

Thinking about global learning

~ trusting teachers' creativity

At this time of change in schools, global learning has a vital role to play. In this thinkpiece, **Becky Link** argues that, to make this real, those of us in support roles for teachers need to trust in their capacity to respond creatively to the challenges of global learning.

Building on her experience as a teacher and as the Education Manager for Severn Trent Water, **Becky Link** has joined the Projects Development Team at **Tide~ global learning**. She has a background in teaching Key Stages 2 and 3, focussing on geography, science, Education for Sustainable Development and outdoor learning and has been involved in many Tide~ initiatives before joining Tide~. These include involvement in the development of the publication *Water Issues~ local and global*, chairing the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Regional Liaison Group and being a member of the Tide~ Management Committee. She is currently leading Tide~ secondary curriculum work, and is involved with launch of the new Tide~ Cities Project.

Introduction

I write this thinkpiece at a time of great change in and around schools. Big issues such as climate change, global financial upheaval, poverty, social unrest, unemployment and terrorism impact upon all of our lives in some way. We are all living in and responding to a global context at our own personal level.

In schools, teachers are faced with great challenges around the nature of learning, the purpose of schooling and the pressure of accountability. The education profession seems to be taking a good look at itself, challenging the centralised, over-prescribed, content driven curriculum and asking itself the question, is this curriculum fit for purpose for the 21st century?

I believe that this is a really exciting time to be working with schools, and that global learning has a vital role to play. To make this real though, I argue that those of us in support roles for teachers need to trust in their capacity to respond creatively to the challenges of global learning.

Thinking about global learning in our schools

Many Tide~ teacher groups have grappled with the nature of global learning in the context of school and curriculum developments. Recent curriculum changes at Key Stage 3 and the review of the primary curriculum by Sir Jim Rose offer challenges and opportunities for teachers; it is undoubtedly a time of change and uncertainty. With the increased flexibility offered by these changes, some teachers are being encouraged to move out of the comfort zone of content driven schemes of work, towards more challenging, learner-centred curricula which will, hopefully, offer a more meaningful and relevant learning experience for young people.

Responding to these challenges, Tide~ has published a series of materials including '*Enabling global learning through the KS3 curriculum*' (at www.tidec.org). This book, with online support, is a synthesis of many issues and ideas raised by West Midlands teachers over recent years. The debates around this publication have helped us to become much clearer as to what we mean by 'global learning', and to investigate different approaches to curriculum development with a global perspective which are relevant and meaningful to the teachers and young people involved.

So what does Tide~ mean by global learning? For us, global learning is all about the needs of learners growing up in an increasingly global context. For example, how can we support our young people to explore issues around their place and identity, or the impact of science and technology, or the importance of art to different cultures without recognising the global scale? It is all about seeing links and connections, or having a 'world-view' from a very local starting point. It is also about enabling skills of

critical thinking, creative approaches to problem solving and teamwork, as it is the development of these skills which will enable the young people of today to make decisions for themselves in the future.

For us then, global learning is an essential component of all teaching and learning; it is certainly not confined to a study of 'other' places. It is also clear to us that this debate can never be concluded; it needs to continuously respond to the changing global context in which we all live.

Thinking about the challenges and opportunities raised by the QCA curriculum 'big picture', we choose to talk about the connected curriculum and connected learning. This enables us to think about curriculum development in terms of learner needs, specific to each individual school and learner context. We also hope that it will prompt innovative and creative thinking around what a connected curriculum might look like. '*Enabling global learning through the KS3 curriculum*' shares different approaches to curriculum development that we feel support the idea of connected learning: through really creative connected subject teaching; through rigorous cross-curricular themed planning; through carefully planned suspended timetable experiences; through whole school issues such as community cohesion.

We do not advocate that any one of these approaches is 'correct' or the best way of planning for global learning. Whichever approach is chosen, the needs of the learner must be considered as a central driver to the planning. To aid this, we suggest that a learner entitlement is helpful to bring the global context of their learning experiences to the fore. A proposed entitlement is included in the publication not as a checklist to follow, but as a stimulus for teachers to debate what their young peoples' entitlement might look like.

Our ambition is that eventually, the discussion about a learner entitlement to global learning will not be necessary as the global context will be seen by teachers and young people as a vital perspective to all good teaching and learning. However, we have found that that debating this entitlement enables teachers to think the issues through and give time to the discussions necessary to really consider what their specific learner needs are.

Working with teachers around global learning

With the curriculum 'big picture' clearly stating whole school dimensions including 'the global dimension and sustainable development', and official publications stating the case for a global perspective, there seem to be renewed discussions about how to get the global 'into' schools. In my experience, it is absolutely not about 'getting it into

schools' but very much about working with the creativity and passion of practising teachers who have the capacity to see possibilities that I could never have imagined.

