

OVER TO YOU

Time for a school owned 21st century curriculum

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Schools in England are being asked to take more ownership and control of the curriculum than perhaps any time since the National Curriculum was introduced. We suggest that this presents a significant opportunity for schools to re-examine the meaning and purpose of their school curriculum, and highlight how global citizenship can help schools in this process.

This may allow schools to take a more holistic approach, and relate this to the core values, attitudes and skills they wish to promote as a school and community. It will also help them to consider a fundamental question relevant to any school – are they preparing their pupils to engage successfully with the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century?

Education 2012 series

This think-piece is part of a short series from Oxfam considering how global citizenship can help schools in the current education environment in England.

Other guides about the links to Ofsted requirements and to school ethos are available at: www.oxfam.org.uk/education/policy/education2012

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Image: Students from Oswald Primary School take part in Global Water Day, Summer 2010.

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SUMMARY

- There is an expectation from the government that schools will take more ownership of the basic and local curriculum.
- This gives schools the opportunity to re-examine the purpose of the school curriculum.
- There is evidence that teachers, pupils, parents and businesses want schools to better prepare pupils more appropriately for the 21st Century world.
- And schools may want to make the curriculum more meaningful for pupils (providing a *need to know*), and considering the overall purpose of their school curriculum.
- There is also evidence that schools want more freedom and of schools already embracing it through models such as the IB.
- The key competencies of Global Citizenship can help schools set the overall vision and goal of their school curriculum.
- And Global Citizenship can also help by providing relevant and engaging contexts to design activities around, linking to student interests, experiences and opinions.
- A large number of resources are available to help schools do this.
- Refocusing the curriculum around a meaningful vision, and using more purposeful activities to engage pupils should assist schools in securing high achievement.

FROM GOVERNMENT TO SCHOOLS

Between 2010 and 2012 a host of policy changes for English schools were introduced. None can be considered in isolation and some even appear contradictory. However it is evident from a number of them that control and responsibility for the overall school curriculum has shifted away from government and towards schools. For example:

- The education White Paper in November 2011 includes a desire for greater teacher autonomy, and the need for teachers to have more control over curriculum planning¹.
- Academies legislation only requires that schools deliver a 'broad and balanced curriculum' - and so far well over 1000 schools have become academies.
- The Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review in England recommended that schools and communities have more control over what they defined as the basic and local curriculum, as distinct from the National Curriculum².
- The subsequent draft primary National Curriculum programmes of study for English, Maths and Science³, whilst quite prescriptive, state clearly that they are meant to be delivered as part of a more flexible wider curriculum which supports the "maximum level of innovation at school level in the development of content"⁴.
- And in June 2012 the DfE signalled its intention that secondary schools will have no National Curriculum to follow at all, and instead the only requirement will be preparing pupils for an updated set of centrally set exams in Key Stage 4⁵.

Therefore schools will increasingly be expected to interpret a narrower centrally set core into a school determined wider curriculum, taking more ownership over curriculum design in the process.

For some schools this may be incidental, as they grapple with accompanying changes to accountability and increased standards pressure. Yet for others, this change in emphasis presents an opportunity to re-examine their school curriculum, and consider more closely what its aims and purposes are.

¹ The Importance of Teaching, Department for Education (2010, para 4.3)

² The Framework for the National Curriculum: A report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review, DfE (2011, p19)

³ <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum/b0075667/national-curriculum-review-update>

⁴ Letter from Michael Gove, MP, to Tim Oates, Cambridge Assessment, p4 (available from above link)

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-18529471>



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CURRICULUM?

The first step in re-examining the school curriculum is to ask the question: what is the curriculum for? Of course a curriculum needs to help schools deliver test and examination results. However is that all that matters? We consider what else might be important.

A curriculum for life

As the consultations for the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) in 2009 illustrated, many teachers had become dissatisfied with a National Curriculum that seemed highly prescriptive and inflexible, disengaged pupils, packaged knowledge into subject silos and focussed on just passing tests rather than encouraging curiosity and interest.⁶ It suggested that many schools instead want a curriculum that supports achievement, but also helps young people develop the range of skills, values and attitudes required for life.

