

## MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN GREAT BRITAIN

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The United Kingdom has welcomed newcomers for centuries. It is a mixture of diverse ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture and often their own language or religion. Contemporary UK is often referred to as a multicultural and multi-faith society. Large scale immigration to this country started after the Second World War, and increased significantly from the 1960's onwards. The descendants of these migrants as well as intermarriage have created the multicultural society that now exists. At present, the expression '*multicultural*' is wide-spread and has been a heavily debated phrase all over the world.

In the 20th century, the powerful and proud British Empire had to fight two world wars. Even though these wars ended up with the British victory, the British inevitably lost their empire in the end. What exists today is a strong parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy, and a legacy of political, cultural and linguistic domains on Britain's old colonies, mandates, and the Commonwealth nations [Grant, Kay, Kerrigan, & Parker 2011]. British multiculturalism has undergone several challenging process and disheartening experiences including assimilation and integration policies, and racist and anti-racist riots through its history. Sometimes, racism was accepted as an inevitable experience for immigrants to the UK.

Recent changes in world politics, as well as the removal of political and physical barriers in Europe have created new circumstances under which British society has been repeatedly confronted with the challenge of immigration. The society, which has been defining itself as an open and multicultural since the second half of the twentieth century, is now in a state when it simultaneously enjoys the pros, and experiences the negative consequences of immigration.

This paper is concerned with the amount of space which is provided by the national curriculum for the integration of multicultural issues into education at primary and secondary level. Therefore, our attention is focused on the current situation of the implementation of Multicultural education within the national school curriculum and the research proves that the national school curriculum provides space for students' education in this field in various ways.

Today, a variety of approaches and responses to education are found, as well as reactions to multicultural education. The always present need to address multicultural education as policy remains absolutely essential. Within classrooms it has been vital when considering the changing nature of cultural diversity as well as international and domestic practice. "Multicultural education includes acknowledging and including not just the child or student, but also the family, the local community and learning and teaching environments which relates to levels of engagement within a community" [Race 2011, p.88]. It is assumed that education has the potential to strengthen civic and social engagement. However, it is kind of a two-way relationship: while education can

influence civic and social engagement, people's social engagement and community as such can have an important influence on their educational success and on the distribution of educational opportunity. Multiculturalism sets one basic question: who are we? Multicultural education in response focuses on struggles over students' identity. Derman-Sparks warned that young children may develop pre-prejudice, which she defined as "beginning ideas and feelings in very young children that may develop into real prejudice through reinforcement by prevailing societal biases" [Derman-Sparks 1997, p.3]. The author further explains that: "Pre-prejudice may be misconceptions based on young children's limited experience and developmental level, or it may consist of imitations of adult behaviour. More serious forms are behaviours that indicate discomfort, fear, or rejection of differences" [Derman-Sparks 1997, p.3].

It seems that also the promotion of social justice is one of the most important goals of multicultural education. Children need to learn to appreciate the contributions of all groups who have added something to the society. By all means, it is necessary to teach them that they can stand up for what they believe in and make positive changes in the world. "Education in a democratic society should help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they will need to participate in civic action to make society more equitable and just" [Derman-Sparks 1997, p.3]. "Children who experience learning for life as an enriching and innovative experience, as well as a challenging one, will be more able to confront the uncertainties ahead with understanding, creativity and a sense of responsibility" [Clouder et al. 2013, p.18].

If one wants to reflect on multicultural education, one needs to understand political and conceptual processes that form education as well as social policy. "Integration and its influence on policy-making remained important within England in the 2000s, but multiculturalism is still practically relevant today when examining English education in nurseries, schools, colleges and universities" [Race 2011, p.7]. This paper is concerned with the amount of space for the issues of multicultural education which is provided by the national curriculum. The hypothesis states that the national curriculum provides enough space and it is done through the subjects of Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and the subject of Citizenship and also through cross curricular activities as well as several school project works. The only way how to prove it is to observe how the national curriculum is designed and how schools perform multicultural education within their own teaching practice. The research has focused on schools in Great Britain, more precisely on schools in England and Wales as the educational system in Scotland follows a different pattern.

