

Title: Editorial: Legal Literacy in Action: Rights, Justice and the Rule of Law.

Authors: Sera Shortland and Hans Svennevig Teaching Citizenship Editorial Members. (Photos on file).

Pull Out Quote: We need to consider how legal literacy is embedded across the national curriculum in different guises and that just knowing about the law is not enough, understanding how the law affects lives, how it can be challenged and be held to account are all skills that are fundamental to learning within Citizenship education.

Article Begins:

Legal literacy through citizenship education helps young people to understand 'lived law.' This is essential as children encounter the law in every aspect of their lives. All young people are living in environments governed by protections and duties (their rights and their responsibilities) around issues to do with education, equality, safety, privacy and the purchasing of goods and services (both offline and online). Children are certainly not passive observers of the law.

Young people need to be able to engage with learning to build their confidence with which to actively participate and understand the law they encounter in daily life. Including how they interact with legal institutions and how their age dictates what they can do and buy, knowing the rules around voting (soon at the age of 16) and how to open a bank account and be responsible with finances, or even how to interact with law enforcement including when engaging with active citizenship.

This journal brings together a collection of expert insights within legal and educational fields aiming to both challenge thinking and support the reader to explore the concept of legal literacy. Within schools, the law can often be taught through static systems and processes. Legal literacy needs to go beyond just the role and function of parliament and the courts. We need to consider how legal literacy is embedded across the national curriculum in different guises and that just knowing about the law is not enough, understanding how the law affects lives, how it can be challenged and be held to account are all skills that are fundamental to learning within Citizenship education.

Legal literacy requires a trust in the knowledge that citizens can utilise to bring about change to secure positive inclusive progress in society. It just takes reading the news to see how law can conflict with rights, like the right to protest and the freedom of expression and assembly (Article 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights) vs the Public Order Act 1986 and the Police, Crime and Sentencing and Courts Act 2023. Controversial issues can be challenging for non-specialists to tackle and so the value of an outstanding citizenship curriculum becomes imperative when teaching about legal principles and knowledge.

Teaching about legal literacy and rights within the legal system will support young people to understand when rights may have been violated, developing their skills to hold lawmakers and enforcers to account, enabling them to understand why we need to scrutinise systems and processes within the law, while working to avoid prejudice, discrimination and bias from perverting the course of justice.

Students in Citizenship classrooms need to learn that the development of laws are not just fixed points in time, but real struggles by individuals to create meaningful change and that within legislation exist rights that we all have that must be actively defended. If young people cannot access learning around legal literacy through a strong and relevant citizenship curriculum, they may be at risk of not receiving the knowledge and skills needed to navigate and thrive in a complex, legal landscape.

Thank you to all the contributors of this current issue who bring the key issues into sharp focus and who provide much all of us with knowledge and skills to deliver in the classroom.