'I felt really inspired by it, it was really interesting to interact with the pupils': active citizenship in the British undergraduate social science curriculum

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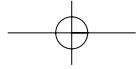Shirley Koster***, Wayne Clark*****

Abstract

A formal citizenship curriculum has recently been introduced into schools in England following the publication of the Crick Report in 1998. This initiative has received considerable academic and political attention as its implementation is researched and evaluated. However, citizenship education is not restricted to schools and in recent years there have been a number of publicly funded initiatives to develop citizenship education in UK universities, although the research base on these initiatives is thus far extremely limited. This paper contributes to the literature in this area with reference to evaluation research undertaken in relation to one module, 'Citizenship and Identi

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ty', delivered to first year social science undergraduates at 'Rivershire University' in South East England.

Keywords: *active citizenship, schools, undergraduates, sociology, psychology.*

Introduction

This paper explores the research findings from a project on active citizenship and citizenship learning in higher education in the UK, more precisely the South East of England. It provides an evaluation and discussion of social science undergraduates' experiences of studying citizenship in one particular first year module, 'Citizenship and Identity'. The paper addresses some of the possibilities, and limitations, of embedding a meaningful experience of citizenship within the higher education curriculum.

There is an emerging national and European policy agenda focused on active citizenship and citizenship education. There are two key contexts for this. The first concerns the construction of a European political community and the attempt to constitute a meaningful European identity. Secondly, there is a crisis over social and political integration at the national level indicated by low levels of trust for political elites, 'crises' over immigration and cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as the perceived negative effects of the individualisation of everyday life (Giddens 1991). Active citizenship and citizenship education in such an environment could mean nothing more than the extension of mechanisms of state control and market discipline. Historically, citizenship education at the national level has been concerned with inculcating children with dominant ideologies and cultures. Meanwhile, the image of the active European citizen appears to be that of the liberal, self-governing individual with the skills to negotiate the highly competitive global 'knowledge' economy (Wright 2004). Educators are in this sense faced with the dilemma of a policy agenda open to citizenship education but contexts which may constrain and direct the form this can take. Despite recent moves to standardise higher education curricula, it is possible to argue that this remains a space where academics still negotiate and control key aspects of the construction and dissemination of knowledge. The starting point of this paper is that of citizenship
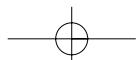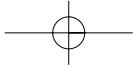
as a contested and open concept that can be meaningfully translated into the learning experiences of higher education students.
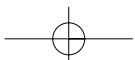
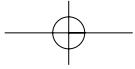## From schools to universities: citizenship education in the UK

Citizenship education has undergone a rapid expansion in the UK during the last 10 years. Attention has been paid to the introduction of citizenship education within the school curriculum in England following the publication of the Crick Report (QCA, 1998). The Report defined citizenship in terms of social responsibility, community involvement and political literacy and set out what a pupil is expected to have learnt about citizenship at key stages in their school career. The approach to citizenship learning in the Crick Report is developmental and viewed as progressing from primary school to post-compulsory education age (16+), although citizenship has only been made compulsory within the secondary school (age 11-16) curriculum. Alongside this is an emphasis on the idea of active citizenship, as the Report makes clear:

'It is vital that pupils are provided with structured opportunities to explore actively aspects, issues and events through school and community involvement, case studies and critical discussions that are challenging and relevant to their lives.' (ibid: 26).

In recent years there have been a number of publicly funded initiatives to develop and support citizenship education in UK universities[1]. The Dearing Report into higher education highlighted the importance of work in community and voluntary organisations for undergraduate students (NCIHE, 1997). Many higher education institutions in the UK now offer their students opportunities to become involved in various kinds of community and voluntary work through initiatives such as mentoring. In general, citizenship education can be seen to be a core component of the UK lifelong learning agenda.

