



**RESEARCH PAPER**

# **Effective Teaching and Learning through Active Citizenship Project**

**Executive Summary**

**CSV Education**

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Our current activities include volunteering and training projects centred on the environment, in schools, with older people, with troubled young people and with those disadvantaged by poverty or crime. We never turn a volunteer away and we run programmes which bring people into volunteering who traditionally were seen as its receivers, such as young people with special educational needs, prisoners,

people with disabilities and people who are mental health service users.

CSV Education, a division of CSV, has over 30 years' experience of working in partnership with universities, colleges, schools, local authorities and voluntary and community organisations. In 2008/09 we supported 10,000 young people to take action in their communities and during the same period we engaged 2,500 adult volunteers and provided training to 3,000 individuals.

We provide resources for learning and reflection as well as training in specialist skills including tutoring, mentoring, e-mentoring and leadership. Our current priorities include: developing mentoring programmes for disadvantaged young people; family learning and healthy recreation; recognising and celebrating learning in young people's volunteering; providing training and resources for young volunteers.

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## 1. Introduction

This summary aims to provide an outline of the CSV/CfBT Effective Teaching and Learning through Active Citizenship Project. What follows sets out in brief a context and rationale for the research, gives an account

of the project, provides key findings and presents some recommendations for a range of audiences including policy makers, schools and practitioners.

## 2. Context and rationale

The research project grew out of two concerns held by the Community Service Volunteers (CSV) education team in relation to citizenship teaching. The first was that secondary school citizenship education is too didactic and does not employ enough of the sorts of pedagogies that encourage pupils to develop the skills, values and attitudes required in real-life situations. This concern was based on emerging research evidence (the report cites Kerr *et al.*, 2002, 2003 and 2004 and Ofsted, 2002 and 2003) and the direct experience of CSV staff. The second concern was that due to key stage organisation, continuity of experience between Years 9 and 10 is difficult for schools to provide and the progression in

learning within citizenship education is thereby not being maximised.

The CSV team wanted to see citizenship education within secondary schools enriched to provide both more opportunities for practical learning experiences for pupils and active learning in the community. Their wish was that this learning should also be substantially owned and driven by the students. The small-scale and exploratory research project aimed to provide the opportunity for such a learning approach and evaluate the impact of this on those involved. The project was funded by CfBT and supported by CSV staff.

## 3. About the project

This research project sought to:

- enrich citizenship teaching through the introduction of a more student-led pedagogy; in this case the development of an active learning project in a number of Year 9 citizenship classes
- investigate the effect of this active learning project on the participating pupils and their teachers
- investigate if/how any effects from the active learning project implemented in Year 9 would continue to impact on the same pupils in Year 10
- evaluate whether the use of this active learning pedagogy would encourage

young people to develop the skills needed to become involved in their communities

- provide some case study evidence that could be of use to other schools, pupils, teachers and policy makers who would be interested in doing something similar in their own context or setting.

Initially, 12 schools were selected to take part. These were not intended to be representative but were chosen because they had displayed an interest in active citizenship and pupil participation. Of these, seven successfully ran active learning projects and provided the necessary data to be included in the final analysis. A further three schools conducted active learning projects and submitted enough data to be included partially, and the final two

did not appear to complete active learning projects or submit data despite having showed an initial interest in taking part. The reasons for the range of engagement and participation by schools was due most often to differing levels of staff capacity, staff turnover, and school commitment.

The active learning projects were conducted in groups within each school. The groups ranged in size from 20 to 29 pupils. Most schools were able to devote one hour per week for a period of eight weeks to the project, usually within PSHE, life skills or citizenship lessons. The school groups were supported by a CSV trainer who worked with the teacher, providing materials, ideas and support prior to and during the project. The nature and level of involvement of the CSV trainers varied from school to school.

Each school's active learning project was unique, and varied greatly. Below are some extracts describing the types of activities undertaken within the school and local community:

- A small group of students researched development and drainage issues for the locality and presented their findings to local borough council members. One girl wrote a letter that was published in a local newspaper.
- One school chose 'Fair Trade' as their theme and developed a drama for primary schools, led school assemblies, conducted surveys of local food stores, organised and staffed a Fair Trade stall within the school, prepared a wall display and produced a leaflet for distribution in the school and wider community.

In order to meet the aims of the study the following methods were used to collect data:

- Three pupil questionnaires were administered:
  - The first questionnaire asked questions relating to pupil self-esteem, attitudes towards school and schoolwork, sense of ownership and agency within lessons/school and their attitudes towards expressing their voice and opportunities for

doing so. This questionnaire was administered before the active learning project had begun and 240 were returned.

- The second questionnaire focused on asking pupils about their experience of the active citizenship project and the impact of their involvement. This questionnaire was administered at the end of Year 9, following the active learning project. A total of 164 were returned.
- The third questionnaire covered similar ground to that of the first questionnaire. In addition it also asked questions about any active citizenship work they were doing in Year 10 and their feelings towards this. This questionnaire was administered in Year 10. A total of 164 were returned.
- A questionnaire was administered to seven teachers at the end of the active learning project. The teachers were asked about their attitudes towards themselves as teachers and their professional ability, their relationships with colleagues, school leaders and students, and the impacts they felt the project had made in these areas.
- CSV trainer reports and pupils' logs were collected. These were to provide commentary on the CSV trainers' input in schools, interviews with teachers and pupils and pupils' thoughts on the work they were doing.
- Documentary sources were collected and scrutinised. These included Ofsted reports, school and citizenship subject development reviews and plans, and school prospectuses.
- Interviews with the CSV trainers were conducted about their involvement with the school groups and teachers.

