

Who Do We Think We Are?

Geographical perspectives on identity, diversity and citizenship

Harpreet Sanghera

A new education project entitled *Who Do We Think We Are?* was recently launched to engage primary and secondary school teachers in the exploration of identity, diversity and citizenship, at a range of scales, with pupils in their school and at local and national levels. The project draws on a range of subject areas including geography, history, citizenship and religious education to provide teachers with guidance, expertise and ideas on how best they can engage their pupils and local communities in an exploration of their interconnectedness and, most crucially, how they can answer the question: *What makes us who we are and why?*

Who Do We Think We Are? builds on the recommendations of the 2007 *Curriculum Review on Diversity and Citizenship*, undertaken by Sir Keith Ajegbo. This report identified that the quality and quantity of education for diversity was uneven across schools in England; that teachers often lacked confidence in exploring issues relating to identity and diversity with their pupils; and, critically, that pupil voice was often given little consideration in activities. In order to address these issues one of the report's recommendations was for schools

to participate in a national week of activities dedicated to a whole-school exploration of identities, diversity and citizenship (*Who Do We Think We Are?* Week). In 2009 this week will take place from 22–29 June, which provides a focus for activities and events that may build on work developed across the school at other times of the year.

How to get involved

Your school can become involved through the website www.wdwtwa.org.uk. This site provides advice on embedding work throughout the curriculum (including specific guidance for geography) in order to sustain the exploration of identity and diversity issues as a central part of school life. In addition to signposting existing resources, the website provides introductory activities for running WDWTWA events, and also profiles a selection of activities that have involved young people shaping the programme for the week. Case studies from across the country and across key stages illustrate how teachers developed their own work during pilot programmes in 2008. There is a huge variety of school contexts throughout the UK (from schools with very diverse cultural intakes to schools with almost mono-cultural intakes) as well as

varying levels of prior experience and confidence that teachers have in their approach to discussing identity and diversity issues.

The WDWTWA site incorporates a wide range of ideas and opportunities from which teachers can select, including resources that support the development of links with local communities. Resources can simply be adopted as seen, adapted according to the school context or used to inspire the development of innovative new resources, and are grouped according to the four central WDWTWA themes:

- School and community
- Relationships, belonging and faith
- History and settlement
- Britishness, national identity and values and the 2012 Olympic Games

A primary geography pilot case study for focusing on WDWTWA

A primary school located in Enfield, North London, was supported by colleagues from the Royal Geographical Society with IBG to develop pilot work in 2008 on the WDWTWA Project. The school has a diverse intake of pupils and as part of a year 5 half term programme of work focussing on



the human geography of Enfield, pupils investigated the range of people who live in their local area. Students used locally available statistics (from the 2001 Census and available from www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/) to find and understand the following statistics for households in the area: ethnic background, religion and household type.

To complement this data pupils designed their own questionnaire to compare the characteristics of pupils in the class with the characteristics of the wider community of Enfield. By using 'real' figures for their local area it allowed pupils to see the direct relevance of their work and to understand the importance of this type of data collection. It also crucially raised discussions with pupils concerning what questions were appropriate to ask participants and how they might go about asking questions in a sensitive and considerate manner. For example, within the census there was a requirement for respondents to answer a question about ethnicity, whilst the questions asked about religion were voluntary. This allowed pupils to discuss what might be appropriate and also how best questions might be asked. For example, one pupil questioned whether it was 'racist' when another pupil suggested they might ask whether people were "black or white". Discussion with the pupils established that whilst the question might have been inappropriately phrased, it was appropriate to ask people about their ethnic background and indeed a number of pupils then volunteered information about their own ethnic backgrounds, which ranged from white English to Greek and Turkish – alongside their different faiths.

Using the real figures also provided concrete validation of the pupils' own identities, such as recognition of their religious beliefs. For example, to hear that 2% of Enfield's population was made up



of Muslim individuals was met with pride by the two Muslim pupils who saw their own family's heritage acknowledged by an official data source in the classroom. Using the Census data on household composition also opened up discussion about whether pupils might live in single parent households, with different parents at different times of the week, or in a household with two parents. Indeed, the 'official' Census approach of asking questions at every household allowed pupils, particularly those with separated parents, to take their own surveys to *all* the households relevant to their lives rather than just one selected home.

This geography-focussed study revealed much new information about the pupils themselves, and about the wider community of Enfield. It created a safe environment for the exploration of identity and diversity in a real world context. Some further ideas for extension of the above project are provided below:

Further activity ideas.

Migration mapping

Using a world map look at diversity represented in the school and the class by asking students to label the place of birth of their parents/guardians/carers. Use the map to discuss the reasons for migration and the idea of 'home'.

Oral History

Trace the history of your local area by making links with the local community. Interview local people, from the eldest residents to newly arrived people, to get their thoughts and perspectives.

Explore evidence of the impact of different cultures on the local area

Use fieldwork to investigate the diversity of shops and restaurants in the local area and/or consider local place names and features of the built environment. How are these things linked to the history and identity of people in the area?

Link to a school from a contrasting locality

Schools can share and compare work with a school from a contrasting locality by registering with the Schools Linking Network (SLN). The SLN offers support for school linking within the UK as a way of supporting active citizenship.

Who Do We Think We Are? Week 22-29 June 2009

The WDWTWA team is keen to encourage as many schools as possible to take part in WDWTWA during 2009 and in future years. We hope you will use this week as a focus for curriculum work in geography, such as about your local area, and alongside relevant work in history, citizenship and religious education, etc.

Register your interest on the WDWTWA website and we will keep you up-to-date with developments. We would be delighted to see how your school has become involved in this project; please send us examples of pupils' work and curriculum approaches you have developed.

For further information about the *Who Do We Think We Are?* Project and support in planning and delivering activities as part of the June focus week, please contact the Project Officer Harpreet Sanghera at h.sanghera@rgs.org.

WDWTWA is supported by DCSF and managed by a partnership of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), Association for Citizenship Teaching, Citizenship Foundation, Historical Association and citizenship consultant Paula Kitching.

Websites

Who Do We Think We Are?

www.whodowethinkweare.org.uk

Unlocking the Archives

www.unlockingthearchives.rgs.org

Schools Linking Network

www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/

[home_page/home_page.aspx](http://www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk/home_page/home_page.aspx)

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Diversity&Citizenship.pdf>

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