Citizenship education is particularly fertile ground for social scientists and a growing academic literature has critically examined the Crick Report and its implementation. This policy development raises fundamental ques-
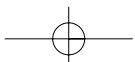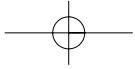
tions about how we learn and experience citizenship. For critics, the Crick proposals contained flawed assumptions about contemporary citizenship including essentialist ideas of national identity that cannot address issues of diversity and difference, a failure to address social injustice and an implicit moral authoritarianism (see inter alia Osler and Starkey 2000; Cunningham and Lavalette 2004; Faulks 2006). Alongside some of the more practical problems associated with delivery (Oulton et al., 2004; OFSTED[2] 2005), the existing literature would suggest that there is a question mark over whether meaningful citizenship learning can take place in the English school system. The issues raised by citizenship education concern how citizenship is conceptualised, curriculum content and modes of delivery. All of these issues are relevant to higher education but in comparison to the statutory sector the exploration of citizenship in UK Universities remains limited and, in particular, there is very little detailed curriculum research. We explore these issues with reference to evaluation research carried out on a curriculum project involving the development of an innovative 'Citizenship and Identity' module at Rivershire University in South East England[3].

Citizenship and Identity module

The 'Citizenship and Identity' (CI) module was designed to interest and engage students in the key debates relating to citizenship at level 1 of the undergraduate programme. Students taking this module came from a wide range of degrees within the social sciences. The module sought to enable students to apply citizenship issues and debates to real life contexts and to reflect upon the way in which they and others learn citizenship. The module enabled students to experience citizenship in action and to undertake practical work as a compliment to the theoretical component.

The CI module followed a structured lecture and seminar format together with active learning opportunities that included working with schools. The module explored a range of citizenship topics and issues such as national identity, European integration, human rights and social exclusion. A key component of the module was that the students were expected to actively contribute to citizenship in schools. To achieve this, students would attend and facilitate at one of four school council conferences, but they could attend more if they so wished. A total of ten Rivershire schools be-

came involved. Eight of these were 'upper' schools, several with high pro-
portions of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and two were 'gram-
mar' schools. Two of the upper schools attended all four conferences,
while other schools attended less often. Between two and seven represent-
atives from each school council attended the conferences. During the first
conference, these school councillors gave the name 'River Schools Voice'
(RSV) to their meetings and set out a series of aims including meeting reg-
ularly to share ideas and explore ways to keep in contact; planning and in-
itiating joint projects and inter-school activities; and also to challenge the
existing divisions between schools and stereotyping of pupils.

Rivershire University staff facilitated the RSV conferences alongside un-
dergraduates. The first conference was introduced and facilitated by third
level students helped by level one CI students, whereas the subsequent
three conferences involved only the latter. The conferences started with a
verbal report from each school council. Following the reports the format
varied, but generally the councillors worked on different activities and proj-
ect planning in mixed school groups. The undergraduates worked with
groups of councillors, joined in discussions, acted as 'scribes' and gener-
ally helped facilitate. A 'River Schools Voice' website was set up with the
support of the Rivershire University web design team and it included cop-
ies of the conference reports alongside general information about RSV.

Widening access: working with schools

It is important to provide a sociological context to the Rivershire area
of South East England in which the project took place. This area covers
one of the most affluent parts of the U.K. characterized by upmarket com-
muter villages, high levels of home and car ownership, and a strong mid-
dle-class presence. Despite this general affluence, there are also pockets
of deprivation found in certain urban and rural neighbourhoods including
those in which several of the schools involved in the project are located
(Watt and Stenson, 1998). The 'Citizenship and Identity' module was seen
as contributing to the widening access agenda, a policy promoted along
partnership lines between Rivershire University and local schools[4].

