

The Role of Questioning and Dialogue in Teaching Complex Global Issues: Perceptions of student-teachers in England

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Abstract

This article is based on a study of student-teachers' perceptions of how complex global issues should be taught. It finds that many are positive about engaging with this, and often associate teaching complex issues with the use of participatory methodologies. However, most student-teachers in this study appear to be reluctant to question their own assumptions or engage in mutual learning with pupils, seeing themselves as the gatekeepers of knowledge. This might result in a reliance on simplistic information that ignores the structural nature of many of these issues, suggesting a further need for support in this area.

Keywords: Global education, initial teacher education, dialogue, controversial issues

Introduction

This article discusses the inclusion of global education to support teaching controversial issues in initial teacher education (ITE), focusing on the English context. It is based on a Masters study of student-teachers' perceptions of teaching complex global issues during their Secondary Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course, the requirement for qualified teacher status in England. After giving an overview of literature relating to critical pedagogy and global education, I report on the perspectives of student-teachers on delivering complex global issues. The study includes analysis from two phases, the first looking at the entire cohort with the use of self-completion questionnaires, and the second going into greater depth using semi-structured interviews with a small sample of these student-teachers. This article focuses primarily on the qualitative data resulting from the interviews. The results of the quantitative data are reported elsewhere (Brown, 2009).

Here I use the term global education to refer to education relevant for life in the 21st Century, with the interdependence this implies, and regarding the many issues that have global implications, covering a diverse range of topics from inequality and poverty to trade, immigration and climate change. By the very nature of these issues

I define them as both complex and controversial; issues which can be interpreted in different ways from different perspectives, and influenced by a range of factors that make classifying them as 'right' or 'wrong' problematic. However, as an inevitable part of understanding the world we live in, I argue that finding a way to manage these in the classroom is important.

While the Development Education Association¹ uses the term global learning, the perspective taken here on global education reflects the definition given by the DEA, that this is education which puts learning in a global context and fosters 'critical and creative thinking; self-awareness and open-mindedness towards difference; understanding of global issues and power relations; and optimism and action for a better world.'². In order to develop critical thinking, I see it as important to open a space where these issues can be explored from different perspectives, in dialogue, and where there is an opportunity for mutual learning. In this way, the complexity of the issues can be drawn out and structural injustices discussed, with the intended outcome that this will promote values of solidarity, self-esteem, empathy and cooperation, which may in turn lead to changes in behaviour.

In my analysis of this data I draw on literature from critical pedagogy, discussing the use of participative methodologies and relating this to teachers' fears of indoctrination and their management of moral values in the classroom. I ask to what extent student-teachers feel prepared to address complex issues and what tools they have to enable them to do this.

I found that many student-teachers had had some contact with teaching complex or global issues, and were positive about developing this more. Yet they expressed some doubt about managing different values and perspectives and were not always confident in their use of participatory methodologies. Indeed, they did not associate these with dialogue, mutual learning or questioning their own assumptions. There is a danger then, that passion for an issue from a single perspective may override criticality and the examination of multiple perspectives. I argue that a greater focus on developing critical thinking skills during the PGCE course would benefit teachers of all subjects. Indeed, the relevance of these skills across the curriculum suggests the need for early cross-curricula introduction of critical literacy in ITE (Ellis, 2009). This also supports the Development Education Association's advice that ITE 'needs to develop the confidence of student-teachers' critical thinking and discussion; to teach about controversial issues ... and ... make teaching relevant to the world we live in' (DEA, 2008:25).

While there have been studies on teaching controversial issues, and on global education, this study brings together a number of issues raised in prior research. It focuses on the role of questioning and dialogue as a means of dealing with the complexity of global issues, tying in the relationship between recognising structural injustice and the openness of teachers to exploring and learning alongside their

pupils. It asks student-teachers how they feel about managing these issues and what support they feel they require, while also analysing their attitudes to critical thinking and dialogue as a means of teaching complex issues.

