Perspectives

'LEARNING TO UNLEARN' THE CHARITY MENTALITY WITHIN SCHOOLS

Jen Simpson

Abstract: Educators hold a potentially pivotal role in promoting a just and sustainable world for current and future generations. However, in reality, for many schools and educators global learning begins with charity and fundraising and does not reach beyond this 'charity mentality'. This limitation to learning has the potential to distort people's perceptions of other countries or peoples, particularly those in the global South.

The aim of the research discussed within this article was to explore the potential of one of the six aims of the Global Learning Programme (GLP) - a schools' programme in the UK that aims to enhance global learning in the classroom - to move educators from a 'charity mentality' towards a 'social justice mentality'. It also sought to assess the extent that a social justice perspective might impact on teachers' approach to their practice to ensure a more equitable educational response to global issues.

Key words: Charity; Social Justice; Transformation; Pedagogy; Schools; Teachers; Classroom Practice.

Introduction

The Global Learning Programme (GLP) England is a Department for International Development (DFID)-funded programme of support for teachers in primary, secondary and special schools. It aims to deliver effective teaching and learning about development and global issues at Key Stages 2 and 3 (upper primary and lower secondary) through local networks providing free training for teachers through a programme of after-school twilights as well as funded Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training and curriculum resources. Enabling teachers to move pupils from a

charity to a social justice mentality is one of the six main aims of the GLP though early on it was clear that teachers and schools as a whole also needed a change of mindset to meet this aim. The GLP twilight programme was a key platform for engendering this move towards social justice being a natural priority in schools. This action research study, funded by the GLP Innovation Fund, was aimed at exploring the most effective interventions to ensure greatest impact within the time-limited twilight sessions run by the GLP. In addition, there was a need for some further clarity on what a social justice mentality means to educators or how it 'fits' within education in order for teachers to see the value in it.

What is a charity mentality?

> "Charity has two conventional pathologies: the unjust dependency of the recipient, and the unjustified condescension of the giver" (Mill, cited in Saunders-Hastings, 2014: 233).

Commentary and debate on charity is not new; J.S. Mill writing in the late 1860s demonstrates the paradox of charity or philanthropy which had increased across Victorian Britain. His criticism of the response centres on the lack of or type of education of those providing the charity, namely women in this instance. He argued that those providing aid focussed on the 'education of sentiments rather than understanding' and looked to the 'immediate effects on persons and not to remote effects on classes of persons' which was ultimately detrimental to those they wished to help (Mill, cited in Saunders-Hastings, 2014: 246). Moving forward into the 21st Century I would argue that the same criticisms can be made of the charity mentality of people and societies today though on a wider, more global scale.

One criticism of the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) especially with schools has been that, in the past, too much emphasis was placed on the helplessness of those in the 'South' and the need for individuals in the North to act for change, with focus on charity and campaigning (Bryan and Bracken, 2011 cited in Bryan 2013: 9). If, as suggested by Standish (2009 cited in Tallon 2012) too much emphasis is

placed on action over theory or exploration of complex issues then there is the potential for certain agendas to influence the way we think about the 'other'. This focus on the global North's responsibility towards the global South places those in the North in a position of power, creating a seemingly kind and benevolent master but a master nonetheless.

I would suggest for many that this mentality has not developed or changed greatly in recent decades though it may have been re-packaged into more palatable forms such as Comic Relief or through education initiatives such as active global citizenship. However, the message essentially remains the same; 'we learn about you and we help you' (Tallon, 2012:8) reinforcing that sense of responsibility without questioning why. As highlighted by JS Mill in 1869, this standard message of promoting a charity mentality as the norm has the potential to distort people's perceptions of other countries or peoples, particularly those in the 'South' and it can become a smoke-screen behind which hide complicated issues and historical prejudices which allow the continuation of unfair practices and promote unbalanced societies. Andreotti (2006: 44) likens it to a 'sanctioned ignorance' for societies in the global North, preventing critical engagement whilst perpetuating the 'myth' of the North as the 'good guys' on a civilising mission. This paradigm has been labelled the 'Live Aid Legacy, characterised by the relationship of 'Powerful Giver' and 'Grateful Receiver' (Darnton and Kirk, 2011:6). This concurs with Spivak's (1990, cited in Andreotti, 2006: 44) suggestion that the constructed view of the 'West' being responsible for the 'Other' prevents equality in terms of economics, social and educational dialogue and perpetuates negative stereotypes to ensure the continuation of the 'vicious circle' of charity.