The Rivershire local education authority in which the schools are situat-
ed operates a selective system in which children are assessed at age 11.
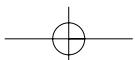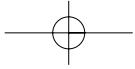
Those who obtain high marks in the 11-plus examination gain entry to the prestigious 'grammar' schools that routinely feature near the top of the national league tables. In contrast, those children who 'fail' attend 'upper' schools which are seen as less desirable by many local parents and have lower levels of academic achievement as measured by the league tables. The Rivershire local education authority and schools do not officially use the terms 'pass' and 'fail', but these terms are common currency amongst parents and children in the area. The urban areas which 'feed' several of the upper schools have a multi-ethnic population made up of Pakistani and black minority ethnic groups plus lower-income white families. Recent OF-STED reports have highlighted the social disadvantages faced by pupils at some upper schools as indicated by above national average levels of free school meals. In contrast, pupils at the grammar schools are predominantly white and middle class. Previous research by one of the authors has highlighted the social tensions that exist between pupils from the grammar schools and those from the upper schools (Watt and Stenson, 1998).

The research

The research consisted of several strands involving both Rivershire University and the various schools involved in the project. One hundred and fifteen Rivershire undergraduates completed a citizenship questionnaire within the first three weeks of beginning their degrees. This questionnaire covered their attitudes towards citizenship, citizenship-related activities, plus their experiences of citizenship education prior to entering Riverside University. Some of the results from this questionnaire have been reported elsewhere (Watt et al., 2006). The questionnaire was revised and then distributed at the end of the academic year to those first year students who had completed the Citizenship and Identity module. This revised questionnaire asked about the module plus a range of issues related to citizenship. A total of 33 students completed the questionnaire out of 53 who were enrolled on the CI module giving a response rate of 62%. Seventy six per cent of respondents were single honours Psychology students, 15% were single honours Sociology students and 9% were Psychology with Sociology. Most of the respondents (88%) were female, 41% were non-white, 39% were aged over 24 and 21% were aged between 40
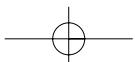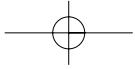
and 49. Some of the results from this end-of-module questionnaire can be compared with the findings from the start-of-module questionnaire.

In addition to the questionnaire, ten CI students were interviewed at the end of the module, some in groups, some individually and some both individually and in groups. The respondents were volunteers, all of them were female, seven were mature students (over 21), three were Asian, one was black, one mixed-race and five were white. Six respondents were enrolled on the single honours Psychology degree, three were enrolled on Psychology with Sociology and one was enrolled on single honours Sociology.

Both the Rivershire tutors who taught the CI module were interviewed[5]. The School Liaison Co-ordinator was also interviewed about her role in helping to set up the conferences. Finally, two members of the research team acted as observers at three of the RSV conferences, as did one of the teaching team who subsequently wrote up reports for the Rivershire University website based on the conferences[6].

In relation to the schools involved in the module, 20 pupils from five schools who attended the last RSV conference completed a short questionnaire about the conferences. In addition, members of the research team subsequently contacted the two schools who attended all four of the conferences. Interviews were undertaken with the two senior teachers who were responsible for the school council, and at one of the schools a group interview was conducted with three members of the school council who also attended the RSV conferences at Rivershire University.

In the rest of this paper, we draw upon various aspects of the research findings, beginning with what the Rivershire students found interesting about the CI module.

Interest and engagement in citizenship education

Interest and engagement in citizenship education was high amongst the CI students. When asked how interesting they found learning about citizenship in the module, 42% of the students described it as very interesting, 46% as quite interesting, and only 12% (4 students) found it not interesting. All of the latter were single honours Psychology undergraduates, a point we develop further below. In the first questionnaire, we had asked the same question to first year students who had studied citizenship
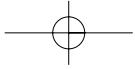
either at school or further education college (Watt et al., 2006). Of the 25 students who fell into this category, 60% (15) found it 'quite interesting' and only two students found it 'very interesting', whilst four found it 'not interesting' and four didn't know. The higher education module therefore generated a greater degree of positive responses compared to students' experiences of citizenship education at school or college.

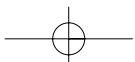**Table 1.** Level of interest in Citizenship and Identity module topics (row %).

