

ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED THROUGH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

In this article, **Alosa Kaimacuata** describes the challenges and successes encountered during the delivery of the ‘Engaging the Disengaged through Development Education’ project, which worked with pupils excluded, at risk or exclusion or ‘disengaged’ from their learning, classmates and teachers. The article aims to demonstrate how a range of development education methodologies were employed to effectively engage excluded or disengaged pupils with global issues. It also describes how the project was evaluated using the *How do we know it’s working?* toolkit developed by the Reading International Solidarity Centre.

Introduction

This article describes the challenges and successes encountered during the delivery of a Department for International Development (DfID) and Esmée Fairbairn-funded project entitled ‘Engaging the Disengaged through Development Education’ at the Lancashire Global Education Centre. The project worked with teachers and pupils at four schools in Lancashire, including two pupil referral units/short stay schools, which had pupils that were either excluded, at risk of exclusion or deemed to be ‘disengaged’ from their learning.

The article highlights the approaches used within this project to practically engage pupils and the challenge of engaging teachers in development education approaches. It also examines the need to model these approaches to engage those working with challenging pupils and considers some of the successful outcomes for pupils and teachers involved in the project. Finally, the article poses and addresses the question: who is really ‘disengaged’ in terms of development education?

Engaging the Disengaged through Development Education project

The project was delivered over three years between August 2007 and July 2010 by the Lancashire Global Education Centre (LGEC). It aimed to work with excluded primary and secondary students in pupil referral units (PRUs) and those at risk of exclusion in mainstream schools or by their teachers, using development education (DE) approaches. It followed on from previous pilot

work done by LGEC with pupils in two Lancashire secondary PRUs, which indicated the potential benefits of using DE approaches with disengaged pupils.

The objectives of the project were to implement and incorporate DE methodologies, approaches and activities into project schools' schemes of work, to more fully engage challenging key stage two (KS2) and three (KS3) pupils in PRUs and mainstream classes in their learning. The project aimed to increase participation by giving them opportunities to develop their local and global awareness of important issues such as poverty, climate change, human rights and responsibilities, and in turn by improving their skills in critical thinking, discussion and action. Training and support for the teachers and staff were provided to ensure effective selection and delivery of appropriate DE approaches. This would also support a more sustained impact upon pupils and schools over time as DE methodologies could become embedded in the schemes of work for their learning.

Project activities included: planning meetings with key staff at schools; a training day to introduce DE participatory approaches appropriate for the target group; support from LGEC's project co-ordinator in delivering DE directly with pupils; bi-annual working group involving all key teachers to provide further support; bi-annual steering group meetings involving headteachers, evaluators and local authority (LA) advisors to support the project's strategic aims related to sustainability; and dissemination and evaluation of activities undertaken in partnership with researchers at Edge Hill University's Department for Social and Psychological Sciences.

The first project activity involved meeting with headteachers from the four schools that had originally shown interest in the project. However, there was a long delay between their initial show of interest and the start of the project, and two schools subsequently decided to no longer take part. We therefore needed to bring on board two new schools as well as four extra schools, who would not be involved to the same intensive level as the other schools, but would receive introductory training, attend teachers' project meetings in the last year of the project, and participate in the project evaluation. As introductory material, headteachers of schools that fitted the project criteria were presented with two booklets: *Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum* (DfES, 2005) and *The Global Dimension in Action* (QCA, 2007), which illustrate only recommended global educational practice. None of the headteachers approached was familiar with these materials or the 'global dimension' and how it related to their school's curriculum. They tended to find

the breadth of the eight key concepts of the global dimension overwhelming, and this led to a discussion on how they could begin to balance what they were already doing with concepts they felt they needed support to cover or were lacking attention. The global dimension concepts which they seemed most interested in addressing were conflict resolution, values and perceptions, diversity and social justice, as these related to the issues their pupils dealt with on a personal and local level.

Development education approaches used in the project

The next phase of the project involved selecting DE approaches and activities that would address these concepts, and then incorporate them into training for teachers of both KS2 and KS3 pupils with challenging behaviours. Previous experience gained while working with such pupils showed they would need to develop their participation skills on an on-going personal-local manner in order to feel confident enough to participate in the DE activities that would link to wider global issues. The main focus was on developing pupils' and teachers' skills such as: speaking and listening; teamwork in small groups; sharing ideas; critical thinking; and for the teachers, fostering a more facilitative mode of leading their class.

