



**Democracy and Diversity: Principles and Concepts for
Educating Citizens in a Global Age**

**UK and European Launch Conference
Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education
University of Leeds
20 July 2006**

Conference report

**Joanna Stephenson
CCHRE
MA Education and Democracy Programme 2006-07**

Table of Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>The context</i>	2
<i>Key principles for educators</i>	3
<i>Responses from educators and students</i>	4
<i>Achieving unity and diversity through citizenship education</i>	5
<i>Participants' responses and questions</i>	8
<i>Personal reflections</i>	9

Democracy and Diversity: Principles and Concepts for Educating Citizens in a Global Age

The context

Questions of how to teach for democracy and diversity are at the centre of education policy debates at national, European and international levels. In July 2006 the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education at the University of Leeds hosted the UK and European launch of a key new report *Democracy and Diversity: Principles and Concepts for Educating Citizens in a Global Age*.¹ The *Democracy and Diversity* report and the conference were designed to encourage teachers and researchers to participate in these debates and develop policy and practice in this field.

Democracy and Diversity represents the product of two years collaborative work by an international group of scholars and teacher educators, led by Professor James Banks of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, Seattle. Professor Audrey Osler, Director of the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights (CCHRE), was the sole European representative in the drafting group. The launch conference marked an important landmark in an ongoing collaboration between the University of Washington's Center for Multicultural Education and CCHRE.

The conference was opened by Professor Stephen Scott, the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor, who spoke of his enthusiasm for the international work of CCHRE and the central relevance of the issues discussed in the *Democracy and Diversity* report for the structures and values of all educational institutions, including the University of Leeds. He highlighted the innovative conference format in which young people were invited to give their responses to the leading educational researchers who prepared the *Democracy and Diversity* report.

¹ <http://depts.washington.edu/centerme/demdiv.htm>

The launch marked CCHRE's first major international conference. The conference Chair Professor Audrey Osler highlighted the global interest in the *Democracy and Diversity* report, which was reflected in the diversity of those present: around 150 delegates attended the event drawn from 18 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Middle East. Delegates included policy-makers, teacher trainers, teachers and school students, researchers and representatives of NGOs and teacher unions - a broad spectrum of professional backgrounds. Educators clearly recognise the crucial importance of reflecting on our understandings of multiculturalism, national identity, and citizenship at a time when these same concerns are continuing to attract the attention of the media and to feature prominently on the political agenda.

The Rt Hon Baroness Ashton, Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Department for Constitutional Affairs, began by outlining the political need for a curriculum underpinned and informed by the values of human rights and emphasised the British Government's commitment to the creation and implementation of effective citizenship education in the UK.

Key principles for educators

The *Democracy and Diversity* report identifies four fundamental principles which the authors suggest should underpin an effective citizenship education programme within a multicultural democracy. Three principles address the focus of such programmes: unity and diversity; global interconnectedness; and the teaching of human rights. The fourth principle focuses on student experience and participation, so that students not only learn about democracy but have opportunities to practice it at school.

The report then identifies ten key concepts, which are explored and developed with the aim of providing schools and teachers with the resources to both prepare and enable students to become active, engaged and empowered citizens within a new, and often uncertain, global context. The report draws on a wide range of research to support its findings and

concludes with a useful checklist for educators, to generate dialogue and debate about the principles and concepts in the report.

A panel of three of the *Democracy and Diversity* report's contributing authors, Professor Cherry A. McGee Banks, from the University of Washington; Professor Carole L. Hahn from Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia; and Professor Audrey Osler, each explored in greater depth one of the paper's four key principles, drawing on their own research and teaching experiences to illustrate how these profound and challenging concepts can be translated into classroom contexts with the goal of educating young citizens.

Responses from educators and students

Following the presentation of the report, the conference organisers invited responses from Professor Sally Tomlinson of the University of Oxford; Dr Anne Hudson, Headteacher of the Central Foundation Girl's School, London and leading authority on the implementation of citizenship education in England; and a group of Leeds school students from Lawnswood High School and Allerton High School. Professor Tomlinson, who had served on the Commission on the Future of Multiethnic Britain, compared the *Democracy and Diversity* report with the Parekh Report *The Future of Multiethnic Britain*.² She analysed media reactions to the latter and the role of the media in the construction of popular understandings of multiculturalism and national identity.

Dr Hudson drew on her current experiences as headteacher and on her previous work as citizenship coordinator at Deptford Green High School, which pioneered the citizenship curriculum in England, prior to its introduction into the National Curriculum in 2002, to discuss some of the practical challenges and rewards of teaching for citizenship.³ In particular, she

² Commission on the Future of Multiethnic Britain (CFMB) (2000) *The Future of Multiethnic Britain*. (The Parekh Report). London: Profile Books.

³ See Hudson, A. (2005) Citizenship education and students' identities : a school-based action research project, in A. Osler (ed.) *Teachers, Human Rights and Diversity : educating citizens in multicultural societies*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

emphasised that effective moves towards greater democracy at school require a headteacher or principal who is prepared to take risks.

