

Perspectives

DEVELOPING THE GLOBAL DIMENSION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Sian Higgins

Introduction

‘Developing the Global Dimensions in Peterborough Schools’ was a two year project co-funded by the Department for International Development (DfID) and The Leprosy Mission to engage six primary schools in development issues and support children to become effective global citizens. Using my perspective of the project as Head of Programmes Coordination at The Leprosy Mission, I will reflect on the importance of the Global Dimension in primary education and explore how these primary schools developed their curriculum, policies and ethos to ensure children are better prepared for the global world in which we live.

What is the Global Dimension and why is it important?

Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum (DfES, 2005:12), a Department for Education and Skills (now known as Department for Children, Schools and Families) recommended document for primary and secondary schools, outlines the eight concepts of the Global Dimension (GD): Diversity, Global Citizenship, Conflict Resolution, Social Justice, Human Rights, Interdependence, Sustainable Development, and Values and Perceptions. Children are our future leaders and decision-makers, and making them aware of these concepts is paramount if we are to address global issues such as poverty, health, education and discrimination, and prepare children for life in the 21st century:

“We teach our children to read and write, to add up, to run and to jump. And we do those things well. But many headteachers, school staff and governors will tell you that success in their schools has an additional dimension to it. They will say that it is embedded in their school’s ethos. Invariably it includes valuing diversity, being outward-looking, tolerant and respectful to one another. This dimension – the

Global Dimension – is fundamental to learning in the twenty-first century. It helps make sense of the complexity of our world. It stimulates debate, encourages creativity and gives us skills for our work and our personal lives. Global education is good education. It is about success, both academic and social, and about engaging with our world as global citizens willing to take action in support of our local and global communities” Rt Hon. Hilary Benn MP in EES-SW (2007:3)

The Global Dimension is not intended as a bolt-on to an already overburdened curriculum. It is designed as a conceptual framework that should be an integral part of the curriculum, policies and ethos of communities of learning. Recognising the support that schools need to integrate these concepts, The Leprosy Mission (a Christian development organisation striving to eradicate the causes and consequences of leprosy) worked with Peterborough City Council to develop a pilot project to demonstrate best practice.

Outline of ‘Developing the Global Dimension in Peterborough Schools’

Co-funded by DFID’s Development Awareness Fund and The Leprosy Mission, the project ran from August 2007 to March 2008. Its aim was to mobilise and build the capacity of primary school teachers in Peterborough to integrate the Global Dimension into teaching, and provide children with a creative curriculum that supports them to understand global issues and how they impact on their lives and the lives of others.

Six key objectives formed the heart of the project:

1. To ensure teachers have the knowledge, skills and understanding to develop creative strategies to integrate the Global Dimension across the primary curriculum;
2. To enable Peterborough schools to have improved access to resources and training that support the teaching of the Global Dimension;
3. To ensure primary strategy consultants, advisers and leading teachers in Peterborough Local Authority have an increased understanding of how to support teachers/headteachers to develop the Global Dimension across the curriculum;

4. To develop six ‘Centres of Excellence’ – schools that share good practice, creatively integrating the Global Dimension across the primary curriculum;
5. To ensure pupils and teachers are more aware of how The Leprosy Mission, other NGOs and the government are contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and of their own role in supporting development; and
6. To share project findings across the UK.

Strategies for integrating the Global Dimension

There were six partner schools in the project and headteachers appointed an existing member of staff as a Global Dimension Co-ordinator to lead the project in each school. These teachers attended a series of workshops to develop an understanding of the Global Dimension and how it could be embedded throughout the school. Their first task was to establish a Global Dimension team to support them in their work. Team members varied from school to school, the most successful being those with a representative from Key Stages 1 and 2 (students aged 5-7 and 8-10, respectively), the senior management team, a teaching assistant and a governor. The teams utilised the Yorkshire and Humber Global Schools Association (YHGSA) benchmarks (see www.yhgsa.org.uk) to identify which elements of the Global Dimension were already evident in their schools’ practice. The benchmarks examined a broad section of school life, including: leadership and ethos; teaching and learning; monitoring and evaluation; resources; staff development; and parental/community involvement.

For some of the schools this was the first time that they had focused on the Global Dimension and they had little or no understanding of the concepts. However, two of the schools were already engaged with the Global Dimension and this had been recognised through their achievement of the International School Award (ISA). Nevertheless, although both headteachers felt that the ISA was a good starting point, they wanted to embed the Global Dimension in a more sustainable manner. For example, one school had been awarded the ISA three years previously and, yet, the new headteacher now found little or no evidence of the Global Dimension in the school’s learning environment. Bearing in mind the warning that achievement of the ISA will not necessarily result in a sustainable impact on

practice, the schools opted to apply for the ISA as part of a wider strategy to integrate the Global Dimension.

Towards the end of the autumn term, each school prioritised various aspects of the YHGSA benchmarks and utilised this document to develop their school action plans. Schools developed a Global Dimension policy and revised existing policies accordingly. Training was delivered to all staff, as well as to school councils; regular assemblies presented a global theme; and international days like World Leprosy Day (see <http://www.leprosymission.org.uk/resources/lessons/>) were used to raise awareness of global issues. Some schools had an official launch involving the whole school; others also involved parents and the local community in an open evening. However, this project was not about one-off international events, but rather ensuring that children develop as global citizens.

