INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CEDAR (IJC)
2026 – Volume 1, p 42- 57
https://www.cedar.ac.za/international-journal-of-cedar/

# *Citizenship education in diverse societies – A Biblical command-ethical approach*

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article examines how citizenship education can be effectively implemented in hyper-diverse societies such as South Africa. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, the country transitioned from enforced segregation to integration and freedom of association, resulting in greater diversity driven by migration and social change. Schools have consequently become more diverse, raising questions about how best to cultivate citizenship skills among learners in such a complex, pluralistic context. To approach this issue effectively, citizenship education should be understood as a broad, holistic process of personal formation rather than as subject-based instruction. It involves developing moral judgement, social responsibility, and the capacity to bring about peaceful coexistence. Citizenship education should permeate all aspects of schooling and extend into learners' broader social environments. The central claim is that, within Christian private or independent schools, a Biblical command-ethical approach offers a meaningful framework for citizenship education. This approach grounds moral behaviour in Divine commands, particularly the "love command" (loving God and one's neighbour as oneself), which serves as the foundation for ethical conduct and social harmony. Biblical teachings are presented as practical guidelines for fostering mutual respect, care, and cooperation in diverse communities. Children acquire moral values*

**ARTICLE HISTORY**

Published: 4 May 2026

**KEYWORDS**

Citizenship education, hyper- diversity, Biblical command ethics, moral education, peaceful coexistence

*through experience, social interaction, and role modelling across family, school, and community contexts. Teachers play a key role in creating inclusive, empathetic classrooms and embedding ethical principles in everyday practices. While not universally applicable, a Biblical command-ethical approach can help foster mutual understanding, trust, and responsible citizenship in diverse societies.*

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## Introduction and Problem Statement

South Africa's demographics have always been highly diverse. During the more than three centuries of colonisation and apartheid, from the mid-seventeenth century until 1994, attempts were made to manage this diversity—particularly in terms of race, language, and ethnicity—according to a political "blueprint" terms of which the different groups were to be segregated.

In the long run, however, this plan failed, and in 1994 a transition was made to a new, democratic dispensation based on a social philosophy of integration and freedom of association. Since then, the full extent of diversity within the citizenry has come to the fore. There has no longer been any enforced separation of any group. Based on the principles of personal freedom and freedom of association, the population has become increasingly intermixed and consequently become more diverse. Since 1994, diversity has further increased significantly due to the influx of migrants, especially from states to the north of South Africa. Many of these migrants and their children—an unknown number of whom entered the country unlawfully—have been and remain undocumented in South Africa. Some children born in remote rural areas are also undocumented. The presence of all these individuals increases diversity in the country and, consequently, in education (schools).

The Phakamisa judgment (2017) by the Eastern Cape High Court (named after the secondary school involved in the case), namely that all children are entitled to attend school, has also led to increasing diversity in schools. The Department of Home Affairs' attempts to review South Africa's immigration policy (DHA, 2023; 2024) have not resulted in any reduction in diversity.

Like the rest of the globalised world, South African society has become hyper-diverse, highly complex, fragmented, and pluralistic. The situation in the Netherlands is typical of this pluralism around the world (Van Olst, 2025: 53, 65). According to Kalkman (2021: 1), Dutch children and youngsters are constantly faced with "the diversity of a multi-coloured society". This fragmentation means that people today—in a postmodern world—no longer have a relatively simple and coherent view of society. Owing to the complexity of modern life, everything consists of fragments and pieces of a vast reality of which no one can form a complete picture (Wu, 2026: 5). For the observer, the small parts of society form an opaque and incoherent whole. This opaque and incoherent view of society exists in the minds and the lived experiences of the citizenry. There are also no longer clear

answers to the major questions of life (e.g., whether assisted suicide is permissible, and whether there is such a thing as a justifiable war—cf. the wars launched by Russia against Ukraine, and by the United States of America and Israel against Iran) (cf. MacIntyre, 2002: 259). The situation has been aggravated by issues such as patriarchal oppression, sexism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, larceny, the "disease" of self-hatred, self-distrust, self-abuse, and LGBTQI identity politics (Murray, 2022: 37, 65, 209).

