

Executive Summary

Research into the Impact of the Global Learning Programme in Northern Ireland **2015-2017**



**GLOBAL
LEARNING**
Programme



Summary of the impact of the Global Learning Programme (GLP) 2015-2017

The Global Learning Programme (GLP) is a four-year programme of support to schools funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by the Centre for Global Education (CGE) with the aim of embedding Global Learning as regular practice in the classroom and at a whole school level. The aims of the research conducted by Ulster University were to assess the impact of the GLP in enhancing Global Learning practice in grant aided primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland and to examine the progress of pupils in Years 5 to 10 over the duration of the programme.

Global Learning

Global Learning helps learners make sense of the increasingly globalised, complex and rapidly changing world in which they live. It equips children and young people with the essential knowledge, skills and dispositions that will enable them to realise their potential and make a positive contribution to a fair and sustainable world. Since 2015, 50% of schools in Northern Ireland have taken part in GLP training, which aimed to enhance their Global Learning practice and thus support pupils to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Whole School Impact of the GLP

There were six possible stages of Global Learning progression for schools:



Online questionnaires and interviews with teachers leading on Global Learning within their schools over three years showed progress in almost all areas, although few reached the final embedding stage. This may be an indication that the programme needs a longer lifespan in order to allow for a deeper and broader development of this work. Movement from one indicator to the next represented considerable achievement in schools where demands on teachers' time remain constant. Interviews with pupils from Years 5 - 10 showed notable development in their questioning attitudes towards cause and effect in regard to global matters, as well as how these were manifested in their local community.

1. Curriculum Teaching & Learning

According to one post-primary Lead Teacher, Global Learning *was the only initiative that has crossed over from a pastoral dimension into curriculum development*. In post-primary schools, some Lead Teachers and their colleagues were teaching Global Learning in a connected way across different subjects by Year 3 of the programme, including Geography, History, Religious Education, Learning for Life and Work, Drama and Dance. The last two creative areas were said by one teacher to generate more positive feedback from pupils, promote greater understanding and foster emotional intelligence. All this has contributed towards the importance of sustaining Global Learning and, in this regard, the research suggested Geography as a leading (but by no means sole) subject home for this work (Geographical Association, n.d.)¹. However, teachers were also identifying opportunities for integrating Global Learning into primary thematic units and other secondary subjects to allow for more meaningful and relevant connected learning for pupils.

2. Community Connections & Awards

There was considerable evidence of GLP schools working with others (to avoid isolation and to share ideas), including with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and with complementary initiatives. There was marked progress by Year 3 in respect of helping parents/carers to understand the aims and benefits of Global Learning. However, there was still relatively little uptake of complementary school awards although it is likely that the industrial action affecting teachers in Northern Ireland may have had an adverse impact on this. However, mention was made, too, of the significant time commitment required in doing these awards. Incorporating a global dimension into the delivery of the Eco-Schools Award topics was, however, rated much better.

¹ Available at: <http://www.geography.org.uk/projects/globallearningprogramme>

3. Impact on Learners

Teachers' actions resulted in greater pupil knowledge of the key concepts of Global Learning (poverty, global inequality, social justice, sustainable development and global interdependence); a widened understanding of their own potential impact on the world including collective responsibility; a clearer perception of interdependence; a greater understanding of the causes of poverty and inequality; and a grasp of sustainability. Pupils improved their critical thinking skills and their ability to question, and could now recognise how world events are presented in the media. In terms of their understanding of how society might make a difference, there was a positive shift upwards. In the Year 3 interviews only, pupils were asked *inter alia* about their interest in learning about other global issues. The wide range of responses they identified and the questions they asked plainly showed their curiosity, perplexity and concern about some of the more prominent problems that are prevalent in a range of media.

