War, global citizenship and cicil society

A recent research project in the UK found that learners of all ages wanted to know more about war and conflict. **Lynn Davies** *and* **Hiromi Yamashita** *discuss the implications for civil society of this key finding.*

Through interviews, observation, camera work and questionnaires in primary and secondary schools, the project *Global Citizenship: The Needs of Teachers and Learners* (Davies, Harber and Yamashita 2004) aimed to identify the needs of teachers and teacher trainees in implementing a global citizenship curriculum and the needs of learners in terms of what they wanted to know, do and understand within global citizenship and world events. (We also wanted respondents' own definitions of 'global citizenship' and 'the global citizen'). One outstanding finding was that learners of all ages wanted to know more about war and conflict – in the current context, and not just historically. A previous questionnaire-based study by MORI/DEA (1998) had also showed this trend. At the beginning of our research, this demand from students was clearly in the context of the Iraq war and the extensive coverage in the media. Yet this concern continued all the way through the research interview period until March 2004.

Students of all ages and both sexes wanted to understand what was happening, the reasons for the war, the reasons for hate, and the reasons for UK involvement. Together with this basic understanding came the need for specific knowledge: 'What the country's actually doing to the people'; 'What other people are doing about it to save it'; 'Why they're torturing them'; 'People who get to make decisions about the war'; 'Why some countries fight and not others'; 'Why do they want the oil in Iraq?'; and 'Why did they ever invent guns?'

There was genuine puzzlement about how war is possible, why we can't live in peace:

Why do we have to make weapons at all? (Year 5)

When we can blow up the world three times, I mean, what's the point of making that? (Year 6)

It is significant that only one child mentioned safety issues, i.e. learning about masks in case of bomb attacks; all the other comments had a political tone. Only one child expressed fear, but the quotation seems to point to the need for more information, not less:

When I heard about Iraq I kept saying, 'if our team helps USA, if there is going to be war, then are they going to bomb us?' And my Dad kept telling me that they haven't got anything that carries bombs that can get close enough to our country and I kept saying 'Dad, I'm dead, I'm dead, we're going to get bombs'. (Year 4)

Hypocrisy was not missed, even by primary age children:

Yeah how come we're accusing the Iraqis when America has 'weapons of mass destruction'? (Year 5/6)

With the war, is that, if two kids are fighting or something, a grown-up will always come down, 'stop fighting, talk it

over', they all say it to us, but they don't do it themselves, so they're real hypocrites really. Because it's true, because they could talk it over, I know it's hard and difficult, but if they wanted to, they could talk it over with Saddam Hussein, I know he's not being really reasonable, but if they wanted to they could push for it so there wasn't a war. (Year 10).

For some children, of course, there was an immediate and personal interest:

Also I have a relative there, cousin in Iraq. I don't know what they are doing in camp sites and concentration camps. (Year 10)

*My own country [Bosnia], I've never known it, I want to think about it. (*Year 8)

Some students would have a sophisticated awareness that there were different sides to the story: There was realisation that the information or spin they got was 'biased', that they only got one point of view.

My dad's got like channels in Iraq and it's totally different what they're saying to what we're saying really. (Year 10)

However, what emerged from the study was that this desire for a complex and transparent treatment of war and conflict was not always being met in schools. Some teachers were able to develop these themes within their curriculum areas, and had imaginative uses of newspapers and television coverage, yet many lacked confidence to do this, as they recognized:

The children did mention the horrific images some of them had seen of September 11th, and I think as staff, we didn't know quite how to deal with it. I mean, because of none of us are old enough to remember the war, we hadn't had anything like that happen in our lives, so how were we supposed to cope with it.... So we would just keep to the routine, rather push it to the side I am afraid, in order to help the children settle, because that is what this school needs.

