

Seeing the bigger picture of local and global citizenship

Wendy Young

The “coherent, enjoyable, motivating and relevant” revised Northern Ireland Curriculum aims to empower young people to develop as individual contributors to society, the economy and the environment. The curriculum review identified the need to reduce fragmentation and increase relevance and skills development:

“As we move into a world in which knowledge is proliferating at a fantastic rate, we simply can’t keep adding to the curriculum. We need to add by subtracting and by giving young people the skills to connect learning and to learn more for themselves” (Drake, cited in Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2003, p.3).

“Learning for Life and Work” is placed at the centre of the revised framework; this area encompasses Education for Employability, Local and Global Citizenship and Personal Development. The inclusion of Global Citizenship is a welcome addition to the Northern Ireland Curriculum:

“In an era of human history in which global interdependence is one of the defining characteristics, it is time for our understanding of citizenship-and citizenship education - to expand as an ideal that more closely befits the world we have created” (Pike 2001).

The predecessors to Local and Global Citizenship, the cross curricular themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage, “had the potential to encourage the development of learning to live with differences in a spirit of acceptance, fairness and mutual respect” (Richardson, 1996). They had an important but solely local focus and, according to a University of Ulster evaluation, were found lacking in the areas of human rights and political education. Michael Arlow identified concerns surrounding the use of citizenship terminology in a ‘contested society’ such as Northern Ireland and yet also recognised it is in the:

“discovery of commonality and difference between young people in different cultures that students could begin to understand the reality of interdependence and to see themselves as Global Citizens as well as Citizens of the UK or Ireland” (Arlow 1999).

This defined, hopefully not confined, place in the revised curriculum, for young people to “see themselves as Global Citizens”, has given the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community an opportunity to encourage and support the delivery of development education. They have responded “almost in an overdrive producing resources” and have been recognised as having a crucial role to play in supporting the delivery of global citizenship in schools (CCEA, cited in Coalition of Aid and Development Agencies (CADA) 2004, p.39). The Centre for Global Education has responded to local and global citizenship requirements by developing an interactive web-based resource called the Big Pic. This resource is inclusive of all components of local and global citizenship that is: Diversity and Inclusion, Equality and Social Justice, Democracy and Active Participation, Human Rights and Social Responsibility and has made concomitant training available to all users. The Big Pic (www.bigpic.biz) went live in January 2004 and has had over 35,000 hits to date (a hit represents the downloading of one activity). The final section of the site was installed in June 2006.

The site hosts games, quizzes and activities addressing local and global issues. For example, ‘Diversity Street’ challenges the user to consider many different viewpoints surrounding local issues of ethnic diversity, equal rights, and migrant workers. Attitudes and stereotypes are exposed and the user is invited to concur or disagree. In ‘Global Connections’ users identify the many ways they connect to places and people all over the world simply by the food they eat and things they use. ‘The Piggy Bank’ exposes the economic problem of debt repayments for many developing countries while the ‘Super Market Sweep’ activity and the asylum seekers presentation provide examples of how users can help make a positive difference by taking action. External links to other NGO websites provide additional information, for example to Oxfam’s Cool Planet and the Save the Children websites. Teacher and youth work sections are provided to give context to the site and guidance on best practice.

The site has definite formal sector roots but is now also promoted to the non-formal sector. The Department of Education Youth Strategy 2005 - 2008 envisions young people “participating as active citizens” and “promotes outward-looking youth work by developing awareness of global citizenship.” Consequently youth groups were consulted in the piloting of activities and the inclusion of youth work guidance material ensures that the

Big Pic is an effective global youth work resource. As feedback from youth focus groups shows:

“The Big Pic addresses and raises important issues that everyone should be more aware of”.

“The website makes me want to learn more about the Global World”.

“The site is excellent and raises issues that we all tend to not think about”.

Whatever the user group and in whatever context, the Big Pic allows users to focus on local and global issues and to make the connections between those issues and their everyday lives. It encourages experimental and participative ways of learning, the development of creative and critical thinking skills and engagement with real issues. Local and global citizenship is placed in the central framework of the revised Curriculum and provides an invaluable forum for development education. However, “Citizenship has suddenly become the carrier for everything” and there is a danger that global citizenship will become secondary in importance to local concerns or even that “the claims of citizenship - whether national or global in orientation - will largely be ignored while schooling is oriented to the imperatives of the global economy”(Osborne, cited in Pike 2001, p.30). Will the ultimate products of this “coherent, enjoyable, motivating and relevant” revised Northern Ireland Curriculum, be active and engaged citizens or consumers who find their sense of identity and belonging in what they have rather than what they do or who they are as individuals?

“This is an important time and opportunity in young people’s lives to create and deepen their interest in current affairs and issues of social concern and to help them examine and clarify the conflicting values they see around them” (CCEA 2003).

If young people are to clarify and respond to the conflicting values within society and even within their education the bigger picture must always be kept clearly in view.

References and Bibliography

Arlow, M (1999) 'Citizenship education in a contested society' *The Development Education Journal*, Vol.6, no.1, pp.14-15.

Bourn, D (2005) 'Development Education in the Era of Globalisation', *Policy and Practice*, Issue 1, Autumn 2005, Centre for Global Education, Belfast.

Coalition of Aid and Development Agencies (2004) *The Global Dimension in Schools in Northern Ireland*, CADA, Belfast.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2003) *Pathways: Proposals for Curriculum and Assessment at Key Stage 3*, CCEA, Belfast.

Kirkwood-Tucker, TF (2004) 'Towards a theory of world-centered citizenship education', *The Development Education Journal*, Vol. 10, no.2, pp.14-15.

Harland, J et al (2002) *Is the Curriculum Working?*, National Foundation for Educational Research, Berkshire.

McCloskey, S (2005) 'Development education in Northern Ireland: assessing the past and charting the future', *Policy and Practice*, Issue 1, Autumn 2005, Centre for Global Education, Belfast.

Pike, G (2001) 'Towards an ethos of global citizenship education; some problems and possibilities,' *The Development Education Journal*, Vol.7, no.3, pp.30-32.

Richardson, N (1996) 'Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage', *Conflict Archive on the Internet*, Retrieved December 14, 2005, from <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/emu/emuback.htm>

Wendy Young is a Geography teacher in Dalraida Grammar School, Ballymoney. In July 2006 she completed a one year secondment in the Centre for Global Education as Training and Resource Officer during which she worked on a web based resource for Local and Global Citizenship called The Big Pic. The site can be visited at www.bigpic.biz