What is a social justice mentality?

If we consider social justice mentality in relation to a charity mentality the main difference is that the former removes the smoke-screen of 'sanctioned ignorance'. By critically reflecting on local and global injustices, especially from the perspectives of others, we begin to disrupt those 'myths' about our relationship with the global South. The challenge of defining a social justice

mentality is that it is not a 'fixed' concept as opinions are mixed on whether social justice is an approach to learning (Bryan et al., 2009), a way of thinking (Bourn, 2014) or an act (Bryan, 2013). No matter the process or method it is generally agreed that by engaging in social justice it will eventually produce positive outcomes such as challenging stereotypes and promoting equality on a personal level or affecting changes within society on a social level. Therefore, a social justice mentality or mindset could be considered a commitment to equality, a developed critical or independent thinking which results in ethical action.

How does this relate to education or teaching and learning?

Bryan et al (2009: 31) implies that the importance of the role of social justice has been amplified with modern globalisation and the realisation that many issues are indeed global ones which 'transcend borders'. If this is the case, the role of educators in encouraging young people to develop a social justice mentality is more significant than ever. It is suggested by Andreotti (2006:45) that education policies relating to the global dimension in England provided a continuation of imperialistic thinking which illustrated other cultures as 'only having 'traditions, beliefs and values' whilst the West has 'universal knowledge'. The tokenistic attempts at promoting the 'Other' through dance, art and music along with the stereotypical image of poverty stricken countries and peoples have unintentionally undermined educators' attempts to engage their pupils with the real issues and possibly reinforced stereotypes and prejudices. Biccum (2010) further argues that educators have been actively encouraged to promote 'active global citizenship' as a means of creating little developers able to participate in the global economy but without the skills or experience of critically engaging with issues such as inequality and injustice, what I suggest is a form of 'market colonialism'.

In an educational climate where schools must justify any deviation from core subjects or Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2017) standards, the educational value must be justified. Much of global learning is linked to the Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural aspects of learning (SMSC) or values which, I believe, have a

tendency to actually de-value its core educational significance. It puts it on the periphery of the curriculum or what some consider the 'hidden' curriculum as it is difficult to plan for or 'test'. Using the focus of 'charity' allows schools to tick-boxes and has demonstrable results such as donations, events and assemblies.

The challenge here is to alter the perspective of those within education to see and value the educational benefits of this form of learning. Learning is considered to be, essentially, about moving the learner forward whether in terms of knowledge, skills, behaviour, understanding or initiating change. In order to achieve deep learning it is suggested that learners must engage in active unlearning (Spivak, 2004 cited in Andreotti 2006: 45) and in this case, unlearning the charity mentality or deconstructing assumptions and preconceptions of the 'other' and reconstructing knowledge through the lens of social justice. If we agree to understand 'knowledge to be socially constructed and therefore open to deconstruction and reconstruction' (Campbell and Baikie, 2013: 453) teachers can encourage a process of critical and reflective learning (learning to unlearn) and offer multiple perspectives on global issues (including the 'other') to ensure that true understanding or learning may be achieved (Illeris, 2003) providing good educational value.

Challenges of moving to Social Justice Mentality

It must be recognised that a charity mentality is often the starting point into learning about global issues and development (Bourn, 2014). Charity, within a school setting, can also be an integral part of the school ethos, encouraging young people to be thoughtful, caring and morally 'correct'. Which is not a criticism as charitable activities can often result in the development of values, though Andreotti and Spivak may ask 'whose values?' Therefore, it is important that values should be challenged and questioned, perhaps unlearnt and reformed and that this critical reflective process is ongoing.

