CHILDREN'S DEVELOPING IMAGES AND REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL LINK ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

Over the last few years, the government of the UK has promoted the development of global citizenship within the primary curriculum and has provided funding for schools to link with partner schools in places around the world in order for pupils to develop values of global citizenship. The research discussed in this chapter was developed within the context of one such school-linking project between Richard Bonington School in Nottingham and St. Anthony's High School in Goa, India. The link was initially funded by the Department of Primary Education at the Nottingham Trent University as part of a small-scale research and curriculum development project within the context of its Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Partnership Programme. Within the Department there was a growing concern to develop the global dimension within the humanities modules in order to prepare students for their future careers in primary schools. Many local schools were addressing global citizenship through setting up school linking programmes and it was becoming increasingly important that this aspect was reflected in the ITT curriculum.

The project has developed as a three-way link between the two schools and the university and is very much led by the curriculum development needs of all three institutions. The research focus has strengthened this development and fed back into the work of the schools, as well as raising wider research issues for future consideration. The link has provided a variety of curriculum development and research opportunities including teacher exchanges and a student study visit. The work has been disseminated locally through presentations for teachers, tutors and research students. This chapter focuses on one aspect of this school linking experience.

Literature review

The revised National Curriculum (DfEE/QCA, 1999) placed a greater emphasis on the global dimension in the primary curriculum and on the development of citizenship. The publication of a guidance document (DfEE et. al, 2000) for head teachers, senior managers and LEAs published in the following year, urged schools to 'place the school curriculum within a broader, global context'. It also advocated 'incorporating a global dimension into the wider life of the school with particular attention being paid to school linking and the opportunities that this offers for learning across the curriculum.'
Increasing numbers of primary schools have developed links with schools abroad, many of which are in economically developing countries and support and guidance from the Central Bureau, the former educational branch of DfID, has been readily available to facilitate these projects.

The nature of global citizenship

Definitions of global citizenship and the value of including it in the primary curriculum have been well documented in recent publications (Oxfam, 1997; Grimwade et. al, 2000; Young & Cummins, 2002) and these promote a welcome emphasis on process and ways of working as well as on knowledge and understanding. However, as Tsolidas (2000) asks ‘How do we teach and learn in times when the notion of global citizenship sounds like a cliché?’ As Graves (2002) has argued, there is a need to question some of the assumptions and premises on which effective practice is based and query whether addressing such a complex subject in the primary school without the provision of extensive school based training and staff development is an appropriate path to take.

Central to the concept of global citizenship is a commitment to the idea of personal reflection and critical thinking, processes which need to be informed by accurate information about the world and knowledge of how that information is constructed and communicated. In an overburdened curriculum which prioritises the acquisition of basic skills and sidelines the arts and humanities, surface coverage of many important areas of children's learning about the world is a major cause for concern. In order to explore the notion of global citizenship and raise young children's awareness of issues such as sustainability, social justice and poverty, a context needs to be provided.

History and geography, as traditional school subjects, provide rich opportunities to develop these understandings and it is ironic that the downgrading of these subjects in the primary curriculum has occurred at the same time as global citizenship is being increasingly promoted. School linking seems to be developing as a preferred context for such work. The opportunities provided by geography, as a national curriculum subject, to address these key concepts are abundant but there has been a significant reduction in the amount of geography being taught in many schools and the latest indications are that the quality of geography teaching has declined (Ofsted 2002). Ashley (1999) has referred to citizenship as being ‘the new humanities' and it undoubtedly shares a common concern with the experiences of people in society. However there may also be a danger that in subsuming much humanities learning within the citizenship curriculum, the rigorous methodologies of history and geography will be lost. The focus in primary history and geography on the enquiry process and the use of evidence has a particular contribution to make to the development of the global citizen and school links which aim to develop global citizenship need to consider the particular contribution that the geography curriculum can make.
Teaching about distant places

The study of a distant locality provides children with opportunities to develop key geographical skills and concepts. Through comparing and contrasting their own locality with another in a distant place, children can develop concepts of similarity and difference and come to an understanding of shared humanity and environmental processes. When the distant locality being studied is located in an economically developing country, issues relating to the effectiveness of teaching resources and approaches are of particular significance. The messages which children absorb through the images, and materials they are exposed to, will have a major impact on their attitudes and perceptions (Wiegand, 1992).