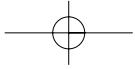|	Very interesting	Quite interesting	Not interesting	Don't know
British citizenship and identity	41	50	6	3
European citizenship and identity	39	48	10	3
Global citizenship and identity	52	39	10	0
Human rights	75	25	0	0
Moral development	61	32	7	0
Citizenship and education	47	50	3	0
Environmental citizenship	38	53	9	0
E-citizenship	19	36	39	6
Active citizenship	59	38	0	3
Democracy	47	37	17	0
Citizenship and gender	53	38	9	0
Citizenship and disability	56	34	9	0
Citizenship and social class	63	31	6	0

Total N = 33 (note: not all the respondents answered each question)

The students were asked to describe how interesting they found the different topics covered in the module and the results are presented in Table 1 below. The most popular topic was human rights with 75% saying this was very interesting. This was also highlighted in the open-ended questions, for example:

Human Rights – because I feel strongly about the disadvantages and unfairness that some individuals experience. Also because it's universal (sometimes!) and effects [sic] every human being.

Other popular topics included citizenship and social class, moral development and active citizenship (see Table 1). Moral development was

highlighted in the open-ended questions notably because it was linked to psychology, their main degree subject, a point we develop below. The least popular topic by far was E-citizenship since only 19% found this very interesting whilst 39% described it as not interesting, as seen in this quote from the interviews: 'I didn't like e-citizenship, I found it quite boring' (Judith – Psychology with Sociology, mature, mixed-race student).

Democracy was the next least popular topic given that 17% found it not interesting, although 47% found it very interesting (Table 1). Another less popular topic was European citizenship and identity, which was disliked both because it was 'very political' and least concerned with psychological issues. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, environmental citizenship did not generate more interest given that only 38% described this as very interesting. Amongst the interviewees, only one student mentioned this topic as something she particularly enjoyed: 'I was interested in the environmental, because that's something that I'm just very interested in anyway, so I was looking forward to that' (Rachel – Psychology with Sociology, mature, white student).

Several students who were interviewed commented on the fact that they enjoyed the seminars and the discussions and debates that took place:

The seminars sometimes they were quite heated because people were very set in their ways and hadn't thought about other people's opinions or different cultures or things like that, so there was a lot of heat sort of around it which was quite, I liked that kind of thing, it's quite a challenge, so in that respect it was pretty good. (Christine – Psychology, mature, white student).

Learning through participation

The questionnaires and interviews indicated that the majority of students regarded attendance at the school conference as a very positive aspect of the module. With one exception, the students who were interviewed found the RSV conference to be a rewarding activity:

''I was a little bit nervous to begin with, but I was also excited at the same time because I wanted to see what these young people had to
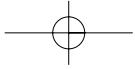
say. I found the whole day very, very interesting, listening to their ideas. For people so young they had so much to offer and they actually made me feel slightly ashamed''. (Judith – Psychology with Sociology, mature, mixed race student).

''It was good, I loved the day, it excited me and enthused me to get involved more and I realized how three hours of your time can make such a big difference to these kids, well to any group really, I mean all we did was facilitate, and I love to be part of the process for change. I think I'm going to do more in the future''. (Patricia – Psychology, mature, black student)
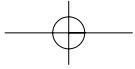
Students also talked about the way in which interacting with the school pupils was a source of inspiration:

''I went along to 90% of them [school council conferences] because I found them exhilarating and uplifting. I felt really inspired by it, it was really interesting to interact with the pupils. I felt, well they actually said to us as students that it was really 'cool' (their words) for us to be there as well, not just the lecturers and teachers who are obviously always there. Because they felt that they could relate to us more''. (Sarah – Psychology, mature, white student)

The module brought about significant changes in student learning notably as a result of participating in the experiential aspects of the module linked to engagement with schools. Firstly, there was evidence that the practical elements of the module had reinforced the more traditional academic learning. For example, attendance at the school conferences had been a very positive learning experience by providing an exemplar of 'citizenship-in-action', as described by one student:

It certainly helped me understand what it [citizenship] was about. I think that for me personally when there is a practical example matching the academic example its something that really helps, I think 'OK I get it now'. And not only having the interaction with the school conference pupils, they would tell us what they were doing and they were so much more in tune with what citizenship is all about, that it helped, definitely, without a doubt. (Sarah – Psychology, mature, white student).
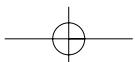
Secondly, several mature students talked about the way in which the pupils at the school conferences had helped them, particularly by giving them confidence in relation to their own presentations.

