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Developing Education for Global Citizenship through International Placements for School Leaders

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Abstract

Schools in England are being encouraged to develop a global dimension in the curriculum to develop pupils as global citizens. This paper presents data from school leaders, teachers, pupils and governors in eight English primary and secondary schools where the headteacher or deputy headteacher had just undertaken a three-month placement in an African school. It illustrates how different conceptions of global citizenship were used in schools, and how, in some cases, they came into conflict. The predominantly negative perceptions of Africa held by pupils are presented, and the role of education for global citizenship in the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and patronising attitudes is examined. An approach that aims to create critical, autonomous citizens is advocated.

Introduction

This paper begins with a review of the policy context of global education in England. We then describe the project for which these data were collected, and outline the views of teachers and pupils in four different primary schools to illustrate how schools appear to be focusing on differing aims of global education. We show that only very few teachers were aiming to educate critical global citizens, and that these teachers faced opposition. However, in light of the stereotyped and negative views held by pupils we argue that it is important that global education aims to develop critical perspectives. This should include consideration of values and perceptions, power and past injustices designed to challenge stereotyped ideas and images.

Policy context

Global education or World Studies grew in significance in British schools during the 1980s (Vulliamy and Webb, 1993; Holden, 2000; Davies, Evans and Reid, 2005). In England, the introduction of the National Curriculum served in some cases to decrease the global dimension in schools (Holden, 2000), although the introduction of Citizenship Education (a statutory requirement in secondary schools from 2002) has prompted more interest in the idea of global citizenship.

There is evidence to suggest that both teachers and pupils want to include global issues in the curriculum (Robbins, Francis and Elliott 2003; Davies, 2006). However, Davies et al. (2005) warn against 'simplistic notions that may suggest educational responses to globalisation can be achieved merely by adding international content or token global education-type activities to citizenship education programmes' (p85).

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There is no single term or definition used to refer to global education. Marshall (2005) encountered numerous different terms, different definitions of global education and different aims, content and teaching methods. In the literature, aims for global education include 'preparing young people and adults for living together in an independent world' (Osler and Vincent 2002) and building 'knowledge and understanding as well as developing skills and attitudes' (DfES/DfID 2005). Content includes topics as diverse as global dynamics, equal opportunities, non-violence and sustainable development, and suggested teaching methods include 'child-centred teaching' and pedagogy which encourages critical thinking and responsible participation (see Becker, 1988; Vulliamy and Webb, 1993; Osler and Vincent, 2002; DfES/DfID, 2005).

Halsted and Pike (2006) distinguish between three different (although not mutually exclusive) aims of citizenship education; these can be helpful in thinking about the global dimension and education for global citizenship:

- producing informed citizens
- producing committed active citizens
- producing autonomous, critically reflective citizens.

Halsted and Pike discuss how these different aims for Citizenship Education might produce different content and pedagogy in school. For example, where the aim of Citizenship Education is to produce informed citizens the task becomes a cognitive one of extending children's knowledge and understanding. This approach tries to avoid the link between citizenship and values and concentrates on knowledge. Where the aim of Citizenship Education is to produce committed active citizens, Halstead and Pike suggest that pedagogy might need to include practical activities such as charitable work and environmental action. In this case, content might need to include some reference to values and principles behind practical action. The third aim for Citizenship includes a critical dimension missing from the first two, and aims to produce students who critically reflect and are willing to challenge things they perceive as unjust. They suggest this might include reflection on the needs of society, such as the different needs and rights of various groups in society and the needs arising from the abuse of power.

Torney-Purta et al. (1999) suggest that the 'vision of Civic Education often emphasises the development of critical thinking or education about values but the reality is often about knowledge transmission' (p39). However, the vision set out in the government guidance in England "Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum" (DfES/DfID, 2005) has little aspiration to critical thinking and a strong focus on knowledge transmission. In the document, most of the key concepts link most closely to the aim of educating informed citizens (see table 1). There are few mentions of values or commitments, although pupils are intended to become 'informed, active, responsible citizens'. Only the 'Values and perceptions' concept has a focus on developing a critical perspective.