Critical Pedagogy and Dialogue

Most advocates of global education agree that it should involve 'critical dialogue and debate and space for a range of voices, views and perspectives' (Bourn, 2008a:19). Therefore, global education is often associated with critical pedagogies, drawing on the work of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1972; Bourn, 2008a; Andreotti, 2006). The aim is to allow students to critically explore and examine the world in which they find themselves and to identify its contradictions. For May (1999), it is about realising that knowledge and values that are presented as universal are neither common nor available to all (May, 1999). In order to deal with complex and controversial issues teachers need to be able to question their own views and be aware of how community and background affect those views (Bennett, 1995:262). They also need to recognise the extent to which 'knowledge' is contested (Shah and Brown, 2009), and that they cannot always rely on the safety of universally accepted 'facts'.

The idea that all education is a neutral and objective portrayal of *the* 'facts' is occasionally problematic. To understand facts as something which can 'impinge on the observer from the outside, and are independent of his consciousness' (Carr, 2001:3) is to miss a vital element of how we understand the world. Facts cannot be said to 'speak for themselves' (Carr, 2001:5) and when called upon to interpret information we must examine the source. Since information must be selected from an infinite number of 'facts' which must then be interpreted by the writer before being presented as 'true', to ignore this interpretation is to accept the author's version of reality as the only possibility. This is not to say that one interpretation is necessarily as good as another. 'It does not follow that, because a mountain appears to take on different shapes from different angles of vision, it has objectively either no shape at all or an infinity of shapes' (Carr, 2001:21). What is important is that an educator is conscious of their place in history and their own situation (Carr, 2001:38). This need not mean complete relativism, only that we must be aware of what is and what is not relative.

For Popper there is no criterion of absolute truth, so while he believed that there is such a thing as truth, he did not think we could ever know this for certain. Therefore, we can learn and grow in knowledge, and thus get closer to knowledge. His view is that criticism 'is the only way we have of detecting our mistakes, and learning from them in a systematic way' (Popper, 2002:566). We do interpret the world in different ways, and since our understanding of the world may differ as a result of our experience, our upbringing, nationality, class, social habitat and so on, no-one is exempt from subjective bias.

Therefore, it is important to explore many perspectives, including those that do not correspond with one's own views. Critical pedagogies are based upon a framework in which knowledge is seen as a social construction 'deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations' (McLaren, 2009:63), constructed due to the agreement and consent of individuals living in a society at a particular point in time. Therefore, critical pedagogy encourages us to ask 'how and why knowledge gets constructed in the way it does' (McLaren, 2009:63).

Andreotti, drawing on Spivak's ideas, examines critical pedagogy from a post-colonial perspective: she identifies the need to 'look at one's own context, positioning and complicities' (Andreotti, 2007:69), and argues that dominant ideas must be questioned on the grounds that these aim to maintain the *status quo* and reinforce the neo-colonial structures that cause oppression (Andreotti, 2007).

With such a politicised agenda, global education is challenged for presenting a Leftist understanding of the issues and ignoring opposing ideas. In one such challenge, Scruton suggests this work lacks intellectual argument and that its deliberate selection of facts to support a particular point of view is indoctrination (Scruton, 1985:31). This, he claims, is particularly strong when dealing with the impressionable minds of children and young people.

Indoctrination is defined as education with narrow goals, where there is seen to be one 'right' answer (Roger and Horrocks, 2010:61). Thus, one way in which indoctrination might be avoided is by using teaching methods that move away from the idea that there is one 'right' answer when dealing with controversial issues. Indeed, in global education there is a stronger focus on the learning process than on content. Batty argues that critical reflection will not be brought out well from training that is focused on content, and that ITE courses need to model critique. (Batty, 2009:30). Indeed, teachers need to be aware that there are trade-offs and be able to bring to the surface contradictions in the knowledge we accept as true (Shah and Brown, 2009). Clearly, this demands a lot of a new teacher, therefore:

Modelling is crucial in teaching, and to support students to be self-reflective, and to respond to complexity and change, teachers need to be doing so themselves. Anecdotal evidence from practitioners who support educators suggests that some teachers hold views that reinforce stereotypes on global issues. Hence fostering critical thinking means teachers, as well as students, questioning their own understanding and assumptions. Like students, teachers need to be supported in this (Shah and Brown, 2009:24).