''I had been feeling a bit nervous about the presentation, you know just standing up, and after being at the schools conference I thought 'this is ridiculous, those children are standing up in a big lecture theatre, in a university in front of lots, lots of their contemporaries that they didn't even know and they were very forceful'. So for me it made me think 'don't be ridiculous'. So for that I enjoyed it more, so they taught me a thing really. (Laura – Psychology, mature, white student).

Thirdly, the mature students argued that attendance at the school council had challenged the negative preconceptions that some of the undergraduates held about young teenagers:

''It was really lively, very, very lively, the children were really, in a way you wish that more people could see children like that. Because I think going into it, the students that I'm studying with, some of them don't have children, so they were very unsure about what they were going to face, you know – teenagers, hoodies and all those stereotypes, and came out just thinking these kids were fantastic, And they're from secondary schools, they're not just the pick of the cream of the area... Certainly they were very vocal about how impressed they were with the kids and you don't really see that do you, that's not depicted very often? So that's what I came away thinking – there is hope''. (Laura – Psychology, mature, white student).

One mature student was adamant that this engagement with schools should remain a central part of the module in future years:

''I think that it has to be a central part of the module, doing the school council. Whether it be that the schools come to you or whether it be that we go to the schools. It really helped a lot of my peers to relate, they were really apprehensive about meeting these secondary school kids because they unfortunately believe the stereotypes that these are wild kids who wear you know 'hoodies', and it really changed their perception entirely.....their opinion changed dramatically. Also how confident and articulate they were and how worldly they were and
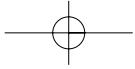
how, actually, to some extent how more aware they were of what citizenship was all about''. (Sarah – Psychology, mature, white student).
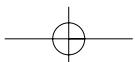
Finally, the Rivershire students were also impressed with the way that the school pupils themselves wanted to challenge stereotypical views about the different schools in the area and young people in general.
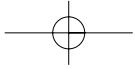
''One issue that kept coming up was the issue about stereotypes, they wanted to make a change, to mix with other pupils from other schools. They did not want to be part of this stereotype or this separation process, where if you are going to this school you are somehow different to me. They spoke about integration......It was a common theme and it kept coming up''. (Judith – Psychology with Sociology, mature, mixed race student)

Whilst the experiential aspects of the modules enhanced student learning, there are a couple of caveats to make. Firstly, module tutors expressed reservations as to whether the interlinkages between citizenship theory and practice had been as well developed as they could have been, especially in the written assignments, as the students found it difficult to link academic content into commentaries and reflective writing. The second caveat was that there was differential involvement in the school conferences on the part of the Rivershire students:

''... for some I was a bit concerned that perhaps this is not going to be such a meaningful experience as I would want it, and it probably wasn't. Some students came to like three out of the four conferences and really got to know the kids individually. So for some students it was a very kind of involved... they got very involved; whereas for others I felt it was more of a... it was kind of less significant''. (Rivershire lecturer)

This differential involvement was partly an organizational matter since there were more students than pupils at some conferences.

Controversial topics

Research in schools has highlighted the way that only a small propor-Research in schools has highlighted the way that only a small proportion of teachers feel well prepared to teach the kind of 'controversial issues', for example racism, that are covered in citizenship education (Oulton et al., 2004). In contrast, this was not generally a problem for the Rivershire lecturers since they had many years' experience of teaching sociology that routinely involves so-called 'controversial issues'. Amongst the students, on the other hand, there were mixed views regarding learning about potentially sensitive issues. Some of them felt uncomfortable in relation to discussing certain topics, for example 9/11, social class and sexuality:

''... the reason I didn't like that particular lecture also was because I felt it was too heated, it was too sensitive a subject, and far too early on in the module. We didn't know each other, we didn't know each other's opinions on it''. (Rachel – Psychology with Sociology, mature, white student).