These skills are required when working within a DE approach which emphasises aspects of 'good education', such as increased awareness and understanding through participation, and critical thinking and reasoning within a global perspective. But how might DE differ from other approaches fostering 'good education' already used in schools and why would teachers need to be introduced to it? There is no clear cut answer to this as many of the aspects of 'good education' are fostered in pupils according to teachers' approach to the curriculum.

Many teachers already deliver what is deemed a DE approach to education without labeling it as such. Some may feel restricted by the curriculum, or the topics and approaches taught to them in their teacher training. They may also lack confidence in implementing an approach to teaching that is flexible, facilitative, incidental and critical in which pupils' learning objectives are more skills-based than information-based. This is an educational culture in which teachers and pupils are used to being 'spoon fed' the required knowledge. Schools are accustomed to inclusive approaches such as the SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) programme and circle time to encourage personal skills of empathy, sharing, speaking and listening in

isolation or in the context of Personal Social Health Education (PSHE). However, most are unaware of methods they could use to embed and encourage similar skills whilst teaching core curriculum areas. The Engaging the Disengaged through DE project encouraged teachers to allow their pupils to critically think about and discuss, within a global perspective, information presented to them, empowering both pupils and teachers to make their learning relevant personally, locally and globally.

As part of the initial teacher training component of the project, we introduced the participatory methodology of Philosophy for Children (P4C) (see www.sapere.org.uk and www.p4c.com for more information), and demonstrated how to incorporate the global dimension concepts into the curriculum using activities such as simulation games and role play activities, including forum theatre (see Kent and the Wider World, 2007). Each of the four key schools received a minimum of six P4C sessions using stimuli related to the concepts highlighted earlier. For example, in one session pupils were told a story about two villages separated by a river with a bridge, and how originally they clashed but ultimately came to appreciate their interdependence when the bridge was broken. In response to this story, pupils in groups formulated open questions for potential discussion, shared these with the class and then voted for the question they wanted to discuss the most. Pupils chose and spent time discussing the question ‘Why is there conflict in the world?’ in the mainstream Year 5 class and ‘Why do people fight over where they live?’ in the KS2 PRU. Teachers were then encouraged to deliver their own P4C sessions with their class to foster participation skills and discussion around global dimension concepts.

After engaging in participatory classroom-based sessions within the first two school terms, pupils were brought together to take part in school linking activities during their summer term. The KS2 mainstream pupils (of predominately Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin) wrote profiles of themselves to the KS2 pupils at the PRU (of white British origin) and the latter wrote a class profile back to them. They also spent two days working together: for the first day they engaged in football-based team building activities at Blackburn Rovers Community Trust, a local charity. On the second day they participated in drama activities facilitated by professionals from Konflux Theatre-in-Education, and performed two plays based on global issues entitled ‘Love Food Hate Waste’ and ‘One World’ to the group, which also included their teachers and parents. A KS3 geography class and the KS3 PRU also took part in linking activities in which both classes followed *Get Global* (Actionaid, 2003) steps and

activities to choose local to global issues that interested them to explore further. They shared these issues at a 'get to know you' day at Blackpool Zoo where they chose three topics, war, drugs and bullying, to explore in their classes and in a subsequent 'Get Global Conference'. At the conference they engaged in activities defining conflict and peace, and photo-based exercises, and participated in drama and role play exploring issues of bullying in local and global contexts. The conference finished with a P4C inquiry where pupils discussed the question: 'will there ever be peace?'

At this point in the project a second training day was held to introduce DE to additional teachers in the project schools. Project teachers were given the opportunity to attend a workshop on forum theatre to address community cohesion led by Globallink, a partner Development Education Centre. Useful information on this and other DE approaches that were introduced to project teachers to incorporate the global dimension, including case studies, school linking guidance, lesson plan guidance, benchmarks and policy related information can be found in an LGEC booklet, (Drake, 2006), and at www.globaldimension.org.uk.

Key teachers attended working group meetings prior to the linking activities to share their experiences of the DE approaches and to plan for their linking days. During the second school year of the project the teachers were left to deliver their own planned DE activities with minimal project support.