For Douglas and Wade the heart of the matter is the 'commitment to education predicated upon critical and respectful dialogue, relevant experiential learning, informed negotiation and decision taking' (Douglas and Wade, 1999:7). It is possible that the student-teachers' understanding of many complex issues will be superficial or from a single perspective. There is a danger of reinforcing stereotypes when issues are not questioned or different perspectives considered (Andreotti, 2006). Pictures capturing images of the 'poor African', for example, 'allow a construct that

externalises the problems of this society, so that everything negative becomes an aberration rather than something that may be systemic and therefore in need of consideration and solutions' (Graves, 2002:306).

What is particularly significant is the idea of dialogue as including all voices and being open to genuine exploration of ideas, and dialogue as a means to an end, with a specific set of predetermined ideas. Therefore equipping teachers with the skills to question knowledge is an important part of moving teaching into the 21st century, where interdependence and globalisation are an inevitable part of daily life. This might mean, for instance, acknowledging the intrinsic links between the issues of interdependence, poverty and inequality and 'historical processes like imperialism and colonialism that have shaped the world we live in today' (Fiedler, 2008:51). This requires an opportunity for pupils to explore these issues with the teacher.

However, there are tensions to consider in managing discussions in class since in a discussion, people can come in with what they already know or think and the teacher tests the students' ability to reason or argue their point and show they have understood what they are supposed to know. It is a series of monologues in many cases, where the aim is to express the 'right' answer, rather than to 'problematise' knowledge (Allman, 2009:426).

New teachers need a space for reflection and a forum in which to develop 'questions rather than answers' (Swanson, 2010:260) and examine their own personal values and understandings. This also means recognising that they do not have to be the knower of all knowledge. Critical thinking consists of engaging with 'probing questions at their most fundamental level' (Kumar, 2008:42). This approach is linked to a dialogic learning and a problem-posing approach to education in which both teachers and pupils have something to teach and learn.

This implies a respectful relationship between pupil and teacher. In Martin Buber's educational philosophy of dialogue, he sees education in terms of the relationship between human beings and uses two concepts to describe human encounters; 'I-It' and 'I-Thou'. In I-It relationships the other party is recognised as an object rather than an equal and therefore the other person is treated as a means to an end. In contrast the relation of I-Thou 'stresses the mutual and holistic experience of two beings' (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009:566). Only this can lead to genuine dialogue. So Buber criticises both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches to learning and favours education based on true dialogue. For Buber 'education based on dialogue is one that places appropriate weight on both the teacher's influence and the student's capacities, interests and needs' (Guilherme and Morgan, 2009:568).

Global Education

Under the New Labour government (1997-2010), global education began to receive more attention, but there was a question about whether its aims should be to equip

learners to work in a global economy or to prepare them to understand and interpret a changing world (Bourn, 2008b:6). Therefore, as its aims became blurred, it created confusion for teachers in which critical thinking and dialogue were lost. This can be understood by considering the different ideological positions of the proponents. As Schattle notes:

Structuring a discussion of the ideological dimensions of global citizenship education can be a tricky endeavour, since aspects of moral cosmopolitanism, liberal multiculturalism, neoliberalism and environmentalism all co-exist within many educational programmes and institutions. In addition, global citizenship initiatives within the educational arena often combine the dual aims of (1) promoting moral visions for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world and (2) enhancing the academic achievement, professional competence and economic competitiveness of the next generation. (Schattle, 2008:75).

This confusion is reflected in teachers' attitudes. For example, some teachers fear losing control and worry about judging what is and is not appropriate, as well as doubting their own knowledge and confidence to teach controversial issues (Hicks and Holden, 2007:19). As with any subject with a political dimension, some teachers still fear accusations of indoctrination (White, 1988:40). However, as Graves points out:

No issue that involves power, conflict, human rights, social justice, citizenship or any of the key concepts, can be free of this. ... Children should be exposed to as many ideas, perceptions and views of these as possible. Encouraging debate will facilitate understanding of the system and processes that create our lives, and help them exercise judgement and make informed choices in the future. (Graves, 2002:309).