With restricted curriculum time available for distant locality teaching, it becomes even more urgent that the approaches and materials used are of an appropriate nature. Resources such as the Chembakolli locality pack (Action Aid 2002) are widely used in schools and although it has many attractive features and has been usefully updated, it needs to be used in a cautious and selective way if the stereotypical image of an Indian village is not to be seen as representative of the lives and experiences of all Indian people. Used with care and supplemented with a wider range of images and other resources, it is possible to portray the more complex mixture of modern and traditional, rich and poor, urban and rural contexts that make up India today. School linking can offer another approach which enables children to learn about the real lives of real people in a real place and can be developed to enable children to communicate meaningfully with each other about their own lives. Weldon (1994, 16) argues that

...forming overseas links has the potential to develop in children a greater sympathetic and caring attitude to other peoples and ways of life, a sense of responsibility for the environment, both locally and globally, and helps to counteract prejudice.

In such circumstances, the similarities children find when they share experiences about their lives often outnumber the differences but there are difficulties. Challenging children's perceptions that all people in India live in poverty and have no possessions, can be powerful but if it reinforces their view that to be a person of value, it is necessary to possess western consumer items and be as similar to themselves as possible, the lessons of global citizenship are not being learned. As Tsolidas (2002, 222) argues,

    teaching and learning needs to be premised on the understanding that there is an ongoing and productive tension between sameness and difference. Rather than construct a pedagogy which aims at either sameness or difference we should be teaching to the relationship between these by focusing upon what is shared as a means of making difference more familiar to all students.

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This emphasises the importance of teachers widening the study of a distant place to include teaching global issues in a way which enables children to consider underlying political and moral issues and which focuses their thinking on the impact which lifestyle choices in the UK have on the experiences of others.

**Research method**

The drawing of clear distinctions between curriculum development and research in the field of education is always problematic and can be unhelpful. The nature of this research context, which involves the complex interaction and experiences of children, teachers, parents and communities required an approach which would not exclude all participants in the setting of directions or priorities. My role as researcher was far from being a cool observer of the events and central to my role was the relationship I was forming with all concerned. In many ways, I acted as original initiator in bringing the schools together and providing funding, in accompanying staff on exchange visits and providing curriculum support and advice. I worked with teachers and children in their classrooms to support the geographical aspects of their teaching and learning and it was the ‘insider’ nature of my role which enabled me to gain a deeper and more informed view of the value of what was being undertaken and achieved. In becoming so much an insider and an actor in the unfolding drama, certain objectivity could be forfeited but the advantages of this role far exceed these limitations. Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2000) conception of action research as ‘a small scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention’ match well with some aspects of the research process undertaken.

The research discussed in the following sections was all focused on 9/10 year old children in Year 5 (UK) and Standard 6 (India). Three aspects of their developing images and representations of the school link environments have been explored. In each case, analysis of the data has focused on the emerging characteristics and dominant features of children's work rather than on the tracking of changes in the work of individuals. It has also been the case that it was not possible, or desirable, to duplicate exactly the way in which the tasks were set up in each school context. The cultural and contextual differences in the English and Indian curricula meant that the tasks which the children undertook, although essentially the same, were adapted to fit as much as possible with the children's known curriculum and ways of working. The case study nature of this research limits the extent to which wider claims can be made but it raises issues for further research and hopefully provides a resource for teachers and other researchers to develop in their own contexts. The work was produced within the first three years of the project and its function needs to be seen as exploratory and establishing a basis on which more in-depth research will be built as the project continues to develop. It should also be noted that there are many other aspects of the project which are not referred to in this chapter.
The main source of data on which the findings are based is the work produced by the children themselves. This includes their drawings, writings and map work. These data have been supported by classroom observations and discussions with teachers about the work produced.

