ACT|Project

Report on the implementation of active citizenship projects in England

ACT|PROJECT

Work package Title	WP3 – Field trials
Work package Lead	Spanish Ministry
Author(s)	Darren Coyle
Contributor(s)	Elyanne Hatton, Elspeth Groundwater,
Reviewer(s)	Consortium members
Dissemination level	Public
Project Number	582958-EPP-1-2016-2-FR-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY
Instrument	Erasmus+ KA3 Initiatives for policy innovation
Start date of Project	28/02/2017
Duration	36 months
Project coordinator	CIEP

Versioning and contribution history

History version	Date	Modification	Modified by
V1	06/11/2019	DfE Draft 1	Elyanne Hatton
V2	22/11/2019	Young Citizens input and and British Council Draft 2	Darren Coyle & Tom Nissen
V3	27/11/2019	LSE input added	Anne West & Luis Schmidt-Rivera
V4	28/11/2019	Restructuring/reordering and removing identifying information about schools/ teachers	Elyanne Hatton & Elspeth Groundwater

1. Introduction

Following terrorist attacks in France and Denmark in early 2015, Lord Nash (then Education Minister), along with education ministers from all EU Member States, signed the Declaration on Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education[1] (the Paris Declaration).

To support this agreement the EU committed funding to test policy interventions in the areas of citizenship, counter extremism and fundamental values. The **Department for Education** (DfE), the **British Council** (BC) and the **London School of Economics** (LSE) were approached by France in 2016 to bid for €2,000,000 worth of Erasmus+ funding to participate in a research project. Partners in Spain and Greece were also invited to participate. The project bid was successful and funded for 3 years between March 2017 and February 2020.

This report acts as a record of how the project was carried out in England. A global report for the overall project will also be made available as well as the final impact assessment.

2. Objectives

Firstly, to design a training package for teachers of students aged 13-15. The package was intended to upskill teachers in the areas of **open classroom climate**, **co-constructed service learning** and **innovative assessment**, and enable them to deliver active citizenship projects in their class.

- **Open classroom climate:** A classroom where teachers allow pupils to have a voice; express opinions freely; and engage in open, respectful dialogue even in disagreement.

- **Co-constructed service learning:** Students participate in the process of learning through activities that are relevant to their own lives.

- **Innovative assessment:** Using assessment methods that complement the teaching tecniques being used. In particular, ensuring assessment allows for all pupils to succeed (rather than comparative to other pupils) and incorporates students' own reflections.

---

[1] Paris declaration: https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_en.pdf

Secondly, using randomised control trial methodology, assess the impact of the intervention on:

a) Teachers' attitudes and practices with respect to teaching citizenship

b) Pupils' skills, attitudes and behaviour relating to democractic engagement, tolerance and inclusion and civic skills.

3. Methodology

3.1 Recruitment

The project was open to teachers of any subject who were teaching a class of pupils in Year 8 or Year 9 in academic year 2018/19, in England. There were some difficulties in the recruitment of schools and, as such, it was decided to also to include participation from special schools (which do not always group students by age).

A number of documents were prepared to assist with recruitment and on-boarding:

- Welcome pack for teachers registering an interest with project information and overview of next steps.

- A British Council Project Agreement letter for senior management to sign to explain the project and seek approval for the project to go ahead.

- Additional guidance for teachers explaining the information required for evaluation, including how to complete the baseline questionnaires. This pack also included:

  o Information for students which could be given or read aloud to the class ahead of undertaking the pupil baseline questionnaire.

  o Data privacy notice for teachers.

  o Parent information letters offering the option to withdraw the child from evaluation questionnaires.

The British Council developed a web page for teachers to register their interest in the project. Several methods were used to advertise this link to all eligible schools, for example: advertising on social media via the British Council and partners; dissemination to the British Council network of schools, British Council network of ambassadors, and DfE networks in local authorities; dissemination of leaflets at conferences by the Department for Education.

As a result of this, approximately 250 teachers registered their interest in participating in the project. However, when schools were asked to send pupil data and attend training, only a small percentage of schools actually confirmed their participation. When it was clear that England would struggle to recruit the anticipated 100 schools, an agreement was reached with partners to proceed with a lower number.