The question we seek to answer in this article is: What is the best way to instil citizenship skills in learners in such a hyper-diverse and highly complex society? This issue can be approached from different angles, such as political, economic, or psychological ones. For us as Christian scholars, however, it is natural to seek an answer from a biblical-religious perspective. We believe that citizenship education, for those who think, work, and teach from the Bible, is best shaped through a divine-command ethical approach. As we will explain, this is an approach that not all citizens of the country can identify with, because the Biblically rooted ethical/moral precepts on which it operates do not appeal to adherents of other religions. In South Africa, its application is understandably restricted to private or independent schools, and in some cases to the personal lives of learners and teachers in public or state schools. To substantiate our *central claim that, from a Biblical perspective, citizenship skills can best be taught to learners by means of a divine-command ethics approach*, we will follow several lines of reasoning in the remainder of this article. The first is to contrast citizenship education with citizenship instruction. The second is to explain what a Biblical command-ethical approach to societal issues, such as increasing diversity, entails. The third is to determine how children come to learn and master such command-ethical principles and norms. The fourth is to examine what citizenship education in a highly diverse society entails and requires of the educator (teacher), in this case, in private or independent schools in South Africa, or in state-supported schools with a discernible religious identity, as in the Netherlands (Wolhuter, Broer & Van der Walt, 2023) and in Belgium (Loobuyck & Franken, 2011)[1]. The execution of these four steps yields several findings and a conclusion related to the article's central claim. First, then, citizenship education as opposed to citizenship instruction.

**The term "citizenship education"**

In the title of this article, we used the term "citizenship education". The English word "education" has two meanings. It can refer, on the one hand, to the general formation of a child or a young person in an encompassing sense, and on the other, to teaching-and-learning in a formal, structured environment such as a school, the mastery of some learning content[2]. This

[1] This freedom has latterly come under social and government pressure, among others because of the increasing diversity in the populations of the two countries (Lievens, 2019).

[2] Afrikaans, Dutch and German possess two different words to distinguish between these two activities. Afrikaans and Dutch employ "opvoeding" for the broader meaning, and "onderwys" (Afrikaans) / "onderwijs" (Dutch) for teaching and learning/instruction. German uses "Erziehung" (upbringing) for the broader meaning, and "Schulbildung" for teaching and learning. Understanding of the English word "education" depends to a certain extent on the context in which it is used, which is why we spend some space in this article to distinguish

discussion centres on the first meaning, i.e., the broader connotations of "education," which denote the comprehensive formation and development of children and young people. This meaning differs from "education" in the sense of "instruction", which refers more narrowly to the activities undertaken by an instructor—such as a schoolteacher—to impart knowledge and skills, typically within delineated subject domains (commonly referred to in schools as subjects or learning areas). Education, in the broader sense intended here, entails a more holistic, formative engagement with the child or young person, aimed at preparing him or her for life.

Given that the English term "education" encompasses both meanings, Biesta (2011: 142) distinguishes between "education in the form of schooling and in the form of lifelong learning". The latter—education in its broader sense—constitutes a more encompassing endeavour, as it includes worldview formation and character development. It entails processes of broad socialisation, including the cultivation of social understanding, as well as cultural transmission and subjectification, the formation to become a self (Biesta, 2020: 93). Education in this sense is therefore more expansive than training or instruction; it represents a comprehensive formative process guided by a particular normative conception of what it means to become a well-formed adult within a given (in South Africa's case, hyper-diverse) society.

According to Azcona (2012: 2), the purpose of education in this broader sense is to guide young people towards an understanding of freedom, justice, and peace, while fostering the development of their physical and intellectual dispositions, willpower, emotional intelligence, moral judgement, and sensibilities. In contrast to instruction, which is primarily concerned with the transmission of knowledge and skills, education in the broader sense encompasses the entirety of human life. Its aim, as Azcona (ibid.) suggests, is the progressive formation of the person, understood as growth towards harmonious coexistence in a highly diverse society.

