

*Welsh and European dimensions of citizenship: The  
experience of Polish migrants' children in Wales*

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*Introduction*

As a research team we have made the writing of a research proposal our primary aim and we outline this in some detail below as an account of our primary activity under the bursary funding. We wish to stress, though, that the process of writing the bid has had other benefits as well and the opportunities offered by the WERN bursary funding have been considerable. Most importantly, the experience of working closely and intensely on developing the proposal has helped to build a strong research partnership between members of the College of Education and Lifelong Learning at Bangor University and colleagues in the School of Education at the University of Wales, Newport. As a consequence of this partnership we have been able to develop new research capacity across the two institutions, both in the central research proposal itself and in related activities such as writing joint conference papers.

*The research problem and its significance*

The original proposal for a WERN bursary arose from an interest among members of the research team in issues around citizenship education and how it might help to ease some of the social tensions created by the recent rapid increase in economic migration within the European Union. Long-standing members of local communities have not always been welcoming to new migrants, citing economic concerns and, in some cases, a perceived threat to the distinctive culture of the region or nation. Migrants, from their perspective, sometimes consider that they are being exploited and that they have been denied many of their rights as European Union citizens (IPPR, 2007; Anderson, et al., 2007). We argue that education has a major role to play both in helping migrants and their children settle in to their new country of domicile and in helping people in those countries to recognise the opportunities for enrichment that living in a diverse society can bring. In the words of the recent European Union green paper, 'Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems' (Commission of The European Communities, 2008), 'education is key to ensuring that these pupils are equipped to become integrated, successful and productive citizens of the host country' (p. 4).

Much useful work has been done both in academic research and policy development about the role of education in helping migrants to settle in the UK, a significant amount of which has focused on refugees and asylum seekers (Bolton and Spafford, 1998; Rutter, 2003; DfES, 2004). Recent migration within the European Union, though, shows distinctive features. Rutter, Latorre and Sriskandarajah (2008) point out that 'new patterns of temporary and circular international migration, coupled with greater residential mobility and increased diversity among immigrant groups, challenge orthodox assumptions about what government can and should do to promote migrants' integration ...' (p. 5). While these patterns have been widely recognised in the broader literature on migration (Boyle et al., 1998; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Castles and Miller, 2003) there are significant implications for citizenship education in a European context which have not yet been fully explored. We see our project as contributing to that ongoing debate.

To explore these very large issues in a manner that is manageable within a project of this size, and in a way that will allow us to draw tangible and practical conclusions, we focus on the recent migration of Polish people to Wales. Wales has distinctive policies on citizenship education and we investigate the ways in which these policies may be relevant to the experiences of

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Polish pupils, and beyond them, to the experiences of other migrants in other parts of Europe.

*Current educational practices in Wales*

A great deal of what has been published on citizenship education in the UK focuses mainly on England – e.g. (Eurydice, 2005) – but despite some useful research on the broader issue of migrant children in Wales (Brentnall, 2004) and some valuable recent work on the responses to new migration of settled receiving communities in south-east Wales (Threadgold et al., 2008), very little research has been done on the specific Welsh approach to citizenship education and its implications for migration. Yet, since devolution the Welsh Assembly Government has developed unique policies of relevance to the education of children in Wales and set them out in two major documents. The first of these, ‘The Learning Country (National Assembly for Wales (2001), sets out a long-term vision of learning in Wales. It states that ‘Barriers to learning must be recognised and steadily overcome to the benefit of learners’ access and participation; support for diversity and communities; and wider opportunities and option choice’ (p. 10). The second document, ‘Children And Young People: Rights to Action’ (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004), based on on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Act 1998, states that ‘we want to listen to children and young people themselves, including those from diverse, minority and marginalised backgrounds’ (p. 2).

