

GLOBAL EDUCATION AND MUSIC

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Introduction

Global education has increasingly become part of the agenda of voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland, including many that traditionally have not seen their role as delivering education on global issues. However, many of these organisations have developed activities and strategies towards addressing and tackling attitudes against racism and sectarianism within the local community.

These activities are not only the result of the social response to the local conflict, recent history and current peace processes over the last 10 years, but also represent a contribution to the social challenges associated with the arrival of migrant workers in Northern Ireland.

With increased inward migration, it might seem that the historical feelings of suspicion and intolerance between the main Protestant and Catholic communities are being transferred to the new arrivals. Years of conflict, division and sectarianism between the two main communities in Northern Ireland have made necessary new methods to address these attitudes and to encourage understanding of how they affect the conflict and local division.

The general consensus has been that the best approach to reduce and eliminate negative attitudes against 'other' groups, such as migrant workers or ethnic minorities, is through the formal education system. This is because schoolchildren provide a receptive audience and are likely to absorb new ideas that they can share with their families and because schools are becoming increasingly multi-cultural and keen to address the challenges that these changes bring. Partnerships between schools and voluntary organisations have become a widely accepted approach to maximise efforts to create a more open-minded society.

Beyond Skin is a locally-based voluntary organisation that has begun to incorporate global education within its activities. In its many years delivering workshops in schools to address racism and sectarianism, this organisation has used the universal language of music to bring a message about increasing understanding of and respect for the greater diversity of cultures and

communities in our society. Beyond Skin has also provided the opportunity for the pupils to meet musicians from the global South living in Northern Ireland.

This article describes Beyond Skin's *Exploring Global Issues through Music* project, delivered in 2008-2009 in partnership with six schools across Northern Ireland. The project provided an innovative way of addressing the connections between: local problems and global concerns; the challenge of talking about racism; and looking at migration as a global phenomenon which has origins in poverty and inequalities between 'rich' and 'poor' countries.

The project

The project was funded by the Department for International Development (DfID), and targeted two main aims of DfID's strategy for the promotion of global education. First, it involved incorporating projects related to 'global issues or development education' into school curriculum activities and second, it engaged migrant workers and ethnic minorities in its delivery. Beyond Skin worked in partnership with the development organisation Children in Crossfire to utilise their extensive experience in global education practice. This partnership added value to the programme by enriching its content and methodology which music as an engagement tool and a resource to create a friendly and non-threatening environment.

Why music?

Music has particular value in promoting global issues. It is a universal language, and is easy to understand and share with others irrespective of their culture. Music is non-threatening and is appreciated by people of all ages. Teenagers especially, who can often be resistant to formal learning situations and unwilling to take part in group activities, are generally highly receptive to music and eager to engage with musicians. Within the Northern Ireland context, where different kinds of music and musical instruments are associated with the two main communities, many groups have worked to break down these cultural boundaries by bringing the music of one tradition to the other. Cross-cultural music, for example where both Lambeg drum and bodhrán are played, has been championed by a number of groups. The approach used by Beyond Skin, where both the music and musicians reflect the increasingly multi-cultural nature of Northern Ireland society, is recognised as having an increasingly important role in local and global understanding.

Bringing the world to the classroom

One of the main strengths of the programme was the diverse background and profile of the musicians who took part as co-facilitators. All of them live permanently in Northern Ireland, and although most of them were formally trained professional musicians, most of them are now working in a job unrelated to music. However, being part of Beyond Skin gave them the opportunity to perform in occasional concerts or music workshops.

Training sessions were organised in order to help the assorted musicians perform effectively as part of *Exploring Global Issues through Music*. The musicians were also informed that the programme would not have the usual format of a single workshop where they only introduced themselves and played; the programme would require them to contribute actively as co-facilitators.

The musicians participated in a one day training seminar delivered in two parts. The first session introduced them to the concept of development education and was delivered by a facilitator from Children in Crossfire. This provided the context of the programme and gave an overview of the main issues in terms of the concepts and activities associated with global education. The second session was delivered by a facilitator from Beyond Skin and focused on the practicalities of the programme: the objectives, activities and methodology. Other practical issues, such as child protection policy and the need to obtain permissions for photographs were also discussed. The training session provided an opportunity to design the programme with consideration of the musicians' experiences and opinions about their global South roots, the connections between their previous life and present life in Northern Ireland, and the challenges they faced to adapt to living in a new country and culture.

Once the project began delivery in schools, the students were able to interact with the musicians and ask them questions related to their countries and also to increase their knowledge about topics such as geography and politics. The musicians' complete involvement in the programme development and delivery gave the sessions a global atmosphere, talking in other languages and exploring local dialects, for example, as ways of pronouncing the students' names. This dynamic provided the confidence and trust needed to openly discuss negative attitudes and address erroneous perceptions about ethnic

minorities within the classroom. The diversity within the team really enriched the content and interventions during the sessions.

The programme: Learning, activities and piloting new methodologies

The programme was delivered in six schools in Northern Ireland: two in Derry, one in Bangor, one in Lisburn and two in Belfast. The number of participants per school was on average 25-30, with an age range of between 13 and 17 years. Four 75 minutes sessions were delivered in each school although it was necessary to keep the programme flexible to meet school needs. The schools were initially contacted by Beyond Skin, with either the principal or the music teacher informed about the objectives, content, methodologies and activities involved in the project. Five or six co-facilitators and one main facilitator delivered the programme in each school.