The distinction between education and instruction, however, is not always consistently maintained; the two are sometimes conflated. Van Olst (2025: 57), for instance, characterises the aim of instruction as follows: "Good instruction is therefore aimed at enabling pupils to develop their gifts and talents (...), to place these at the service of the greater whole (...), and to do so from an independent and responsible personality." He contends that this view aligns with that of the Christian educationalist Waterink, who emphasises "the formation of the human being into an independent, ... service-oriented personality, willing and able to employ all the gifts he has received to the honour of God and for the well-being of creation, across all spheres of life" (Van Olst, 2025: 57–58). Waterink had in mind education in the broader, formative sense—an understanding that exceeds the narrower scope of instruction focused primarily on knowledge and skill acquisition. (Elsewhere in his work, however, Van Olst [2025: 76, 139] does draw a clearer distinction between instruction and education.) In this context, it may therefore be preferable to refer to *educative* or *broadly*

between education in the broader sense, and education in the sense of teaching-learning or instruction.

*formative instruction*—that is, instruction that not only transmits knowledge and skills but also contributes to the learner's holistic formation. In this way, the learner also becomes an educand.

In the South African context, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011) positions Citizenship Education (in the sense of instruction, and hence written with capitals) as a distinct subject or learning area[3]. The inclusion of Citizenship Education in the CAPS conveys an implicit normative message: that citizens ought to coexist as peacefully as possible and work collectively to address the fractures and injustices of the past. In essence, it calls for the enactment of responsible and constructive citizenship. To support this aim, several significant scholarly contributions have been published to guide educators in this domain, such as works by Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006), Rooth (2010), Jordaan and Naudé (2018), and Nel (2018).

However, it is argued here that such resources should not be confined to a single subject or learning area in the curriculum. Rather, all educators should engage with their content, and the underlying principles should be integrated across the curriculum and embedded within the full spectrum of school activities. Accordingly, the responsibility for citizenship education should not be restricted to a discrete subject area. Instead, it should permeate all aspects of schooling: across subjects, beyond formal instructional periods, within the broader school environment, and extending into the home and wider society. In line with Van Olst (2025: 8, 109), citizenship education may be regarded as one of the few means through which school-going youth can be meaningfully connected to one another within a hyper-diverse society. Kalkman (2026:1) recently concurred by stating that "it would be prudent to address the issue of diversity on a schoolwide basis, not as a separate theme, but as an essential component of good education [4] ". The citizenship preparation attended to in schools should therefore be reconceptualised as a comprehensive educational endeavour that spans all school activities and the entire curriculum. As Van Olst (2025: 8) observes, "This has everything to do with broad formation, and with citizenship as the art of living together."

Given the limitations of social integration in a hyper-diverse context, citizenship education in schools in the more comprehensive form suggested, should aim at connectedness and cooperative coexistence (Van Olst, 2025: 18). Within such a framework, individuals are enabled—through comprehensive, educative forms of teaching and learning—to develop into mature persons (Biesta, 2025: 46) and, insofar as possible, to participate in a shared social identity. In pursuit of this ideal, it is proposed that Christian private or independent schools should follow a Scriptural command-ethical approach for the design and implementation of the

[3] Life Skills are taught up to the end of Grade 6. From then on, Life Orientation is taught, and is an examinable subject for the National Senior Certificate (Grade 12). Achievement in this subject is not examined in the final October/November examination, but is assessed through School-Based Assessment (SBA) and a national Common Assessment Task (CAT) in September.

[4] Kalkman uses the word "onderwijs" here, thereby referring to teaching and learning.

envisaged school-wide citizenship education programme.

