

How can education make poverty history?

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This think piece is one of a series of articles in which writers set out their own views on how the curriculum might change in the future. QCA hopes that the think pieces will stimulate debate on the future of the curriculum. You can contribute to the debate at www.qca.org.uk/futures/forum/.

'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'.

Nelson Mandela



Moira Faul

A classroom in Niger: Awa tries to keep up with lessons although she woke at 4am to fetch water for her family and, when she finishes her classes, will look after her siblings, fetch

wood and pound millet. A classroom in England: pupils are learning not to judge or feel sorry for her, but to empathise; not to accept others' opinions, but to think critically about the viewpoints presented to them in the media, by their peers and families; to be outraged at the injustice of her poverty, not to accept it as a fact of life; to consider and decide what action they could take to make a difference. These young people are also learning how to empathise with their classmates, families and communities and think critically about local issues and poverty through building lifelong, transferable frameworks of knowledge, skills and values.

This is education for global citizenshipⁱ. With explicit recognition that education serves a purpose beyond fitting young people for work, Oxfam and the development education field believe that education, not awareness-raising, for global citizenship can make poverty history.

Why should education tackle global poverty at all? The design and implementation of

education curricula fundamentally affect the way young people relate to their world. It can help young people decide what their contribution might be to society and how to make it in all spheres eg political, economic, social, environmental. Limiting our curriculum to only one aspect limits the development of young people's understanding, skills and how they value other facets of their lives. Defining the purpose of education beyond the parameters of fitting young people for work will help young people decide how they can make a full contribution to society.

Global issues are part of everyday life in the 21st century: a curriculum for global citizenship gives children and young people the opportunity to explore who they are and how they relate to the world around them in the classroom. Images and information about terrorism/freedom fighting, refugees/bogus asylum seekers and deserved/undeserved poverty bombard young people through TV and other communications technology. These can reinforce prejudices if children are not given the opportunity, in the relative safety of their classrooms, to explore and develop the values, skills and understanding appropriate to their 21st century context.

Research tells us that global poverty is of real concern to young people and therefore needs to be addressed in schools:

- Young people are already thinking about their own citizenship globally. They want to critically engage with topical issues. In July 2005, 33 per cent of 16- to 25-year-olds were wearing the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY**ⁱⁱ wristbandⁱⁱⁱ.
- 81 per cent of pupils believe that young people need to understand global matters in order to make choices about how to lead their lives and would prefer to learn about them at school^{iv}.
- Young people are puzzled by world events, and feel short-changed if schools do not give these attention in depth or present only one side of a story^v.

- Children and young people's support for development is currently at its highest. Mori polls directly attribute this to contemporary events and, significantly, to the increase in education for global citizenship in the curriculum and wider school activities^{vi}.
- Schools and teachers are also aware of and are seeking to implement global citizenship approaches in their school: 24,000 orders have been received for the *DfES Guidance to Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum*. This helps schools provide a space for pupils to explore and discuss issues and, if they want to take action, what that might be^{vii}.

So, education for global citizenship is at the core of any curriculum and whole-school ethos that is relevant to young people in the 21st century. It seeks to create real understanding and desire for change, leading to meaningful action and participation.

David Bell (HMCI) said a global citizen is one who 'knows how the world works, is outraged by injustice and is both willing and enabled to take action to meet this global challenge'^{viii}. A curriculum for global citizenship should respond to young people's need to develop their global citizenship, working through participatory educational processes to help them develop their own:

- **knowledge and understanding** of justice, peace and conflict, interdependence, appreciating similarities and respecting diversity, and sustainability
- **values** including a belief that people can make a difference, and can have respect, self-worth, empathy and concern for the environment
- **skills** in thinking, challenging injustice, cooperating and resolving conflict and respect.

Education for global citizenship is about education, not indoctrination. The participatory, revelatory methodologies employed in education for global citizenship

seek to develop young people's understanding and practice of their rights and concomitant responsibilities to each other and to the planet itself, fostering the understanding, skills and values that enable them to make their world more just and sustainable. These participatory methodologies also form a vital part of good practice: learning is more effective, enjoyable and motivating when personalised and contextualised in ways that are relevant to learners' concerns. It does not preach or prescribe actions for children and young people to take, nor can it separate this aspect of learning and school life from any other.