Preparing young people for life means helping them to navigate an increasingly connected, challenging and uncertain world – as highlighted by the *beyond current horizons* project. Teachers seem to recognise this: in a survey⁷ carried out by the organisation Think Global, 94% of teachers said schools should prepare pupils for a fast changing and globalised world.

We can also see that it isn't just teachers who think this. Further Think Global surveys⁸ show:

- ¾ of parents want schools to engage their children with global issues and encourage active citizenship.
- 80% of businesses think schools need to do more to help young people think globally.
- Over ¾ of young people themselves think schools should help them understand how to make the world a better place.

Therefore teachers, parents, businesses and (most importantly) young people demand that schools support pupils to successfully engage with the world. The school curriculum must

Preparing for the future

The Beyond current horizons project was commissioned in 2007 by the then Department for Education and Skills looking at the future of education. It presents 6 'possible futures' depending on how we respond to current global challenges and processes such as information, networking and relationships. It illustrates the large, multifaceted and complex nature of the social and technological challenges young people can expect to face. See www.beyondcurrenthorizons.org.uk

Teachers' views

A recent Oxfam survey asked over 80 teachers what was now more important to them. Two thirds said making the curriculum more innovative and creative, and 80% said engaging young people more effectively.

⁶ Although this relates not just to the curriculum, but also associated assessment and accountability structures

⁷ DEA/IPSOS MORI (2009, p5)

⁸ DEA/IPSOS MORI (2008, p5), Think Global (2011a), Think Global (2011b)

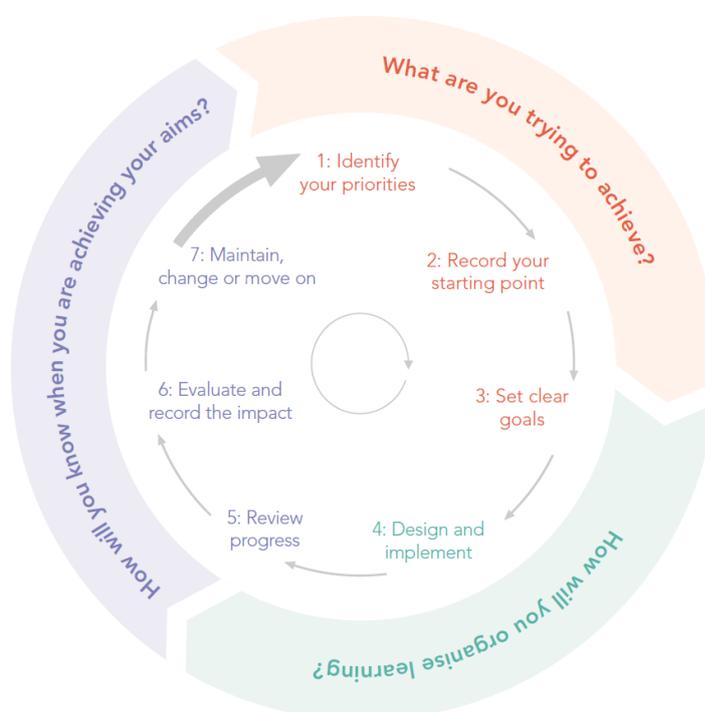


therefore develop the appropriate knowledge and understanding, values, attitudes and skills to enable this.

A curriculum with meaning

To be effective, learning must be meaningful. Therefore good teachers draw on more than just subject knowledge to design curriculum, as illustrated by the Geographical Association's 'curriculum making' process, which highlights how teachers also draw on their own preferences student experiences in curriculum design. The GA also stress the importance of creating a 'need to know' for pupils, which means motivating through curiosity and interest, rather than from any delayed gratification – i.e. to pass a test later.

Creating a learning need also applies to the whole school, demonstrated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's curriculum innovation process (see diagram). This suggests schools first establish a vision for what they want to achieve through their curriculum – analogous to a 'need to know' – then create curriculum principles and activities accordingly.