**A Scriptural command-ethical approach**

There is a variety of ethical approaches, ranging from virtue and character ethics through natural-law ethics, divine command ethics, prophetic ethics, deontology, consequentialism, act and rule utilitarianism, situation ethics/casuistry/situationism, narrative ethics, social ethics, teleological ethics, antinomianism, an ethic of caring and compassion, a self-emptying ethic, an ethic of non-judgment, an ethic of autonomy, of community, of divinity, of complexity, of justice, of critique, of profession – to apodictic ethics, to mention only some of those abounding in literature. The notable aspect of all these ethical approaches is that each can be recast as Biblical command ethics, as illustrated by the work of Van Olst (2025: 34) and Wilkens (2017: 1-29)[5]. Instead of following such a roundabout way, namely to recast some or other ethical system or approach in the form of a Biblical / Scriptural command ethics, we approach the task head-on by asking: What ethical precepts did God provide to Christian believers in his Inscripturated Word – the Bible – as guidelines for living faithfully and fruitfully to his honour and glory in a highly diverse society? Put differently, we depend solely on God's revelation and his will, as given in Scripture, for how Christian believers ought to live and educate future citizens to be able to cope with diversity, and to coexist peacefully. Our task in the remainder of this section is to formulate Biblical command ethical precepts that can serve as guidelines for citizenship education in Christian private or independent schools, for a form of citizenship education aimed at peaceful coexistence in highly diverse communities.

Biblical divine command ethics is an approach in which the content of morality (i.e. what is right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust) is directly and solely dependent on the commands and prohibitions of the God who revealed himself in the Bible (Idziak, 1979: 1). According to Hare (2017: 125), the theory is, "that what makes something morally wrong (or morally forbidden) is that God forbids it, and what makes something morally right (or morally obligatory) is that God requires it". Scripture uses this method to motivate righteous behaviour. It is God's commands that define the virtues that enable believers to evaluate their own behaviour and that of others (Frame, 2008: 31). In a sense, then, divine command ethics is a form of deontological ethics in that it states what God expects ought to be done, as a duty – regardless of the consequences, in Nkansah-Obrempong's (2013: 39) opinion.

The love command is at the centre of Jesus' ethic (Schnelle, 2020: 118). Biblical command ethics finds its deepest rationale in the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37-39: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself". The apostle Paul said in Galatians 5:14: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself". It is only when one

[5] It is interesting to note that there are those who are vehemently opposed to what they refer to as "theistic morality", i.e. the "idea that morality consists in obeying the dictates of a deity, which are enforced by supernatural reward and punishment in this world or in an afterlife" (Pinker, 2019: 419).

loves God above all else that one will ever be able to love one's neighbour as oneself. It is only when one keeps the first four commandments (having to do with the worship of God) that one will be able to keep the last six commandments (having to do with love for the neighbour) (Tripp, 2020: 36).

It is important to note, says Van Brummelen (1994: 37), that the word *agape* that Jesus uses for love does not refer to friendly or sentimental affection but to self-sacrificial love, love even for the "unlovable". Love in the *agape* sense embodies a total commitment, a deliberately chosen devotion. It is a love that begins with a person's innermost commitment and faith. It consumes all one's strength: strength of character, of conviction and will (Mark 12: 30). It also includes one's whole mind: to love God, one also ought to have the mind of Christ. The Christian life is empty unless it is based on such all-encompassing love for God. Love for neighbour, Jesus emphasises, is not separate but flows naturally out of love for God (Van Brummelen, 1994: 37). Jesus emphasised this according to John 13:34 where he says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another". According to George (2018: 62), this is an expression of Jesus' love for his followers, a love that is missional in that it flows out to reach all humanity.

Scripture provides believers with a raft of commands from God, and all are authoritative. Numerous passages in Scripture emphasize God's authority (Gen 18:14, Phil 3: 21). Scripture also emphasizes obedience to God's commands (Deut 4: 37-40; Lev 18:4, Mt 28:20). The Ten Commandments are all also in the form of imperatives. According to Wilkens (2017: 25), the moral mandate for God's people is summarised in Deuteronomy 12: 28: "Be careful to obey all these words that I command you today, so that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, because you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God".

