

What does it mean to live in a multi-ethnic society?

Can we understand our own citizenship without exploring this question?

- Some insights from Bhikhu Parekh and the Parekh Report as a stimulus for debate ...

Bhikhu Parekh chaired the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain which was set up in January 1998 by the Runnymede Trust. The Commission's remit was to analyse the current state of multi-ethnic Britain and to propose ways of countering racial discrimination and disadvantage and ways of making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity. The Commission published its report after two years, this is known as the Parekh Report.

Why might The Parekh Report be useful for teachers and schools?

- ❑ it offers a thorough survey and analysis
- ❑ it knits together a variety of issues affecting a whole range of public life eg. in education, health, criminal justice system etc
- ❑ it provides a focus for creative debate
- ❑ it examines the notion of cultural norms within national designation [eg British]
- ❑ it takes account of both history and future scenarios
- ❑ it discusses issues of identity, inclusion and participation.



“ It was frequently stressed to us that a country's education system is a gateway to employment and to participation in political, social and cultural affairs. Also, it equips children and young people – or fails to equip them – with the essential understandings, skills and values which they need to play a substantial role in the building and maintenance of Britain as a community of citizens and a community of communities. ”

Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, June 2000.

“ Although equal citizenship is essential in developing a common sense of belonging, it is not enough. Citizenship is about status and rights, but belonging is about full acceptance. An individual might enjoy all the rights of citizenship and be formally equal ... and yet feel that they are not fully accepted ... full acceptance is a deeper notion than inclusion. For a long time there was no legal concept of a British citizen ... even now, citizenship is seen in dry legal terms, and there is little moral or emotional significance in the status of citizen. ”

Page 54-55, Parekh Report.

Bhikhu Parekh was invited to draw upon the experience of the work of the Commission and to identify issues that the Report raises relevant to the current challenges of the Citizenship curriculum.



At the Tide~ Conference he responded by saying that there was a need for citizenship education to cultivate:

- ❑ capacity to live with difference;
- ❑ capacity to delight in diversity and difference;
- ❑ a profound sense of justice;
- ❑ a common sense of humanity and to see that in a world context;
- ❑ a capacity for critical thinking ... [and for independent thinking]
- ❑ a capacity to live with our multiple identities

These implications for education take on new significance after recent events in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham. Teachers and schools have a vital role to play along with others in the wider community in contributing towards building a positive multi-ethnic society. Many schools are already developing innovative approaches which respond to the challenges above ... there is though the need and potential to develop this work further, so that these aims become central rather than peripheral to curriculum planning.

The Tide~ Global Citizenship Commission [including representatives of the fields of education, business, and media in the West Midlands] has sought consultation and debate on these issues, particularly with young people, teachers and schools. Recommendations for future initiatives will be published in the Commission's Report, due to be launched at an event in March 2002.

At a practical level, a new project involving KS3 history teachers is now underway entitled 'Birmingham: one city, many communities'. This aims to involve young people in investigating the experiences of people from different communities who came to settle in Birmingham. Citizenship issues of identity, inclusion and participation will be central to this investigation. Students will have the opportunity to share their own family experiences, and to conduct their own research through interviews and analysis of source material. This is just one example of a number of current projects responding to issues raised in the Parekh Report.

Copies of the Parekh Report and details of current projects are available from the Tide~ Resource Base. Please let us know if you would like to get involved.