3.2 Participants

A total of 42 schools and 44 teachers fully registered to participate in the programme, out of which 39 schools and 38 teachers continued their participation through to the end of the evaluation.

Map to show the geographical location of the schools taking part

Key

 Treatment School

 Control School

Teachers involved in the project were from across a range of disciplines including citizenship, geography, history, modern foreign languages and economics.

3.3 Data collection methods and protocol

After schools were recruited and participating students and teachers were confirmed, schools with similar characteristics were paired, and one school in each pair was randomly assigned to the treatment group. Teachers from treated schools attended the training that took place in October 2018, November 2018, February 2019, or May 2019.

Quantitative evaluation

Online teacher and student surveys were the primary source of the evaluation of the programme,. All students and teachers in control and treatment schools needed to sit the baseline survey (October 2018-March 2019,) and then sit the endline survey at the end of the school year (July 2019).

Appropriate consents were obtained from parents and students. The evaluation was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Economics.

In total, there were four sources of data collected to inform the analysis:

1. **Student surveys**: these surveys were administered at the start and at the end of the school year. They were implemented on the schools' computers under the supervision of teachers or other members of the school staff. They collected measures of altruism, tolerance, trust, democratic engagement, well-being, discrimination and bullying, quality of student-teacher relationships, and friendships among classmates.

2. **Experimental games**: at the end of the student endline questionnaire, students were invited to play two games inspired by experimental economics. These games are adapted versions of the dictator and the trust games, played with virtual money. Students were randomly assigned to another player in the same school or to another player outside the school.

3. **Teacher surveys**: these surveys were implemented at the start and at the end of the school year. Teachers were sent a link and then asked to go on a website to fill a form. They collected measures of effectiveness of citizen education, student-centered practices, teacher collaboration, and school climate.

4. **Campaign for Climate**: at the end of the school year, evaluators offered the possibility to all students taking the endline questionnaire to participate in a campaign which aimed to build awareness amongst policy-makers about young people's concerns regarding global warming and environmental degradation. To do so, teachers were asked to circulate instructions to interested students, who then had to go on a website and fill a short survey in which they could either write a short message to European policy-makers, or to send a photograph related to environmental issues.

Regarding participation in the surveys, a total of 817 students and 43 teachers replied to the baseline survey (including schools that dropped out), whereas 683 students and 38 teachers replied to the endline survey. We received 82 valid messages and 15 valid pictures for the campaign for climate, and 389 responses to the experimental games.

Qualitative evaluation

The qualitative evaluation involved ten schools. These were selected from those in the 'treatment' group, with the aim being to achieve diversity of school type, school mix and geography. In practice, there were some limitations given the total number of schools and the willingness of teachers to take part in interviews and school visits. Five schools were visited and interviews conducted with teachers. Of the remainder, two teachers were interviewed at each school.

Data were collected through:

- Interviews with teachers (all ten schools were interviewed shortly after the training session then again towards, or after, the end of the project)

- Focus groups with pupils

- Direct observation

The focus groups with pupils and direct observation of classes took place during visits to five of the schools in the sample. In each of these, a researcher observed an ACT lesson and conducted informal, mini-focus group discussions with pupils during the lesson. In addition, data was collected on the teacher training via direct observation.

Five of the first interviews were conducted by one researcher, and the remaining interviews and all of the focus groups and direct observation of classes were conducted by a second researcher. Each researcher also observed a half-day of teacher training. The researchers took notes by hand during the interviews, focus groups and observation, and wrote up detailed notes shortly after. Pieces of primary evidence were also collected during several of the visits, such as examples of flyers that pupils had created as part of their project.

In addition to carrying out the empirical work, information about the schools involved was obtained via a range of DfE and OfSTED data sources.

Data analysis was conducted thematically. Notes from interviews, focus groups and direct observation were coded using NVivo 12 against a framework developed from the 'ACT Qualitative Evaluation Guide for National Reports'.

4. Project implementation in England

4.1 Teacher training sessions

Training sessions consisted of 6-hour days (including breaks and lunch) for two days. The training covered, broadly, citizenship as a subject and what makes a civic project, assessment methods, techniques to support debate and pedagogical techniques to choose a project theme.