Challenges

At the start of the project the main challenge was engaging teachers with the approaches and activities to be used in the project. Teachers were not experienced in using participatory methods with their pupils and some headteachers even commented that they would need to be 'spoon fed' the approaches instead of being required to develop the activities themselves. However, DE approaches are best when developed by those who will deliver the activities:

“An important and challenging aspect for development education practitioners is thought to be building ownership within schools. Ideally this means enabling teachers to question ideas and develop their understanding of and responses to the global dimension without imposing solutions” (Critchley & Unwin, 2008:15).

Key teachers' initial responses to the DE approaches (particularly P4C) were that given the challenging nature and behaviour of their pupils, they did not believe that the approaches would engage their students. It seemed that the teachers lacked the confidence to deliver a new approach in which they played a more facilitative rather than an authoritative role, and expressed concern as to the likely response and engagement of their pupils. The expectations of the teachers were that their pupils' behaviour would hamper participation and they would not want to engage in global issues.

Throughout the project, key teachers, colleagues and teachers in additional schools were expected to attend working group meetings to support and share their delivery of the DE approaches. However, these were not well attended during the last year of the project due to teachers' inability to get release time. There was also poor attendance at the steering group meetings by the headteachers and Local Authority (LA) advisors supporting the project. Beyond the difficulty of finding time to engage with issues outside already pressing curricular requirements, this also reflected the low priority given to global education within the education system. Changes in senior management at schools with headteachers retiring or moving on also hindered continued active participation, which in turn highlighted the importance of teacher engagement for the sustainability and use of the DE approaches.

The need for modelling development education approaches

If the project had relied on imparting training in DE methodologies alone, these approaches would not have filtered into teachers practice and pupils' learning, due to teachers' initial attitudes and expectations.

The project activities following on from the teacher training however focused on intensively supporting teachers within key schools, and modelling participatory approaches that incorporated local-global issues on a regular basis. These in-classroom sessions played an important part, not just in enabling the pupils to participate in group discussions on global issues, but in supporting their teachers in exploring the feasibility of using DE approaches with more challenging pupils. Teachers saw pupils interested, participating and communicating both in small groups and with the class as a whole. They witnessed normally withdrawn and disinterested pupils engaging in discussion on various issues, demonstrating the usefulness of DE approaches in increasing pupils' confidence, self worth, communication skills and empathy, and also how DE could support other key objectives.

These in-class support sessions prepared the teachers to confidently plan for and engage in the school linking activities, enabling them to fully engage in the project and giving them the motivation and incentive to deliver these approaches by themselves.

Successful outcomes of the project

DE approaches used in the project were clearly successful in engaging both primary and secondary pupils in their learning, and increasing participation and discussion around local-global issues and their links. For example, a boy with autism at the primary PRU had changed from being very withdrawn and not wanting to speak directly to people, to being able to confidently share his opinions on global issues (of which governments, global poverty and crime interested him most) and encourage his peers to also participate in group discussions. He thrived, given the opportunity to learn in this participatory manner where there are no right or wrong answers. Teachers at both PRUs indicated that the DE activities had played a key role in successfully integrating pupils into mainstream education.

The project was also able to support teachers' colleagues through training, the modelling of some DE activities with their pupils and by enabling teachers to impart skills in their teams. In terms of sustainably integrating DE into schools, all key teachers have shown a real improvement in their attitude to and confidence in delivering DE activities with their pupils. All continued to deliver, adapt and further explore DE when left to their own devices during the last year of the project. For example, the primary PRU teacher gave pupils the opportunity to discuss contrasting contexts within South Africa (in relation to a World Cup focus) and let them learn about apartheid and Nelson Mandela (a controversial topic she would not have had the confidence to approach previously). The key teacher at the secondary mainstream school has also increased her confidence in using DE approaches and took up the position of community cohesion co-ordinator to improve her school's performance in this area.

These outcomes were disseminated to local teachers at a regional subsidised conference in June 2010 (supported by James Nottingham of www.p4c.com) at which the aim was to encourage teachers to give DE approaches 'a go' in order to provide a challenging learning environment for their pupils.

