

The World's Working Children

Using an international school partnership to research shared values and experiences.

Children at Alwoodley Primary School in Leeds, in collaboration with children at their link school in Paraguay, researched the lives of working children in the UK and round the world and the support available to them to help them to get an education.

What did the school want to achieve?

The main aims of the project were for the children to develop greater understanding of the lives of other children; to recognise that many children face difficulties and challenges regarding their entitlement to education; and to have a sense of ownership of the work and a belief that they can make a difference. The school hoped that through this project, the pupils would recognise and celebrate children who need to work as well as go to school and also appreciate and value their own entitlement to education.

How did they set about doing this?

The school has an established partnership with Colegio Aula Viva in Paraguay, supported by DFID Global School Partnerships, and a yearly teacher exchange in each direction has enabled them to plan joint curriculum work. On one visit to Paraguay, Joanna Speak, founder of the partnership, met a boy who went to school in the morning but worked in the afternoon shining shoes to support his family. This led to discussion between teachers in the two schools about the struggles some children face to receive an education and the different ways in which education can be provided. As Joanna says, *'Quite often we look beyond what is on our own doorstep and I immediately saw links between the experiences of these children and children in our own society who have to care for people at home'*.

The schools decided to research the experiences of working children in their own communities and around the world. At Alwoodley a group of nine gifted and talented Year 5 pupils attended 'child labour group' meetings at lunchtimes. Tasks were divided and the pupils worked in groups of twos or threes, carrying out internet research in literacy time and at home, getting in touch with organisations that support working or caring children and producing PowerPoint presentations about their findings.

The groups then combined to write a play about working children, using their research to

create the characters. The key message the children wanted to share was that throughout the world some children need to work to support their families, and if they can be supported get an education too, they will have more chances in life. The play was performed and filmed on a DVD which was shown to the whole of Key Stage 2 and visiting Paraguayan teachers who helped the children incorporate some simple Spanish into the script – thus supporting the school's Spanish teaching.

How well did they achieve their aims?

The children's end of project evaluations from both schools showed that they had learnt a lot from hearing the stories of real people and that the work had made them question their own views of education and how they took it for granted. They had also gained from working in groups and being allowed to take ownership of the project. 'I think children being able to take an idea on a journey to a finished product which they decide on is something we don't do enough of in schools' Joanna says. Choosing the messages they wanted to share and working out how to convey them through the play and DVD gave the children a sense that they can use their voices to make a difference.

What do they plan to do next?

Curriculum work and skills-sharing between the two schools continue to develop. A joint decision, shared with the children in both schools, has been made to incorporate into future collaborative projects: conflict resolution, sustainability and further work on 'diversity on our doorsteps'. Meanwhile, Joanna has used the 'Working children' video at her new school for Human Rights Day – both to introduce the concept of education as a human right and to show that young people can use their voice to make a difference.

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“ I learnt how children who have to work feel because we based our play on research we had done on real children.”

Gugandeep Kaur Rayat

Reflections:

- Teachers need to question their own values and attitudes in order to support pupils to do the same.
- Good school links are based on equitable partnerships where, in all their shared projects, the issues are looked at as they affect people in both countries, encouraging an understanding of global issues and of common needs and concerns, as well as open-mindedness towards difference.
- Primary pupils can understand complex and controversial issues when they learn through engaging and meaningful approaches.

“It made us think deeply about other kids in the world. I liked the way we had to split up to research child labour in different parts of the world. Then we got our information together to create a big play. We each had a special part.”

Uma Ramachandran

More information:

- Alwoodley School website: www.alwoodley.leeds.sch.uk.
- DFID Global School Partnerships: www.britishcouncil.org/globalschools.