However, other students who were interviewed didn't feel uncomfortable in relation to 'controversial issues', but instead welcomed the supportive learning environment provided by the lecturers and the opportunity that the seminars gave them for open-ended discussions:

''I felt it was a really easy going class, it was just kind of like you come to class and you say what you feel about everything, and I felt good about it ... and we could bring up anything and draw it to citizenship and identity, and that's one thing I liked''. (Nazneen – Psychology, young, Asian student).

Citizenship for non-sociology students

Only a minority of the students taking the CI module were single honours Sociology students. Most were single honours Psychology students who did not expect to be studying modules that were sociology/politics
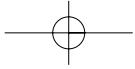
based (they also had another compulsory Sociology module in their first year). The fact that such a large percentage of the students taking this citizenship education module were non-sociologists made a difference and provided a significant pedagogical challenge for the teaching team.

Findings from the questionnaire indicate that moral development was one of the most popular topics amongst non-sociology students because of its connection to psychology: 'I really enjoyed studying this because psychology was linked to this topic, so it was interesting'. Whereas the majority of students on either single or minor Sociology degrees plus the older (over 24 years) Psychology students thought that learning about citizenship was very important, only a minority of the younger (under 25) Psychology students did so. Instead, the latter were more likely to consider citizenship education as either unimportant or only fairly important because it didn't overtly link to psychology and because they had not chosen to study it. However, the interviews revealed that despite expressing initial disquiet about having to take 'Citizenship and Identity', there was a pronounced shift of opinion on the part of the mature single honours Psychology students by the end of the module:

> ''I really came in at the beginning thinking, 'I'm just going to get through it, it's not going to be me...it's nothing to do with psychology'. And I have completely changed my mind. I just don't know really that you should be able to study psychology ... you need to have both ways of looking at things. And so for that it has been a revelation and I've really enjoyed it''. (Laura – Psychology, mature, white student).

This change of perspective was less in evidence amongst the younger undergraduates: 'I believe as psychology students, I believe our time could have been better spent learning psychology'. As the module leader said, 'I think some of the younger ones didn't engage at times'. Students' disciplinary identities are often strong and the research raises issues about non-sociology students having a compulsory first level citizenship module and the importance of trying to make the module more relevant to their perceived needs. By no means all the younger Psychology undergraduates were negative about the CI module, however. One commented favourably about how students were encouraged to put forward their own ideas as well as looking at the academic literature and she compared this aspect of the CI module favourably with seminars in the Psychology modules which she described as 'dull':
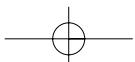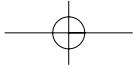
''I loved talking about what I feel about things, and so I loved it that
we had so much chance to express ourselves and say what we feel
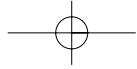about things. I love that''. (Nazneen – Psychology, young, Asian student).

Active citizens of the future?

One of the key questions raised in the research was whether or not this
citizenship education module would enhance undergraduates' capacity,
in terms of knowledge, skills and willingness to engage in citizenship-re-
lated activities. Awareness of citizenship issues was certainly raised for
many of the students. Around two-thirds said that their interest in issues
such as human rights, gender equality and the environment had in-
creased as a result of taking the module.

Attendance at the RSV conferences not only expanded the undergrad-
uates' awareness of school councils, but also challenged the negative
preconceptions some of them held about teenagers. There was a distinct
local dimension to their more enlightened attitudes regarding young peo-
ple. Many commented on how impressed they were that the pupils, main-
ly from upper rather than grammar schools, not only had a good grasp of
the inequalities between the schools but also wanted to challenge these
by breaking down school-based stereotypes:

''It surprised me how much of a grasp they'd got about the inequal-
ities of life especially in X [Rivershire town] because of the school sys-
tem. And that came across, they wanted to tackle it and that came
across even though it wasn't to do with what they were discussing,
they were very vocal about that inequality and they wanted to put it
right ... They were quite passionate about the inequality of their educa-
tion. So that was, for me, that was quite inspiring. Very thought provok-
ing''. (Laura – Psychology, mature, white student).