Although the Bible does not contain a set of plain, simple, and unequivocal moral teachings or a fully formed moral theory (Baggini, 2020: 8), Scripture itself operationalises (makes practical and feasible so that can be done as expected) the commandment to love one another— including all the others in a highly diverse society (and school situation). Biblical love, says George (2018: 69), is more than a commandment. It is a gift that comes from the Father through Jesus. Mutual love is a matter of exercise, practice, and action. Scripture operationalises the love commandment not only in the form of a series of *one another* commands in the New Testament, but already in the Old Testament through the second table of the Ten Commandments and especially through the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). The New Testament does not introduce a new ethic; rather, it brings to fulfilment and fuller expression what was already required in the law, the prophets, and the wisdom writings. Christ Himself summarised the second table of the law in the command to love one's neighbour, and the apostles explicated this covenant love in the practical "one another" exhortations of the church. Thus, the New Testament commands to accept, forgive, serve, encourage, and care for one another are the covenant fulfilment and practical outworking of Old Testament neighbour-love, as reflected in the table below:

| New Testament commands | OT reference | NT reference |
|---|---|---|
| Accept one another | Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19 | Rom 15:7 |
| Confess your sins to others | Lev 5:5; Num 5:6–7 | James 5:16 |
| Show respect to others | Lev 19:32; Ex 20:12 | Rom 12:10 |
| Pray for one another | Job 42:10; 1 Sam 12:23 | James 5:16 |
| Serve one another in love | Lev 25:35; Isa 58:6–7 | Gal 5:13 |
| Do to others as you wish them to do to you | Lev 19:18 | Mt 7:12; Luke 6:31 |
| Bear one another's burdens | Ex 23:5 | Gal 6:2 |
| Use gifts in one another's interest | Prov 3:27 | 1 Cor 12:7; 1Pet 4:10 |
| Greet one another | Ruth 2:4 | 2 Cor 13:12 |
| Live in peace with one another | Ps 34:14 | 1 Thes 5:13; Col 3:15 |
| Love one another | Lev 19:18 | Col 3: 14; 1 Jn 4:11-12 |
| Encourage one another to demonstrate love and do good works | Prov 27:17 | Heb 10:24, 25; Thes 5:11 |
| Do not speak evil of one another | Lev 19:16; Ex 20:16 | James 4:11 |
| Do not hold a grudge against another | Lev 19:18 | James 5:9 |
| Do not judge one another | Lev 19:15 | Rom 14: 15 |
| Do not be jealous of another | Ex 20:17; Prov 14:30 | Gal 5: 26 |
| Do not lie to others | Lev 19:11; Ex 20:16 | Col 3:9 |
| Share with one another | Deut 15:7–8 | 2 Cor 8, 13-15 |
| Teach one another | Deut 6:6–7 | Rom 5:14; Col 3:16 |
| Care for the interests of one another | Prov 3:27 | Phil 2:2-3 |
| Look after one another | Ezek 34:4 | I Cor 12:15 |
| Comfort one another | Isa 40:1 | 1 Thes 4:18 |
| Tolerate one another in love | Prov 19:11 | Eph 4:1-2 |
| Forgive one another | Gen 50:17; Prov 19:11 | Eph 4:32 |
| Exhort one another | Prov 27:5–6 | Heb 3:13 |
| Support one another | Eccl 4:9–10 | 1 Thes 5:11 |
| Be joyful with those who are joyful | Eccl 3:4 | Rom 12:15 |
| Be part of one another | Ps 133:1 | 1 Jn 1:7 |
| Be unanimous | Ps 133:1 | Rom 12:16; 1 Pet 3:8 |
| Show hospitality to one another | Gen 18:1–8; Job 31:32 | 1 Pet 4:9 |
| Be patient with one another | Eccl 7:8; Prov 14:29 | Col 3:13 |
| Be good for one another | Mic 6:8; Zech 7:9 | Eph 4:32; 1 Thes 5:15 |
| Love one another | Lev 19:18 | Jn 15:17 |
| Subject yourselves, one to the other | Prov 15:33 | 1 Pet 5:5 |

It is clear from the above that there is a divinely ordained order to loving one another (an *ordo Amoris*). According to the Great Commandment, we are to love God first and foremost. We are also to love all others as we love ourselves (Lev 19:34; Deut 6:5, Mt 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28, and as shown in the table). This is where consequentialism comes into the picture: people will reap what they sow; if they disregard the proper order of the Great Commandment and the responsibilities of love – also regarding others in a hugely divided and complex society – they violate God's commands, and will find

themselves in a painful state (Naugle, 2012: 51-52). The phrase "painful state" refers to the hate (speech), conflict, jealousy, and many other a- and unsocial behaviours and attitudes that might ensue when people in a highly diverse society do not work at loving one another, at obeying God's Great Commandment.