So underlying the rhetoric of global education, and the values it espouses, there are a number of competing ideologies, which are rarely openly acknowledged. It may be true that these issues are contentious in the classroom, but to ignore them is to 'undercut our ability to explore the modern world' (Scoffham, 2009:137).

In terms of evidence of teachers' engagement in teaching complex global issues, Robbins et al found that most teachers 'were happy to incorporate teaching related to the environment or to other cultures, but tended to ignore more complex global issues' (Robbins *et al*, 2003:93). Reasons for this tend to highlight lack of time or resources, lack of confidence (Davies and Yamashita, 2005; Yamashita, 2006) or teachers' fears of 'being challenged or involved in controversy' (Schukar, 1993:55). Yamashita notes that 'teachers are reluctant to teach about these issues because they feel inadequately prepared and because of 'haunted stories' of unsettling children and other problems. Teachers' fears may also result from 'unclear government legislation and advice' (Yamashita, 2006:38).

Surveys of student-teachers agreed with a need for training in order to build the confidence required to teach complex issues, and better understanding of using different methodologies (Clarke and Drudy, 2006:375). Due to the danger of complex issues being treated in a superficial way or reinforcing stereotypes, 'student-

teachers need to locate themselves in a process of self-examination with regard to their values and engage in a critical assessment of their country's colonial past and its current involvement in exploitation of the South' (Graves, 1996:14).

In a study of student-teacher attitudes to key concepts of global citizenship during the 1980s, Hicks (1982) found that 'liberal versions of the issues were more commonly presented. Radical perspectives were less common. When ranking key concepts, underdevelopment and injustice rated highest and structural violence lowest, implying that favoured concepts have more to do with symptoms than causes' (Hicks, 1982:121). While it may be true that things have changed since this study, in 2003 Ryan also found that ITE students seem to

'... have little awareness or understanding of issues such as power relations, which cause or contribute to the world's resource problems ... Several commentators observe that ITE students (and teachers) are rarely involved in critical reflection concerning wider ethical, social and political issues and abstract concepts and indeed find it difficult when asked to do so' (Ryan, 2003:3).

Osler and Starkey highlight the 'opportunities for debating and discussing contested issues' as a key theme of teaching citizenship (Osler and Starkey, 2006:453). Exploring different perspectives is associated with methods such as discussion, role-play, resource-based learning, and research or visits outside the school (Oulton *et al*, 2004:503). However, it is possible to engage in discussions or role-plays without evidence of critical or dialogic learning (Allman, 2009:426), and furthermore, many student-teachers show 'a reliance on traditional teaching strategies' (Clarke and Drudy, 2006:382).

There has been increasing interest over the last few decades in the importance of integrating teaching complex issues into ITE programmes (cf. Pike and Selby, 1988; Steiner, 1996; CitizED, 2005; Hicks and Holden, 2007; The Historical Association, 2007; Batty, 2009; Ellis, 2009). Indeed, the pressures of globalisation and the increased interdependence implied by global trade, international conflicts, and migration all mean that education must adapt to deal with these realities.

There have also been a number of moves to try to introduce dialogue into schools, and hence ITE courses, through the development of methodologies (cf. Alexander, 2001; CSSGJ, no date). Studies have noted that 'exploratory talk, argumentation and dialogue – promote high-level thinking and intellectual development through their capacity to involve teachers *and* learners in joint acts of meaning-making and knowledge construction' (Wolfe and Alexander, 2008:1).

Findings

This study, then, aimed to explore student-teachers' perceptions about teaching complex global issues, and how this relates to values in education. In the analysis there were a number of assumptions made: firstly, that it is important to be aware of complex global issues and understand how this relates to life in a globalised society, and to have the capacity to critique sources of knowledge regarding controversial

information; secondly, that one way of doing this is through the use of participatory methodologies and by opening a space for dialogue, allowing different voices to be heard and having the teachers and pupils act as partners in the learning process; and finally, that values and attitudes are an inevitable part of dealing with controversial issues.

The research questions asked to what extent student-teachers felt confident using participatory methodologies and whether they provided the opportunity for genuine dialogue. The focus was on two key ideas: whether they felt prepared to be a mutual learner and tried to relate to their pupils through an 'I-thou' relationship (Buber, 2004) when handling complex issues; and to what extent they were open to exploring different perspectives in class or allowing knowledge to be problematised. One key issue that emerged was the need for a balance between optimism or passion about a particular issue and the criticality required to avoid accusations of activism or indoctrination in the classroom.