"Classes engage with pupils in their local community about global issues." (Special school teacher)

"Children are more aware of the causes of poverty and how they as individuals can help." (Primary teacher)

"...our students have been given numerous opportunities to develop a range of skills, qualities and dispositions. [This] has allowed [them] to show respect for others, integrity, curiosity, tolerance, concern for others and self-belief that they can have an impact on the lives of others on a local and global scale." (Post-Primary teacher)

4. Effective Leadership

The research identified clear support from senior managers and colleagues as a key enabler of Global Learning. Such support was evidenced by schools providing increased timetable capacity and opportunities for collegiality and preparation; encouraging connectedness to other parts of the curriculum; embracing a pastoral dimension; forging links to NGOs or even countries in the Global South; and, crucially, allowing the inclusion of global learning within individual teachers' planners and within whole school development planning.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership in Global Learning had improved substantially. Similarly, schools' ethos and vision with respect to Global Learning had steadily grown over the three years with some now in the highest stage of progression for this area. Its inclusion in school policies and School Development Plans saw a steady upswing too. Surveys and interviews suggested the Lead Teachers' colleagues were becoming much more aware of the Global Learning Programme, were finding and using the resources on the GLP website, developing and using their own materials, and liaising with the Lead Teacher in this regard.

5. Key Challenges for Global Learning

Key challenges included colleagues' busyness (although they generally welcomed help), timetable restrictions (prioritisation of academic subjects and the Transfer Tests at age 11, but Primary 5 and 6 Lead Teachers also referred to lack of time), industrial action and the lack of dedicated time or designated funding for this work. There were also distinctive challenges associated with assessing Global Learning.

Other initiatives can come along to consume teachers' time and passion, and, without a named position in the curriculum, without a designated, committed and capable champion in the staffroom, and without sustained government funding and support for Global Learning, the impact of the GLP may well eventually diminish over time. This concern has congruence with Worden and Smith's² (2017) disquiet about the positioning of Local and Global Citizenship in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. There may be an opportunity to revisit this in a future curriculum review. The evidence shows that those teachers who have been trained through this programme and have enabled their schools and pupils to make commendable, steady progress, will be competent to argue the case for Global Learning.

2 Worden, E.A. & Smith, A. (2017) Teaching for democracy in the absence of transitional justice: the case of Northern Ireland. *Comparative Education*, Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2017.1334426>

Teachers were still very conscious of the considerable conceptual difficulty around combining charitable fundraising with developing a sense of social justice and concern for the environment. Nonetheless, this is a challenge that is worth the effort.

Recommendations

For Schools

Couched within the realities and competing demands identified in the research evidence, schools should persevere with the provision of opportunities for pupils to engage with Global Learning across the curriculum. To do so, teachers need ongoing guidance and support to develop actions in partnership with pupils that reflect the latter's increasingly nuanced understanding of global issues resulting from the Global Learning Programme input. It is certain that these issues will continue to impact upon every aspect of their lives at local and global levels. Building the pupils' knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions in Global Learning is demonstrably in accord with the aims of the NI curriculum. Schools should, where possible, consider the role of Lead Teacher as a shared one.

For National and Local Government

Finally, it will be very difficult for progress to be made on Global Learning without support at national (Department for International Development) and local (Department of Education) government levels. Policy development might usefully encompass curricular change, initial teacher education, school governance and inspection.

Specifically, support from the Department for International Development might encompass funding to sustain the expert support for schools (both face-to-face and online via the GLP website) and the ongoing collection of research evidence, so that a longitudinal analysis might be maintained during any transitional period and further developed if the programme is extended. The research dimension should ideally permit collaboration with relevant Higher Education Institutions across the UK, and also enable dissemination of findings to wider audiences. The extension of the Global Learning Programme in Northern Ireland might usefully support broadening it to other curricular areas and phases with accredited/certificated course provision, including professional cooperation between teachers, locally, nationally and internationally. Such progress would only be possible within a fully engaged, supportive, high-level policy environment.

The full GLP impact report, on which this Executive Report is based, can be downloaded from the GLP website: www.globallearningni.com/about-the-glp/the-impact.

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