## 4. Key findings

“...the findings showed that a notable proportion of pupils reported positive changes in key areas as a result of their participation in the project.”

This section aims to highlight some of the most important findings from the study.

### What difference, if any, did participation in the active learning project make to pupils?

Overall, the data showed that for the majority of pupils there had been no change as a result of their participation in the project. It was also hard to disentangle whether the changes that did emerge were due to the pedagogy used or the content of the citizenship lessons. However, despite these qualifications, the findings showed that a notable proportion of pupils reported positive changes in key areas as a result of their participation in the project:

- Approximately 40% of pupils said that their willingness to take part in class discussions had improved as a result of their participation in the project.
- A third of the boys and half the girls said that there had been an improvement in their ability to communicate with others as a result of the project.
- A quarter of pupils said that their feelings about themselves had ‘got better’ or ‘much better’ as a result of the project.
- Around 40% of pupils reported an improved relationship with their citizenship teacher as a result of their participation in the project.
- Just under a third of pupils said that there had been an improvement in their work in other classes as a result of their participation in the project.
- Approximately a quarter of pupils said that their feelings about voting in elections had ‘got better’ or ‘got much better’ as a result of their participation in the project.

The first and final pupil questionnaires asked a set of questions to allow comparison over time. Some of these related to citizenship issues such as pupils’ views on the value of voluntary work whilst others focused on issues such as self-esteem and relationships within

the school. Again, there were some interesting changes reported:

- More pupils saw the value of voluntary work following their participation in the project, particularly in the case of the boys.
- Following the project, the data showed that more pupils thought young people were able to improve their communities.
- There was a slight decline in the number of pupils who said they intended to vote in elections when they were old enough.

### What happened when pupils moved up to Year 10?

The final pupil questionnaire also revealed interesting findings about the continuation of an active learning approach in Year 10.

- Only half of the schools that took part fully had been able to build upon the active learning project work done in Year 9 and were continuing to employ the same approach in Year 10.
- Pupils in those schools where active learning work was ongoing in Year 10 continued to be largely enthusiastic about their involvement in such work.
- Most pupils in those schools where active learning was no longer taking place reported having positive memories of the active learning projects in Year 9. However, despite these positive feelings, the majority were indifferent to the fact they were no longer involved in work like this.
- Despite not all schools continuing with an active learning approach in Year 10, some pupils in all schools indicated that they were still engaged in active citizenship work in school and/or outside school in Year 10.
- In those schools continuing with an active learning approach in citizenship teaching, more girls said they were still engaged in active citizenship work in or outside

school than girls in schools not continuing this work in Year 10. Interestingly, the reverse was true for boys, with more boys in schools continuing with an active learning approach saying they were not engaged in any active citizenship work than boys in the other schools.

### Teachers and the active learning projects

- All teachers were very positive about their involvement in the project. The Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and less experienced teachers were more consistently positive in their questionnaire responses throughout.
- CSV trainers reported that relevant previous experience of teachers made a difference to the success of the active learning project. Of the seven schools that took part fully, six projects were led by experienced teachers and two were

led by NQTs with specialist citizenship training.

- Teachers reported that the project had been of importance and value and they were proud of their involvement. As a result of their participation they felt positively regarded by school leaders and thought they were better teachers.
- Teachers thought they understood their students better and believed in the students more after the project had taken place.
- All teachers reported an improvement in their students' attitude towards their community.
- Teachers were positive about the support they received from the CSV trainers; appreciating the classroom input, materials offered and the opportunity for reflection and discussion.

## 5. Recommendations

“...the approach was valuable as a method with potential for enriching teaching and learning within secondary citizenship education.”

- The use of a more active learning pedagogy in citizenship teaching in Years 9 and 10 is viable. Although there were difficulties in implementing the approach in some of the schools that took part, it was realised in most. Policy makers, schools, teachers and supporting organisations/individuals that wish to implement something similar should bear in mind issues such as staff capacity, school commitment and leadership support to ensure success.
- Questions regarding the timetabling and priority for citizenship education need to be considered carefully by schools and policy makers. In order to encourage success, time within the curriculum needs to be made to carry out active learning projects like the ones described here. In the experience of these schools, this appeared to be easier to achieve in Year 9 than in Year 10. It poses the question as to whether there can and should be room in the curriculum in Year 10 for

citizenship education and active learning approaches.

- The findings of this small-scale evaluation suggest the approach was valuable as a method with potential for enriching teaching and learning within secondary citizenship education. Further research would be needed to support and enrich the findings offered here. Areas for further investigation could include: investigating whether any impacts are linked to the content of citizenship teaching and/or the active learning approach; looking at gender differences; and/or investigating the longer-term impacts of active learning approaches in citizenship teaching and learning on young people.
- In this study the involvement of outside experts helped support the implementation of the active learning approach. Schools and teachers wishing to try something similar should consider involving non-teaching adults and relevant organisations or NGOs such as CSV.

## 6. Final comment

This project highlighted important issues in citizenship teaching. The active learning approach proffered and evaluated by research provided some evidence to suggest that it can positively impact on teaching and learning in citizenship education in Years 9 and 10. Such findings must be qualified by the small-scale nature of the project and the difficulty associated with linking the reported impacts with the active learning approach

alone. However, they should encourage further research to fully evaluate the use of an active learning pedagogy in citizenship teaching and learning. The report's findings also offer some useful considerations for policy makers, school leaders, teachers, supporting individuals, and pupils, interested in implementing or supporting active learning projects within their own setting or context.

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