Sample and context

The sample for this study was drawn from one English University. One cohort of full time Secondary³ Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students from 6 subject areas completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the academic year 2008/9, with a response rate of over 90%⁴. From those who chose to give their contact details, a representative sample of one participant from each of the main subject areas (English, mathematics, science, history, geography and modern foreign languages (MFL)) was interviewed at the end of that academic year during a time in which they were being encouraged on the PGCE course to reflect on their role as teachers and their experiences of teaching and learning throughout the year. The interviews were coded and analysed using NVivo8.

It is worth noting the context in which this research was conducted. The English system has become quite tightly controlled, with high levels of accountability and assessment, and one of the main requirements of the PGCE course is to familiarise student-teachers with the content of the National Curriculum⁵. Students take the course after completing an undergraduate degree in their specialist subject; it consists of 36 weeks in which over half is spent on teaching practice in schools, while the rest is input sessions at university. Most of the student-teachers have been through the English system themselves and have not experienced a critical pedagogy approach throughout their education, so may be unfamiliar with the idea of open dialogue in the classroom.

Attitudes to Education

The first question put to all interviewees was how they saw their role as a teacher. All the participants were very clear they did not see that their role was to get their pupils through examinations and all had a more holistic view of education. They talked

about developing potential in their pupils and helping them develop their identities and understanding of the world. All the participants talked about the importance of equipping the pupils with the ability to learn and develop skills for life:

We don't want all young people to leave education and only feel fulfilled because they've got 5 GCSEs[®] A-C, all teachers want the best for their pupils and they want them to know they have got some self worth, they have got a place in society, they can contribute to society (History PGCE Student).

However, four participants felt that this holistic understanding of education conflicted with what they had encountered in schools on teaching practice, where there was a strong focus on 'teaching to exams' (English PGCE Student).

Balance between enjoyment and classroom management was also mentioned. All the participants talked about making lessons fun and interesting, and discussed incorporating different teaching methods such as group discussions and role-plays. However, five of the six also commented that this was not possible without good control of the classroom, and the need for them to be the 'boss'.

I'm more of a disciplinarian than I thought I would be. I think good behaviour is the foundation of good fun lessons (Geography PGCE Student).

Knowledge of Global Issues

When asked to comment on their personal understanding of global issues all the participants were fairly confident, particularly when the topic related to their subject area. However, all said they would need to do research before embarking on a lesson on a particular topic. For one participant this also involved recognising that they could never fully understand a complex issue:

The thing is with global issues and with history, you're never going to know everything, that's what's quite exciting about it with history as well, but it's the same with global issues, they change all the time (History PGCE Student).

For the majority though, the idea of not knowing all the facts was a source of worry. They felt that they should have all the answers and be able to control the direction of a discussion. As one participant articulated:

Teachers are like these mythical figures and the kids rely on you to have the answers, if they saw that I didn't have the answers that would make them feel very vulnerable and confused and disorientated, I think. I would rather be able to know that I can steer it or guide it, even if I can't give a definitive answer, if I could just know how to mould it a little bit I would just feel more comfortable. I think you do need to do a lot of preparation (English PGCE Student).

Indeed, the focus on content and factual information tended to be paramount. While they did recognise some of the benefits of a participatory learning process, this was not conceived of as part of critically questioning information or assumptions.

Experience of Global Education

The participants were asked if they had come across any global issues on their teaching practice and how they had managed this. All mentioned at least one lesson they had either taught or observed in at least one of the following areas: different cultures, identity and heritage, life in different countries, fair trade, justice, genocide, war, poverty, development, energy, stem cell research, and farming methods. They had all used Internet sources in their planning and three had used knowledge from their degree (Science, History, Geography).