This now raises the question of how children learn to master these divine command ethical principles, values, or precepts.

**How children learn to master divine command-ethical precepts**

Haidt (2012: 5) correctly asks: How do children come to know right from wrong? He then answers this question by stating that some forms of behaviour lead to harm and sorrow, while others lead to fairness and well-being. Children soon learn to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, fair from unfair, and so on. As they grow older, they learn to self-construct moral norms and values. They learn on the playing field from turn-taking, sharing and playground justice, and gradually develop into "a moral creature, able to use its rational capacities to solve even harder problems" (Haidt, 2012: 7, 12). We agree with Haidt (2012: 30) that morality is neither innate (according to the nativist theory, cf. Paley, 2021: 158) nor derived from experience as such (the empiricist theory). Children learn to self-construct moral precepts, norms and values based on their experiences of harm and unpleasantness. These experiences help them understand that it is morally unacceptable to inflict harm on others, and, in turn, lead them to grasp moral precepts such as well-being, fairness, and justice. This understanding, according to Pinker (2012: 351), is guided by moral intuitions supported by emotions, norms mastered through education, and social taboos. Paley (2021: 165) describes this process in the form of a metaphor: "…they get their principles from their peers as flamingos gain their colouring from their food: without realising they are doing so, and with no way of stopping it from happening… they pick [it] up from other group members". The acquisition of values, according to Kopp and Mandl (2018: 124), is a lifelong process. This is supported by Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which explains that children move from an egocentric concern with avoiding punishment toward an understanding that rules exist for the "safety and well-being of society," and eventually toward awareness of "universal ethical principles" such as equality of human rights and respect for dignity (see Lin, 2021: 45–46).

Education, in the form of schooling/teaching, and learning, obviously also plays an important role in the acquisition of moral values, norms, and principles. The prevailing school climate and the role-models offered by teachers have an implicit effect on this process. Engagement in school projects with other learners has an explicit effect because learners come together for extended periods to work on joint projects, thereby interacting with one another. By engaging in such projects, learners learn to live and work peacefully together (Kopp & Mandl, 2018: 123). In a sense, human nature contains the seeds of its own moral improvement in the form of producing the norms that channel parochial and personal interests into mutual benefits (Pinker, 2019: 28).

The school, and therefore the learners, finds itself located in the tension zone between the family, the church, the state, and the broader society. The school nevertheless possesses

autonomy as an independent societal relationship, namely as an institution responsible for the teaching and learning of the upcoming generations. Part of this task is to manage the teaching-learning process aimed at mastering citizenship skills. The parents, the church and the state have similar responsibilities with respect to the instilment of citizenship skills, each characterised and guided by its unique leading principle, in accordance with the principle of sphere sovereignty. This is reflected in the literature, which describes civic development as "community-oriented in nature," emphasising humanity's need to belong with one another, to promote the common good, to value diversity, and to emphasise community-oriented values (Lin & Rim, 2021: 3). At the same time, critical citizenship education must prepare learners to live together in diverse societies through "tolerance, human rights and democracy" and should not reduce civic responsibility merely to religious duty, but to citizenship itself (Costandius & Alexander, 2021: 364–367). Furthermore, education is identified as "the strongest determinant of active citizenship" because citizenship education helps citizens make responsible choices, adhere to the rule of law, promote human dignity, and participate fully in the life of the nation (Pali, 2024: 4–5).

The parents educate their children guided by the leading modality of loving and caring. The parental home is the first societal relationship or context in which children are confronted with moral issues. Children begin to master moral values at their mother's knee. They begin to understand the moral value of loyalty, for example, because they grew up in a home where their parents were loyal to each other and to their children. As they grow up, the children tend to look for guidance in other societal spheres as well. They do this for two reasons: they discover that their parents are also morally fallible (Frame, 2008: 62-63), and they reach school-going age.

