



***Citizens All? Children's Rights and Citizenship Education***

**- a report published by UNICEF UK**

**Speech by David Kerr (NFER) at the launch on 12.04.05**

Thank you for inviting me to the publication of this survey.

I would like to commend the **foresight of UNICEF** in initiating this monitoring survey of citizenship education not just in England but throughout the UK back in 1999.

I have been pleased to have been associated with the monitoring project over the past few years.

The **focus on promoting the active participation** of children and young people in their education is also spot on – as this is at the heart of effective citizenship education.

I know that **UNICEF** and **Aileen McKenzie** in particular have put a great deal of time and effort into this monitoring project and note that this is the **6<sup>th</sup> report** in the series. They are to be commended for everything that they have done.

I hope they feel proud about this final report which is both timely and contains some important findings. I want to just pick up on a few of these.

It is timely because:

1. It chimes with the current initiatives of **international and European agencies** in the area of citizenship and human rights education.

In particular, the Council of Europe has designated 2005 as the **European Year of Citizenship through Education (EYCE)** with the slogan 'Learning and Living Democracy'. The focus is on building capacity in education for democratic citizenship within and across countries.

The Year is a UK wide initiative (in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and a showcase conference, supported by all countries, on showcasing the best of UK practice for a European audience will take place in Manchester in mid-May, managed by the British Council

2. The findings add to the **evidence base** for citizenship education in the UK. This is important because citizenship education is still relatively new and therefore the evidence base, though growing, remains sparse

3. The findings **resonate** with what the current evidence base about citizenship education is telling us.
- As the introduction to the report notes ***‘what seemed impossible in 1999 has indeed proved possible – a quiet revolution in the nation’s approach to child rights is taking place’***. I think the report underlines the ‘quiet revolution’ that is taking place in the growth and progress of citizenship education within and across the UK since 1999.
  - It also highlights the **diversity of the UK** situation in that though all countries support the general aims and principles of citizenship education – the way they approach the area varies considerably dependent on history, culture, tradition and context.
  - The report also highlights the **considerable work** that still needs to be done in supporting schools, teachers, young people and communities to develop effective citizenship education policy and practice. As it notes we are seeing the ***‘Tip of the iceberg – there is still much to be learnt and done’***.
  - Finally, the findings **chime** with some of those in the latest report from the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study - a nine year Study which finishes in 2009 and is following a cohort of over 18,000 young people, the first to have statutory citizenship education in schools, from age 11 to 18 to see what impact citizenship has on their citizenship dimensions – knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and behaviours.
  - The latest report is entitled ***‘Listening to Young People – Citizenship Education in England’*** – it focuses on the experiences and views of 6,400 Year 8, 10 and 12 students and provides a fascinating snapshot of citizenship education in schools and citizenship in communities. It highlights:
    - Teachers (69%) and school leaders (64%) remain positive about the impact that citizenship education will have on students’ participation and engagement in schools and in the community *(though perhaps we still need evidence to support the link between student participation and attainment in schools)*.
    - Young people define citizenship as being more about rights and responsibilities, identity and belonging than about formal political processes (voting, government etc).
    - Schools and teachers report the need for more training, particularly in terms of active teaching and learning approaches and assessment.
    - Traditional teaching and learning methods are predominant in the classroom (as reported by students and teachers). There are only moderate opportunities for active participation.

- Schools report themselves 'moderately democratic' in terms of opportunities for students to participate (school leaders are more positive than teachers/ teachers are more positive than young people).
- In terms of political interest 67% of young people said they were not very interested in politics, though over one-third (36%) felt that politics has an impact on everything that they do.
- Students' development of citizenship dimensions is neither even nor consistent.
- Students' sense of belonging and attachment to differing communities may **change over time**. Their sense of belonging to the school community may increase with age (compared with other communities). This raises the potential for schools and colleges to have a significant impact on the development of students' citizenship dimensions by providing them with 'real and meaningful' citizenship and participation experiences.

I hope that this final report is disseminated widely across the UK

and that UNICEF, through their follow-up plans continue to engage with the evidence base for citizenship education and also contribute to it.

We need to see more than the *'tip of the iceberg'* for citizenship education.

Thank you.