“They become completely involved.” What teachers say about the benefits of global citizenship in schools.

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Introduction

The concept of global citizenship is one that is gaining in importance within the context of primary education. As we continue to explore its nature and scope, the promotion of global citizenship is likely to figure strongly in the aspirations of curriculum planners in the foreseeable future. “Global issues are part of children and young people’s lives in ways unfamiliar to previous generations.” (DFID et al., 2005). Education for citizenship has been an area of major development in Scottish education in recent years. In many Scottish schools the approach adopted has been one of attempting to embed associated learning and teaching both within the curriculum and across the broader roles of the school, rather than to regard it as a topic to be addressed separately. This has been undertaken in an attempt to better prepare children for their future participation in political, social, economic, cultural and educational decision-making in Scottish society.

The principles underpinning Environmental and Citizenship Education are becoming increasingly embedded within A Curriculum for Excellence, (Scottish Government, 2009) with its aspiration to enable all children to develop their capabilities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society. Global issues, therefore, have become factors in the lives of young Scottish people quite unlike the issues and concerns of earlier generations. In consequence Scottish primary teachers will be pivotal in preparing and empowering children to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future.

There are obvious implications here for teacher education, and this was the starting point for the work reported in this chapter. The main aim at the outset was to learn more about emerging practice in this area, primarily to inform ITE programmes – but also as an opportunity for further research into classroom practice. Through various contacts we became aware of a number of teachers and schools in the local area where interesting work was going on in the area of global citizenship. We did not have a pre-set agenda or specific research questions. We wanted to see what was ‘out there’ and to explore the perceptions of the teachers who were leading developments. The
expectation was that this initial work would allow us to identify aspects which would then be investigated in more detail.

**Methodology**

In broad terms, our approach was framed within an interpretivist paradigm; although we were keen to learn more about what was being done in schools, we were interested in the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of the individuals concerned. This approach steered us towards the collection of qualitative data, with an emphasis on open-ended enquiry. Non-probability sampling was adopted; we had learned about schools who were leading the way in developing the curriculum in the area of global citizenship, and these schools and individuals comprised the population from which we drew our sample. Interviews were conducted with teachers in seven schools – six primaries and one secondary school. The sample of primaries included large inner-city schools, a mid-size suburban school and small rural schools. The secondary school was a medium size school in a market town in eastern Scotland. The teachers who took part varied in terms of gender, age, length of time teaching and management experience.

The main data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview which looked at teachers’ experiences, beliefs and attitudes towards the teaching of global citizenship. The interview schedule was created in a step-wise manner. After an initial open discussion on a range of issues surrounding global citizenship, the members of the research team drew up a list of issues they wanted to learn more about. Researchers worked as individuals or in pairs, formulating appropriate questions; these were then collated, and the large pool of questions reduced. Firstly duplicate questions were removed. Next, redundant questions were identified and these were also removed. Finally common themes – or underlying factors – were identified. Eight main issues emerged from this process, and these then became the key questions. For each question several probes were identified, based on the initial set of issues raised. The interviews were conducted in the spring term of 2009, and typically lasted for 50-60 minutes.

**Findings**

*Teachers’ conceptualisation of the area*
It was evident that teachers varied in the way they conceptualised global citizenship. For many the term appeared to be an umbrella concept which encapsulated a range of different initiatives, including eco schools, responsible citizenship and multi-cultural education. When exploring what global citizenship means in practice, many respondents answered by referring to the activities associated with a specific project, usually based on a developing country; examples included Peru and Bangladesh. It was rare for respondents to list a set of underlying principles, although one primary school did this and produced eight key aims, including both cognitive and affective factors. In this case, there were aims related to knowledge acquisition (for example, of specific environmental issues facing the planet, health issues), development of skills (for example, research skills, collaboration skills) and social and personal factors (compassion, responsibility). However, this type of classification was not typical, and most respondents were more general in their description of what global citizenship encompassed. In fact, the discourse seemed to suggest a perspective which was experiential in nature, rather than one based on knowledge or content. Responses were usually framed in terms of activities provided for the children, or the resources used, rather than discussion of principles. Discussion would often focus on a specific resource pack, or an activity the children benefited from, or a product they created, or an inspirational visitor. Generally, affective elements were emphasised by teachers, with descriptions of children’s experiences and their consequences.