We concentrated on primary and secondary schools of different types within shire counties and towns with population of more than 20,000. An online questionnaire concerning issues of multicultural education was created and an electronic tool of Google form was used as it is a convenient form of gathering required information easily, quickly and efficiently. The questions were designed to gather relevant information from schools to prove the hypothesis. For instance, the questionnaire looks at ethnic groups included at schools, asks about the importance of the concepts of anti-racism and multiculturalism within education today, requests information whether the

curriculum provides enough space for multicultural issues and enquires various possibilities of implementation of multicultural issues into education through the subjects of PHSE and Citizenship, cross-curricular or extra-curricular activities, national or international project works.

Making students aware of existing diversity and different identities in British society is one of the main goals the subjects of Citizenship and PHSE aim to achieve. This includes the multiple identities that may be held by groups and communities in a diverse society, and the ways in which these identities are affected by changes in society. All pupils should have the opportunity to explore and develop their understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the UK today. Citizenship as well as PHSE offers opportunities for schools to address their statutory duty to promote community cohesion. For instance, pupils can learn what the factors are that unify groups and communities, how migration has shaped these communities and how living together in the UK has been shaped by economic, social, political and cultural changes. Religious education is one of the school subjects where cross-curricular dimensions such as identity, cultural diversity and community cohesion provide important unifying themes that help young people make sense of the world and give education relevance. We can find features of multicultural education also in the subjects of History or Geography. Pupils learn about people's lives and lifestyles, about significant people, events and places from both the recent and more distant past. They learn about change and continuity in their own area, in Britain and in other parts of the world. They look at history in a variety of ways, for example from political, economic, technological and scientific, social, religious, cultural or aesthetic perspectives.

One of many possibilities for schools across the UK to integrate multicultural issues in their educational process was The Comenius Programme (currently known as Erasmus+). This programme is aimed at schools, colleges and local authorities across Europe with its two main objectives:

- to develop knowledge and understanding among young people and education staff of the diversity of European cultures and languages, and the value of this diversity
- to help young people to acquire basic life skills and competences for their personal development, for future employment and for active European citizenship [About Comenius].

Multilateral partnerships are cross-curricular projects that involve at least three schools or colleges from at least three European countries. They enable staff and students in the UK to work together with partners in other Comenius eligible countries for the duration of the two year partnership.

One of many projects which have been organized under British Council educational activities is a global education programme Connecting Classrooms which offers school partnerships worldwide with the support needed to build a relationship with a link school. It also offers professional development for teachers that get equipped to tackle global themes in the classroom. Connecting Classrooms also provides specially developed resources to help schools explore a number of social, environmental, and

cultural themes. Over 5,200 schools and 936,000 young people across the world have participated in Connecting Classrooms education programme [What is Connecting Classrooms?].

Another recommended way is participation in Global Education Week activities. In 1999 the first Global Education Week was launched by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, promoting school activities in the member states with a specific focus on how to overcome poverty and social exclusion. It encourages pupils and teachers as well as youth groups to explore educational activities for global citizenship [Global Education Week]. This project is an opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds to come together to learn about global justice, to spread that learning and to use it to take action for justice locally and globally.

As we can see from the above examples, there is more space provided by the National Curriculum within various subjects apart from Citizenship or PHSE. In addition our research shows that as much as 61.91% of schools agree that there is enough space for multicultural education provided by the curriculum, 28.57% consider the space provided as medium and only 9.52% of schools consider the amount of space less than medium. It has been proved that British schools can use several subjects to raise awareness of ethnicity, equality, diversity of cultures and inclusion.

In conclusion, there are various approaches to multicultural education at schools in England and Wales through many subjects within the national curriculum, cross-curricular or extra-curricular activities, as well as different domestic and international school projects. They reflect the major ideas and challenges that face individuals and society and can provide a focus for work within and between subjects and across the curriculum as a whole. The outcomes of our research show that possibilities that schools have in education should prepare the young generation for life in a multicultural society. It cannot be, however, generalized on all educational institutions in England and Wales because of a small number of schools participating in this research.

## **Literature**

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## **Summary**

The paper is concerned with the amount of space for the issues of multicultural education which is provided by the national curriculum in Great Britain. The research has focused on schools in Great Britain, more precisely on schools in England and Wales as the educational system in Scotland follows a different pattern. The hypothesis states that the national curriculum provides enough space and it is done through the subjects of Personal, social and health education and the subject of Citizenship and also through cross curricular activities as well as several school project works. The paper observes how the national curriculum is designed and how schools perform multicultural education within their own teaching practice.