Having been a teacher struggling with ideas about curriculum development and global learning, in my opinion, it couldn't have been simpler. I had the opportunity to become part of a small group of teachers from different settings within my local authority who were exploring issues around sustainable development and global learning. We came together to explore how ESD can be taught through existing units of work, rather than seeing it as a bolt-on to current schemes.

In reality, this meant that we met for a series of twilight and half day sessions over several months. Facilitated by staff from Tide~ and Worcestershire County Council, we were led through a range of activities which helped us to consider the big issues for ourselves. We explored, argued, disagreed, bounced ideas off each other, went back into our own schools, tried out activities with our own classes, and eventually developed practical ideas to implement in our own schools. Throughout the project, we worked towards planning and running a workshop for other teachers in our local authority to explore our ideas. Tide~'s aim was to build capacity for us to take on global learning in our own teaching, and to begin to work with colleagues in our own schools.

This mix of sharing ideas with a small group of 'like minded' teachers from other schools, the time and space to consider the issues individually and as a group, and a structured approach to this exploration, gave me confidence to 'have a go'. I saw the benefit of embedding a global perspective in all of my teaching, and it helped me to recognise the importance of learner needs in creating challenging and relevant learning opportunities.

I often wonder what I would be doing now if I had not taken part in that group nine years ago. It is impossible to tell what other opportunities might have been available to me, but I am certain that the experience of this kind of professional development changed the way I think and act both professionally and personally. It gave me the confidence to have a go, to challenge other people's ideas, and to push myself beyond what I feel comfortable doing.

Teacher confidence and trusting teachers to respond with creativity are regularly mentioned within the Tide~ global learning network as real issues facing schools today. We often talk about giving 'time and space' to teachers to explore the big issues around global learning for themselves. The simplicity of the phrase belies a subtly structured approach to working with teachers. It isn't just a matter of bringing some teachers together in a room, getting them to talk about their ideas and generating some interesting teaching ideas – although that is an important

component! The process requires an enabling approach by the facilitator, guiding the groups through activities, debates and thinking time, helping them to grapple with issues in a safe environment.

This is a very structured approach to creativity; we might call it 'structured trust' or even 'disciplined innovation' to use a QCA phrase. It allows us to guide participants to question their own beliefs and values, to enable them to reflect on the implications (positive and negative) of their own 'worldview' on their teaching. We often use a discussion of potential pitfalls to consider what we might try to avoid. These include 'doing good' that avoids thinking; manipulative activity leading to 'right answers'; failing to acknowledge our own perceptions and bias; global is about somewhere else; and it's all doom and gloom. (*Global Learning ~ exploring the pitfalls* by Elaine Miskell of Tide~ is at www.tidec.org/Tidetalk/articles/Global%20learn%20pitfalls.html).

For this structure to work, the person leading or facilitating the group needs to have an idea of the direction the group might go in, and needs to be able to select activities which best enable the process to happen. It is unlikely that the sequence of activities for one group will be entirely transferable to another group of teachers. As with the philosophy of a curriculum designed to meet the needs of learners in a particular context, so we know that no two teacher groups are the same. Therefore an approach is needed to planning and facilitating teacher groups that takes these needs into account.

In my experience, the deepest engagement happens when the group has built a relationship with each other and with the facilitator. This takes time. It may be over a series of meetings with time between to try ideas and to build on thinking, or it may be over months of contact that the most profound and exciting developments happen. But more often than not, really exciting and creative things happen in schools as a result. The Tide~ network demonstrates this.

So, at this time of change and innovation in schools, we need to make the case that global learning should be a part of all good learning experiences, including teachers' own opportunities to learn; a teacher entitlement to mirror the proposed entitlement for learners.

However, there is a vital element to working with teachers that needs consideration in my role at Tide~ and, I believe, by us all in supporting teachers in schools: trust.

Teachers are dedicated, professional creative people who, when given the opportunity, rise to the challenge of global learning. We need to trust teachers to respond creatively to the challenges of global learning because they have decided it is important to their role and to their learners, not because they are told that it is the

correct thing to do. The global dimension and sustainable development (and indeed community cohesion, pupil voice and so on) are in danger of becoming another prescribed element that schools must 'deliver'. We must resist the temptation to find a solution to global learning and 'roll it out' to schools. Put the teachers in control! They do magnificent things when they are given the chance.

Challenges for supporting global learning in schools

How do we collectively use this time of curriculum change to enable teachers and push against a prevailing sense of mistrust in teachers' abilities?

What are the pitfalls when working with teachers and how do we as individuals and organisations, regionally and nationally, respond to them?

If learner and teacher entitlements to global learning are desirable, how are we going to achieve them?

These are real issues for Tide~ global learning. We would welcome any comments you might have.

Please contact Becky at wmc@tidec.org with any comments.