A theme which recurred was that of helping children to appreciate the reality of the lives of less fortunate children, often focusing on lifestyle and life-chances in other countries. Frequently, the language employed by teachers in this context included terms such as ‘comparison’, ‘recognition’ ‘appreciating’ and ‘understanding’. Certainly, a common value which emerged from the teachers’ comments was caring for others, and this had both local and global aspects. One teacher stated unequivocally, “The main benefits are with the children’s attitudes”. It was suggested that when children learn more about others, they appreciate the commonality as well as the diversity of experience. The point here was that pupils are learning more about different cultures, but are learning also that (as one teacher put it) “we share a lot with them; they are real people like us”.

Interestingly the term ‘empathy’ was not specifically mentioned, but it seems central to much of the discussion here. Another notable finding can be located within child-centred educational ideology. There was clear evidence of a pedagogical perspective which values starting from the child’s immediate experiences and knowledge of local community – and then moving outwards towards other cultures and societies. A further theme was the emphasis on the environment at both local and global levels. A message came through in several interviews that concepts of citizenship and
personal responsibility are linked. Although it was not specifically stated, the notion of empowerment or agency seemed implicit in much of the discourse.

The motivation for undertaking work in this area

As might be expected, several factors were discussed in relation to the personal motives and/or the professional drivers for undertaking their project work. Most frequently, reference was made to *Curriculum for Excellence* and the emphasis on global citizenship as a focus for development. But additionally, the influence of HMI was noted; one school had been told that citizenship was an area where development was needed. Various projects (for example, Comenius, KIVA, Connecting Classrooms) were also identified as being significant factors in the decision to develop work in the area. In terms of motivating factors, a message which came through on several occasions was that visits from individuals with first-hand experience of other cultures were very valuable. In schools in one city, there were frequent mentions of Tom Jolly and the work for Project Colibra. (Tom Jolly is a retired teacher who now lives in Peru and plans to set up a school for street children there.) Other examples were provided, including a local dentist who was able to provide first-hand accounts and share experiences with children. It was also suggested that current news issues often highlight concerns and stimulate new aspects of the work.

The activities related to global citizenship

As suggested above, when discussing the actual work undertaken there appeared to be considerable variation in both content and the activities engaged in. Having said that, a topic based around Peru seemed to crop up frequently, and ‘The Peru pack’ (a council-wide resource) was mentioned more than once. More recently a project based on jute (the Dakar to Dundee project) has provided curriculum guidance and resources. In terms of learning gains, knowledge, skills and attitudes were all mentioned, including geographical knowledge, (e.g. regions, rain-forests, climate), the wild-life of other countries, health issues for different peoples, and so on. There was an interesting example of children learning Spanish, so they could communicate with children in Peru. As with so many activities reported by the teachers, one cannot fail to make the links here with notions of authentic learning and relevance in the curriculum. But this Spanish example alerts us to another characteristic; the learning exchange is not a one-way process. Certainly, children are learning new things, but they are also communicating with others about their own experiences and their own country. Furthermore, from the perspective of personal and social growth, they are learning about working with, and helping, others. There is evidence that such activities have a positive effect on children’s self-perceptions.
Global citizenship work was often incorporated with other cross-cutting themes or initiatives. Many such links were identified, including the Health Promoting School, Fair Trade events, Rights Respecting Schools and Eco-Schools. Links were frequently made with enterprise; indeed the two seem to be very closely related in many schools. The links here are seen in relation to engagement with different local organisations. Several examples were provided of children’s efforts through fund-raising events (e.g. salsa evenings, producing a DVD) and also working to secure donations from local organisations to help the community. One school ran a Fair Trade tuck-shop. It is notable that there were several examples of the local dimension of citizenship, for example, supporting a local disability centre and helping local older-age citizens. Another example was one school where the children were collecting rags for recycling – incidentally making links with concepts of sustainability. Apart from the materials specifically produced for schools, several other resources were mentioned by interviewees, including First News (a children’s newspaper), the Vine Trust, the Peace Child organisation, and a book Pachamina – Our Earth Our Future.