As Bryan (2013) stresses, individuals need to acknowledge their part in this structurally unjust world and it is easy to see how a charity mentality

allows us the peace of 'sanctioned ignorance' protecting us from the guilt of our complicity. It might be agreed that we cannot approach the subject of injustice too lightly nor employ emotive reactors to engage in the issue (Bourn, 2014). We need, instead, a keener approach to engage learners' skills, and to empower and enable educators to think critically both professionally and personally. That being said, the trainer must be careful to consider the means and approach to avoid the educators developing guilt or a 'feeling of helplessness' (Andreotti 2006: 48) which would lead to disengagement and ultimately be counterproductive.

Research approach and findings

One of the most important and challenging aspect of the research was to design interventions to illicit a transformative move towards social justice within the constraints of a 1hr 30mins after-school training session or twilight common amongst schools in England as a means of teacher CPD. To avoid the tendency for teachers to 'fall back' into previous practice once back in school as other pressures come into play and without the social aspect or impetus for change; such as within the training group. Realistically, the research timeframe was too limited to do more than reflect on how far the interventions removed teachers from a charity mentality and towards a social justice mentality.

Interventions

I carried out six different interventions with six teachers over the course of a 1hr 30mins twilight session in May 2015. In order to achieve the greatest impact on the teachers within the short twilight session and engender a 'transformative move', I opted to model the session on a process of critical reflection as proposed by Fook (2006), designing interventions around the 'learning to unlearn' ideology:

1. Unsettling or unearthing of fundamental assumptions.
2. Potential for further reflection of assumptions.
3. Breakthrough connections are made/recognising the origins of assumptions.

4. Evaluating assumptions against current experience/experiences of others.
5. Old assumptions are reframed.
6. Changes within practice based on new/reconstructed understanding.

Participants

The research focuses on a group of six teachers from the same primary school in the North-West of England with mainly white, British pupils who offered to take part in the research. This is admittedly a small group though representative in terms of a range of teaching experience and all participants had little or no previous training in global learning. The school had recently registered as a GLP Partner School recognising the need to develop this area and to access more training and support; this is typical of many schools engaging with the GLP.

Intervention 1: Framing (part 1) – Unearthing of fundamental assumptions

The first stage of the intervention process aimed to find out current learning or assumptions about knowledge, in this instance I chose the notion of a 'world view' and teachers' individual and collective understandings of that. Building on Spivak's suggestion that there has been a 'worlding of the West as the World' (1990, cited in Andreotti, 2006: 69) the first intervention was designed to illustrate the colonial framing of the world. Adapting a 'spectacles' activity used in GLP twilight sessions I used a frame to surround a world map on which I asked the participants to write elements of their identity which might influence their world view. The activity highlights how our influences, experiences and personalities can affect our perception of the world around us and draws attention to the fact that we 'construct' our world view based on those elements. Dialogue from the teachers included:

> *You could write some of these down (teacher D).*
>
> *I wouldn't think of those . . . I am not middle-aged, married or a parent (teacher A).*

> *I wonder if we see the world different, you and me (teacher D).*

This activity set the scene for the 'unlearning' to begin.

Intervention 2: Why are we changing the maps? Unsettling and further reflection of fundamental assumptions

The 'unlearning' or 'deconstructing' process was initiated using a clip from 'The West Wing; Why are we changing maps?' (2001) as used by Campbell and Baikie (2013) to challenge assumptions and the notion of a 'world view'. This proved a surprisingly 'unsettling' experience for the participants:

> *You never think about it that way (teacher B).*

> *You've freaked us out a bit (teacher D).*

It was also a liberating experience as it opened up new possibilities and avenues of thinking or questioning and was referred to throughout the session. The participants themselves rated this intervention highest in terms of impact. One noted:

> *I was shocked to find out that what we have been taught our whole life was wrong. It made me consider what else we have been taught that is wrong (Teacher B).*

Intervention 3: Framing (part 2) Breakthrough connections are made/recognising the origins of assumptions

This intervention was designed to further mimic what Andreotti (2006) refers to as the 'colonial framing' of the world by introducing a 'hidden' frame of influences such as colonialism, empire, media all chosen as words that perhaps people would not wish to associate with but are inevitably woven into our cultural psyche.