Not only was awareness of citizenship enhanced amongst the under-
graduates, but skills relevant to citizenship were also increased, for exam-
ple in boosting their confidence, enhancing responsibility, improving their
ability to work in groups and presentation skills. This enhancement of
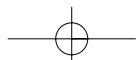skills is especially significant given the fact that many of the Rivershire stu-
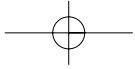
dents were themselves from non-traditional HE backgrounds. Several said that they had a more developed capacity for critical reflection and also that they were better able to appreciate others' points of view, which for one student came out of the openly discursive nature of the seminars:

''It was nice because citizenship was sort of in the group itself because we were learning to respect what each other had to say and if we didn't agree, that was also OK. But to still listen to what they had to say, and accept each other for whatever opinions they had, which is what citizenship's about''. (Christine – Psychology, mature, white student).

If the students' citizenship capacity in relation to both awareness and skills was enhanced by their citizenship education experiences, to what extent were they more likely to translate this capacity into action ('praxis'), and effectively become the 'civic leaders of the future'? Here the evidence was less emphatic. The students were asked whether they had taken part in any activities related to citizenship since they joined Riverside University, i.e. during the first year of their degrees. Leaving aside those activities connected to the CI module, a total of 11 students had done so, i.e. one third of the total. All of these were female and also there was a strong age correlation since the active students were mainly mature, i.e. over 25 years of age. None of the 18-19 year olds had taken part in citizenship activities and only 3 of the 20-24 year olds, making a total of 15% of the young students under 25. In marked contrast, eight of the 13 mature students over 25 (62%) had engaged in citizenship activities. Specific activities the students had been involved in included fundraising and volunteering for charitable organizations; working with the Pyramid Trust (a charity for low self-esteem children), and environmental projects such as recycling and protection of trees. Other students made more general reference to volunteering, working in the local community and raising money for charity.

On the whole, not much of this activity seemed to occur as a direct consequence of the module or their degrees. The majority of students who were interviewed commented that the CI module had encouraged them to get more 'involved', although they were less specific about what that might mean. Nevertheless, one female student, who was a volunteer for charities said that, 'this module teaches that people need to take responsibility of the world on any scale possible', and another mature stu-

dent who enjoyed the school council conferences intended to get involved in this again during the second year of her degree.
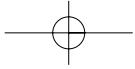
The schools' perspective

Feedback from the school pupils and teachers who participated in the schools council conferences was overwhelmingly positive. When asked what they enjoyed about the RSV conferences, all 20 pupils who completed the questionnaire answered that it was the opportunity to meet pupils from other schools and being able to share ideas - 'Communicating between schools. Meeting new people and sharing ideas. Helping bringing schools together'. Three of the pupils in the survey looked forward to more joint projects: 'the possibility of having combined school events and hopefully eliminate the rivalry between a few of them'. This pupil from an upper school is alluding here to the tensions that can exist between upper and grammar school pupils (Watt and Stenson, 1998). The pupils who were interviewed agreed that what they liked best about the conferences was meeting pupils from other schools, although this had been quite nerveracking at first.

A number of the pupils in the survey also highlighted the way in which the conferences enabled them to learn from other school councils, which meant they were 'getting new ideas to take back to our school council'. This view was echoed by one of the teachers who saw the conferences as a way that the councillors at his school, which had a relatively newly established school council, could gain encouragement and ideas from others with more experience:

''... the RSV has actually helped our school council. That really was my hope – that if we got involved with something with other school councils it would inspire our kids to take on the role of the school council and drive it forward''. (Deputy Head – upper school).