From a pedagogical perspective, a theme that emerged from the discourse was of a process of negotiation between teacher and pupils – and a sense of children having a say in the direction of the work. Quite apart from the resonance with Curriculum for Excellence, there are obvious benefits here in terms of intrinsic motivation and the notion of authentic learning (mentioned earlier). One respondent felt that the success of the work was due to “real decision-making powers [which] motivate the children”. Of course, from a practical point of view, this degree of collaborative decision making has implications for flexibility in planning. It was also noted that work in the area of global citizenship can raise issues which are challenging and/or contentious. Examples cited included materialism and global health.

In the interview with a secondary school teacher, it became apparent that there was not an official policy on global citizenship in that particular school, although this was under consideration. However, many relevant topics, including those incorporating moral and ethical issues, (e.g. racism, human rights, environmental issues such as global warming and genocide) were part of the formal curriculum. It was explained that such topics were addressed at different times, within a range of different curricular areas and by different teachers. We learned of an interesting example of this work forming a bridging project from primary to secondary school. In this case, an ‘Eco Island’ activity begins in primary 7 as an induction unit, and is then revisited when the children move up to S1. It was evident also from a long list of fund-raising activities that providing support for those who are less fortunate was very much in the thinking of the school.
Some possible benefits for children

In most schools visited, the discussion of benefits was wide-ranging. It was suggested that increased knowledge about different countries and an understanding of the lives of the children provided meaningful insight into cultural diversity. Stereotypical thinking was often challenged as a result of this. Many other benefits were reported too. Children often showed increased interest in other countries – not just those studied – and more generally in world affairs. It was also pointed out that when children learn about other famous individuals (e.g. Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King) the links to equality issues become more meaningful. A message that emerged on more than one occasion was that this work made the children reflect on many aspects of their own lives – both at home and in school – focusing on the simple things in life. It was also suggested that the children tend to become more aware of waste. One final point here: after learning about the value placed on education in other countries (often despite many difficulties associated with school attendance) many children seem to be valuing their own education more.

There were reports of benefits in terms of social and interpersonal skills (e.g. co-operation with peers within class, and with children in other classes) and levels of motivation; teachers often commented that the children developed a desire to learn more. Gains in self-esteem were also reported and it was suggested that these are as a result of what children have achieved – not least a sense of pride in helping others. (A range of fund-raising activities was noted across the schools surveyed.) Many other benefits were reported by teachers, including a belief that children seem to become more reflective about what they learn; in some cases this contributes to the development of a sense of responsibility. In another school it was stated that it helps “promote ethical education for everyone, from nursery to p7”.

Several thoughts are worthy of reflection here. Firstly, reading over the responses, one gains the impression that the value of this work is not limited to new knowledge of other countries and the people who live there – important though such knowledge is. Its value may also be related to a ‘springboard effect’; that is, we should consider what this work can encourage children to move towards – further learning experiences and the social and personal development associated with them. Secondly, from the responses of teachers, it seems that attitudinal change is central to this work. Short-term gains have been reported, but on an anecdotal basis. There is a need to measure more systematically attitudes and beliefs so that we may learn more about how these are really affected. Similarly, it will be interesting to learn more about whether any changes in beliefs and attitudes persist over time, given social mores and other influences on children (for example, the media).
**Impact on teachers themselves**

In one of the interviews, in a small village school in Perthshire, we learned that several teachers had visited Chittagong in Bangladesh, with the Bangladeshi teachers in turn visiting the Scottish village. Further exchange visits are planned, with different staff taking part. This was related to a British Council funded project, *Connecting Classrooms*. Not surprisingly perhaps, the researcher commented in her notes of a real enthusiasm for the topic work at that school.

Even without such experiences, there were many suggestions that teachers can be influenced at a personal level. In fact, comments suggested a positively reinforcing cycle can be set in motion. The more the teachers learn themselves, and see how the work influences children, the more enthusiastic they become and the more committed to global citizenship; this in turn has an effect on the quality of future teaching and learning. Certainly attitudinal factors can impact on pedagogical beliefs: several teachers indicated a desire to see global citizenship more widely embedded in practice. One teacher explained that she now looks for links even when the topic is not designated as a global citizenship focus. It was suggested that, as with many new or interesting ideas, what one class is doing can have an influence on the other classes. At the very least, there is a greater awareness within the school of what’s being done. The process of such organic growth within a school community is one which merits further investigation.