As a result the education system in Wales has become steadily different from that in England, leading to the development of a unique curriculum for learners in Wales. A number of these distinctive developments provide the potential for integration and inclusion. Of particular relevance to this study are the themes of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC), the Personal and Social Education Framework, the Curriculum Cymreig (Welsh Dimension) and, for older pupils, the Welsh Baccalaureate (WJEC, 2004).

In order to trace the potential benefits of educational practice in Wales to broader questions of citizenship in a European framework, we chose to focus on three specific empirical issues:

1. What are the experiences of Polish children in the Welsh education system?

2. What are the views of parents, teachers and LEAs about these experiences?
3. How are Welsh schools and LEAs responding to the arrival of Polish children?

### *Methodology*

We sought to investigate these questions through in-depth interviews with LEAs, teachers, pupils and parents in a number of schools in two Welsh LEAs. Schools were selected, in consultation with the LEAs, that reflected a range of socio-economic contexts and which had different prior experiences of cultural diversity in terms of pupil intake. The views of the pupils as well as the views of their parents, their teachers and the LEA staff who have responsibility for these pupils would also be sought, in order for their differing perspectives to be captured. Whilst the focus was on schools with the highest intake of Polish children, the experience of more isolated learners was also sought. The purpose of these interviews was not to evaluate the performance of the schools or the LEAs – we were clear from the very beginning that such judgements would form no part of the project – and no individuals, schools, or LEAs would be identified in any published documents arising from the project without the explicit written permission of the appropriate LEA.

A common set of data-gathering instruments were developed which allowed similarities and differences between the respondents and their contexts to be tracked and ensured consistency between the different researchers working in north and south east Wales. Once the data is collected and analysed we will be in a position to answer two further, policy related questions.

4. What implications can be drawn for policy and practice in Wales?
5. How can Welsh policy and practice in this area contribute to the development of an inclusive model of European citizenship?

### *Anticipated Research Outcomes*

Our answers to question four will have both immediate and medium term implications. Most immediately, we would aim to feed our findings into good teaching practice and policy discussions to enable Welsh schools and

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policy makers to ensure the best possible assistance to Polish children in Welsh schools. In the medium term this will also help in the ongoing evaluation of education policies such as Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship and the Curriculum Cymreig by the Welsh Assembly Government and identification of areas in which they might be modified and improved.

In answering question 5, we will draw on the information we have gathered to provide detailed examples of the practices we have encountered which help migrant children to become integrated into the education system of the host country. We will also discuss how the policy recommendations which we will make in answer to question 4 may be applied to help address the needs of migrant children and education providers in other European countries.

*Outcomes from the bursary group process and proposed future developments*

We have focused on developing a research bid as the key element of our work as a research group. We expect the research process to take place over 18 months and we have submitted a bid for an ESRC small grant in order to finance the project. We have also explored alternative avenues for funding should this be unsuccessful.

As we point out in the introduction, there have been a number of other very positive outcomes from the process as well. Chief amongst these has been the building of research capacity within the group. One of the conditions of the WERN funding was that a mentor be sought to assist the group in its deliberations. We were fortunate to have the assistance of Professor Cathie Holden of the University of Exeter in this capacity. Her help both in sharing her own experience of bid writing and as acting as a critical friend to the group, reading and commenting on the bid documents as they were produced and participating in three of our four face to face group meetings, was most valuable.

A further very positive outcome has been the recognition of joint research interests between colleagues from the two institutions and this has led to work on (at time of writing) two joint papers, one 'Religion, Education, Migration and Identity', to be given at an international conference at the University of Krakow, Poland in December 2008 and the other on 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: A Case Study in Policy Formation'. Building on the relationship established during

the writing of the WERN bid, these new ventures are offering the opportunity to consolidate and develop our working research partnerships. It has been particularly rewarding to work in a collaborative way, across two Welsh HE institutions. In so doing, we have strengthened our confidence in ourselves as individual researchers and developed our ability to work as co-researchers in a way that is both challenging and supportive of each other.

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