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Education for global citizenship: the knowledge, understanding and motivation of trainee teachers

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In 1998 over 1000 school children, aged 11-16, were questioned about their knowledge of global issues. Whilst most felt they knew something, the majority felt that they needed to be taught more at school and that such an understanding was important to their future (MORI 1998). If this is the case, then how well are we preparing our new teachers to meet this need? Do trainee teachers feel secure in their knowledge of global issues? How confident do they feel to include global perspectives in their teaching? In 2003, four universities from the south west of England undertook a collaborative study to investigate these issues. Key questions were:

- how knowledgeable are trainees of global issues?
- where does their knowledge and understanding come from?
- how prepared (and motivated) do they feel to educate for global citizenship?

A total of 850 trainee teachers, both secondary and primary, postgraduate and undergraduate, were involved in the research. This paper reports on the findings of the research from the 300 primary PGCE (Post-graduate Certificate of Education) students, drawing on both questionnaire and interview data, and discusses the implications for both teacher education and for effective education for global citizenship

Global issues

The debate about how children should best be educated to deal with our rapidly changing and interdependent world has recently re-surfaced, having been marginalised when the National Curriculum was introduced in 1988. The introduction of education for citizenship in 2002 has been one reason for this debate re-surfacing, with its requirement that pupils be taught about ‘the world as a global community, and the political, economic, environmental and social implications of this’ (DfES 1999; 14). There is a recognition that the focus of the national curriculum has been too anglo-centric and nationalist, ignoring both the culturally diverse nature of the UK and the global community within which we now operate. Many reports (Runnymede 2000, Cogan and Derricott 2000) indicate an urgent need to educate young people as competent global citizens, knowledgeable about global issues and competent to participate in a democracy.

Hicks (2003) has traced the global education movement back over the last 30 years, indicating how the work of Richardson, Hicks and Fisher, Pike and Selby among others have influenced both policy and practice. The current resurgence of interest owes much to the work of these authors and is typified by the work of the Department for International Development (DfID) and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are supporting schools and ITET (Initial Teacher Education and Training) in the teaching of global issues. Oxfam, for example, has provided materials for what they have termed ‘global citizenship’ and has identified the key areas of knowledge and understanding which should underpin such a curriculum as:

- peace and conflict (present and historical conflict)
- globalisation and interdependence (world affairs, political systems)
- social justice and equity (in different societies)
- sustainable development
- diversity (cultures in our own and other societies). (Oxfam 1997)

The MORI survey: children's knowledge of global issues

The five areas identified by Oxfam (above) are closely mirrored in the research conducted by MORI (1998), which in turn formed the basis for our subsequent research into the views of trainee teachers. The questions to the pupils covered their knowledge and understanding of the reasons for war (in the world), famine, overpopulation, environmental problems, economic problems in developing countries and human rights abuses.

Most of the pupils felt they knew something about global issues. Three quarters felt they knew something about the causes of war, with two thirds saying they knew something about the reasons for famine in the world, environmental problems and the reasons for overpopulation. Half felt they knew something about the reasons for human rights abuses and the Third World's economic problems. However, one quarter admitted to knowing nothing about the last two issues. The causes of war, along with the reasons for human rights abuses emerged as the issues that pupils most wanted to learn more about.

Television (82%) was cited as the primary source of information about global issues, with school, newspapers and parents following close behind. Although some pupils said that they learnt about global issues at school, three quarters wanted to know more and felt that they needed such understanding to help them in the future. They felt that environmental problems, war and the increasing gap between rich and poor would affect their lives as adults. They did not, however, feel that they could do much to change the world. This feeling of being interested but powerless is mirrored by other research – e.g. Hicks and Holden (1995), Hutchinson (1996).

Our research: trainee teachers' knowledge and understanding of global issues

If the children in our schools are interested in global issues and want to know more, then how well are we preparing our new teachers for this work? Our survey aimed to keep as far as possible to the MORI questionnaire to enable direct comparisons, while adding some new questions to ascertain the background and prior experience of the trainees. This was in line with findings from Thomas (2001) that teachers with prior experience, for example of VSO, are more committed to introducing global perspectives into their teaching. When pupils were asked about their knowledge and understanding of specific global issue, they were given three choices: 'know something', 'know nothing' and 'don't know'. This was amended with the trainees to 'know a lot', 'know something', 'know nothing' as it was felt that some trainees might consider themselves to be well informed in a way that school children would not.