Table 1: The eight key concepts underlying the global dimension (DfES/DfID) against Halsted and Pike's categories of the aims of Citizenship Education

	educating informed citizens	educating committed active citizens	educating autonomous, critically reflective citizens
Diversity	Understanding and respecting differences and relating these to our common humanity		
Human rights	Knowing about human rights including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child		
Interdependence	Understanding how people place economic and environments are all inextricably interrelated and understandings that choices and events have repercussions on a global scale	
Sustainable Development	Understanding the need to maintain and improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for future generations		
Values and perceptions			Developing a critical evaluation of representations of global issues and an appreciation of the effect these have on people's attitudes and values
Social justice	Understanding the importance of social justice as an element in both sustainable development and the improved welfare of all people		
Conflict resolution	Understanding the nature of conflicts, their impact on development and why there is a need for their resolution and the promotion of harmony		
Global citizenship	Gaining the knowledge, skills and understanding of concepts and institutions necessary to become informed active and responsible citizens	

Methodology

This paper is based on data collected as part of the evaluation of the impact on schools in the UK of a pilot project, International Extended Placements for School Leaders organised by VSO and the NAHT. This involved placing UK school leaders to work alongside senior educational practitioners in Namibia and Rwanda for three months. The school leaders (headteachers or deputy heads) came from diverse schools (rural and urban, large and small). Data was collected through eight school case study visits (including interviews with: the school leader who undertook the placement; other teaching and administrative staff; a small group of pupils¹; and a governor).

¹ Because the pupils were interviewed in groups, we cannot give accurate ages of individuals quoted, but only the age of the group. Nor, in some cases, can we be sure that the whole passage quoted was said by the same speaker.

One of the aims of the programme was to provide school leaders with the motivation and the experience to introduce a global dimension into the curriculum of their schools. In fact, all of them had started to develop a global dimension in their schools before the placement, and five were well advanced in this process. Teachers varied in the terms they used to refer to global education; we have in the rest of the paper referred to global education or the global dimension as the terms used by our funders, although we could have used global citizenship. The precise term is not important in this case, as we are concerned to unpack the aims, content and pedagogical activities to which teachers were referring.

There is a particular focus in this paper on global education relating to Africa. This was inevitable given the context of our research evaluating placements in two African countries. However, it may also reflect a more general focus in global education in English schools.

Findings

We found considerable differences between different teachers' understandings of the aims and content of the global dimension. The following sections illustrate differing approaches in four case study schools to the aims of citizenship education set out by Halstead and Pike (2006) in the context of global education. We have used two schools to illustrate different approaches to the aim 'educating active citizens'. While we focus on the four selected schools, we also draw on data from other school in the sample. It should not be assumed that each school had a single aim; we found elements of each approach in of all the schools, but the main focus was different in each of the schools discussed.

Educating informed citizens

The school in which the focus was most clearly on creating an informed citizen was a small primary school in a prosperous village whose pupils were predominantly white. The teachers described the global dimension as providing information about other countries, which was intrinsically useful and central to education.

The more the children know about different people and different cultures and different ideas, that's what we're supposed to be all about, isn't it? That's what education is: learning about different things and you know geography and religion, it's just learning about different ones. (Teacher)

Global education was justified as valuable for children growing up in a global economy in which 'the world has got smaller'. This argument was reflected by some pupil who commented that 'sometimes things that happen in other places can affect you'.

The school leader had her expectations of Africa challenged by her placement. She thought she knew what to expect but 'the Africa I thought I was going to and the Africa I went to were two quite different things'. She was therefore keen to inform pupils about different aspects of Africa:

[It's about] telling them how it is, and showing them videos - when you are doing Kenya you show pictures of Nairobi as well as the National Park. You show them that one [indicates picture on the wall of children playing in a dusty area] and you show them that one [indicates a picture on the wall of children in an IT suite] and Africa is more and more developed, and so you just have to show them pictures of it all. Knowledge is important. (School leader)

Teachers argued that it was important to teach children to respect other cultures irrespective of their wealth or poverty, and did not wish to give a negative message about children in Africa by saying 'they're poor, it's awful'. They described trying to accomplish this by emphasising similarities as well as differences between pupils in England and Africa, such as liking football. However, these teachers also had a strong desire for their pupils living in their prosperous village in England to realise how lucky they were:

I mean we all know how privileged these children are and how lucky they are but you know she [the school leader] really knows it now. ... (Teacher)

In this school, the message that countries in Africa are very varied, that there are huge rural-urban differences and that there might be things of value in African cultures was not reflected by pupils: their talk was mainly about African wildlife, reflecting the photographs the school leader had brought back. In fact the only pupils who talked about the different experiences of rich and poor people in were in ethnically diverse schools where the focus groups included pupils whose families had moved to the UK from Africa recently. While children in all the schools had acquired a great deal of factual information about life in the African countries their leaders had visited, they almost exclusively talked about what pupils in Rwanda and Namibia lacked:

And it's really interesting to find out what the children did in their school day, what they're learning from like showing photos, what they ate and stuff like that, how they lived their lives really. ... their classrooms weren't like ours, like bright colours and carpet, it was just concrete instead of carpet ... the walls were dull and they didn't have many stuff like we have ... they'd only get one meal a day and they only got that at school. (pupils aged 9-11)

Teachers in the village school hoped that learning about the placement country and Africa in general would help pupils to deal with life in multi-cultural Britain. The school leader saw the global dimension as important because it would create 'tolerant grown-ups'. Another teacher linked teaching about Africa with the 'shock' that these rural children might experience when visiting multicultural cities in Britain. While this kind of attitude acknowledged the global roots of British citizens and the range of differences that exist abroad and at home, we found that in several of the predominantly white schools, there seemed to be a worrying tendency to conflate all those from minority ethnic groups as 'global' or foreign, even those born in the UK.