**Links with parents and the wider community**

Given the underlying community aspect of citizenship, links with those outside the classroom are clearly of interest, and there were many examples of this from the respondents. At the most basic level, parents are informed about the work through their children and through newsletters. In addition, we learned about displays in school for visitors to view; examples included displays showing letters and photographs and pieces of children’s work. However, amongst these respondents at least, the impact of the work seems to go beyond this. A notable characteristic was that parents often become actively engaged with the work, for example, by providing support in terms of fund-raising, attending events, buying products, etc. One school in particular reported a range of benefits in terms of parental involvement, with the local community providing materials and resources, helping to develop the school grounds, and being active in other project-related work. Another example was a project with a local repertory theatre, and one school had plans to involve members of ethnic groups in future projects.
Developing a sense of community is exemplified in a comment from one school, where it was reported that planning for global citizenship work is a collaborative venture. It involves work with support staff, parents and pupils: “Everyone is involved with the process – this is part of the ethos and culture of the school.”

**Future directions**

A range of goals and plans was evident amongst the respondents; some of these seemed to be very well developed, with others still at an early stage. Some were modest in their aims; others were more ambitious. An example of the former is a group of children in one school who had agreed with the school community to collect change at tuck-shop time and to use this for good causes. A plan which presents greater organisational challenges is to allow children currently learning about Bangladesh in primary 7 to maintain links with their twinned school when they transfer to secondary, with the eventual aim of visiting that school when they are in year 3 in secondary.

In some cases, schools planned to continue with existing projects, but often there was a sense of moving forward to develop work in the area. Examples included plans to establish new links with other countries (Jamaica and Slovenia were specifically mentioned) and steps to integrate an element of global citizenship into a wider range of projects in the school. However, there were differences of opinion in terms of the best way to go about developing this work. One approach favoured organic growth, with the global element infusing different projects as knowledge and interest increased. On the other hand, several teachers clearly favoured a more systematic approach to developing a global citizenship dimension throughout the school. One teacher stated simply, “There needs to be a set agenda.” An issue raised in this context was the nature of the learning experiences (and the topics explored) at different stages of development, taking into account children’s levels of understanding and other issues of appropriateness. Several other points were made as teachers looked to move forward in this area, including sustaining children’s interest over time. Some spoke of the links between the local and the global, and helping children to develop their sense of identity and cultural awareness.

**Challenges or barriers to global citizenship work**

Despite the obvious enthusiasm of the teachers in this investigation, and their success stories, some difficulties or concerns were mentioned. One which recurred is not unique to this area of the curriculum; it was a worry that the learning achieved in primary may not be built upon in secondary school. One teacher who spoke about a group of children learning Spanish as part of their global citizenship work, found out that they were unable to continue with this on transfer to secondary
school. There were several complaints about the ‘red tape’ that sometimes surrounded activities which were planned. One teacher spoke about the difficulties created by health and safety regulations. Another described how, for some reason not fully explained, the children were not allowed to have pen-pals in Peru – an element which would have added an extra dimension to their work. The issue of resources came up on several occasions. Although many good resources could be obtained, there were some problems accessing internet sites (even when previously vetted) because the protective software blocked access in schools.

Having mentioned such difficulties, teachers were often quick to point out that many useful resources are available. In addition to the usual educational sources and many well-known official organisations, local supermarkets were known to be very helpful. It would appear that these committed and resourceful teachers generally overcome the obstacles they encounter, but there will be value in investigating difficulties experienced and solutions found. Certainly, in the interests of encouraging more teachers to become involved in this work, there will be value in collating and disseminating such information.

Some further reflections

Although the information gathered in this study has helped to sketch out some interesting and worthwhile work currently being undertaken, it has also raised a series of issues. A view held by the writers (and evidently shared by most of the teachers) is that attitudinal change is central to the purpose of teaching in the area of global citizenship. While teachers have expressed the belief that children’s attitudes can change as a result of this work, these views are impressionistic in nature. This does not make them any less valuable, but it would be helpful to gather more systematically ‘hard’ evidence to support this belief. Some preliminary work has already been done in this area by the current writers, and it will be important to further explore the issues surrounding the identification and measurement of such attitudes.