A range of methods were used such as PowerPoint presentations, discussions and building on each other's ideas, general group work, bidding wars, expert groups and reporting back to whole class discussions, debate and opinion sharing, making posters or leaflets, and role-plays. With some of the more participatory methods (e.g. a role play as in the quote below), the student-teachers noticed that it was the pupils that were usually disruptive who engaged better with the activity. This suggests that these methodologies may be used to access different types of learners:

Some of them were really good, it was quite interesting how much they'd actually thought about these things and I got a lot more out of them than I'd expected in some cases, and not necessarily the kids that I'd expected it from either, some of the lower level kids ... actually came up and gave me something really good (Science PGCE Student).

Exploring Different Perspectives

A key area within the discussion of teaching global issues was the extent to which different perspectives were explored, and how the student-teachers managed these. While all of the participants talked about 'facts', they never acknowledged the possibility that these may be seen through a particular lens, nor did they discuss the role of their own contextual bias. There was no conceptualisation of the idea that everything has an 'ideological and political underpinning and is shaped by patterns of power distribution' (Shah and Brown, 2009:23).

None of the participants touched on the political nature of facts. Some talked about giving the pupils the 'hard facts' (MFL, Geography) to enable them to form their own opinions. Some talked about presenting different sources of information for the pupils to evaluate and get closer to the 'real' facts (Science, English, History). Some discussed presenting two sides of an argument, or showing that there are various perspectives on the way we understand the world (English, Mathematics, History, Geography). The History student-teacher in particular recognised the often Anglo-centric nature of traditional curricula, and touched on the need to critically examine sources of information:

The danger with history, with any subject, is that you're only seeing a white, British viewpoint, as good historians we shouldn't want them to learn that, we should want them to see things from a much wider perspective, even if it just means that they can, later on in life, say ok, well maybe there's a conflict but not necessarily that our country's always right, why's that situation like that, there must be..., just because we read it in the *Sun* or the *Daily Mail*, or the *Guardian* even,

doesn't mean there's not two sides to it, which is the whole idea of history, that we look into different view points, why something is the way it is (History PGCE Student).

In terms of the pupils' own perspectives, listening to different opinions was also discussed. In some of the classes, pupils were able to give their own opinions in pairs, groups or as a whole class and also they could do so as themselves or in role, for example as a 'banana grower' (Mathematics, Geography). However, the extent to which the student-teachers felt they could let their own opinions show, or how equipped they felt to deal with opinions they, or other pupils, disagreed with, was often more difficult. This was the biggest area of contention for all the participants and something they felt they needed more guidance on. For the English student-teacher, looking at aspects of the political situation in Nigeria left her unsure about how to present her own opinion:

I found things that really made me unhappy, really terrible terrible things and I became aware that it would be really easy to go into the classroom and say 'Look at how awful this is!' but at the same time, do I actually have the right to do that? So I think there are some quite big questions about the implications of how these things are taught (English PGCE Student).

Two student-teachers said that there were some opinions they could not tolerate in the classroom:

If we look at something like a family in Ethiopia and you're exploring how you should help, and kids come out with 'it's just black people in Africa' I wouldn't tolerate that. I don't want to tell people how and what to think, but I don't think we should accept certain values that you find intolerable. It could transcend to violence and things and you can't let that go (Geography PGCE Student).

So it was quite difficult to get round those misconceptions first because a lot of them had been on these websites by these flipping animal rights terrorist organisations that go round blowing people up and things, they were very tuned into that kind of view, and I said 'hang on you do know that nothing on those websites is true don't you' (Science PGCE Student).

In one case efforts were made to alter the pupils' opinions and this was managed by limiting the sources of information the pupils could use:

I actually set them a task to produce a leaflet of free range versus battery eggs and I said 'right, you will not use this website or this website', and they were like 'oh but I'm a member of that website' and I went 'well tough, it's rubbish!' (Science PGCE Student).

In this sense discussion was not always used in a dialogic way and there was an idea that there were right answers that needed to be teased out.

The Role of Values in the Classroom

Values were seen by all the participants as integral to what school is about, to help the pupils develop their own personalities and enable them to contribute to society. For some participants it was important to encourage the pupils to form opinions and be able to justify them, touching on the idea of questioning their perceptions and giving them prompts and information to inform their judgments.