Global education was also justified because it was something school inspectors looked at. Teachers argued that global education for informed citizens could be achieved

through learning about other religions and countries in religious education and geography, and through singing, dancing, art and other cultural events. The focus was on the value of information about the global dimension.

Educating active citizens: fundraising

Several of the schools had developed a particular focus on educating citizens who were active and committed to fundraising. The school we describe here is a Catholic primary school in a predominantly white urban area. When one teacher was asked what she saw as the importance of the global dimension, she responded immediately:

Certainly anything we can do to help, fundraising, anything we can do along those lines ... Trying to make a difference, really, in whatever small way we can.

Teachers described the school community feeling compelled to 'think about what we can do'.

Whenever anything happens, the response is that, 'Well, we'd better do something about it'.

In this school the 10- and 11-year old children had developed a road show about Africa and taken it round other schools in the area, raising a lot of money in the process. The staff also contributed to fundraising:

That has a knock on effect with all of us, things like at Christmas we don't get cards or presents, we all put into a fund and the money goes straight there [Africa].(Teacher)

This school had attained international school status and had developed several European links. Other activities included visits from African drummers, and a Chinese New Year event. However, the work of fundraising was central to their practice of global citizenship:

I think it's opened up that whole curriculum, really, of global citizenship for us. Since then we've acquired international school status and we made these sorts of works a big part of our lives, particularly this time of year at harvest, and at Lent when your focus is more on those things and people who are less fortunate and need more. (Teacher)

The children in this school described the school leader's placement in the light of conflict and poverty:

It's a very sort of poor place so [Mrs X] went to help, to help in the schools. Because of the war they don't have much educated people.

Like there had been a war and everything got wrecked, and they are all poor and stuff. (pupils aged 9-11)

The pupils explained that the money that they had sent to the placement country had made a real difference. The emphasis on fund-raising was common to the narratives of the pupils in seven out of the eight placement schools. Children often put forward a very simplistic view of the possibility of solving problems with money:

They ain't got that much money. And if we keep on donating money to them it might make it better. (aged 8-9)

The children who had talked about the concrete classroom floors and dull walls (quoted in the previous section) went on to say:

We're raising money and then they can have like classrooms and everything, and we can bring a few bits of stuff to put in these boxes to send off to them, so they've got like toys and clothes to wear. (aged 9-11)

It may be that pupils were encouraged to produce these kinds of narratives of the necessity of helping Africa by their understanding of the purpose of the school leaders' placement. Pupils tended to say that she went to help, to raise money or to tell the head-teachers about the way we do things, which was thus automatically constructed as better than the way they do things in Africa:

It's important to learn about other countries so when we grow up we can help them like Mrs X did. (ages 6-7).

Educating active citizens: sustainability

A rather different approach to educating active citizens was found in a large primary school in a deprived urban area where the children came from a number of different ethnic groups. This school had developed a focus on sustainability. Several teachers stressed how important it was for pupils to see themselves as 'part of a global community'. The school was trying to conserve resources and promote sustainable lifestyles:

[What we could take further is] the sustainability, what are we actually doing? I was horrified to come back, the simple things, like find out all the recycling bins have suddenly disappeared! But why? That's something simple, that's something we can put in place. (School leader)

Another teacher in this school emphasised sustainability in explaining what she saw as the importance of the global dimension:

I think it's how we need to re-use and all that kind of thing, you know, so we're not wasting all the time. ... I think the environmental impact is quite a big thing that we could bring in ... It's all very well saying 'It's a big global thing', OK, but what can we do, our little bit? So it's talking about what can we be doing locally. (Teacher)

Another teacher at this school had stimulated a class discussion on re-using carrier bags, based on the news that in the placement country, plastic carrier bags were banned.

Thus in this school as well as activities using pictures, artefacts and songs from around the world, there were activities designed to raise money or raise awareness about poverty or sustainability.

Educating critical, autonomous citizens

Many of the school leaders had reflected on social justice, rights, development, aid and the complexity of trying to make a difference while in their placement countries. Several were keen to encourage teachers and pupils to think more deeply about these issues:

Although we would always fund raise if we could, well I think it makes them into better human beings if they're understanding issues [like justice and fairness].