> *These are historical words (teacher C).*

*A time which is frowned upon, a bit controversial . . .
we should be proud, not places we trashed or the slaves
but we were pioneers. In hindsight the things we did
were not the right ones but we travelled the world
(teacher D).*

All agreed that the media had a major impact on their global knowledge and
the way they thought about the world and places which, they agreed could
impact on the approach to learning and teaching:

We should have a balanced view (teacher C).

*But we don't have a balanced view do we? Because of
the way we have been brought up and the way we've
been taught these countries are portrayed (teacher D).*

*Really hard to do a balanced view, to cover some or all.
What . . . do I teach them . . . they are the same?
(teacher C).*

Maybe we should? (teacher D).

This illustrates that the dialogue had already turned towards teaching and a
re-evaluation or reflection on their current practice. Interestingly, this
dialogue came from the two most experienced teachers and was watched
closely by the others.

Intervention 4: Box 'o' Poverty cartoon - Evaluating assumptions against current experience(s) of others

In intervention four, the focus moved to considering social justice itself
through Andreotti's (2006) 'Soft versus Critical Global Citizenship' grid.
The intervention used Box 'o' Poverty cartoon (Sorensen, n.d.) as a stimulus
for thinking about our role within a socially unjust world and to work through
Andreotti's grid. The teachers found this challenging due to the complexity
of the text and contentious stimulus.

Intervention 5: Soft global citizenship versus critical global citizenship – old assumptions are reframed

The fifth intervention aimed to provide an opportunity for the participants to begin to reconstruct or reframe their new understandings around critical global citizenship (CGC) thereby encouraging them to construct their future educational practice around a social justice approach. The teachers were asked

to further explore the 'soft vs critical global citizenship' grid created by Andreotti (2006) by sorting school initiatives such as Fairtrade, Foodbanks into either 'soft' or 'critical' categories. The grid has been subsequently re-designed and made more accessible for teachers (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Soft versus Critical Global Citizenship Grid.

	Soft GL/Charity Mindset	**Critical GL/Social Justice Mindset**
Approach (What?)	One-off campaigns, assemblies, theme days, food tasting.	Global Learning approaches within lessons/topics as well as one-off events/days.
	Charity or fundraising linked to local, and global events/needs.	Consider and explore local and global issues.
	Moral/Emotive focus (caring value).	Knowledge and understanding focus (educational value).
	Focus on poverty (reduction of), helplessness or lack of rights.	Focus on inequality, social justice and rights.

Reason (Why?)	'Impulse to help', moral, being 'good'.	'Impulse to understand', equity and ethical.
	Responsibility FOR the other (or to teach them).	Responsibility TOWARDS the other (to learn/decide with the other).
	Caring for poor people.	Solidarity with people without rights or opportunities and challenge this where possible.
Action (How?)	Help people to survive poverty - Raising money for poor countries overseas.	Participate in structural change for elimination of poverty and inequality.
	Sharing our wealth.	Critiquing how we got wealthy.
Learning (Message)	Reduce poverty through charitable work, campaigning and fundraising.	Challenge inequality and injustice and support rights for all.