In-depth interviews were used to illuminate the responses in the questionnaire. 300 students volunteered to be interviewed, from which a sample of 41 was selected. Trainees were asked to 'say more about' their responses and to talk about their confidence to teach

about global issues and their perceptions of their training. Whilst the focus was on the global issues identified in Table 1, the trainees widened the remit to include other aspects of citizenship education such as teaching about justice, equality, cultural diversity and politics in this country and teaching the skills of co-operation, discussion and critical reflection.

The primary trainees' perspectives

This paper focuses on the responses from the 300 primary trainees on PGCE programmes. The training of primary students on a one year PGCE programme is of particular interest as trainees must cover the National Curriculum with its emphasis on mathematics, science and English which leaves little time for global issues. Given this emphasis and the short nature of the PGCE, the knowledge and attitudes which trainees bring with them are of real importance.

How knowledgeable are trainees about global issues?

Table 1 Trainees' knowledge of global issues (%)

	Know a lot	Know something	Know nothing
Reasons for war in the world	11	85	3
Reasons for famine in the world	12	83	4
Reasons for the destruction of the environment	17	77	5
Reasons for overpopulation	14	78	8
Reasons for the Third World's economic problems	12	78	10
Reasons for human rights abuse	11	73	16

These questions were the same as those given to the pupils with the exception of the extra 'know a lot' category. The Table indicates that the vast majority feel they know either something or a lot about most of today's pressing global problems. They know least about the reasons for human rights abuses. This parallels the findings from the pupil survey, where they too knew least about the reasons for human rights abuses and the Third World's economic problems. Further analysis of the data indicated (perhaps understandably) that trainees with no interest in global issues and no connections were the most likely to 'know nothing' – i.e. they had the least understanding of global issues.

Comments made in interview endorsed these responses. One trainee said she knew a little about most of the questions but 'there is too much to know' whilst another admitted 'I don't know very much' but would 'like to know more'. Others talked about their engagement with voluntary organisations in this country or time spent living or working abroad: these experiences had often been the source of their knowledge and had fuelled a desire to know more.

*Where does trainees' knowledge and understanding of global issues come from?***Table 2 Sources of information (%)**

Television	93	Magazines	52
Newspapers	90	University	48
Friends	63	Internet	47
Books	60	Films	38
Radio	58	School	28
Family	57		

Like the school children, the trainees cited television and newspapers as main sources of information, but after that they differed. Important sources of information for the children were parents and school, followed by magazines and books. As the table indicates, under half of the trainees felt they had learnt much about global issues from university even though the majority of them had just finished an undergraduate degree. In fact their main sources of information were those which could carry a particular viewpoint, so there may be a question here about how well we train young people (and in particular potential teachers) to be critical interpreters of the information they receive.

Table 3 Prior experience

(responses total more than 100% as trainees could tick more than one category)

Lived and worked abroad	43%
Family/friends from other cultures	62%
Particularly interested in global issues	58%
None of the above	13%

The questionnaire given to the children did not include this section, but, as noted above, we felt it important to go beyond the sources of information in Table 2 and look at the prior experiences of trainees. Table 3 indicates that while nearly half had lived or worked abroad, well over half had friends or family from other cultures and were interested in global issues. A minority had no interest in global issues and had no connections with other places or peoples. As noted earlier, these trainees were also those most likely to say they 'know nothing' about global issues.

Interviews shed more light on the nature of the experience of those who had lived or worked abroad. Some had taught English in other countries- e.g. India, Nepal and Morocco. Others had done voluntary work abroad, such as working for VSO, for the Raleigh International Project in Ghana and for Aids Awareness in Zimbabwe. Some had lived abroad with their families (in India, Australia, Nigeria) or travelled extensively (in Nepal, Pakistan, China, Spain etc).

Those who had lived and worked in the South spoke of the importance of experiencing difference. They spoke in terms of cultural difference, ideological difference and the difference in terms of wealth and privilege. For many, their time abroad had raised issues for them in relation to wealth and poverty and had given them a broader perspective. As one explained:

It opens up your eyes to how other people live and the problems they face and how like you they are... I feel that everyone is similar to each other... we live in different places but we're fundamentally the same.

A student who had been going to India since she was young because her father worked there, described it as 'forming who I am'.

Other trainees who had not had such experiences were nonetheless aware of and interested in global issues. Some were involved with campaigning organisations or charities in the UK, such as Amnesty, Greenpeace, Traidcraft and local environmental or action groups. Others cited the influence of their parents, their friends or their religious beliefs on forming their opinions.