Teachers admitted they 'hadn't really thought about it', or claimed that the prescriptive National Curriculum (and its assessment) 'mopped up' so much time and so many resources that there was no space. Students therefore felt short-changed. Nothing was ever done in depth. People 'don't explain it properly to us'. Teachers were reluctant to give a personal view because of fear of indoctrination, and yet students desperately wanted to know what teachers thought on political issues. Interestingly, there was recognition by students that teachers had difficulties in teaching controversial issues:

I think sometimes they want to be more politically correct... I don't know whether that's the right term, but

they often want to make sure that they're not going to be seen as going against our government and what we ought to be all thinking. (Year 10)

One recommendation from the study was therefore that there should be much more emphasis in both pre-service and in-service education on teaching controversial issues and on being able to respond to contemporary events as they arose. Many teachers and teacher trainees clearly felt unprepared, and/or would not have the confidence to interpret the National Curriculum creatively so as to include such essential political learning for young people. The location of citizenship education in Personal, Social and Health Education in some schools meant emphasis on the personal rather than the political, with conflict being dealt with on the level of bullying and friendships, rather than taking a broader view.

Do mention the war: implications for civil society

We now draw out two implications for the current agendas around civil renewal. One is social cohesion and the other is active citizenship. In terms firstly of social cohesion, a significant aspect was the link that students made to their multicultural society. One group guessed that teachers did not teach about war or world issues because they were avoiding making racist bullying worse at school.

I think it's because, in this school, really, we have so many different languages and religions that people take the mick out of them. So if, say we did about, if there was a Chinese person here and we were doing about China, if there was any things that would embarrass them they would take the mick out of the people there who were at this school [...] I think the teachers say it [multi-cultural school] makes us all happy, and then they don't do it [teaching about other countries] to make us all sad. (Year 5)

Yet for young people, the war has a particular impact on issues of race and racial harmony, and needs tackling:

Apparently I heard that 20% racial discrimination, that's how much it's increased by [after the Iraq war started], 20%, and I feel that's so wrong, because there's war going on in another country because of oil, everyone's got it against Asian or Muslim people you know? (Year 10)

It is our view that schools have a duty to tackle such racism and discrimination – not by bland versions of 'tolerance' or multiculturalism, but by teaching directly about conflict, its sources and impact, both internationally and locally. We found many good examples of schools imaginatively and successfully taking risks with this:

- One primary school dealt with issues of war and conflict through circle time and assemblies, with a teacher stating 'we can't hide it, so we want it discussed'. One lesson observed found the teacher exploring fears of the children about the Iraq war, and linking it to day-to-day conflicts in the playground; the children also learned about conflict in the Balkans.

- Another primary school became involved in Coventry Peace Month activities, and was recognizing and tackling the traumatic experiences that some refugee children had had in the past.

- One secondary school made a strong connection between history teaching and global citizenship education, dealing with different forms of discrimination (the Holocaust, women) and wars in different eras; this linked to discussion of contemporary human rights abuses.

- In another secondary school, a teacher created weekly 'News in Numbers' and 'News in Pictures' materials to be used in tutorial time in the morning, so that students could discuss contemporary events. For this big multi-cultural school, the issue of the Iraq war was a strong discussion point and was the site of potential conflict among the students; the school decided to create a 'War Bulletin Board' for students to write their opinions on a card to stick on the board and share.

- In the student magazine (completely uncensored by staff) in another school, students touched upon the Iraq war in a number of issues and generated a debate.

- In yet another (predominantly white) school, the Year 9 citizenship teachers used Iraq as a case study following the QCA Scheme of Work Unit 11: *Why is it so difficult to keep the peace in the world today?* Information posted on the school Intranet by the citizenship team allowed classroom teachers to deal with this sensitive topic, and the support structure gave them confidence.

This use of the official QCA curriculum means that schools do not have to forge a lonely furrow in teaching about conflict and our report cites a range of materials recommended by teachers to help such teaching (eg. from Development Education Centres, ActionAid and Oxfam). One excellent resource which came out after this study was completed, is Oxfam's *Making Sense of World Conflicts: Activities and source materials for teachers of English, Citizenship and PSE* (Midwinter 2005), which not only shows how the activities link to the National Curriculum orders, but tackles hard-hitting areas of conflict and culture, the arms trade and the reporting of conflict.

