

Teachers' Introduction

Teaching citizenship isn't easy. It deals with abstract ideas – rights, justice, responsibility – and making those accessible within small time-slots is a tough challenge. Many pupils won't have relevant background information, and while there may be links between playground scraps and international peace-keeping they're not obvious or simple.

So teachers will need to introduce facts and information previously unknown to students, but they will also need to involve them in discussion. The guidelines envisage that pupils should learn to “justify orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues” and “contribute to group and exploratory class discussions.”

The development of small-group discussion is a vital part of secondary education, but it hasn't been encouraged by a content-heavy curriculum and an emphasis on written tests. For the activities that citizenship requires teachers will need to limit their own talking, and to work at the complex business of organising small-group talk – creating groups, allocating assignments, controlling the allotment of time and deciding the nature and extent of plenary feedback. Those are challenging skills, often devalued in the current climate, but without them the fruitful exploration of citizenship stands little chance.

My intention is that each of these assignments should stand on its own, as a one-off basis for discussion. Whether or not they fill a complete session will depend on pupils and the teacher, as well as on the availability of further stimulus. As they stand, these resources are bare and print-heavy, but they are a minimal skeleton, to which I hope that teachers will add video, supplementary information, contact with outside speakers and the personal experience of both teachers and taught.

It is also important to vary “what pupils do.” These assignments assume that they will talk as individuals, in pairs and in groups. But they should also talk in different ways – analysing information, expressing opinion, asking questions, and planning a group presentation. They should have the chance to research topics before discussing them, and to follow up ideas which have been discussed in previous lessons. You have to decide the full pattern of that variety, but you shouldn't be inhibited into repetition by the apparent similarities between assignments.

A further variation in method could be the use of play scenes, read and discussed in small groups, and ZigZag have also published a collection of *Citizen Scripts for Key Stage 3*, which I have devised in parallel with these tasks. I hope that both collections help pupils to respond to an innovation which is challenging but full of potential.

Paul Francis, Much Wenlock, June 2002