Four training sessions were held in London[2]:

Date	Number of attendees
22 – 23 November 2018	4
11 – 12 February 2019	6
27 – 23 February 2019	8
13 – 14 May 2019	3
Total	21

One teacher-trainer was used for all of the training sessions. To remove a known barrier to participation, supply cover was offered to all schools to enable teachers to attend the training.

The training sessions evolved over time, for example:

---

[2] In October 2019, training was offered to control schools to incentivise them to complete the data collection requirements for comparison with the treatment schools. Thirteen control schools in total took up the offer.

- Later sessions started later on day 1 and finished earlier on day 2 to accommodate teachers travelleing from other parts of the country.

- More ideas were included to help structure and guide the students' projects.

- More discussion and explanation was covered about what active citizenship actions might look like (eg. fundraising for charities, practical actions and volunteering, awareness raising, setting up a social enterprise, lobbying people in power such as political representatives or business owners, using their power as consumers) and examples of previous projects.

- More guidance included on how to maximize opportunities for citizenship learning as opposed to Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) learning (e.g. contacting political representatives, checking to see if there were any relevant bills going through parliament such as the modern slavery bill.)

4.2 Implementation in the classroom

The training aimed to equip teachers to support their class to deliver an active citizenship project to address related to cultural diversity, social inclusion or discrimination. This included delivering three mandatory 'ACT Protocol lessons' through which students decided on the project.

Lesson one: Introducing the ACT project and understanding what is meant by active citizenship.

Lesson two: By the end of this lesson, each small group of students should have come up with a citizenship project proposal that may be presented to the class.

Lesson three: Presentations of group citizenship project proposals to the class and then to a vote by the class for the project that they will be implementing throughout the school year.

Following the training sessions, all teachers were sent an email with the PPT slides used in the training, electronic copies of the ACT Protocol documents if they wanted to make any slight amendments to the activity sheets, video links used in the training and links to any other useful resources. They were then contacted at regular intervals to see how they were getting on and to ask if they would like a phone call or a support visit.

The four teachers that took part in the first training session on 22 and 23 November 2018 were not ready to provide any information about their theme and get started on implementing their ACT project until March 2019 as they were still completing the 3 ACT Protocol lessons.

> *'We have made a start on the project, having completed three hours of initial lessons. They are enjoying it so far!'* March 2019

Photograph of newspaper headlines used by one school to stimulate discussion about possible project ideas based on issues in their local community.

By May 2019, all of the schools in the first wave of training had managed to select a project theme and issue.

Project themes

The most popular issue chosen by students seemed to be **mental health** (students in six schools chose projects based around this issue) and how this related to feelings of social isolation, and how poor mental health can also lead to people experiencing discrimination.

ACT|PROJECT

> **Case study: Mental health project**
>
> One school created questionnaires for students to complete asking them about what makes them stressed or anxious and also created a petition in school calling for better access to mental health help. They contacted their local education authority asking questions about the rise in mental health problems and the measures put in place to deal with the issues. The students decided that they needed to identify what caused people to have issues with their mental health, examine the stigma that exists around mental health, and then put in place a way of making long term changes to the way that treatment of mental health is provided in schools and in the wider community.

The second most popular issue was **homelessness** (chosen by four schools), again linking with the ACT themes of social inclusion and discrimination. The schools did a variety of activities from helping raise awareness of the causes of homelessness and encouraging more empathy in others by designing posters, inviting in representatives from local homeless charities to speak with the students, setting up social media campaigns, making presentations to primary schools and liaising with local politicians about job opportunities for homeless people.

Three schools chose to look at the issue of **racism** with one school focusing on discrimination against migrants, especially asylum seekers. Two of the schools worked with the charity 'Show Racism the Red Card'.

Other topics included human trafficking, the issue of people judging others based on their appearance, knife culture and the environment (even though it was made clear in the training session that the students' ACT Project had to relate to at least one of the themes of cultural diversity, social inclusion or discrimination).

Mentoring

Mentoring was provided by the teacher-trainer with schools being offered help and support by email, and over the phone. They were also encouraged to support each other if working on similar themes but it did not appear there was much contact between school.

Only one school took up the offer of mentoring support, which was used to provide advice on how to proceed after the class vote. The teacher was concerned that the project that won the vote did not have much scope to involve the whole class, and in fact students seemed overwhelmed by the challenge of their chosen project.