How then, does education for global citizenship impact upon poverty eradication, taking the wearing of a white band beyond a fashion statement into real engagement with their world? A curriculum for global citizenship should enable young people to:

- engage with others with respect, from a basis of deeply founded self-worth, not prejudice and fear
- understand poverty better through participative engagement with the issues and believe that they can make a difference
- decide what they believe to be the root causes of poverty and choose actions they believe will make the difference
- act individually or with others to call for justice for the world's poorest people
- improve their own chances of avoiding poverty^{ix}.

Young people of today are the leaders of tomorrow and the citizens that will hold them accountable. We owe it to them to ensure their school curriculum deals with the issues and actions that will make the world they inherit the just, sustainable and respectful world they would like to live in. Oxfam, for example, believes that individuals have the power to take action that makes a difference, be that living more sustainable lives or working with others. This might include bringing pressure to bear on world leaders and the global institutions that have the power to change the rules under which our world currently functions, particularly those as regards international trade, aid and debt cancellation. Pressurising our political leaders

to change these rules will transform the lives of millions of people, and bring about a global system that is more just and sustainable.

Teachers have asked for training to facilitate the learning for global citizenship their pupils are asking for. They request a grounding in:

1. teaching controversial issues
2. keeping up with contemporary political happenings
3. feeling comfortable with unpredictability in the classroom
4. listening to young people and enabling their voices to be heard
5. devising suitable assessment and feedback^x.

While there are many continued professional development and classroom resources available^x, as well as local support for schools through Development Education Centres^{xi}, this cannot happen if restricted to individual teachers in their classrooms.

Education can make poverty history and be truly relevant to young people, their lives and their futures if we (policy makers and practitioners):

- define the purpose of education beyond the parameters of fitting young people for work, explicitly stating and demonstrating in our work (policy and practice) that we are addressing how young people can learn to make a contribution to society^{xii}. This would bring to life the values and aims of the national curriculum rather than ghettoizing this aspect of education into one subject area (citizenship)
- pursue and support structural policies and practices (including modelling behaviours) that are inclusive and integrative. Teachers should not feel they have to 'get around' the national curriculum or use it to legitimate not educating their young people for global citizenship^v
- commit to furthering true education for global citizenship that helps young people make sense of their world, acknowledging and critically exploring complexity. For this to happen, learning needs to go beyond raised awareness or pity into developing a basis for making and taking choices about participation and action.

As adults – policy makers and educationalists – we can take the responsibility to begin the process of change. We can provide a curriculum that will help children develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to see how they can affect the issues of the world that are of concern to them.

Education for global citizenship is not only easily achievable, effective education, it is also essential to allow all children and young people to make sense of and participate positively in their world. Let's meet the challenge our young people are setting for us; through meeting this, we will better enable them to meet the challenges of the 21st century, including the challenge to make poverty history.

Notes

- i Oxfam's Education for Global Citizenship www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/
- ii **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** is a UK alliance of charities, trade unions, campaigning groups, faith communities and celebrities seeking to build popular and institutional support for the drive against poverty and injustice. www.makepovertyhistory.org/
- iii MPH Omnibus Research (HI Europe, commissioned by Oxfam July 2005)
- iv Mori 1998 *Children's Knowledge of Global Issues: A research study among 11-16 year olds*. www.dea.org.uk/dea/
- v Davies, L., Harber, C., Yamashita, H. 2005 *Global Citizenship Education: The Needs of Teachers and Learners*. CIER: www.education.bham.ac.uk/research/
- vi Mori 2005 *DfID Schools' Omnibus*. www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/
- vii DfES *Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum*. This document contains a wealth of case study material on how to implement Education for Global Citizenship. www.globalgateway.org.uk/pdf/
- viii Bell, D. *Education for Democratic Citizenship* November 2005.
- ix In an LSC study, employers identified the skills that young people practise and learn through participatory methodologies as key (communication, team working and problem solving): LSC 2003 *National Employers Skills Survey*. www.lsc.gov.uk/National/
- x Oxfam's *Catalogue for Schools* www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/
- xi Development Education Association map of local Development Education Centres www.dea.org.uk/map/
- xii Fien, J. 1993 *Education for the Environment: Critical Curriculum Theorising and Environmental Education*. Geelong: Deakin University.

