



Assessing citizenship education purposes, possibilities and practices

David Kerr and Avril Keating

NFER researchers have recently directed and completed a groundbreaking project on pupil assessment in citizenship education in collaboration with CIDREE, an international educational consortium.

Responding to a recognised gap in knowledge about purpose and current practices in this area, NFER worked with colleagues in eight European countries –

England, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – to answer three core questions.

- Can you assess pupils in citizenship education?
- If yes, how can you do it effectively?
- What are the challenges in developing pupil assessment in citizenship education?

Researchers collected information comparing current policies, purposes and practices in the eight countries. The final report maps the emerging themes in assessing citizenship learning among pupils of all ages, identifies the main challenges and highlights the possibilities for taking this area forward.

Can you assess pupils in citizenship education?

The overwhelming answer to this question was yes. The majority of participating countries are undertaking assessment of citizenship learning at some point between age five and 18 for their pupils, and policy plans suggest that the assessment of pupils' learning in the subject will become more prevalent.

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How can you assess pupils effectively?

The policies, approaches and practices across the eight countries revealed that it is possible to assess learning in citizenship education effectively if there is a clear strategy for such learning and assessment. However, there is no one way of assessing pupils' learning in citizenship education; rather, there is a range of ways, each of which is equally valid.

It is easier to assess what pupils have learnt in citizenship where learning is delivered through discrete curriculum time and much more difficult to assess it where citizenship is delivered through cross-curricular approaches.

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What are the issues and challenges in developing pupil assessment in citizenship education?

The project underlined that pupil assessment in citizenship education is very much under development, with policies, approaches and practices progressing rapidly across European countries. It also highlighted the considerable challenges that remain if more effective assessment is to be achieved. These challenges relate to six aspects:

- 1 rationale and definition
- 2 scope and scale
- 3 consistency and progression
- 4 training and development
- 5 evaluation and review
- 6 sharing and dissemination.

Taken together these provide an essential 'checklist' when considering how to

progress the effective assessment of pupil learning in citizenship, whether in formulating teaching practice in individual classrooms or forming assessment policy in local, national and supra-national agencies.

Final comment

'The project reinforced the power of collaboration between European partners. It showed how quickly things are changing, with the original question "Can you assess pupils in citizenship education?" being replaced by a much greater focus on, "how can you effectively assess?"' said David Kerr, who directed the project.

Looking to the future, the research highlights how current developments in pupil assessment more generally, particularly through Assessment for Learning, are creating exciting opportunities to assess not only the more traditional cognitive dimension (knowledge and understanding) of citizenship but also the active dimension (skills and behaviours) and affective dimension (values and attitudes). These moves herald the possibility that

assessment in citizenship education can be

comparable in its rigour and standards to that in other curriculum subjects and areas.

Further information

Kerr, D. Keating, A. and Ireland, E. (2009). *Pupil Assessment in Citizenship Education: Purposes, Practices and Possibilities. Report of a CIDREE Collaborative Project.* Slough: NFER/CIDREE.

www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/PCE01/

CIDREE is the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe. It is a network of educational organisations involved in curriculum development and/or educational research, set up in 1990 to establish closer working relationships at a European level. CIDREE is run by the members, for the members, and collaboration largely takes the form of reciprocal study visits and the development of joint projects and publications.

