

# Reviews

## **Experiences of Childhood**

Reviewed by Mervyn Hall

In January 2007 I attended a seminar in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, facilitated by Michael Brown, the Director of Development Media Workshop (DMW). What originally attracted me to this event was its focus on child labour in the Third World. I was told that there were filmed examples of child labour, as well as supplementary educational material. As Citizenship Coordinator for my school, I had already identified key areas from my citizenship teaching that required attention. These included the need for fresh educational material on Third World poverty, which would enhance the Citizenship teaching to our Year 9 groups (12 to 13 year olds). I also felt that more contact was required with outside agencies, such as DMW.

Michael Brown's presentation and suggested classroom materials immediately won me over and I agreed to pilot his work. Working within Mr Brown's time limit I decided to create three new lessons based on his work and to incorporate these lessons into my existing Year 9 Citizenship programme. In total I was to spend five lessons on child labour and poverty in the Third World which included one of DMW's films on child labour. The aims of these sessions were to capture the spirit of DMW's work and, at the same time, inform students about Third World poverty and the wider concept of rights of the child.

*Experiences of Childhood* is an attractive and robust teaching package, which is clearly laid out and is divided into five progressive content themes:

- What is childhood?
- What are Child Rights?
- Child Stories
- Why, and how, are children denied their rights?
- How can children's rights be protected?

A matrix is provided at the beginning of the resource which outlines the pack's theme, content, suggested activities, and the resources provided. This is complemented by a curriculum rationale within the core area of local and global citizenship which is one of three strands contained in Learning for

Life and Work as part of the Northern Ireland post-primary curriculum.

The teaching notes contained within the pack are clearly set out with headings, bullet-pointed sub-headings, as well as a description of the activities contained within the resource. Recommended lesson times and methods for teaching the various activities are provided in addition to summary points at the end of the activities. The notes and activities are complemented with colour photographs, including website pages, examples of children's work and teaching exemplars. A DVD of four childhood films and a CD containing teaching materials is also included comprising a visibly superior teaching aid.

In piloting the resource, I was fortunate to have an existing one hour teaching time slot per week for half the school year. This afforded good quality contact time with students enabling effective and wide-ranging active learning to take place. The lessons in the teaching resource are allotted between 35 and 45 minutes although the structure of the resource activities allows for teachers to be flexible and adapt the materials, activities and timeframes to meet their own needs.

My first session equated with Section One of the resource on 'What is childhood?' This lesson was well-received by my Year 9 group as it involved them in group work and feedback. It asked the students to analyse their own childhood and to draft a general definition of childhood, both tasks requiring a degree of introspection. The pack's second activity on exploring childhood invites students in groups to draw a picture of a child and place his or her 'physical, emotional and social' needs around the illustration. It is a fun activity but also forces students to focus on the basic rights of children. Weaker students may need support with some of the terminology in this activity.

Section Two is titled 'What are Child's Rights?' and addresses more closely this fundamentally important issue while complementing the work completed under Section One. The activity in Section Two represents a valiant attempt to make what can be quite a dry topic into an enjoyable experience for students. The activity engages students in decision-making exercises on the basis of statements drawn from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Section Three on 'Childhood Stories' is undoubtedly the strongest aspect of the resource. The students watched spellbound the film on Meera, a 15 year old Nepalese student who earns a pittance working alongside her parents breaking stones with a small hammer in a quarry. The film's sparse narration does not distract the viewer from Meera's story which shows her combining her workload with attendance at a school with very limited facilities. The issues arising from the ensuing classroom discussion were wide-ranging and included Meera's lack of rights, her work conditions,

and the contrast between her rights and ours. Section Four examines how children are denied their rights through the example of a civil war scenario. This particular lesson may be more appropriate for an older age group, perhaps at Key Stage 4.

Section Five examines how children's rights can be protected, looking particularly at the targets set out in the United Nations' Millennium Declaration. The lesson again encourages discussion through group work and asks the pupils 'to consider how achieving the Millennium Development Goals will help to protect Child's Rights'. The pack ends in an uplifting note with the DVD showing how Meera's life has changed for the better.

*Experiences of Childhood* is an excellent teaching aid that fully complements and dovetails neatly into the existing local and global Citizenship curriculum. Its strengths lie both in the real life examples of child labour shown in the DVDs, as well as the breadth of teaching suggestions and activities included. The pack allows for flexibility that permits many of its lessons to be taught to a wide ability age range.

For the teacher the resource is neat, succinct and self-contained with resources that can be easily printed from a CD. Recommended websites are provided that could enable students to carry out research and project work with the support of the teacher. The subject matter also supports cross-curricular work encompassing subject areas such as geography given the resource's focus on developing countries such as Kenya and Nepal. Development Media Workshop has provided teachers with a resource that is fresh, original, thought-provoking and workable. I strongly commend this resource.

*Experiences of Childhood* can be purchased for £10 per pack, to include packaging and posting. Please send cheques to: Development Media Workshop, Fermanagh House, Broad Meadow Place, Enniskillen, BT74 7HR, N. Ireland. For further information, please contact: [info@developmentmediaworkshop.org](mailto:info@developmentmediaworkshop.org).

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