Although it was not specifically stated, the notion of empowerment or agency seemed implicit in much of the discourse. One can easily see the links with the purposes of Curriculum for Excellence, and a question for further investigation might be the extent to which projects in this area do indeed help to develop a sense of agency (whether conceptualised in terms of efficacy, self-competence or autonomy). Certainly, one of the current challenges for teacher educators is to help student teachers understand the psychological processes involved in the development of such personal qualities.
Issues related to the development of global citizenship arose on many occasions. We heard from schools where global citizenship is being developed systematically from primary one upwards; what are the key factors in terms of a progression here, taking account of developmental issues and how children learn? We became aware of schools whose plan was to ‘grow’ the global dimension organically within the school community. Certainly it would be interesting to investigate such a change process and to document its development. Given the emphasis in Curriculum for Excellence, continuity of experience is an important issue. One question to be asked is how we can best ensure that the work started in primary is developed in secondary, in terms of subject content, associated learning experiences and attitudinal factors. To what extent can – or should – such experiences be mapped out across sectors? How can we ensure we respond to the flexibility that Curriculum for Excellence offers, in order to ensure a relevant and meaningful approach to the subject matter?

These questions – and more – emerged from our discussions, both with the teachers and other teacher educators. Some of them are already being investigated; other work is planned. As researchers we are keen to know the answers; but more than this, as teacher educators we are committed to sharing the knowledge gained.

**Conclusion**

This was very much an exploratory study; it was descriptive in nature and designed to help us understand the perceptions of teachers at the forefront of developments in this area. We should also remember that the scope of the investigation was modest, and no claims are made that these views are representative of Scottish teachers or Scottish schools more widely. On the contrary, it seems more than likely that these findings represent a particular stratum of the teaching force: a group who are actively committed to the principles of global citizenship and who are leading the way in classroom practice in this area. It would be inappropriate to generalise from this group to the teaching force as a whole.

Having acknowledged these limitations, we feel that the data collected create an interesting picture – and a useful starting point for those keen to learn more about the development of work in this area. From the perspective of the authors, the information has helped to inform our teacher education programmes in several ways. It has yielded some important information about what is ‘out there’, providing insights and promising leads in terms of pedagogy. But this work has another
important benefit; it helps to raise the profile of values in education. In the recent *National Framework for Inclusion* document, produced by the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC, 2009), we see an emphasis on social justice, including human rights, the right to education and participation and diversity. Work in the area of global citizenship is clearly congruent with these principles, and it relates to other drivers too. For example, it can be seen that increasing student teachers’ knowledge in this area can contribute towards some of the performance criteria for initial teacher education (the SITE benchmarks) (see GTCS, 2006). Benchmark 3.1 for example refers to the need to ‘Value and demonstrate a commitment to social justice, inclusion and protecting and caring for children’.

Of course, we are looking at attitudes and beliefs here, and processes of change in this area are not unproblematic. Indeed, one of the challenges facing both teacher educators and student teachers is to develop an understanding of how best to create positive attitudes. One possible approach could be based on Krathwohl’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1964). Being aware of a progression – from merely receiving, or being aware of, or tolerating ideas, through stages of responding to and valuing ideas, towards the internalisation of coherent value systems – may provide a framework to understand processes of attitude change. Clearly, while knowledge and understanding are important, if we can’t win hearts and minds then our progress may be limited.

Many other questions remain for teacher educators. How can we ensure that issues related to the environment, inequality, poverty, cultural diversity, and participation and access are effectively incorporated into an already packed ITE programme? What are the implications for engaging all tutors in appropriate staff development? These are questions which will have to be addressed, but we close with one final thought. Amongst the many positive messages we received from teachers during the course of the investigation was a belief that the benefits of global citizenship were such that it was worth persevering when difficulties arose: “It engages the children, they become completely involved and it is worth overcoming any hurdles.” The enthusiasm of these teachers is contagious; teacher educators too must work to overcome any hurdles and take the agenda forward.
References:

DFID et al. (2005) Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum. UK: DFID.