I think the important thing for me if I'm teaching things like this is that the kids get to think about how they feel about it and think about what they think is right and wrong and learn how to form

their own opinions and justify their own opinions. So I think in future when I teach things like that I am going to say there is always more than one side to a story and if you're going to have an opinion you have to be able to say why you hold it (English PGCE Student).

Despite the perceived importance of handling values in class, this was an area the participants expressed some doubts about teaching, and they often found it difficult to be reflective of their own position when considering how values should be portrayed. Some authors see this emphasis on values as a strength, as it provides 'a working framework for significant attitudinal change. It is not a content-driven curriculum, but rather one which seeks to promulgate values and attitudes which, we would argue, are appropriate for any context, North and South' (Douglas and Wade, 1999:7). Nevertheless, this tendency to consider that our values can be extended unproblematically across all cultures is a serious issue of philosophical debate. Others consider that extending our own rules and judging them applicable in all contexts is a type of violence which should be avoided in pursuit of social justice (Lyotard, 1988). This reiterates the inherently complex nature of this debate.

Discussion

Student-teachers' attitudes to global education have both a moral and a practical component. From a practical perspective, making the classes enjoyable was a key issue, and participatory methods were seen as a means of doing this. However, there was a clear message that classroom management was seen as an important precursor to succeeding in this. There were also some comments about restrictions on 'fun' lessons, from schools and from the curriculum. The student-teachers expressed some doubts about how to handle values in class when dealing with controversy and did not always consider dialogue, mutual learning or questioning perspectives as a way of doing this. They acknowledged the need for more skills to explore values with which they might not agree.

The student-teachers did not seem to see controversial issues as something for pupils to explore themselves. The Science student-teacher, for instance, would not tolerate certain opinions on animal rights; there was no evidence of examining her own assumptions and there was no recognition that facts are sometimes contested. It was rare for the student-teachers to look at why people hold different views and often they preferred to play down disagreement. The English student-teacher had spent time grappling with her own subjectivity and gave a lot of thought to how she should manage her values in class. She was reflective of the need for pupils to question their opinions, although she did not seem to consider the idea that she could learn and question alongside the pupils as a way of coping with controversy.

New teachers need guidance on how to manage their own values and opinions and avoid oversimplifying an issue, while still making it accessible to pupils. Most of the interviewees talked about hard facts, not considering the idea that facts may differ depending on interpretations of them. The History and English student-teachers

touched on the concept of portraying various perspectives on an issue, including those we might not agree with ourselves, and also accepted the idea of learning alongside the pupils. While they all showed an awareness of bias, they did not reflect on evidence of bias in their own views.

Some commentators consider global citizenship to be a 'legitimising tool for global neo-liberalism' (Armstrong, 2006:354) or that it is more a theory of benevolence than a critical understanding of global structures. It is significant therefore that most of the student-teachers understood issues, particularly those relating to Africa, as something they should 'help' with. None of them mentioned any structural or systemic forces, and this may suggest that they will pass on a view to pupils of cultural superiority caused by the notion that underdevelopment exists only because Africans 'lack' things that we have developed (Andreotti, 2006; Graves, 1996). The structural violence of contemporary global relations (Jefferess, 2008:32) was never mentioned, suggesting a potentially superficial understanding of the issues. Being open to critically questioning assumptions may be one way of avoiding oversimplification, thus allowing structural issues to be explored.

Discussing systemic forces of structural violence was prevalent in the peace education literature (Hicks, 1988; Hicks, 2003), but has largely disappeared from current global citizenship documents (cf. DFES, 2004; DFES, 2005; QCA, 2007; QCA, 2008, Oxfam, 2006). It is therefore not surprising that these issues were not considered by most of the participants.

Conclusions

Of course, a study of this size cannot make grand generalisations; considering the perceptions of only a small sample of student-teachers. Furthermore, as it is based only on interview data, the dimension of how student-teachers actually work in the classroom cannot be explored. However, the aim is merely to draw some tentative conclusions regarding the role of dialogue and questioning when teaching complex issues, and to explore student-teachers' perceptions on how these should be handled from their own experiences in the classroom.

