



Beyond Sectarianism - new thinking for a new generation

A Small-Scale Research Initiative between Scotland (Glasgow) and Northern Ireland (Derry)

This information has been taken from the report and PowerPoint presentation provided by the project leads:

- Dr Margery McMahon, School of Education, University of Glasgow
- Lesley Atkins, Glasgow City Council & Shawlands Academy

Aims

- To provide opportunities for pupils from schools in Glasgow and Derry to explore the past from the other's perspective, using their shared and lived experiences
- To construct meaning and understanding of the present, in ways that can shape their future
- To develop a model for exploring cross community historical and cultural understandings through planned learning experiences, including pupil and teacher exchanges.



Actions

[Project timeline: 1 June 2010 to 25 January 2011]

Thirteen 3rd year pupils (14 years old) from Thornhill College, an all girl Roman Catholic grammar school in Derry, and thirteen 2nd year pupils (13 years old) from Shawlands Academy*, a multi-cultural and linguistically diverse school in Glasgow, spent three days in each other's local environment. This was preceded by teacher exchanges to draft programmes, which they then shared with pupils. The programmes were constructed on models of situated learning, drawing on resources available in local communities.

The young people were asked to consider, collaboratively, the new thinking required for both communities to address the issues of sectarianism and racism in the community. This would build on past learning about how both communities in Glasgow and Derry had worked to create more inclusive communities prepared to overcome division and build greater social cohesion.

The visits allowed the young people to learn in real environments and see first hand the impact of past conflict and the attempts on both sides to resolve and rebuild. Young people from Thornhill College had the opportunity to learn about the impact on Glasgow of becoming a reception city for asylum seeker families and listened to presentations from *The Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees* and *Positive Action in Housing*. Young people from Shawlands Academy gained first-hand experience of the impact of The Troubles in Derry, including the impact on the community of 'Bloody Sunday' and the resultant community pressure and government enquiry.



Pupils from Glasgow then reviewed their account of their visit to Derry and, in small groups, deconstructed and discussed the learning reflected in the account and what was significant for them.

Outcomes

Pupil learning - what did they tell us?

- ⊕ Situated learning - the overall experience appeared to create a significant level of curiosity which generated questions that, in turn, resulted in learning
- ⊕ Pupils gained a deeper understanding of their own city's history, culture and context by comparing it with another
- ⊕ They were aware of their own learning - there was a clear desire to learn among students and they were happy when they were aware that learning had occurred
- ⊕ An awareness of differences in school cultures
- ⊕ The importance of visual learning
- ⊕ The importance of informal learning through social interaction
- ⊕ Overall, a desire to have their voices heard and wanting to be in control of their own learning experiences.

The importance of visual learning



'Separated by colours'

For the Thornhill College pupils, the opportunity to learn from the community in Glasgow about issues resulting from the Home Office Dispersal Act in 2000 naming Glasgow as a reception city for Asylum Seeker families was a very powerful learning experience for their citizenship education.

The learning gained by the Shawlands Academy pupils of the impact on the community of 'Bloody Sunday' and the resultant community pressure and government enquiry was a 'second to none' learning experience for their Modern Studies course.

"We are learning about anti sectarianism and our visit had a great impact on our understanding of sectarianism."

- Lesley Atkins



From the perspective of Shawlands Academy, the initiative contributed to the knowledge and understanding of third year students studying for the SQA Standard Grade qualification in Modern Studies and contribute to the development of relevant experiences and outcomes of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence.[†] It was also an important addition to the school's priority in developing as an international school, with young people gaining the knowledge and understanding of the world, of key events in world history and the intercultural understanding required make sense of global events.

Research strand

A research strand (funded separately and undertaken by a researcher not involved operationally with the project) provided evidence of impact for pupils. Data gathered through focus groups showed how pupils' thinking and perceptions had shifted and changed through participation in the project. The research also highlighted the significance of 'field' or 'situated' experiences and the power of informal learning experiences mediated by experienced teachers.

What the project leads have learnt

- The impact of experiential learning
- The importance of mediation and facilitation of learning
- Funding attracts funding
- Place in the curriculum (integrated or add on)
- More involvement of pupils in the planning process
- Resources available in the community

'As an accompanying member of staff during the recent Shawlands Academy/Thornhill College exchange to Derry as part of the schools' Five Nations initiative I was struck by how positive an opportunity it was for the young people from both cities to come together to explore life in their cities in the 21st century, exploring the shared past of both cities and from this to set a Young People's Agenda for the future of their cities.'

- Lesley Atkins

Challenges

Matching process - Time - Communication - Weather

Relevance to other countries in the Five Nations Network and next steps

- Production of final DVD and its dissemination
- An opportunity for teachers' professional development - fostering an understanding of intercultural learning and an international education
- Building staff capacity
- A Five Nations Pupil Network
- Opportunities for exchange across Five Nations Network.

* The project involved a typical Shawlands Academy class: diverse and including a range of young people at different levels of second language acquisition. The initiative also therefore played a key role in the development of more sophisticated language skills through providing the opportunity to interact more with each other and with the young people from Thornhill College. Shawlands Academy is recognised as the most diverse school in Scotland with a bilingual population of 48% and over 50 community languages spoken. This was evident in the report and images from pupils, which now feature on the school website - www.shawlandsacademy.sch.uk

[†] Relevant Experiences and Outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland):

- 'I can gather and use information about forms of discrimination against people in societies and consider the impact this has on people's lives.' SOC 2-16b
- 'I can critically analyse the relative importance of the contribution of individuals or groups in bringing about change in a significant political event' SOC 4-17a
- 'I can evaluate the role of the media in a democracy, assess its importance in informing and influencing citizens, and explain decisions made by those in power.' SOC 4-17b
- 'I can evaluate the impact which decision making bodies have on the lives of people in Scotland or elsewhere'. SOC 4-18a
- Perceptions [were] challenged and transformed. Curriculum for Excellence
- The realisation that they learned more by doing/talking/interacting with the other pupils rather than learning about them. Curriculum for Excellence