Evaluation of the project

The project was monitored and evaluated in partnership with Professor Helen Whitely and colleagues at Edge Hill University. They looked for noticeable impact on pupils' confidence, self-esteem, self worth and general attitude to learning as a result of being involved in project activities, as well as looking at teachers' opinions and attitudes to the project over time. They took quantitative and qualitative measures twice yearly in the form of pupil questionnaires, pupil focus groups, behaviour rating scales and staff interviews to provide them with appropriate data.

Pupils' global awareness was also monitored and evaluated twice yearly through the use of activities from the Reading International Solidarity Centre's toolkit *How do we know it's working? A toolkit for measuring attitudinal change in global citizenship from early years to KS5* (RISC, 2008). Although time-consuming to implement and record, these activities proved to be very insightful as to pupils' attitudes and global awareness, and useful in informing and evaluating individual teaching approaches. One of the activities undertaken by pupils at the start of the project was to answer the question, 'Who will have which job?' when looking at a number of pictures of children of similar ages and differing ethnicities and given the job titles farmer, doctor, teacher, nurse, cook and cleaner. Pupils were initially very quick to decide who would have which job and related their decisions directly to the photo. When pupils did the same activity approximately nine months later, after having participated in regular P4C discussions, more pupils were able to give reasons for their decisions beyond the content of the photo, e.g. choosing the African boy as the farmer as he is likely to live in a poor country where fewer jobs are available. More importantly, some actually questioned the activity of making the decision itself citing reasons such as: they could not predict the future; people change; they were unaware of where they lived or their hobbies; their circumstances might necessitate a particular position; they might attend university; it would depend on academic performance; and that out of the millions of occupations in the world there were only a few to choose from.

The activity titled 'What would you see if you visited a country in Africa?' gauges pupils knowledge and awareness of Africa, and responses are categorised into natural environment, built environment, people and society, culture and history, economic activity, energy transport and communications, and named geographical features. It became clear through this activity that

pupils held negative and unbalanced views of Africa and its people; they were also unable to name any countries in Africa and stated that people in Africa had few clothes, little food and few things. This lack of knowledge informed teachers' future planning, such as incorporating discussions about the World Cup in South Africa as a focus for DE activities. The categories aided in comparing pupils' responses over time. When the activity was repeated, natural environment responses were still dominant, but pupils could also name significantly more countries in Africa, describe living conditions in more accurate detail and demonstrate an awareness of development issues related to education and poverty, such as lack of universal primary education. Repeating these activities also pointed to pupils' improvements in group work, with responses subsequently being given as mind/concept maps.

So, who is really 'disengaged' in terms of development education?

The pupils targeted in this project, deemed 'disengaged' with mainstream education, have shown increased participation and full engagement when given the opportunity to learn using DE approaches. Comparatively, youth groups have also shown full engagement in and action for change in response to being given the opportunity to engage in DE activities (DEA, 2010a).

Teachers should not be underestimated by their trainers or senior managers as needing to be 'spoon fed' and only able to 'spoon feed' as this project demonstrated. When teachers have the opportunity to learn about and witness DE approaches in practice, with their pupils in their classroom, they become more willing to and confident in exploring and developing DE approaches in their teaching, leading to very successful outcomes for their pupils.

In a wider context, a research study carried out by Ipsos Mori on behalf of the DEA found that:

“Without an opportunity to learn about global issues in school, over a third of the population (34 per cent) are neither involved in, nor interested in getting involved in, any form of positive social action. Amongst those who have learnt about climate change, poverty or world politics and trade at school, this figure drops to around one in ten...There is a very high level of public support for the idea that all members of society should have the opportunity to learn about global issues” (DEA, 2010b:3).

Given these scenarios there is real evidence that the education system, which could be deemed ‘disengaged’ from development education, should prioritise this opportunity to learn about global issues in a critical manner within the curriculum, initial teacher education (ITE) and schools. DE funding needs to be secured as well so that teachers and pupils can engage in DE approaches to allow the education system to “[nurture] a socially responsible, outward looking populace” (DEA 2010b:3).

Note: As the final data collection has only recently been completed since the writing of this article, the final evaluative report is not yet complete. If readers are interested in the final report once completed, please contact the author for further evaluation details.

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