

# Summary

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Commonwealth countries face a range of significant challenges in contemporary times, relating to conflict, HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, threats to social cohesion and disengagement of young people. The Civil Paths to Peace report in 2007 gave education a central role in promoting the ‘respect and understanding’ agenda across the Commonwealth and responding to these challenges. However, engaging education for these ends requires a sustained focus on the nature of educational processes. While expanding educational access is essential, research shows that attention must be paid to the content of schooling, since schools can promote as well as work against conflict.

This study assesses the place of citizenship education within the range of possible interventions for developing respect and understanding. Citizenship education aims to develop learners’ capacities to participate in the political sphere, and to understand and defend their own rights and the rights of others. This report discusses a range of approaches, including Martha Nussbaum’s proposal for promoting three qualities of critical self-examination, world citizenship and the narrative imagination (a form of empathetic understanding of others).

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 of Canada, England, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu. Examples of best practice are then discussed, relating to diverse work including North–South school partnerships, democratic schools, participation of ex-prisoners in post-conflict education and intercultural universities.

In addition to its wider work with young people, the Commonwealth Secretariat undertook a range of actions from 2000–2003 to enable countries to develop national frameworks for citizenship education. This report recommends that the Secretariat renew its support to national governments in this respect, with particular attention to teachers and teacher education, and maintain support through the process of implementation, with careful monitoring and evaluation of interventions. More broadly, Commonwealth countries should foster initiatives promoted by communities and non-governmental organisations as well as national frameworks. 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 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.