Once the schools agreed the dates, the team met the teacher in charge to learn more about the group. Information such as class size and whether any of the children had learning difficulties or other problems was collected in order to adapt the activities according to these needs. The teachers of music and geography in all of the schools were very supportive and participated in the sessions. The sessions provided these teachers with ideas for activities they could use in their own classes to address global issues such as poverty, migration, international debt and fair trade.

The programme was divided in four main parts. In the introductory session the facilitators and musicians introduced themselves and their instruments, and the students were given information about the project and asked about their expectations. The students were also required to agree with some team rules. The session included ice breaker activities that were different in each school, varying according to the size of the class, the age of the students and the particular needs of the class (such as presence of children with learning difficulties). Some ice breaker activities involved finding a country on a world map, guessing the tutor's identity or testing the drums. All these activities aimed to put into context the concepts to be discussed in the next session.

The second session of the programme looked at general global concepts, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), interdependence, fair trade, racism, poverty reduction, migration, globalisation, international debt and the environment. These topics were only touched upon,

however it was important to assess how familiar the students were with these concepts. Despite the majority of the students not having previous training in global education or a great deal of knowledge about the issues, it was interesting that in some schools students were very aware of issues such as fair trade and migration. Most of the students agreed that they had some knowledge or understanding of these concepts through the media or global campaigns, including campaigns in which famous musicians organised a free concert to raise money for causes such as poverty, justice or human rights. This awareness gave us the opportunity to talk about how music has contributed to global education and how through global campaigns such as Make Poverty History and Stand Up Take Action, musicians and local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been able to raise global awareness of the issues that affect all of us.

The third part of the programme was focused on activities in which the pupils could discuss the chapter 'Money' from the *One Giant Leap* film. Using rhythms from different cultures as a background, the video illustrates a journey around the world showing images of rich and wealthy places in contrast to very deprived areas, and industrial zones in contrast to quiet and sacred places. After being asked if the video reflected the real world in which we all live, the students concluded that the video raised issues such as inequalities between the global North and South, injustice, lack of opportunities and education in some places and an excess of goods in others particularly in consumer-driven societies. In general all the students identified one common element to all the places: no matter how rich or poor they are, music is a common language that everybody can relate to.

These reflections contributed to the development of the next activity called 'Making a better world'. The pupils were asked to list ten solutions to the global problems addressed in the video. They made suggestions on how to reduce poverty, extend primary education, protect the environment, promote and develop health campaigns to reduce HIV and other diseases, develop working partnerships between rich and poor countries, enforce better rules to create a more equal international market, and in general, increase awareness of social and global problems. They were surprised that the list of common sense principles they compiled to address these issues correlated directly to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), one of the most important United Nations initiatives to reduce global poverty. This prompted the question: if this list is so easy to draw up, why are these goals so difficult to achieve and what is then needed to secure a real and effective implementation of the MDGs?

Other activities such as ‘would you buy?’ and the ‘country card’ were delivered to increase knowledge and understanding of issues related to international debt and fair trade. These complemented and added a more focused approach to the main activities. Music workshops within these sessions helped to bring a new dynamic to the group, especially after intense discussions or activities that required more concentration or reflection.

The final part of the programme explored the capacities of the pupils to create a product that showed a sense of world citizenship and could contribute to a promotional campaign to reduce poverty or raise global awareness. The students were given many examples of how music has contributed to the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals and poverty reduction campaigns. In some schools, students listed ten well-known songs that conveyed a message of peace, education, poverty or social justice and then explained their selection. In other schools the students prepared a song with lyrics that referred to the MDGs or global issues. Both demonstrated the capacity of the students to associate the concepts learnt with their own initiatives to promote global awareness.

During all the sessions the discussions were recorded and edited to be broadcast on Beyond Skin’s online radio Homely Planet. This was an initiative to link the schools that participated in the programme and promote the positive outcomes and discussions the students had while participating in this programme.

Conclusion

Delivering the *Exploring Global Issues through Music* project was a challenge for the Beyond Skin team, but also a great opportunity to incorporate global education into the ethos and agenda of this organisation. Many of the musicians found the project a creative opportunity in which they could incorporate not only their abilities and knowledge as musicians but also their own life experiences. Moreover the project gave them confidence to develop an awareness training and helped them realise the potential of music to promote and develop global education initiatives.

The teacher and principals, who were very enthusiastic and pleased with the response of the students, realised that the methodologies applied and the activities delivered offered an alternative way of learning. The programme

also provided a basic understanding of how these kinds of projects could be included in citizenship and global education studies in the curriculum.

And finally, as the main facilitator and coordinator, this project has been a very rewarding personal experience. Joining Beyond Skin and its musicians in this journey has given me a new insight into the power of music to stimulate and make different audiences more receptive to global education. I would encourage all organisations that work to tackle and address racism and sectarianism to move beyond their traditional activities, to be adventurous and to learn through discovery as we did delivering our project.