A challenge with the National Curriculum to date is that it has determined for schools what the aims and goals will be, and through apparently prescriptive programmes of study predetermined activities, tempting teachers to deliver it for its own sake. With less prescription, schools will have more freedom to determine the aim and goal themselves, and design activities to meet these accordingly.

Your school, your curriculum

Addressing the purpose of the school curriculum really means deciding as school and community what is important to you, and what sort of learners you want to create. With more freedom schools may decide that they want to focus on developing young people who care about their learning because it is meaningful; are critical and reflective; are aware of the wider



world; and are able to engage as active citizens. They can therefore state this from the beginning, and let this principle percolate through the curriculum design across the school.

By its nature such a curriculum will also be more holistic, therefore joining up what pupils learn in otherwise disparate subjects and reinforcing the relevance and purpose of learning for pupils.

Broader curriculum models

For schools who want to incorporate these ideas into their curriculum, a range of broader curriculum models already exist which can help. These focus on key competencies across subject areas, giving learning more immediacy and relevance for pupils, and giving more space for young people to engage with key global issues.

Some of these are shown in the boxes, below, and the take up of these illustrate that many hundreds of schools are now prepared to re-examine the nature of the curriculum and what it offers their learners. Movements such as Whole Education⁹ represent a public face to these desires, and illustrate their growing strength.

The International Baccalaureate

This is an internationally recognised curriculum and assessment model based on a learner profile promoting 10 outcomes. These include inquiry, thinking, communication, risk taking and reflection.

The IB is increasing in popularity in England, with now over 200 schools using it. See www.ibo.org

RSA Opening Minds

The Royal Society for the Arts Opening Minds is a holistic curriculum model based around 5 key competencies: citizenship, learning, managing information, relating to people and managing situations.

This is now being used in over 200 schools. See www.rsaopeningminds.org.uk

The Cambridge Primary Review Network

The Cambridge Primary Review recommended a domain based curriculum underpinned by 12 aims for primary education. Following publication, an extensive national network was established to promote equity, empowerment, expertise and excellence.

See www.primaryreview.org.uk

The Index for Inclusion

The index for inclusion whole school approach based upon inclusive values. It contains curriculum frameworks for schools to use based upon these. The index for inclusion is growing in popularity, and has currently been adopted by over 400 schools in Norfolk.

See www.csie.org.uk/publications

⁹ See <http://www.wholeeducation.org/>



Schools implement such approaches in ways appropriate to their context. Some use this to compliment traditional subject driven approaches, for example by using the IB learner profile to provide portability of skills across subjects. Others may restructure the timetable to create cross-curricular time for themed project development, or deliver a wholly theme based curriculum.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Global citizenship is based around a set of core competencies designed to effectively support young people as active global citizens (see box, right). This means it is based on real life issues, questions and debates, connects young people to an ever globalising world, and demands their active involvement in seeking resolutions. Engaging with global citizenship therefore helps prepares pupils for life.

Therefore global citizenship also has something important to offer schools who want a curriculum that is holistic, meaningful and supports connecting young people effectively to the world.

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, global citizenship can be used as a vehicle to help set a broad vision for the whole school curriculum, and also as a lens to create meaningful and engaging activities for pupils.

What is active Global Citizenship?

Oxfam considers this to be any approach which enables pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and values needed for securing a just and sustainable world. It involves the development of core competencies which include:

- **Knowledge and Understanding**, including recognising diversity, globalisation and sustainable development
- **Skills**, including critical thinking, forming opinions, co-operation and conflict resolution
- **Values and attitudes**, including a commitment to social justice and equity, a sense of agency and self confidence.

For more details see [Education for Global Citizenship: a guide for schools](#).

1. A global citizenship school curriculum

The core competencies of Global Citizenship can help schools in setting a clear vision of what sort of young people they want to produce – the starting point for any school curriculum – and give a broad purpose which pupils can recognise across their learning. They offer a holistic set of knowledge and understanding, skills, values and attitudes that young people can acquire for a *purpose*, relating to the needs of young people in today.

