. ...”

The Strands

Social and moral responsibility: Children learning from the very beginning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour both in and beyond the classroom, both towards those in authority and towards each other (this is an essential pre-condition of citizenship).

Community involvement: Pupils learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of communities, including learning through community involvement and service to the community.

Political Literacy: Pupils learning about how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values.

These three strands combine with the three elements of the programmes of study – becoming informed citizens, developing skills of inquiry and communication and learning through participation and responsible action – to make the central core of citizenship education. They should always be seen in relation to one another.

If you want to find out more visit the national curriculum website at www.nc.gov.uk or look at our “National Curriculum” document which provides a summary of the programmes of study.

(4) The Purpose & Characteristics of Community Involvement

Purpose

The purpose of community involvement is to:

- **Develop** young people's awareness and understanding of diversity and the nature of communities.
- **Promote** active citizenship through the responsible participation of young people in their schools and communities.
- **Support** community learning by harnessing communities and schools as resources for each other.

Characteristics of Citizenship Schools

Schools committed to citizenship education through community involvement will recognise and value:

- **Diversity** in the school and its related communities.
- **Pupils as partners** in teaching and learning about citizenship.
- **Pupils' capacity to reflect** on the value of their activities and what they have learnt from them.

5. The School Context

School ethos: Effective citizenship education requires a school ethos which promotes mutual respect and equality of opportunity and encourages the active participation of pupils in all aspects of school life. There is evidence to suggest that such an ethos significantly contributes to school improvement.

School aims: The aims of the school will take account of national priorities and the needs of pupils and the community. The national curriculum sets out the learning outcomes for each of the three strands of effective citizenship (social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy.) The aims give direction to the work of the school and expression to what the school values. Broad statements covering such aspects of school life as social behaviour, community links and types of learning will indicate the level of support there is for active learning and citizenship education.

The school's organisation for managing the implementation will outline senior teacher responsibilities, identify curriculum planning to be undertaken, including evaluation, and will identify teachers' in-service training needs.

The community context: Schools vary in the significance of the local community to the life of a school. A school's understanding of where their pupils live in terms of social and economic activity will be increasingly important if active learning in the community is to be a significant part of the curriculum.

Schools working in partnership with local business, voluntary groups, and the local authority, will open up opportunities which enhance not only active learning in the community but also employability and lifelong learning. Schools can contribute to raising the quality of life in communities.

Parents are key partners with schools in raising standards and levels of achievement. In addition to supporting basic skills development and homework they can work with young people in identifying active learning projects in the community. They can act as advisors or mentors for young people working in the community.