One school leader, who acknowledged that she had had limited awareness of global issues before her placement had returned to school eager to develop her pupils to become critical and autonomous citizens. She was supported by the other interviewee at the school. They both talked about interdependence, diversity and social justice.

In this school, interdependence was a key aspect of the global dimension but rather than just information about interconnectedness, teachers wanted to make pupils aware of the consequences of choices they had. This school leader talked about Fair Trade:

I want bring in ... what fair trade is about ... and to look at some of the problems that those countries face, ... And it just opens their eyes, and then they can make choices, informed choices.

The pupils interviewed in this school explained, with some hesitation, and prompting each other, that:

mostly the money goes to the people who like put it on the shelves or who run it through the factory to put it into boxes, ... instead of the people that make it. ... You might have to give everyone a share, you might have to put things at higher prices. (aged 9-11)

However, they did not identify trade inequalities as the main reason for poverty. instead they said that:

They're quite a big country, ... and because it's a hot place they probably don't have enough to survive on, but then because we're quite small and we have the right weather, we can do loads of things and survive. (aged 9-11)

And like the majority of other pupils interviewed, they stressed the importance of fund-raising and sending money to alleviate poverty.

Staff in this school also talked about global education and diversity. The school leader made a clear distinction between learning about global diversity and about diversity within the UK, and was therefore proposing two school links: one with the placement school and one in England:

to develop understanding of diversity in England... to see that these people are actually English and they think differently and have different cultures and they look different and we can meet them and interact with them as well'.

The kinds of activities that teachers in this school were prioritising were designed to raise awareness about global issues. Although some fundraising was currently taking place, teachers hoped to move away from this so that they were not seen as 'white providers' and there could be a more equal exchange between the school and their link school.

However, the teachers in this school had met some difficulties in persuading parents and governors of the merits of the global dimension.

One of the things I did was lead the governors through showing them the global dimension curriculum and that was a very interesting meeting, because those governors were quite surprised at the content of the global dimension pack and thinking it was quite political.

This teacher explained that this experience had made them think about the effects of the introduction of a global dimension:

You're actually asking staff, children, all stakeholders to start looking much more sort of outwards, globally and it gave us an insight, actually it could be quite tricky, you know. We've just done a course where they talk about 'comfort zone', 'stretch' and then 'panic' and it looks like [the global dimension] was going to take parents quite a long way up the 'stretch', if not into slight 'panic' mode.

This conflict led both interviewees to play down the political nature of the global dimension, describing their approach as 'non-political'. Thus although their aspirations were around developing critical and autonomous citizens, it was not clear how far this would be possible.

Discussion

This brief sketch has illustrated four schools where teachers had different aims for the global dimension, and included different content. In relation to the aims of the global dimension, there does seem to be a range of attitudes, from those who concentrate on informing pupils to those who are trying to develop critical autonomous citizens. These approaches can come into conflict, as we have shown. Some of the content is similar, whatever the approach. Interdependence was commonly cited as a reason for teaching about the global dimension. For teachers who aimed to develop informed citizens, the focus was on knowledge about interdependence, while teachers trying to develop active or critical citizens also considered how actions in the UK may impact positively/negatively in other countries. Diversity was another common theme, with teachers often discussing similarities and differences, and the importance of respecting other cultures. Where the focus was on creating informed citizens, the approach was

limited to exposure to religion, geography and art/culture. Where the focus was more on creating critical citizens, a distinction was made between diversity in the UK, and global diversity, although prejudice and discrimination were not discussed. Some teachers, especially those who had a focus on developing active or critical citizens, also discussed sustainable development and aspects of social justice. Issues of power, discrimination, conflict, human rights, values and past injustices were rarely mentioned. This is perhaps not surprising, as the guidance on the global dimension does not have a strong focus on these issues, and teachers may be unwilling to approach them or may lack the confidence to do so (Robbins et al, 2003; Halstead and Pike, 2006).

Despite the variations in approach, content and methodology for global education among teachers, we found that pupils held very similar, predominantly negative, views about 'other countries'. This supports Holden's (2008) assertion that 'whilst all may be concerned about global issues, some are misinformed'. We believe greater support should be given to global education that aims to develop critical perspectives among pupils. This may mean concentrating less on fundraising as part of active citizenship and more consideration of values and perceptions, power, past injustices, negative and stereotyped images. Given the current emphasis on knowledge and understanding in the DfES/DfID guidance on global education, we suggest that there is a need to revise policy documents to forefront the aim of creating critical, autonomous global citizens.

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