ACT|PROJECT

> *'I feel like I've missed something out but I took them through the lessons to get to this point. When I questioned students on the own clothes day and talent show ideas I had to push them hard to understand the difference between and event and an active citizenship project. Their lack of maturity and experience also seem to be affecting their decisions – their awareness of issues is limited. I have been challenging ideas and hoped that they would respond to the more practical project ideas.'*
>
> Extract from mentoring request

Through a mentoring call with the ACT trainer, it was suggested that the students needed re-focusing on the overall project goal and be supported to explore other ways they might achieve this if their original idea was proving to be impractical. It seemed that the students got side-tracked by an over-complicated, novelty way of getting their idea across and hadn't fully considered alternative ways of communicating their campaign message that might take less time and be more effective. Following the phone conversation, the teacher repoted progress had been made and all students were in a group and most had a clear role (e.g. bake sale to raise funds, advisertising, creating a video).

> *"I'm dealing with a lot of confusion. I think they aren't used to being told that it's in their power to do something about the issues they have identified."*
>
> Extract from follow up email.

5. Outcomes

5.1 Testimonies

Teachers were overall very positive about their participation in the training, reporting outcomes such as:

- *"Good strategies for introducing active citizenship projects"*

- *"The three definitions / parts of citizenship. I feel like I've been upskilled as a non-specialist."*

- *"[Understanding of] the ACT protocol and linking projects to one of the core three themes."*

- *"Understanding the concept of citizenship as feeling, status, practice."*

ACT|PROJECT

- *"How to facilitate the project. Moving a project beyond a PSHE project by focusing on the laws and systems influencing our issue."*

- *"Depth of understanding of Citizenship Education as distinct from PSHE. Practical ways to enable students to work independently. That there are a lot of resources out there and many ways we can enhance Citizenship education and increase engagement."*

- *"I am confident in delivering the project."*

- *"Defining Citizenship and the difference between active and passive citizenship [was most useful]"*

Students taking part in the project both enjoyed themselves and gained further skills:

- *"Students in the class learned how to manage time, organise (and the implications and time involved in organising activities), they also learnt how diverse our school was which was a surprise to some of them".*

- *"The project went extremely well! The students were terrified to begin with, all out of their comfort zones, but grew with confidence. They were really proud of themselves by the end of the day…*

- *One student said "Miss, not everyone in the world is horrible." From news stories and social media the students are often faced with negative stories and therefore develop a very negative opinion of strangers, so this comment was delightful to hear. They also learnt about how prejudices are very easily developed and then reinforced by the media, and how we can challenge these. In addition to this, they learnt how to make others feel at ease in order to have open and honest conversations".*

- *"The students thoroughly enjoyed the project and the visit… we raised over £100 and more than 20 students visited the organisation in total from the two groups. All students participated in either the bake sale or the trip".*

Additionally, some teachers found that they developed their teaching practice further as a result of doing the project:

- *"I learnt that it's good to 'let go' and let them make mistakes, which although costs time means that they make it a learning experience and find their own way to succeed".*

5.2 Short-term impact

Regarding the quantitative evaluation, the team at LSE is currently working alongside their partners in France, Greece and Spain to assess the impact of the ACT programme. LSE will provide results in mid December, after discussing findings with partners in Paris on the 9th of December 2019.

Pupils were generally positive about their experiences of the project. One strong theme from all of the student focus groups was that the pupils enjoyed talking about and planning activities that were important and practical. Pupils also enjoyed talking about and debating ideas in small groups, even where they did not particularly value the focus on important issues and practical change.

Several pupils described enjoying the opportunity to take on a position of responsibility, as well as the opportunity to conduct primary research into a topic that interested them. A minority of pupils interviewed were more neutral or negative about the experience. Some pupils described disliking working in randomly-assigned groups. Some teachers reported challenges with engaging the most difficult pupils.

Both pupils and teachers described many ways in which pupils had gained civic and practical skills and knowledge over the course of the project. Pupils also gained skills that were less directly related to citizenship, particularly in the schools for children with Special Needs and Disabilities. Beyond specific practical skills, pupils also developed more general appreciations of democracy, citizenship and inclusion.

In general, teachers were extremely positive about their experience of the project. Some teachers described constraints on their ability to run the intervention as intended due to time and class sizes. Teachers largely enjoyed the emphasis on letting students lead their own projects. This style of teaching was very new to some teachers. A small group of teachers found it more challenging to let the students take the lead, in some cases due to specific restrictions inherent in their school context.