As Stuart Mansel, headteacher of Nene Valley Primary School stated:

“It was not simply about learning about other countries and trying new languages and food. It had to be much broader. Developing awareness of poverty, human rights, the reasons for conflicts and the important role we all have in affecting the world as a whole was of deeper significance” (*Global Dimensions – The Journey of Six Schools*, 2009:21).

All the schools revised their medium-term and long-term plans, identifying which aspects of the Global Dimension were already evident in the curriculum. Schools stated that the eight concepts of the Global Dimension provided to be the best model for identifying their Global Dimension schemes of work. Some chose to colour-code these concepts in their planning which gave them a quick overview of what concepts were being taught as well as highlighting the gaps. Some schools focused on particular concepts each term while others linked concepts to their topic work. For example, learning about Victorian Britain provided great opportunities to explore human rights, particularly child rights, and draw modern day comparisons. This brought history alive for the children and enabled them to see its relevance.

Another important aspect of the project was the Global Dimension Resource Library run by Peterborough Local Authority, which was updated with £10,000 worth of Global Dimension resources. These included books, CDs, musical instruments, clothes and posters. The library was marketed to schools through Local Authority training sessions, headteacher meetings, school flyers and the Global Dimensions website (see www.globaldimensions.org). The library was consequently in constant use and enjoyed a 257% increase in resources borrowed during the project period.

Funding was also accessed from the British Council to enable teachers from partner schools to visit Malawi, with the aim of sharing best practice in creativity and citizenship and to develop reciprocal links. This provided teachers with first-hand experience of global issues that proved to be a huge motivator when they returned to school. Teachers became impassioned, and were determined to prioritise the focus of the Global Dimension in their schools. The partner school visits also resulted in strong links between schools in Peterborough and Malawi. The global gateway (www.globalgateway.org) and e-twinning (www.etwinning.net) websites were used for developing other partnerships abroad.

Partner schools recognised the importance of actively involving children in sharing the aims of the Global Dimension and empowering them to act as champions for promoting discussion on global issues. Working with school councils provided the opportunity for children to have a voice and to lead groups in Global Dimension activities. Two members of each school council attended a workshop to develop their understanding of the Millennium Development Goals. Activities included: 'Filtering and carrying water'; 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'; and 'Poverty – the challenge of living on \$2 a day'. After these activities and a discussion on Fairtrade, the children went back to school and raised the issues with the staff and their peers. Teachers and parents were lobbied to drink Fairtrade tea and coffee, and members of the school council challenged their peers to consider what they could do to make a difference.

At the end of the project a conference was held for teachers, senior management, local authority advisers and school councils to share learning. Staff and children from Peterborough schools had the opportunity to hear

practical suggestions about how to develop the Global Dimension and address global issues.

Tips and lessons learnt from the six schools

Various feedback was submitted as suggestions for future implementation of the Global Dimension in school curricula with some examples cited below:

- ‘Set up a school cluster group. The support of colleagues in other schools has been invaluable in developing the Global Dimension in our school’.
- ‘In order to fully implement the Global Dimension into your school’s curriculum, it is absolutely essential that you have the support and commitment of the management team’.
- ‘It is key to have a strong action plan in place to ensure the Global Dimension is embedded’.
- ‘Involve other staff in managing your international links. This will ensure sustainability and exposes the wider school to the Global Dimension’.
- ‘Have fun developing the Global Dimension; this will enthuse staff and children to become involved’.

Conclusion

The six schools have reported a positive impact on the curriculum, the school environment, standards, ethos and school policy, staff, pupils and the wider community. Global Dimension coordinators are keen to highlight that the Global Dimension is not just relevant for older pupils; some very successful lessons have been taught in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Since adding the Global Dimension into their themes, learning has taken on a larger purpose and children are more motivated to read, write and communicate with others. Staff have become passionate about global issues and are enthusiastic about planning and delivering a curriculum that not only builds on children’s experiences, but allows them to develop ideas about their identity and the world in which they live.

Nicola Wynne, headteacher of Castor Primary school stated:

“We are confident that this motivational curriculum will raise standards of teaching and learning...The opportunities that the global curriculum has presented to our school have been the inspiration that has moved our school forward at a rapid pace because it has united us all in something we believe in” (*Global Dimensions – The Journey of Six Schools*, 2009:9).

If you would like to find out more about the project and are interested in helping your school develop the Global Dimension, details of the project and an associated publication with case studies from the six schools can be downloaded from www.globaldimensions.org. Alternatively contact Sian Higgins at The Leprosy Mission, Goldhay Way, Orton Goldhay, Peterborough, PE2 5GZ or email sianh@tlmew.org.uk

References

Department for Education and Schools (2005) *Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum*, DfES, 1409-2005DOC-EN.

Enabling Effective Support - Southwest (2007) *A Global Dimension - Change Your School For Good*: www.globaldimensionssouthwest.org.uk/downloads/Change_your_school.pdf.

Global Dimensions – The Journey of Six Schools (2009): www.globaldimensions.org.