From the questionnaire data I found that student-teachers prioritise portraying their subject matter well to pupils, good teaching and planning strategies, and ways to manage pupil behaviour. However, developing self-esteem and critical thinking skills are also top priorities and this shows a potentially open and positive attitude to global education (Brown, 2009). From the interviews I also found that classroom management techniques and expertise were seen as important precursors to using participatory methodologies, which were seen as useful tools for teaching complex issues. That the interviewees were positive about global education is perhaps unsurprising, as they may have been more likely to volunteer to be interviewed if they had a prior interest. What is more significant is that despite their positive attitudes

to dealing with values and controversial issues some expressed a need for more support in handling complexity.

Indeed, questioning was not prominent in the work of the student-teachers, and often there was a feeling that pupils needed to be guided towards, or even told, the right answers. There was no clear agreement on the role of dialogue or how this should be defined. Moreover, when the student-teachers held strong opinions it appeared to be more difficult to allow pupils to reach conclusions on their own. Instead they tended to guide responses by engaging in an 'I-It' relationship (Buber, 2004) and therefore closed down the space for genuine dialogue.

In terms of input from the PGCE course, it is clear that there have been improvements since some of the earlier studies in this area. In some subjects, sessions were provided on teaching in participatory and exploratory ways, support was given on providing different perspectives and resources were provided to encourage global education. It seems that there is a growing number of individuals within institutions doing excellent work on questioning and dialogic learning in ITE, and there have been attempts to introduce this on a wider scale (Alexander, 2001). This was reflected in the openness shown by some of the participants to consider different perspectives and to use participatory methodologies. Despite this, there is still a strong culture within the education system in England, through which most of the PGCE students in this study have passed, in which the teacher is the gatekeeper of knowledge, and must therefore control discussions and encourage questioning only in order to lead to a predetermined conclusion.

It is not surprising, nor indeed inappropriate, that the student-teachers prioritised classroom management, and felt they needed to be in control in their classrooms. There may be occasions in which it is necessary for the teacher to have the answers and for them to guide the pupils towards relevant resources or information. However, when dealing with controversial, complex issues, to which there are no easy answers by definition, teachers need to be able to recognise this and be comfortable to engage in mutual learning and dialogue, where there is no clear right and wrong. This means critically examining a range of perspectives, acknowledging their own bias and why they hold the opinions they do, and being prepared to problematise knowledge and to learn alongside their pupils. Too often student-teachers present issues as if they are uncontested (Ellis, 2009:104), in an aim to be seen to have all the facts.

It seems that while ITE courses do encourage questioning as a teaching method, this is rarely conceived of in a truly dialogic way. Therefore, perhaps more guidance and modelling in the context of genuinely mutual learning may take away some of the pressure felt by new teachers when it comes to teaching controversial complex issues, and lessen their worries about the depth of their knowledge on a particular issue.

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Notes

- 1 Recently renamed Think Global: Development Education Association.
- 2 <http://www.think-global.org.uk/page.asp?p=3857>, last accessed 17/3/2011.
- 3 Teaching for pupils from 11-18 years of age.
- 4 Approximately 150 student-teachers completed the questionnaire in total.
- 5 Compulsory in all state run schools.
- 6 General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSEs) are the examinations taken at age 16.
- 7 Three mainstream UK newspapers.

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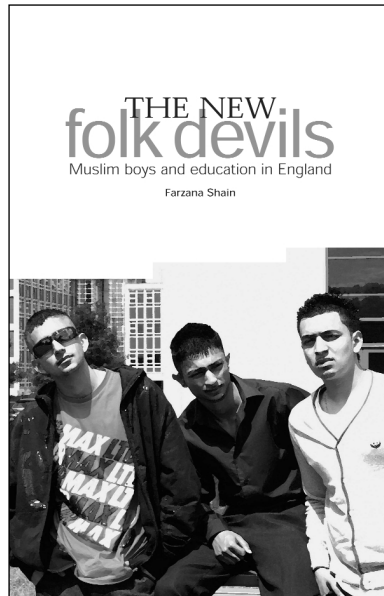
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Dr Farzana Shain is the author of the acclaimed *The Schooling and Identity of Asian Girls*. She is Senior Lecturer in the School of Public Policy and Professional Practice at the University of Keele.

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