



Education for global citizenship in Scotland: Reciprocal partnership or politics of benevolence?



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ABSTRACT

Links between schools in the United Kingdom and partner schools in developing countries are an increasingly popular approach to teaching global citizenship. This study addresses the limited empirical research to date on the influence of such links on pupils' learning and understanding. Following an overview of the curricular theme of global citizenship in the Scottish curriculum and in the context of a partnership between Scotland and Malawi, challenges and potential pitfalls of teaching global citizenship are illustrated by the voices of pupils at four schools. Data is analysed through the themes of knowledge and understanding, concerns about fairness, and giving and helping. We reflect on whether our study indicates the intended reciprocal partnership or a 'politics of benevolence'.

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1. Education for global citizenship in Scotland

School linking, as Bourn and Bain (2012) note, 'has been one of the major areas of expansion within UK schools in the first decade of the twenty-first century', and continues to receive attention in educational curricula. Fostering global citizenship is a significant aim of education in Scottish schools, pursued at the levels of both the school curriculum and national co-operation in partnership with schools in other countries. Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) encourages pupils to have greater awareness of their local, national and global environments, and to value the diversity that these contexts present. Global citizenship education within CfE aims to develop in children and young people a sense of responsibility 'towards each other and the wider world' to enable them to 'take up their place in the world, contribute to it confidently, successfully and effectively' (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2011, p. 10). The publications *Developing A Global Dimension In The School Curriculum* (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) and *Putting The World Into World-Class Education* (Development Education Association, 2005) likewise recognized the importance of the global dimension in school curricula. These policy initiatives reflect a growing consensus in the citizenship education literature that citizenship education needs to be provided against a global backdrop (Humes, 2008) and that a global perspective means 'the provision of insights, ideas and information that enable students to look beyond the confines of local and national boundaries in their thinking and aspirations' (Pike, 2008, p. 469).

In 2005 a Cooperation Agreement was signed between the government of Malawi and the then Scottish Executive. Reflecting the emerging idea of the global citizen as a 'good global neighbour', the Agreement set out to consolidate long-established ties between the two countries in a reciprocal partnership in which their resources would support Malawi in

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pursuit of its Millennium Development Goals. Aspirations to closer ties are clearly reflected in the partnership and especially in the links it sets out to promote between schools in the two countries through twinning, exchanges and other curricular activities in which students and teachers are encouraged to interact.

Yet despite the growth of school partnerships, there has been little empirical research which examines the influence of school links on pupils' learning and their understanding of global and development issues (Bourn & Bain, 2012; Edge & Khamsi, 2012; and see Enslin & Hedge, 2010 for a philosophical exploration of the idea of the 'good global neighbour' in citizenship education), in Scotland or elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Despite the paucity of research to date, the research that is available is positive about the benefits of school linking. Edge, Khamsi and Bourn (2009) report, for example, that school-wide commitment to a global dimension can nurture cross-curricular collaboration and a sense of common purpose. Furthermore, implementing a school-wide global dimension can positively influence students' language learning and cultural awareness (Bourn & Hunt, 2011).

The small-scale exploratory study reported here addresses the paucity of research on this area of key curricular and policy development by examining data that explores young people's perceptions of what it means to be a good global neighbour within the context of the Scotland-Malawi Partnership. Initially, we provide a brief overview of the Scotland-Malawi Partnership and the associated curricular theme of global citizenship that formed the starting point for this research, followed by an outline of the empirical study from which we draw the data. As we proceed, we introduce some challenges and potential pitfalls of teaching global citizenship and we illustrate these with the voices of the pupils at four schools with whom we worked. We draw on three key themes that emerged from the data obtained in this study. The first and overarching theme comprises *knowledge and understanding* of Scottish pupils' counterparts in Malawi, including their perceptions of inequality in material circumstances. A second theme to emerge from the data is *fairness*. Pupil data indicates concerns about an unfair world and what they might do about that. Typically, pupils talk of the need not only to redistribute material resources but to 'give' and to 'help', which forms our third theme. As we will show, such data brings to the fore questions about the extent to which an awareness of an unfair world can avoid a 'politics of benevolence' (Jefferess, 2008) as against one of reciprocal partnership.

2. Fostering global citizenship: the Scotland-Malawi partnership and curriculum for excellence

Twinning schools was one of several initiatives undertaken under the auspices of the Scotland-Malawi Partnership (2009), a network which aims to support and co-ordinate cooperation between the two countries, alongside other initiatives in governance, health and sustainable development. The Partnership aims to combine skills and expertise from both Scotland and Malawi, based on principles of equality, reciprocity and mutual benefit. In its guidance on forming partnerships between Scottish primary and secondary schools and their Malawian partners the Partnership states that:

School partnerships are an ideal way to enhance the global curriculum, by offering pupils an interactive dimension to their study of global issues. By partnership with a Malawian school you will continue to build the historic, cultural, social and political ties between the two countries (Scotland-Malawi Partnership, 2015, p. 3)

Guidance for schools participating in partnerships attends carefully to the principles that should underpin their organisation and activities, emphasising how exchanges can foster understanding – political, cultural and economic – particularly of poverty reduction. Recommended activities include storytelling, exchanging letters, sending learning materials and clothes, and building and repairing schools and classrooms. Encouragement is given to reciprocal visits and to comparative projects about health and well-being, the environment, celebrating cultural practices and lifestyles, each cast as an opportunity to develop mutual understanding.

Whatever the merits of forging closer links and understanding, the Scotland-Malawi Partnership raises complex problems, not least with respect to the persistent and vast differences in wealth, life opportunities and educational access of each country's citizens. Alongside shared membership of the Commonwealth and longstanding links through education and church organisations, a history of Empire defines the context for developing conceptions of global citizenship and good neighbourliness between the young citizens of both countries. In emphasising the principle of partnership, the guidance warns with this complex background in mind of the potential pitfalls to such partnerships. Partnership should not be interpreted as comprising simply the provision of material aid and funds. Instead, it encourages an interpretation of partnership as creating critical understanding among pupils of the lives of their partners, enhancing pupils' skills and teachers' professional development (Scotland-Malawi Partnership 2009, p. 6). When financial support is given, for example to enhance learning and teaching, the potential impact of such aid should be carefully assessed. Partner schools must take care that 'money does not become the primary goal of a partnership otherwise the relationship can become distorted, as well as making mutual goals more difficult to achieve' (p. 6). Similarly, in its advice on partnerships, the Department for International Development (2011) (DfID) suggests that fundraising by one partner school on behalf of another can distort their relationship, creating a power imbalance and fostering stereotypes. Making a distinction between learning and charity partnerships, DfID emphasises the importance of shared roles in the planning and the execution of fundraising activities, as well as in decisions about how funds so raised are spent.

The guidance provided by both the Scotland-Malawi Partnership and DfID acknowledges that partnerships between schools in Scotland and Malawi involve schools and contexts so differently resourced as to inevitably prompt the question of whether such programmes can succeed in promoting reciprocity and avoid what Jefferess (2008) calls a 'politics of

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