One of the aims of the CI module was to contribute to the widening access agenda by encouraging pupils from upper schools to see higher education as an achievable goal. The pupils who were interviewed commented that they enjoyed coming into Rivershire University because it took

them outside their normal school environment and gave them an idea of what it would be like to be an undergraduate:

"I think it's nice to see, especially as you get older, what you are going to go on to, especially sitting in a lecture room, it's quite different from a classroom. There's more space there and it's a lot more airy. And in a couple of years it's where I'm going to be so... It was nice to meet the students as well". (Female pupil year 10).

While all of the pupils and teachers saw the conferences as a positive experience many of them felt that they could have been improved if more schools had attended, especially the grammar schools, because this would help to break down barriers and challenge stereotypes:

"I think a big thing is to break down stereotypes. You know grammar schools are like la-de-da and state [upper] schools 'oh you're a bit...'" (Female pupil year 10).

Both of the teachers who were interviewed also felt that the conferences could play a part in making better links between schools in the county:

"We wanted it to be at a stage where there was a true representation of the schools in South Rivershire. Now that's quite difficult because as you know there's a selective system. So you've got the grammar schools, you've got the upper schools, and people often say 'well ne'er the twain shall meet' and we wanted to kind of dispel the myth of there being such a great divide between upper and grammar schools". (Rivershire school teacher – member of Senior Leadership Team).

School pupils' engagement in RSV was very marked and both of the teachers interviewed expressed their support for the conferences and a desire for them to continue in the future:

"It's been really positive. It's something we'd really like to continue. ... It's been really positive because the young people themselves have said they've gained an awful lot from communicating with pupils from other schools, that they felt empowered ..." (Rivershire school teacher – member of Senior Leadership Team)
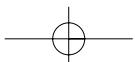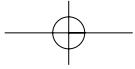
The same teacher commented that she would like to see the project developed, even to a national level:

> ''I would like for there to be national, you know, conferences of perhaps representatives from each county. I mean I think that would be fantastic. What better way to empower young people and to really be putting across everything that you're sort of trying to teach them to do in citizenship anyway?'' (Rivershire school teacher – member of Senior Leadership Team).

Conclusion

John Annette concludes his overview of research on citizenship education by emphasising the importance of active learning in achieving greater civic and political participation.

The introduction of citizenship education as a type of effective learning should involve experiential learning in the community and the ability of the student to engage in reflective practice (2000: 89)

However, ensuring that citizenship education involves active learning is not straightforward and is potentially a radical departure from existing and orthodox approaches to citizenship education. The 'Citizenship and Identity' module presented in this paper did begin to open up citizenship in a meaningful and challenging way to many of the students involved. It raised awareness and interest of citizenship amongst students and they were able to relate topical issues and debates to their own citizenship as well to citizenship in general. The module worked best when the students engaged with citizenship through an exploration of their own commonalities and differences and, in this case, the differences between themselves and another group of citizen learners i.e. the pupils. Students explored their own collective identities through negotiating difference and showed a commitment to integrating 'others'. This engagement with commonalities and differences through dialogue best reflects Lister's (1997) 'differentiated-universalism' model of contemporary citizenship with its linking of the politics of difference to that of solidarity.
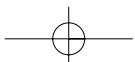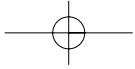
Endnotes

1. For example, the establishment of Crucible (Centre for Human Rights, Social Justice and Citizenship Education) at Roehampton University in London.

2. Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) is a UK government department attached to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools In England (HMCI).

3. The project was funded by C-SAP (LTSN Centre for Learning & Teaching: Sociology, Anthropology and Politics). 'Rivershire University' is a pseudonym.

4. The Widening Participation agenda is a major component of government education policy in the United Kingdom and is one of the strategic objectives of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). More specifically, the agenda refers to 'all those activities undertaken by higher education institutions (HEIs) and further education colleges (FECs), both individually and in partnership, to widen access to HE for those from under-represented and disadvantaged groups, including those on vocational programmes' (HEFCE, 2006).

5. One interview was conducted by Daniela De Vito from Roehampton University and one by another member of the project team.

6. Thanks to Sarah Miles for writing up the reports.

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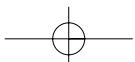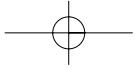
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