Not only do they promote a wide set of learning skills such as critical thinking, responsibility and active participation, they also promote a set of values and attitudes related to making a positive difference as active citizens, and help locate learning with relevant local and global contexts.

Schools may extend this to creating a whole school ethos around global citizenship, explored by another of our *Education 2012* think-pieces.



2. Meaningful global citizenship activities

Global Citizenship can also help the specific design of activities – the more detailed curriculum making process. Being founded on promoting active participation by young people, its delivery is predicated on providing opportunities for young people to consider meaningful issues and consider relevant action based upon it.

Through engaging with issues such as poverty and inequality, diversity, interdependence and human rights, pupils can engage with real outcome based projects related to community engagement, media literacy and local and national political action.

Therefore Global Citizenship can help schools give their curriculum **meaning and purpose**. It can help set a broad vision for the school curriculum – the type of citizens it wants to create – and it can help schools create activities across different subject areas which engage and motivate.

Support

A great wealth of resources exists to help schools promote global citizenship (and global learning more broadly).

These include school projects, lesson plans and activities, and other opportunities such as volunteer speakers – from Oxfam and also a range of other organisations. See www.oxfam.org.uk/education and www.globaldimension.org

How schools use it may depend on their pre-existing experience with global citizenship and the nature of their current curriculum. And as it supports similar competencies and skills, global citizenship is complimentary to broader curriculum models outlined earlier for schools using or interested in using them.

The evidence for global citizenship

A recent Oxfam survey showed that 73% of teachers who carry out global citizenship think it can help schools achieve higher educational outcomes. Other studies looking at global learning have demonstrated impacts on:

- **Pupil motivation:** Schools in Wales reported significant impacts on pupils work, motivation and attainment, as part of the evaluation of the International Dimension (NFER, 2010). Evaluation of the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) had similar findings, including impacts on pupil grades
- **Improved teaching:** An evaluation into school partnerships (NFER, 2011) found teachers reporting positive impacts on their professional development and teaching approaches, a finding also found in the Wales. Philosophy for Children has also been shown to have statistically significant impacts on learners.
- **Pupil values and attitudes:** Welsh schools reported impacts on learner well-being, positive attitudes and participative skills, and schools reported similar impacts for example relating to empathy and fairness in a evaluation by the Development Education Research Centre (DERC – see Hunt, *forthcoming*) of primaries in England.

The recent DERC findings also suggest a more holistic approach to global learning had greater impacts.



WHAT ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY?

Schools of course still have to meet accountability requirements. They have to prepare pupils for examinations, and deliver the revised national curriculum, and these are of course crucial parts schooling not just because schools are judged upon them, but because it is important that young people achieve.

However as any teacher knows, high achievement follows high engagement and motivation. What we have outlined is fundamentally about better engaging young people in the process of learning by making it more meaningful and relevant to them. Therefore addressing the purpose of the curriculum and ways to make it more holistic to promote wider skills, values and attitudes, is perhaps an important part of any strategy to secure high achievement.

It would seem that schools who have adopted alternative curriculum models such as the International Baccalaureate or Opening Minds outlined earlier see it as enhancing their ability to secure high achievement, rather than being an alternative to it.

WHAT NEXT?

We hope that this think-piece gives schools a reason to stop and think about what purpose their school curriculum currently serves. Does it connect pupils appropriately to current global issues, and allow them to develop the values, skills and knowledge required to actively engage with them? Does it allow pupils to consider the meaning behind why they are learning?

Reflecting on this, schools may feel confident that their curriculum does this well. Or they may think it could do more. For schools in a position to consider that, this might mean:

- Thinking about whether the core competencies of global citizenship can offer your school a broad positive curriculum vision
- Incorporating global citizenship activities into your schemes of work
- Exploring broader curriculum models such as the International Baccalaureate

Much of this will depend on an individual school's circumstance, their prior engagement with global citizenship and the personal beliefs of the staff and school leaders.

However at a time of change, when schools in England are being given more space to do so, we hope that some schools are able to take the opportunity to re-examine their school curriculum to make it more relevant and beneficial for their learners. And we also hope that such schools consider how global citizenship can help them to do this.



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