Outcomes (Positive)	Feel-good. Greater awareness of some of the problems. Motivation to help/do something.	Sustained engagement. Independent/critical thinking and more informed, responsible and ethical action. Encourage pupil voice and advocacy. Encourages self-reliance and self-determination for poor countries.
Outcomes (Negative)	Can encourage or sustain a sense of cultural superiority or privilege. Sustains dependency for poor countries. Reinforces prejudice and stereotypes. Uncritical action.	Sometimes uncomfortable and can bring about guilt and shame. Can feel over-whelming leading to a feeling of helplessness.
Ultimate Goal (*of education?*)	Empower individuals to act (or become active citizens) according to what has been defined for them	Empower individuals: to reflect critically on their understandings and perceptions, to imagine different futures and to take

	as a good life or ideal world.	responsibility for their decisions and actions.
Pupil participation	From the outside inside (imposed change)	From the inside to the outside (negotiated change)

(Simpson and Barker, 2016. Adapted from Andreotti, V, Barker, L and de Souza, L M [2006] *Critical Literacy in Global Citizenship Education*, Derby: Centre for the Study of Global and Social Justice and Global Education).

The majority of the school initiatives were placed in charity/soft section for which the teachers gave various reasons such as their own confidence in teaching about the complex issues. Teachers reflected that '*you shy away from stuff you don't know*' (teacher D) and that soft global citizenship (SGC) presented '*easier solutions*' (teacher B) for primary age children.

The intervention then moved from the SGC side to the critical global citizenship (CGC) side encouraging the teachers to re-frame their understanding or approach to global learning. They discussed how they would introduce the idea of poverty or inequality to their pupils with the example of colouring in different countries in terms of poverty but one quickly stated that '*it's trickier than that ... I think high schools should teach that bit*' (teacher D). The idea that primary age children, especially at Key Stage 1, were not able to learn or understand the concept of injustice or inequality ran throughout the session and within the questionnaires. However, studies such as Oberman (2013) illustrate that young children have the capacity to approach these concepts and issues. Fundamentally, I feel that the main barrier or challenge is teacher confidence in this instance: '*Unsure as many of the issues seem too complex to discuss in sufficient detail with such young children*' (teacher E).

Wider research in this area concurs with this observation (Hunt, 2012) that confidence and skills in approaching complex global themes can be an inhibitor for teachers as well as time within the curriculum and opportunity for training. There seems to be an assumption that global issues are a subject to be taught and therefore teachers must have expert knowledge of these complex issues. This is more of an insight into the current educational climate where all knowledge is tested and the focus is on subjects being taught rather than a focus on the learning itself.

As previously argued, the quality of the learning is the key element here and I would propose that teachers need to recognise that their role is not so much to impart knowledge but to facilitate learning; providing opportunities for young minds to explore challenging and complex concepts even if they have no immediate or obvious solutions. However, this is perhaps a mind-shift too far in the scope of this paper and would require further investigation and evidence.

Interestingly there was, quite rightly, some debate on whether charity was a 'problem' or not:

> *Are we saying it is a problem? (teacher D).*

> *Not political enough (teacher C).*

> *If Red Nose Day was making a difference you wouldn't have to keep doing it (teacher A).*

> *Not sure about that (teacher D).*

It is a useful debate to have and it would be unrealistic to expect that schools turn away from charitable work altogether, but instead to critically consider how their involvement and teaching around charity can impact on their learners' perceptions of people and places. Further evidence that the session initiated or developed this thinking came from the evaluation questionnaires:

> *I think we may be less willing to join in with the loudest shouting charities and instead focus on something that we have really looked into and researched (teacher B).*

> *I never really agreed with charity anyway but it just emphasised my thinking that if we want to make a change or impact we need to look deeper into the issue instead of giving money to charity (teacher, questionnaire 1).*

Although this seems very positive in terms of a move from a charity to a social justice mentality I have some concerns about the success of their understanding or interpretation of social justice. I have discussed the varied perspectives of social justice and it is therefore understandable that the participants also make their own interpretations. However, my concern is that, for some, it seemed that the giving of money was being replaced: '*instead of us giving money we should be giving the knowledge*' (teacher A). This also came out within the second questionnaire three months after the interventions: '*We have skills and resources which would, if shared, have a bigger impact on world issues than our "charity"'*. I would suggest the danger here is that the giving of 'knowledge' has the potential of creating another form of 'little developers' (Biccum, 2010). This idea that the global North has the universal knowledge that others need still has the potential to distort perceptions of other people and places. Perhaps the use of the term 'charity' is not helpful as it suggests that anything beyond donating funds seems like a move away from a charity mentality.