As an interesting aside to the interviews, many of the students wanted to point out that while they themselves were interested in issues of global inequality and committed to working for change, they did not think that all students shared their concerns. One said:

People don't have a clue, I remember voting....and no-one that I knew voted, I just about managed to get my flat mate to come and vote with me.

A mature student despaired:

I live in a flat with people who are sort of twenty two, they honestly just don't give a damn,.. they don't think about it, they're not involved with any charities, they don't give a toss about environmental concerns, they just want to go out, get pissed on Friday night and watch the footy on Saturday and have fun and there's this whole kind of Hollyoaks youth culture which wasn't my adolescence and I find that really scary.

These comments are obviously anecdotal - we cannot know how true they are- and indeed by contrast another student from the same course said she was surprised at how many people she knew were interested in global issues. Nonetheless the comments are interesting and may indicate that those who volunteered to be interviewed were not typical. Further research is needed here.

How prepared (and motivated) do trainees feel to educate for global citizenship?

Responses from the questionnaires indicated that 92% of the respondents either strongly agreed or tended to agree that 'trainee teachers need to know more about global issues', and that schools should 'educate pupils on issues affecting the world'. 95% believed that as teachers, they could make a difference to children's understanding of such issues but said that they needed to know more.

This high level of interest in and commitment to teaching about global issues was reflected in the interviews. Trainees said that it was 'essential' that children learnt about such issues, that they had broad horizons, were able to 'live internationally' and could see beyond their own 'small world'. One trainee thought that teachers who did not have this approach were 'short changing the children'. For another, there was a 'big link' between 'active citizenship and global awareness You need to be aware of your actions... that your actions have consequences'.

In one case, the enthusiasm for such an approach came from a recent placement, where the trainee claimed that the 'whole school ethos' reflected a commitment to global citizenship:

What excites me so much about multicultural classrooms is that it's there- it's tangible because the kids are from different cultures and the school reflects that.

However this high level of commitment was matched by an equally high level of concern about how such issues should best be taught. Many could see that there were opportunities within the primary curriculum (especially in cross-curricular topics which included geography, science, English and PSME (personal, social and moral education)) but wanted much more guidance on teaching strategies and on how best to introduce global issues and the other areas related to citizenship. Concerns focussed on:

- the fear factor (children's reactions to war and violence)
- knowing how to judge what is appropriate and what isn't (especially with young children)
- how to be sure of their own role- should they be neutral or give an opinion?
- parents' reaction to dealing with controversial issues
- time for this along with everything else
- lack of confidence to deal with difficult areas (e.g. Iraq, immigration)
- knowing how to facilitate discussion
- knowing how to encourage active citizenship that's acceptable to the school
- having sufficient knowledge themselves of current issues.

One articulated these concerns:

The danger is that.... you're vested with this huge authority as a teacher. I think if you just say 'Well this is my view,' , most of them will look to find a way of supporting your view without actually engaging with the issues. It is difficult in a primary school because they're so young.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that trainee teachers are generally enthusiastic and committed to teaching about global issues and that many bring prior experience to their training. However, they wish to know more and lack confidence in their ability to teach what for many appear to be controversial or difficult issues. There are implications here for those of us in initial teacher education. In particular we need to:

- harness the enthusiasm and commitment many trainees bring
- help them critically evaluate their sources of information on global issues
- listen to their experiences and their concerns
- give them strategies for teaching about global and controversial issues

- provide opportunities for them to improve their own knowledge and understanding
- consider how to address the disinterest of a minority of students.

This may mean a shift in the current emphasis on the core subjects in the teacher education curriculum, or at the very least taking a more cross-curricular topic-based approach.

Garratt and Piper's comments on trainees' knowledge of citizenship, are relevant here. 'It may be appropriate', they say, 'to identify the limitation of a classroom competency driven approach to teacher training in comparison with a more socially conscious conception of teacher education' (Garratt and Piper 2003,143). A shift in the current focus of initial teacher education to include a greater emphasis on global perspectives across the curriculum will not only address the needs of the children in the MORI survey, it will also meet the needs of our young teachers. As one of our trainees said:

There's teaching the stuff that you have to teach but there's also educating children about life and about the real world and real issues and that's something which I feel is really important, it's close to my heart and something which I would want to do

If we are to retain young teachers such as this one in the profession and provide a curriculum which is relevant to them and relevant to the twenty first century then giving time to 'the real world and real issues' would seem a sensible way forward.

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