Findings

Children's initial perceptions of each other's localities

During the early stages of the project, two classes of Year 5 children at Richard Bonington and a similar number of children in Standard 6 of St Anthony's were asked to draw pictures of what they imagined the locality of their linked school to be like. Children in both schools were fairly hesitant about the specificity of this task and the instruction had to be broadened and expanded upon to include the terms 'India' 'England', 'town' and 'village.'

The English children's representations matched fairly consistently with the findings of other researchers. (Graham & Lynn, 1989; Gill, 2002) Their images tended to fall into four major categories:

- The stereotypical, traditional, rural Indian village. This was the predominant image amongst the children and the key features were the straw and mud 'huts', people carrying baskets on their heads, wells and animals.
- The exotic. This was less common but the features of this include domed buildings, snake charmers and minarets; images in keeping with stories from the Arabian Nights and representative of a more 'middle eastern' cultural style.
- Undifferentiated. Again this was not a common response but characterised by drawings which could have easily been of England – the supermarket, road, houses.
- Complex. These included flat roof houses, blocks of flats with balconies, markets, palm trees and bicycles. This was the second most common category and revealed that children had images that were based on some knowledge and had not only focused on the more traditional stereotype.

What was most interesting was what the images did not include - there were no representations whatsoever of any form of modern technology and several children categorically stated that there were no cars or buses. There were no TV aerials, computers, cars. The only buildings represented were houses or flats and one supermarket and a couple of temples. There were no schools even though children knew they were going to be communicating with children in an Indian school.

The Indian children's representations were equally fascinating and fell into the following categories:

- Snowy scenes. This was the largest category and the children drew rural and urban scenes dominated by snow. The people in these scenes were often depicted on skis or snowshoes and well dressed up against the cold.
- Skateboarding. Many pictures included children skateboarding and roller-skating.
• Urban scenes. Many of the pictures reflected a predominantly urban environment with cars, buses, bus stops, traffic lights and shops. There was a fair range of buildings including the Houses of Parliament, the Prime Minister's house, schools, churches and shops. Most of the buildings were depicted in the traditional Goan Portuguese architectural style.
• Rural scenes. These were less frequent but showed hills and rivers, flowers and trees.

Changing perceptions?

Two years later, at a stage when the link was well established, and both the deputy head and head teacher from Richard Bonington had visited St Anthony's and the teachers and children in both schools were familiar and involved in the project, this activity was repeated with two Year 5 classes at Richard Bonington. These children had been exposed to the link through whole school assemblies which drew on their teachers' visits to St. Anthony's and through displays and their involvement in the general life of the school but had not as yet undertaken any focused teaching through geographical or other curriculum work. The children were again asked to draw what they thought of when they imagined India and/or the locality of the school in Goa. The images drawn by the children were far more varied and idiosyncratic than before and it was difficult to slot them so easily into categories. There were still many of the stereotypical, traditional pictures depicting a life of rural poverty but these were by no means the majority. The majority depicted elements of the real locality particularly the school environment. There was widespread reference to modern technology including computers and multinational brands. The pictures reflected knowledge and understanding of key aspects of life in Goa such as tourism and the presence of water and crops. A much wider range of buildings was depicted and there was more detailed representation of people, in both western and traditional clothes and of people engaged in particular activities such as sport. The pictures were more diverse and informed by more knowledge. Images of the partner school were very strong.

Letter writing

In the initial stages of the project, Year 5 and Standard 6 children were matched up as pen pals. This individualised communication has often been regarded as problematic within the context of a school link as children can become disappointed if the exchange is not kept up. However there were strong support systems in place to ensure letters were written and the benefits of this personal level of communication have proved extremely powerful in that it was through the letters that the similarities in children's lives came through most strongly. Their shared focus on family, friends, school and hobbies has probably done more to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about each other's lives than any other aspect of the link. One feature of the letters, which was of particular significance in terms of the research focus, was the significant difference between the two groups of children in the extent to which they made reference to the local, regional and national context to locate themselves in place. The English children frequently gave their address and identified the area they lived in. None gave information about where this was in England or any information about Nottingham as a place or
about England as a country. There were a far larger number of Indian children who communicated information about the locality of their home within the context of Goa and India and gave descriptive detail about the place where they lived, both locally and regionally. It was also significant that many Indian children gave information about their religion and the languages they spoke which were aspects entirely missing from the letters of the English children.