5.3 Expected future impact

During the qualitative evaluation, only a minority of teachers confirmed they planned to repeat the full project in the following academic year. However, many described ways in which they were already using skills and materials from ACT in their wider teaching and would continue to do so in the future.

Some teachers had also shared the ACT resources with colleagues in the school or used them to create resources for students in other classes.

Several teachers described a general shift in their teaching of citizenship to place a greater emphasis on active citizenship and 'doing things'.

The full qualitative report is in the process of being completed.

6. Issues

Timing

The main issue that all teachers had was finding time to complete the lessons and deliver the project. Reasons included:

- Time off work due to sickness

- Students were missing from lessons because of exams, work experience or school trips

- Senior Leadership Team not making enough time available on the timetable for the project to take place

- Staffing changes had caused disruption to lessons

For example, many of the teachers in the second wave of training in February 2019 were only able to start the student projects in May/June 2019 held in February 2019, after having completed the ACT Protocol lessons and choosing a topic.

'I've found it's taken much longer than anticipated to get through the pre-ACT content!'

Accessibility/usability of the lesson materials

One teacher mentioned that his students struggled with the language used in some of the materials and quite a few teachers mentioned that it took a long time to work through the pre-ACT activities and the 3 protocol lessons.

> *"As a non-specialist, it has been quite a lot more of a challenge introducing the notion of citizenship as a subject and getting the students used to the idea of debating...etc! We have about 5 weeks left for the topic so I am thinking of combining the 3 ACT protocol lessons into one/two in order to get through them quickly."*

Supporting *active* citizenship

Many of the teachers struggled to conceive their own ACT project (lesson plan 2) as although they had a good understanding of what citizenship meant (in terms of feeling, status and practice) and what the ACT project themes were, there wasn't enough exploration in the training of what solutions to the issues students identified might look like.

Schools that took part in the pilot phase in particular tended to miss opportunities to explore the political, legal or economic aspects of the issue students chose to address so projects often involved doing 'good' things that schools already do such as visiting a care home or holding a multi-cultural day rather than looking more deeply at how they could initiate changes in wider society.

Training

Lower than anticipated participant numbers and limited space meant some of the more practical activities that required teachers to move around (e.g. those in a circle) were difficult to carry out effectively and some of the discussions and group presentations took less time than expected. The training materials were adapted over time as detailed in section 4.1.

Appendix [to be fully completed submitted in mid-late December 2019]

Interesting practices : what actually worked ? what did not work ?

- Identify 5 good and/or bad practices (ACT projects, pedagogical practices)

- Published as an appendix of the reports and extracted to be added to the "pedagogical resources". Pay attention to the GDPR regulations.

Lists of schools (not to be published)

Treated schools	Control schools
Ark William Parker Academy	Admiral Lord Nelson School
Brannel School	Ark Boulton Academy*
Brownedge St Mary's R C High School	Bede Academy
Cockshut Hill School	Bensham Manor School
County Upper School	Eden Girls' School Waltham Forest
Devizes School	Eggbuckland Community College
Dowdales School	Greig City Academy
Garth Hill College	Headlands School
Highfield Middle School	Idsall School*
Moat Community College	Islamiyah
Plumstead Manor School	Lady Manners School
Selly Park Girl's School	Lawn Manor Academy
St Martins School	Philip Morant School and College
St Roberts Newminster RC HS	Queen Katharine Academy
The Littlehampton Academy	Temple Moor High School
Trinity Academy	The Commonweal School
Wellacre Academy	The Wellington Academy*
West Exe School	Tile Cross Academy
Westborough High School	Wigston Academy
Wirral Grammar School for Boys	Windsor Boys School
Woodlands School	Wyedean School & Sixth Form
Shaftesbury High School**	

*Ark Boulton, Idsall School and The Wellington Academy dropped out from the program prior to endline data collection

**Shaftesbuty High School joined the programme in 2019 after randomization was implemented, thus will not be part of the quantitative analysis.

Administrative issues (not to be published)

Communication with teachers

Teachers were not always clear who their main point of contact should be as they received requests from British Council, LSE and the teacher-trainer for updates.