This manual does not stop at learning about conflict, but also has ideas on conflict resolution and on 'bringing about change', which leads to the second of the implications for civil society: active citizenship. The OXFAM manual gives examples of people across the world taking action against arms abuses, including in UK, and provides guidance on planning a campaign. One significant activity is called 'Citizen or Truant?', which role-plays different positions on whether children should join a demonstration about the huge number of people dying from armed conflicts and gun violence. This resonates with one of the issues which came up in our study, which was students joining the march against the war in Iraq. There was much ambivalence from schools, ranging from the headteacher who took his own children on

the march to the head who talked of how 10% of his students had 'escaped' to go on the march and how they would have to make up the lesson time missed. This was clearly *not* seen as useful learning.

> *I talked [to them] about the fact that the war had already started, that there wasn't any point in demonstrating against it any more, that prayer would be more useful...*

Understandably, there were concerns about safety and permission but students mentioned in interview that they thought that going on the march was a worthwhile thing to do and they could not understand why they were not allowed to 'do something' when they were taught to 'do something' through citizenship classes.

There are obviously more difficulties with global citizenship education than with local citizenship education in terms of the 'active' role. There are numerous opportunities to be active in the local community, whether through volunteering or through taking local action for change, for example in environmental improvements. In attempting to act globally it is more difficult to demonstrate impact and to feel a sense of agency, yet the demonstrations at the G8 meeting, the support for the Live8 concerts and the Make Poverty History wristbands show that people do want to feel they can contribute. In terms of conflict, one way in which young people can feel active is networking into the various peace movements across the globe and in joining campaigns such as Amnesty International's against the arms trade. In this way, an important insertion is made into the 'Think globally, act locally' idea so that it becomes 'Think globally, campaign nationally and act locally'. Active citizenship includes holding governments accountable for action and if, as in UK, more money is made on selling arms than is given away in aid, then there is much work to do in publicising this and in maintaining the pressure for arms control. Poverty is directly associated with war and conflict for many countries, yet the current tripartite concern with increasing aid, cancelling debt and reforming trade do not seem to add the fourth important aim of reducing conflict – or at the least, not contributing to it.

We know from research (reviewed in Davies et al 2004a) that one of the best predictors for who becomes an 'active citizen' in later life is taking part in the democratic life of the school, for example in a student council or a governing body. Studies in USA of adults who had participated in the US Civil Rights movements in their youth found that 25 years later they were significantly more active in local political activities. Apparently, political practices acquired during youth can effectively result in identity-forming political habits that become part of the individual's self-definition and shape their relationship to society. We also know that there is a positive correlation between civic knowledge as a student and participation in the political and civic activities of democratic life as an adult; yet the IAE (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) studies have found that the percentage of English students likely to engage in non-violent protests is low compared to most other countries (Kerr et al 2002). It would seem critical to encourage ways to enable young people to join social movements and to engage in protest, that is, to experience and generate positive conflict in order to campaign against negative conflict. This would imply teachers and schools 'modelling' participation rather than blocking it. And, as we saw earlier, it implies schools taking risks with surfacing contentious issues in ethnically mixed environments rather than suppressing them in the interests of 'harmony'.

Civil society has a wealth of definitions and categorisations, but is generally seen as a sphere of social interaction distinct from economy or state, composed of associations and publics. Modern civil society is created and reproduced through forms of collective action and institutionalised through laws (Cohen 1995). In examining this aspect of global citizenship education, we have seen the potential for collective action and an informed public. Keane (1998) has a vision of civil society that respects differences between groups by promoting non-violent engagement 'from above' (through state authority embedded in national constitutions and international law) and 'from below' (by channelling violent tendencies into non-violent associational life). It is our view that learning about war and conflict in an open, systematic and sustained way has this potential to channel discrimination and intercultural violence into peaceful but effective ways to challenge injustice and aggression. And it is what learners want.

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