

Foreword

The Commonwealth Secretariat launched *Civil Paths to Peace*, a Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding, in 2007. This was the outcome of a mandate given by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2005 meeting (CHOGM) held in Malta to look into causes of conflict, violence and extremism in Commonwealth countries. At the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17CCEM), held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Ministers discussed how education could contribute to enhance respect and understanding among its citizens and urged the Secretariat to focus its work on fostering education for Respect and Understanding based on core Commonwealth values, among other priority areas.

This publication takes forward the ministerial directive by reviewing the Secretariat's earlier work on citizenship education and possible subsequent revision or extension in relation to the current Commonwealth Mandate on Respect and Understanding as set out in the *Civil Paths to Peace* report.

The report takes the view that the solution to conflicts within the Commonwealth should be rooted in the association's agreed principles of human rights, democracy, gender equality, the rule of law and a transparent and accountable political culture.

This study assesses the place of citizenship education within the range of possible interventions for developing respect and understanding.

Citizenship education has been practised for many years in Commonwealth countries, yet interpreted and implemented in many different ways. National initiatives and small-scale local interventions are reviewed in relation to two key aims of social cohesion and strengthening democracy. Particular attention is given to the challenges of implementation and the problematic disjuncture between ideals and practice. These challenges are further explored through five case studies from Canada, England, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu.

In addition, examples of best practice are discussed, relating to diverse work including North–South school partnerships, democratic schools, participation of ex-prisoners in post-conflict education and intercultural universities.

The report recommends new forms of political participation: an emphasis on non-sectarian, non-parochial education that expands rather than reduces the reach of understanding, and greater support to young people, who represent over half of the Commonwealth's two billion citizens.

The Secretariat renews its support to national governments in this respect, with particular attention to teachers and teacher education, and maintains support through the process of implementation, with careful monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

The report proposes that citizenship education should incorporate the following principles: teachers and students should be involved in the conceptualisation and development as well as the implementation of initiatives; teaching about democracy should take place in an environment that embodies democratic values; and there should be porous boundaries between educational institutions and experiences of participation outside.

Attention must also be paid to multiple levels including curriculum and pedagogy, the school environment, teacher education and the education system as a whole. Social justice in educational access must go hand in hand with the development of citizenship through the curriculum.

I hope Commonwealth countries will find this publication helpful in their endeavour to revitalise citizenship education programmes in their respective countries.

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