**Exchange of maps**

As part of the children's distant locality study in geography which focused on the locality of St Anthony's in Goa, children were asked to draw a representation of their own school environment which would show children in the partner school what their school was like. Children at Richard Bonington had already focused on developing maps of their own local area as a preparatory stage in the collection of local area resources to support the project. Children at St Anthony's school were approaching the task with less experience of 'map' drawing. The children had a clear communicative purpose in drawing their representations as the actual outcomes were to be taken to the partner school for their peers to study. Both schools have large grounds and a variety of buildings and space for outdoor activities and gardens. Richard Bonington's main building is the more complex of the two buildings, being spread out, irregular and one storey. St Anthony's, has a main building of a more compact and regular design, but the added complication of three storeys. Drawing a representation of their school environment in order to give their peers a sense of what it was like was a challenging task and children were creative and imaginative in addressing the problem.

The English children, although the task was set up in such a way as to allow them to develop their own representations, which could be pictorial, tended to draw something which approximated to a standard plan view. This reflected their prior experience of map work and their own developing expectations of what a map should be. As is usually the case, the group reflected the whole range of ability in terms of the key features of mapping, ranging from 3D pictorial representations of a limited number of features to incredibly sophisticated and complex plan views.

The Indian children had opportunity to study these plans and identify the features of Richard Bonington School and compare them with those of their own school. They were then asked to draw a representation of their own school environment to send back to the English children. Their representations were almost entirely drawn pictorially and there were fewer elements of the plan view. The pictures however were just as effective in identifying and communicating a real sense of the configuration of the layout of the school and all its main features. Ingenuity and imagination were evident as many of the children had overcome the problem of identifying the individual rooms in a three-storey building and labelling was used to great effect. These pictures were studied by the Richard Bonington children who were also able to make comparisons between the two schools. When used alongside photographs of the schools, children were able to develop mental models of each
other's environments, based on accurate information - information which they had shared in constructing.

**Discussion**

This research has been a small part of a wider research and curriculum development project focused on the effectiveness of school linking in developing global citizenship. It is premised on the belief that geography, as a subject in which the interaction between people and places and their relationships with each other form the foundation for understanding our globalised world, needs to be at the heart of the school linking process. The skills of enquiry and interpretation of evidence, which are the tools of the geographer, are also instrumental in affecting attitudes. It is essential that activities of the type outlined above, are utilised not just to inform the wider field of academic research, but also to help teachers explore and develop the understandings of their pupils in a meaningful geographical context.

The research has raised many questions and in this it has been successful, as one of the initial aims was to explore the possible issues and experiences through a case study approach. An insider's perspective has been particularly useful in facilitating the identification of further questions and in establishing clearer themes for future investigation. The complexity and multi-faceted nature of the relationship between school linking and the development of global citizenship has been highlighted, as has the role of geography as a focus for developing understanding of the processes involved. The relationship between particular geographical activities such as mapping and representing places and the process of developing and changing attitudes has been brought into focus and the relationship between geography and global citizenship has been consolidated and strengthened. With reference to the particularities of the activities described, several key issues have been raised:

**Equality and social justice**

Issues of social justice are never far from the surface in projects which link UK schools with those in the poorer countries of the South. We may be uncomfortable with children in the UK having predominantly stereotypical images of life in India and we know this is not the whole picture of life in the country. We want to portray the whole diversity of urban, rural, rich and poor that make up modern India and we need initially to challenge the predominant stereotype. However, this research has raised the possibility for me that we can change children's predominant imagery by showing them more of 'the other side of the coin'. We can show them that children in India have computer suites in their schools, speak fluent English and have televisions in their homes. However this is no more an accurate image than the traditional stereotype and the research indicates that children have rapidly latched on to the idea that there are western appliances in India and these in turn become the predominant image. There is some indication from this research context, that children's estimation of the worth of their peers in the partner school is affected by the extent to which they possess modern

