

Commissioned Research Article

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School Linking Partnerships and Global Citizenship

‘Children have always learned through Geography and through other parts of school life about other parts of the world...It becomes Citizenship when we say: Why does that matter to me, what do I do about it, how does it impact on my life and how does my life impact on that? That’s when it becomes Citizenship.’

Jan Campbell. QCA. Developing Global Citizens in Primary Schools 2000

For many primary schools, school linking partnerships are an important part of citizenship education providing the opportunity for pupils to engage with the wider global community and learn about important real life issues that affect them and other people. Citizenship is clearly more than a ‘subject’. It has a definite content with knowledge, skills and understanding for pupils to acquire, but it goes beyond the curriculum. It is reflected in the way the school operates, its ethos and culture and the way children develop as members of the school, local and global community. School linking partnerships can develop these essential elements of citizenship. Because of the unique insight into other children’s lives that school linking can provide and because of the relationships that are established, people in other parts of the world and issues that affect their lives begin to ‘matter’ and a sense of social justice is developed. Peatmoor Community Primary School in Swindon is involved in a successful linking partnership and the Head talks about the curriculum being ‘enriched’, about pupils developing ‘a sense of responsibility’, an ‘awareness of global issues’, gaining ‘confidence’ and having their ‘perceptions changed’. These can be directly related to elements of the four strands of the primary citizenship framework :

- developing confidence and responsibility and making the most of their abilities
- preparing to play an active role as citizens
- developing a healthy, safer lifestyle
- developing good relationships and respecting the differences between people

However, many teachers agree that linking is hard work, creates many frustrations and raises many questions. As it says in ‘Global Citizenship: The Handbook for Primary Teachers.’ (Oxfam 2002) *‘School linking can bring great benefits and increased understanding between people... However, it can also present teachers and pupils with difficulties...’* This article will explore some of the benefits and challenges of school linking partnerships using the experience of primary schools involved in linking and explore how they can enrich citizenship within the primary school.

A good time for school linking partnerships?

Over the past few years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of UK schools establishing partnership links with schools in other countries, particularly countries of the South. The educational and political climate at the moment is favourable for linking. The International Strategy, ‘Putting the World into World-class Education’ (DfES 2004) encourages every school to have a link with a school in another country. Oxfam has recently produced a new free booklet, ‘Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools.’ It states that, *“The lives of children and young people are increasingly shaped by what happens in other parts of the world”* and that *“Education for Global Citizenship gives them the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that they need if they are to participate fully in ensuring their own and others’ well-being and to make a positive contribution, both locally and globally.”* Children learn about ‘what happens in other parts of the world’ in a variety of ways – through television and the media, the internet, films, books, lessons at school, holiday visits to other countries and so on, but not all of these provide a balanced view of countries of the South. There is the danger that stereotypical images and ideas are even reinforced rather than challenged. Global school partnerships can provide a learning environment that can really develop young people as global citizens. But for this to happen the partnership has to be well planned and embedded in the curriculum and life of the school. It should also be mutually beneficial and undertaken by informed teachers committed to providing learning experiences that help pupils become better informed and develop a sense of social justice. School linking can also encourage children to think about how their lives impact on others and so helps pupils to *‘begin to understand that their own choices and behaviour can affect local, national or global issues.’* (The National Curriculum Handbook for Primary Teachers QCA/99/457.)

Currently, there is also much talk in the news about global issues. There are the challenges of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the challenges that face Africa and the environment. And of course, 2005 was an exceptional year full of ‘global’ events that raised young people’s awareness of global issues. The Make Poverty History Campaign, Live8, the tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan all made many young people more aware of political and environmental events and more aware of themselves as global citizens. School linking partnerships

provide teachers with the opportunity to put those challenges into a real context and enable young people to see how these issues affect real people and what we, as global citizens can do to bring about a better, more equal, sustainable future. These are high expectations for linking partnerships, but the alternative is linking that is only about sending unwanted, out of date textbook books, old clothes and computers to partner schools - linking that could reinforce stereotypes and negative images, reinforce a culture of dependency, reinforce power relationships and do nothing to tackle the causes of poverty, look at the wider context of development or help increase life opportunities. In Chapter One of 'Global Citizenship: The Handbook for Primary Teaching (Oxfam 2002) there is a section on the role of Global Citizenship in education with some highlighted statements:

*"The world we live in is unfair and unequal, and **Global Citizenship** promotes the challenging of this."*

*"We live in a diverse society and **Global Citizenship** gives children the tools to counter ignorance and intolerance within it."*

*"**Global Citizenship** enables the challenging of misinformation and stereotyped views."*

*"**Global Citizenship** is exciting and relevant to children."*

*"We live in an interdependent world and **Global Citizenship** encourages us to recognise our responsibilities toward each other."*

*"Central to **Global Citizenship** is the importance of learning from the experience of others, both in our own society and beyond it."*

Having seen the positive impact on pupils of successful school linking, it is possible to substitute **global school partnerships** for **Global Citizenship** in these statements and by doing so we can begin to see the power and impact that good partnerships can have.