The church teaches citizenship skills to its baptised members guided by its pistic (religious) leading modality, and the state does so with its future adult citizens based on its juridical leading modality (De Muynck, Vermeulen & Kunz, 2017: 63; Verburg, 2015: 64-67). Because modern societies have become hyper-differentiated (Pinker, 2019: 27), the task of instilling citizenship skills in upcoming generations cannot be confined to a single societal relationship, such as the family of origin, the church, or the school. Put differently, children learn to master citizenship skills and insights in all the societal relationships of which they are members – also in friendship circles, on the sports field, in the broader community, in prevailing social circumstances, with mentors, and in their own reflections on all these encounters. This is how they learn to master the utilitarian skill of behaving to the advantage of their fellow citizens. According to Nkansah-Obrempong (2013: 43), act utilitarianism is not much concerned about rules for human action but rather with the discretion to behave appropriately in a situation. This is because every situation is unique, and each person (agent) is different. Through exposure to all the societal relationships and conditions mentioned above, a child learns to assess the situation they are in and try to figure out what action would be best to bring about the greatest number of good consequences with the least number of bad consequences, not only for themselves but also for everyone else involved in the situation. In brief, children learn to practise

discretion. Discretion is required for greater group stability, sphere universality (Verburg, 2015:205-206) and moral viscosity (Lahti & Weinstein, 2005: 58).

This discussion of how children learn to master the precepts of Biblical command ethics brings us to the next issue, namely, how to manage and offer citizenship education in the school.

**Some practical pointers for the classroom**

Secular schools will preferably offer citizenship education from a natural law perspective, in other words, a view of morality that can be interpreted in various ways considering a learner's and their parents' personal religious convictions, life- and worldview. As mentioned earlier in this article, it is possible to reinterpret most ethical systems, including natural law ethics, from a Biblical perspective, as demonstrated by Peterson (2017: 83-92). The Bible also refers to natural law in Romans 1:18-24. As we said previously, we contend that private or independent Christian schools are able to follow a more straightforward route, namely of focusing on Biblical command ethics when guiding learners towards a God-honouring and glorifying life, and towards living and working to the advantage of their fellow human beings – in alignment with the Great Commandment.

We contend that Citizenship Education, as a subject or learning area, should be replaced in schools with a cross-curricular Citizenship Education program. Our core argument is that, while all ordinary school activities and teaching–learning programs continue, attention should be given—across all classrooms and throughout the entire curriculum to the ideal of citizenship education, namely to promote the capacity of the learners as future citizens to live and work together peacefully, even in hyper-diverse contexts.

A prerequisite for reaching this aim is recognising that, in a classroom characterised by learner diversity, merely speaking about good citizenship in terms of peaceful coexistence from a Biblical command-ethical viewpoint is important and necessary, but not sufficient. Opportunities must also be created in classrooms for learners to practise what has been taught. The textbooks on Life Orientation and Life Skills referred to earlier in this article provide every teacher, regardless of the subject they teach, with valuable material grounded in natural-law ethics to share with learners at appropriate moments. Since, as far as can be established, no such school textbooks on citizenship education or life skills from a Biblical viewpoint are available, the contents of these books will have to be recast in terms of Biblical command ethics. The teachers' presentation of these insights and learners' understanding thereof are important; however, there is no guarantee that peaceful coexistence will follow. The teacher—in every classroom—must devise means of presenting the Divine command—ethical principles, norms, and values highlighted above in this article—in such a way that learners will grasp and internalise them. All teachers must consciously and deliberately work towards enacting, among and between learners, the Scriptural command-ethical norms and values about which they teach.

Eboka (2020: 1–3) has relatively recently proposed several guidelines for putting ethical values, principles, or norms into practice in the classroom. The first is to recognise the differences among learners in the classroom. For example, although all the learners opted to attend a Christian school, some of them may

speak the school's language of learning and teaching with an unfamiliar (foreign) accent, use its grammar incorrectly, and even be ridiculed for this. Others may come from cultural backgrounds that differ markedly from the culture that has, up to that point, shaped the school. Here, the teacher faces the challenge of designing and presenting lessons that attest to obedience to Scriptural command ethics while also accommodating such differences and fostering mutual understanding among learners. Teachers might, for instance, exercise caution with classroom activities that rely heavily on ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background.