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consumer items such as computers and Nike trainers and this is an aspect which deserves further investigation. Teachers may also latch on to this, as it is a much more comfortable image with which to work. There is a possibility that we select our images in such a way as to airbrush out the very real poverty, the shantytowns and the beggars in the street. We cannot afford to dismantle some stereotypes and replace them with others. School linking projects can provide images of real people in real places but it is still possible to select the aspects of the surrounding locality with which we feel comfortable to deal. There are no simple solutions to this problem but grappling with the issues has to be a central focus in any school-linking project and is central to the role of geography in developing the global citizens of the future. There are also implications for providers of initial teacher training, to ensure their courses are preparing students to be able to deal confidently with these issues. The work of The Global Teacher Project, established by the World Studies Trust to help university tutors, students and mentors develop a global dimension in the curriculum, is an important initiative in this field.

Representational skills

The research has made me question whether or not we place an over emphasis on a particular approach to map drawing within the primary curriculum. Children need to develop their skills of representation and to find ways of recording and communicating their mental models of localities and routes. However, the effective and communicatively sophisticated representations drawn by Indian children who had less exposure to maps and little experience in drawing them, indicates that teaching the standard ways of map drawing with a focus on plan view, may not be the factor which best develops representational competence. Knowledge of the environment and an understanding of communicative purpose may be more valuable attributes to develop. Graphicacy in its widest sense can be developed within meaningful, communicative contexts through effective geographical work as part of a school-linking project.

Conclusion

The research has been small scale and tentative in its conclusions. Evaluation of its outcomes has been effective in identifying key issues for further research and in raising some problematic issues which deserve further consideration. The effectiveness of school linking in developing children's awareness of global issues would seem to depend largely on the extent to which the link becomes embedded within the school curriculum in a meaningful way but this raises huge questions about whether the purpose of the link is predominantly forged in order to resource the UK school's curriculum. Unless school links are developed as shared endeavours in which both schools have an equal opportunity to articulate and communicate their own needs and feel that they have an equal amount to gain from the project, they can come dangerously near to epitomising a new form of colonialism which endorses the traditional stereotypes of the dependency of people in the South and the exploitative nature of western culture. There is also a danger that the school link is seen as the sole focus for the global citizenship curriculum and that children's understandings are unduly influenced by their knowledge of one particular locality.

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Teachers may work so hard to challenge stereotypes and provide positive images of this locality that they end up presenting a partial and simplistic view and avoid confronting real issues such as poverty. Unless our teaching and learning really does grapple with global issues and help children understand the complexities of cause and effect on a global scale, school linking projects will do little more than provide yet more surface learning and have little impact on children's development as global citizens. The knowledge base of teachers is crucial to the effectiveness of school linking projects and the inclusion of the global dimension on ITT courses is of the utmost importance. Teachers need to think deeply about the nature of global citizenship, about their own role as global citizens and about what constitutes good practice. There is a strong case for more research both at the case study level and on a wider scale to develop a foundation of expertise on which staff development can be based.

Not all aspects of the project and associated research have been discussed in this chapter and are ongoing. The findings, although only indicative, have endorsed the view that there is a direct and essential relationship between the geography curriculum and the development of global citizenship. If respect for diversity and for people of other cultures is a central attribute of a global citizen, then activities which help to challenge preconceptions, develop communication and stimulate learning have to be present in the educational experience of young children. Whilst a school link can provide opportunities for expression and development in all subject areas, geography has a key role to play in ensuring that children are provided with activities which require them to engage in structured enquiry which relates to the real experiences of real people and which is based on a rigorous exploration of the evidence.

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