Follow-up Review and evaluations

In order to analyse whether the interventions produced a transformative move towards a social justice mentality, I asked participants to complete a follow up review one week after the interventions and another three months on. The initial analysis of the qualitative data from the questionnaires showed promising results in most areas. In terms of changes in attitudes and behaviour teacher B reported: '*I will now question and have a more critical*

view of things seen in the media and what I am being told'. Three months on teachers commented that they '*Think carefully about the charities [I] support and how they work'* and that '*it raised my awareness of global issues and the way we could change our perceptions of charity'.*

In relation to teaching practice the participants reported some changes in their approach to teaching and learning especially in terms of facilitating questioning and encouraging open dialogue;

> *In future I will be a lot more careful about giving a balanced view of things and making sure that the information I give the children is correct. Or if I don't know - putting it out there for discussion*

Three months on:

> *It has changed the way I think about teaching geography, citizenship and global learning. It makes me want to make the children more aware of our impact on the world both by doing nothing and by supposedly giving support.*

In addition, one participant demonstrated a 'shift' from the charity mentality or focus to a more critical /social justice approach:

> *When discussing the 'send my friend to school' campaign with my class, I ensured that I guided the discussion beyond the idealistic idea of building schools in villages in Africa by discussing the issues of safety, resources, expertise etc. I also asked the children to think about possible reasons why some countries do not have the same opportunities for everybody (teacher F).*

When asked three months on about the importance of schools teaching and learning about social justice the responses were positive: *'I think it's*

important for all children (and adults) to realise that charity is a temporary short term solution' and '*that charity doesn't always mean that the people they are helping get the social justice they deserve*'.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to consider how to move teachers from a charity to a social justice mentality within a twilight training session to fit into the GLP support provision for schools. It was also to consider what social justice means to teachers and educational practice and whether the aim to engender this move was realistically possible within the timeframe. The evidence shows that the participants' personal perceptions and, to some extent, their professional practice has been impacted through the interventions, both in the short term and long term. However, the research is not complete and there are some concerns and further conclusions to be made.

Moving away from a charity mentality was, for some, essentially about moving away from fundraising or more specifically, fundraising without question or consideration of impact or perceptions. For these participants their 'move' involved only a few 'steps' from handing over money to handing over knowledge or skills for development which is essentially still rooted in what I consider a form of the charity mentality. This is not wholly negative for those participants and they did still show understanding of a need to move away from fundraising and the importance of questioning and becoming critical thinkers. This illustrates that there was some form of transformation for all participants, some moved further towards social justice than others but still a movement occurred. I would suggest that these interventions have engendered a perception change about charity and how schools in particular approach charity and the potentially negative consequences such an approach can have. Instead of the knee-jerk reaction or 'impulse to help' as Bryan (2013) describes it, the teachers indicated that they might approach charity or fundraising with a more critical eye and consider adopting a more critical educational approach which might have a more lasting impact than previously thought. It would be interesting to

follow-up this research by analysing classroom practice or evaluating any impact on the pupils.

The evidence from my research showed that the interventions - the learning to unlearn methodology - had a real impact on participants and was very successful in terms of transformative learning in a short space of time. Part of the reason the interventions were so successful might be that they were designed to personally as well as professionally challenge the participants. Those initial interventions which shook the foundations of their own assumptions or constructed knowledge had a subsequent significant impact on their personal perspective and openness to 'new' ideas or concepts. These conclusions cannot be representative of the wider educational sector without further research and systematic trialling of the interventions throughout the GLP network across England which is a recommendation of my research.

We should aim to engender a social justice mentality among teachers and pupils because of the pressing issues confronting our global world such as poverty, climate change, war, terrorism and refugees. These issues transcend borders and suggest that the need for equality and preservation of rights are not part of history but are current and relate to us all.

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