Linking is about learning, making friends and about bringing about change. By placing it firmly within the context of the eight key concepts of the global dimension - *global citizenship, conflict resolution, diversity, human rights, interdependence, sustainable development, values & perceptions and social justice* (see Developing A Global Dimension in the Curriculum. DfES 2005) - a more citizenship-rich approach is possible and a more equal basis for building relationships is created.

Listening to schools involved in school linking partnerships

The Marlborough Brandt Group is a charity that has a long established community link with a fishing village in The Gambia. Wiltshire Global Education Centre, the education arm of the charity, works with schools in Wiltshire and Swindon, developing aspects of global citizenship and part of that work is supporting schools with linking partnerships. Last year, an audit of North-South school linking partnerships in Wiltshire and Swindon was carried out and not surprisingly, we discovered a significant increase in the number found, compared to the previous audit that was carried out in 2000. As a response to this increase in linking activity, Wiltshire Global Education Centre decided it would be valuable to learn what kind of impact school linking had had on those children involved, what the benefits and challenges have been and to what extent linking had brought a global dimension to their learning experience. It was also felt that it was important to have the opportunity to meet with teachers from schools from the South, to listen to their views on school linking and feed that information back to other teachers. Consequently, two conferences were organised – a student linking conference for Year 5 and 6 pupils in Devizes, Wiltshire and a school linking partnership conference for Head teachers and teachers in Gunjur, The Gambia. The focus of both conferences was to learn more about the aims, benefits and challenges of North–South linking. The information gained would then inform and help guide those starting out on new links.

Benefits of Linking

There are many projects, websites, publications and organisations that can offer support and guidance for schools wanting to start a link (see below). Many of them highlight the benefits of linking. From the student linking conference, we were hoping to discover how our perceptions (as educators) of the benefits of linking matched with the students' ideas. Students from seven schools took part in the conference and they had links with schools in Zambia, Uganda, South Africa and The Gambia. They were asked to reflect on their own experiences of linking, and say why they felt linking with another country was a good idea.

Students in Wiltshire

Linking is a good idea because:

- it helps us understand and learn about how people from other countries live, their traditions, culture and language
- it helps us to learn facts about each other (school, homes, clothes food, wives, environment)
- it improves the education of pupils from both schools

- it makes us appreciate school more
- it teaches us about things we take for granted
- it teaches us that some things in our lives are the same and some are different
- visits can help teachers learn and they can be fun
- we can share ideas
- we can make new friends
- we can raise money
- it helps us learn about problems and how we can help
- it broadens our understanding of others and expands our knowledge
- it helps us understand global issues like poverty and AIDS

The comments made by the students show that a range of skills is being developed through the links, from knowledge based learning: *“it helps us learn facts about each other”* and *“it helps us... learn about how people from other countries live”* through to value-based learning: *“it broadens our understanding of others”, “it teaches us about the things we take for granted,” “ it helps us learn about problems and how we can help”* and *“we can share ideas”*. The comments also show that students are aware that school linking is a partnership that benefits both schools: *“it improves the education for pupils from both schools”*. There is also the sense that linking can be a learning experience for everyone – both teachers and pupils: *“visits can help teachers learn and they can be fun”*. From the comments made by children it was clear that through their links some children had developed an awareness of wider, global issues *“like poverty and AIDS”*, whereas some were at the stage of feeling ‘good’ because they were able to help. The schools at the conference were schools that had a particular interest in global citizenship and are not necessarily representative of attitudes and approaches of schools in general.

At the conference in The Gambia, teachers were asked to choose statements about why establishing linking partnerships was a good idea and rank them in order of importance. The majority of teachers chose the statement, *“because it helps children learn about different countries and cultures and appreciate the diversity of the world,”* as their priority. Other statements chosen were about appreciating being part of an interdependent world, learning about global issues in a real context and creating friendships and mutual support. There was no consistent placing of the role of fundraising in linking. Some teachers placed it at the top of their list, some at the bottom and some in the middle, but there was a lengthy discussion about its place in linking. I will return to this difficult issue under ‘Challenges .’

Other possible benefits of linking include professional development of teachers through visits, development of the curriculum and school development plans to include a greater global dimension, a change in the ethos of the school, greater relationships with the wider school community and greater motivation amongst teachers and pupils.

Challenges of Linking

Most schools encounter problems at some stage with their partnership link. At both conferences, the participants were asked about potential problems with linking and asked to offer any tips for overcoming those problems. These are some of the issues that were raised. The headings are mine, but the ideas come from the students in Wiltshire and teachers in the Gambia:

- **Communication**

Sending and receiving letters can take a long time. Post can be unpredictable and postage can be expensive. Many schools do not have internet access and email contact is not always possible or reliable, so links can start well but die out because of communication problems.