Ayman Abdullah, a Year 8 student at Lawnswood High School, offered the conference a fascinating insight into how the issues surrounding citizenship and diversity are perceived by students at the transition between primary and secondary school. Ayman presented the findings of his research into his classmates' understandings of democracy and diversity. Ayman's fellow students had attended 12 different primary schools and he invited them to reflect on their primary school experiences. He reported on the degree to which they felt involved in the decision-making processes of their schools; how important they consider it is to be consulted; whether they felt that they had the opportunity to learn about different cultures, societies and religions; and how this might help them interact with and value diversity in society.

One of Ayman's most interesting findings was that although most of the young people had learnt about cultural diversity and had valued this learning, they did not feel it had prepared them for the task of living together. It was clear from Ayman's presentation that there is the potential (and great need), to vastly improve the active engagement of students in democratic processes of school governance.

Sixth form students, Kamaldeep Marwahwa and Lakshmi Sharma presented their responses to the report and offered reflections on what citizenship means to them and how it might be effectively taught in schools. They emphasised the need not only for instruction in democracy, but the opportunity to practice democracy, citing the examples of their school council and interactive multicultural assemblies as means through which they have learnt the value of active democratic engagement. Most importantly, it was evident from the research of all the students who spoke that issues of democracy and diversity matter to young people. Their conclusions reflected and reaffirmed the findings of the *Democracy and Diversity* report.

Achieving unity and diversity through citizenship education

The conference ended with a keynote address from Professor James A. Banks, who spoke animatedly and passionately about the challenges we face as educators in our transforming world and of the role which citizenship education can play in achieving the delicate balance between unity and diversity. We face societies whose members increasingly experience a sense of multiple identity and affiliation, yet who also long to achieve a sense of belonging and engagement; and nation-states which are increasingly diverse, yet in desperate need of unifying values and principles.

Professor Banks emphasised, in opposition to a nationalist and assimilationist standpoint, the vital importance of the nation-state's role in affirming people's identities, and in validating their languages and cultures as a means of engaging them in the overarching values of the nation. He stressed the crucial role which education can and must play in creating the necessary reflective, cultural, national and global identifications which will enable young people to become the active and effective global citizens of tomorrow. Professor Banks brought his address to a close with a poem written by the African American poet, Langston Hughes (1902-1967), *A Dream Deferred*:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore--

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over--

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

The poem stands as a powerful and profound illustration of the injustice and dangers of a world which continues to exclude and marginalise particular racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious groups.

Participants' responses

Following each panel or individual presentation delegates had an opportunity to challenge the speakers and to initiate debate and discussion and to question or to reaffirm what they had heard. Of particular interest was the concept and language of human rights which the *Democracy and Diversity* report's authors present as the most effective framework for citizenship education in multicultural and international contexts. Some delegates questioned whether human rights are not themselves a Western construct. This hypothesis was strongly refuted by Professor Banks and members of the drafting group. Banks drew on the work of Amartya Sen⁴ who seeks to demonstrate how the notion that human rights are a western invention is itself a Western myth. Professor Banks re-emphasised his belief in the need for an unswerving commitment to human rights as international ideals.

Delegates also questioned an apparent tension between the multiculturalist ideal, according to which migrants remain rooted in their primary cultures, languages, or religions and the promotion of a cosmopolitan sense of global identification and affiliation. Professor Banks argued that this apparent tension is not inevitable. He suggested it is quite possible to retain one's primary roots *and* live as an engaged cosmopolitan citizen.⁵ This statement reflects the report's call for the balance between diversity and unity to be addressed at the centre of all citizenship education programmes.

Delegates completed evaluation forms following the event and these reflect an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the conference (100% of the delegates who responded declared themselves to be either very satisfied or satisfied with the event.) Many participants cited the keynote address from Professor Banks as having the greatest impact, but delegates also relished the opportunity to be introduced to the *Democracy and Diversity* report by the authors themselves and to hear the perspectives of local school pupils. Responses received by CCHRE following the event speak of a 'stimulating

⁴ Sen, A. (2006) *Identity and Violence: the illusion of destiny*. London and New York: Allen Lane.

⁵ See, for example: Osler, A. & Starkey, H. (2005) *Changing Citizenship: democracy and inclusion in education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

and thought-provoking' day, of 'uplifting and inspiring' speeches and of a 'contagious passion' for the issues at stake. Indeed, so great was the enthusiasm and interest inspired by the conference speeches that many delegates proposed a longer conference with more time for discussion, questions and debate, with this interaction taking place through small workshops, or seminar groups. CCHRE is currently considering the option of an extended seminar series, building on the themes of the conference.

Personal reflections

I attended the conference in advance of beginning the MA in Education and Democracy programme at CCHRE in September 2006. I could not have hoped for a better introduction to the contemporary challenges posed by the creation and implementation of effective citizenship education programmes, not only in the UK, but also internationally. The event served as an affirmation that these issues remain high on the agendas, not only of policy-makers and researchers, but of teachers and students themselves. The truly international demographic of the attending delegates provided an invaluable opportunity for networking and the exchange of ideas and reflected the significance of the *Democracy and Diversity* report for educators across the globe.

Joanna Stephenson
October 2006