

# **INTERACT**

## **WP 12 Teachers as citizens**

Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education, University of Leeds  
Institute of Education, University of London

The aim of WP12 is the analysis of the data produced by the interviews with teachers of citizenship education. We explore teachers' views of how their citizenship identity affects and informs their professional identity and practice.

We interviewed 31 teachers using a semi-structured interview schedule as reported in WP10 and WP 11.

Some specific questions were designed to elicit a picture of the interviewees' profiles as citizens and to examine the extent to which this is reflected in the way that they perform their professional role as teachers. The teachers were invited to provide information about their possible engagement in political activities and their membership of or support for NGOs, political parties or other organisations. They were also asked to reflect on the extent to which and the ways in which their engagement with such organisations or activities informs their teaching. They had the opportunity to reflect on the relevance of their role as citizens to their professional environment. They were finally asked to evaluate the impact of teaching and schooling on societal change and the potential empowerment of students to engage in processes that lead to changes in society. This analysis of teachers as citizens is based not only on answers to specific questions, but on the interview as a whole.

All the teachers in the sample agree that citizenship education may empower students to participate actively in political and social processes. Some interviewees have themselves been involved in such processes and activities (for example some are members of NGOs; others have volunteered and participated in projects in developing countries).

Many interviewees pointed out that they consider it very important for students to understand the different forms of inequality in the local and wider communities. They also wish to support students in developing the sensitivity, skills and knowledge to engage in efforts to make these communities more inclusive and just. In this respect interviewees' personal views are in alignment with the aims and content of citizenship education in England. This may well have influenced their decisions to become involved in citizenship education.

They see roles as citizens and their professional roles are compatible. There are no obvious contradictions between their broad professional aims and their declared commitment to a just and inclusive multicultural society.

However, a further analysis of the interviewees' views reveals some underlying tensions between teachers' professional and wider political goals. For example, some interviewees point out that they are trying to protect students from their own biases. They wish to avoid potential indoctrination. They assume that a neutral or apolitical stance is a necessary pre-condition in order for students to construct their own views.

These teachers tend to differentiate between the two roles (as citizens and as teachers). The implication appears to be a desire to separate the 'private' from the 'professional'.

There are two significant variations in the above picture: The first is related to the length of their professional service: most experienced teachers seem to be concerned about the issue of indoctrination and keen to make the distinction between 'private' and 'professional'. We think that there are two possible explanations for this. It could be related to the older teachers' professional experience of concerns about political education expressed in England in 1970s and early 1980s. This difference in the attitudes according to the length of service may also indicate a changing professional discourse.

We found that the teachers in one school differed in their perceptions from colleagues in all the other institutions. This school was one which had invested considerable additional resources in Citizenship Education. Teachers in this school do not see their professional role and their role as citizens as two separate concerns. Their professional attitudes were seen as part of their wider roles as citizens within a democratic nation-state. The confidence with which the teachers from this one school assert consistency between professional and citizenship roles seems to stem from three factors: they have undergone advanced training or postgraduate studies in the field; additional resources invested in citizenship education; and the school's inclusive ethos (Hudson, 2005).

To conclude, where genuine alignment between personal and professional roles occurs, it also reflects high quality training opportunities, significant investment in curriculum and whole school development with the explicit goal of fostering citizenship learning in an inclusive school environment.

### Reference

Hudson, A. (2005) Citizenship Education and students' identities: a school-based action research project, in A. Osler (Ed) *Teachers, Human Rights and Diversity: educating citizens in multicultural societies*. (Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham): 115-132.