Eboka (2020: 2–9) further suggests that teachers should design activities that draw on resources available to all learners and that support the acquisition of new skills. Group work can be structured so that learners from diverse cultural, linguistic, or ethnic backgrounds are required to collaborate. Exercises and assessments should be planned so that no learner is disadvantaged or discriminated against based on cultural or other backgrounds. Efforts should moreover be made to strengthen the self-confidence of all learners. One way of doing so is to encourage learners to pronounce the names and surnames of their classmates correctly, and to make it clear that an inability to speak, for example, the language of teaching and learning in the school with the socially accepted accent, does not indicate a lack of intelligence. Equally, unfounded assumptions about people from different cultural backgrounds—and thus stereotyping—must be avoided. Every classroom should become a safe space in which adherence to and the enactment of Divine command ethical norms and values can be realised. Empathy should characterise the conduct of both teacher and learners in every classroom. Every effort must be made to foster mutual trust between the teacher and the learners, and among the learners themselves.

Sacks (2011: 155) describes this entire educational endeavour as follows: it entails cultivating, in the hearts and minds of those involved (teachers and learners), such a degree of mutual identification and concern that none wishes to be excluded from the group. When this is achieved, a "high-trust Christian community" emerges—one in which enforcement costs are low and adaptation occurs rapidly. A group in which all members can trust one another fully enjoys a significant advantage over any other group. Trust, as indicated above, is a prerequisite for attaining group viscosity, stability, and mutuality. To attain this, teachers in all subjects should endeavour to connect learners across cultural and other boundaries through diverse forms of collaboration in line with Biblical command-ethical tenets. This may be achieved, inter alia, by creating spaces in which learners work together on artistic projects, engage in dialogue, exchange personal narratives, and so forth.

Through all these practices, each teacher, in every classroom, should ensure that the formative education they provide within the framework of citizenship education based on Scriptural command ethics enables learners to understand and assume their own moral responsibility and contribution towards a shared and peaceful future society (Stornaiuolo & Nicholls, 2019: 6/20). Nussbaum (1997) appropriately proposed that learners should be taught to be self-critical, to identify with the (global) community, and to cultivate the capacity to place themselves in others' positions through

moral imagination. This advice is particularly applicable to Christian school learners.

**Concluding remark**

The question we sought to address in this article was: What is the best way to instil citizenship skills in learners in a hyper-diverse and highly complex society? Our central thesis was that *citizenship skills for Christian scholars can best be taught to learners from a Biblical command-ethics perspective,* which could provide an appropriate response to this question. The research preceding the writing of this article revealed that a Biblical command-ethical approach would not appeal to all citizens of a country such as South Africa, and that this ethical approach would be suitable for schools with a Christian identity or character.

We elaborated and substantiated this central argument by following several lines of reasoning. In the first, we demonstrated that citizenship education constitutes a more comprehensive concept and practice than citizenship instruction. We then outlined the contours of a Scriptural command-ethical approach to societal challenges such as increasing diversity. We thirdly examined how children acquire and internalise ethical principles and norms. In the fourth, we set out several guidelines for classroom teachers to consider when teaching Scriptural command-ethical norms and views regarding citizenship education within a highly diverse society.

The exposition of these four lines of reasoning now leads us to the conclusion that a Biblical command-ethical approach to citizenship education, despite the fact that it will obviously be restricted to schools with a Christian identity, can indeed contribute to enabling people in a hyper-diverse society such as South Africa to understand one another more fully and to develop greater mutual trust as future adult citizens.

***Competing interests***

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

***Author's contributions***

JLvdW conceived and wrote the article, after which NAB and CCW made contributions towards refinement of the argument.

***Ethical considerations***

The research on which this article was based was ethically approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, North-West University, South Africa. Ethical clearance number: NWU-01094-25-S2.

***Funding information***

The authors received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

***Data availability statement***

Data sharing does not apply to this article, as existing data were analysed and reconceptualised.

***Disclaimer***

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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