- **Sustainability**

Keeping the momentum of the link going can be difficult with all the other demands placed on teachers. Problems can occur if the link is a ‘one man show’ (phrase used by Gambian teacher). If the link is led by just one enthusiastic teacher, there is the danger of the link falling apart if that teacher leaves the school. (This is a particular problem in countries like The Gambia where teachers are posted anywhere in the country and have no choice about where they teach or when they move to another school.)

- **Funding and resources**

Funding and raising money is probably one of the most contentious issues in linking. (There is an interesting article in the **One World Linking** newsletter: Winter 2005 entitled ‘To Aid or Not to Aid...?’ that raises challenging questions about the sending of aid to partner communities.)

For some UK schools raising money might be the only way they have considered they can make a difference to their partner school. But links based only on charity are, “unlikely to become real partnerships – and they can become a very negative experience for pupils and teachers.” (How Can We Develop a Real Partnership? Oxfam’s Cool Planet website). A link that provides sustainable support for both schools through professional development and training, curriculum development and cultural understanding is more likely to create an equal partnership and bring about lasting change. UK schools also need to explore the reasons why their partner school needs new classrooms, books and resources. Children can see that fundraising in the short term can make an immediate difference, but they need to explore ways in which they can challenge inequalities in the longer term, for example by finding out about fair trade or finding out about the work of organisations that campaign for greater equality and access to basic rights. There was much discussion amongst the Gambian teachers about fundraising. Some participants felt that fundraising was a priority because without assistance it simply was not possible to start the link. The hope that the school would benefit materially as well as educationally was seen to be important by many of the participants while others felt that a trusting relationship had to be established between the schools before it was appropriate to discuss fundraising with the UK school. Asking for help and, in turn, supporting those in need is very much part of some cultures but the issue of fundraising is a dilemma that most linking partnerships face at one stage or another. There are no easy answers!

- **Cultural differences**

E.g. in relation to discipline. One Gambian teacher commented that he understood that behaviour problems in schools in the UK were the result of a lack of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment in The Gambia is widely used as part of the system of discipline and one Gambian teacher commented that we should ‘respect each others methods.’

- **Unrealistic curriculum activities**

“Sometimes the partner school is given an interesting, but difficult, task to complete for the joint focus work.”(Gambian teacher) Sharing work schools have carried out on joint curriculum projects can also be difficult.

- **Community involvement**

“Sometimes there can be a conflict or misunderstanding between the community and the linked school. For example, funding can be obtained for teachers to visit the link country, but other members of the community would like to be involved and don’t always appreciate that the visits are part of the teachers’ professional development, aimed at enhancing children’s learning” (Gambian teacher).

- **Differing expectations**

“Schools can have different expectations about what the link is about” (student)

How can these challenges be addressed?

Each link will encounter different problems and there is always the issue of how schools can make the link equal when financial power is often with the UK school, and applications for funding and visits are driven by the UK school. However, although the two schools may be financially unequal, the relationship can still be equal and reciprocal through joint planning. Many of the problems about communication, sustainability, expectations, cultural differences and curriculum activities outlined above can be eased through careful planning and openness between the schools. Drawing up a **partnership agreement** is an important part of this process so that everyone is clear about the reasons for setting up the link and if possible this should be done face to face so that a frank discussion can take place. In this agreement, both schools should agree on a shared vision, aims and objectives for the link. These might be different for the two schools, so flexibility and compromise is an important part of this process. In drawing up a partnership agreement there can be discussions about:

- what each school will hope to gain from the link
- who will be involved
- who will be the main contact person
- who takes responsibility for what
- how often and in what form the children communicate with each other
- which areas of the curriculum will be chosen for joint projects
- an appropriate timescale for activities
- whether reciprocal visits will be part of the link
- what the resource requirements are
- what the financial implications are

- how the link can become embedded into the curriculum and life of the school
- how the whole school can be involved
- what happens if there is a misunderstanding or something goes wrong
- how and when evaluation of the link will take place

If these things are discussed at the outset and strategies put in place then there is less likelihood of a problem becoming a serious issue. Openness is very important as one Gambian teacher said, '*Teachers in both schools need to be able to speak honestly with each other and discuss things openly if there are issues that need to be discussed.*'

The students had plenty of ideas about how to overcome some of the problems expressed above e.g. "*Be patient. Be prepared for a long waits for letters, but keep at it! Teachers can text to maintain contact*", "*Be motivated and dedicated*", "*Fundraise for your link school*", "*Think through and plan activities carefully*", "*Start off your link with a teacher visit to discuss what type of link you will have*". Other Top Tips included: "*Match the schools carefully so there are enough students to write letters to each other*"; "*Be friendly*"; "*Ask questions to find out more*"; "*Take photos/video of here and there*"; "*Have fun*"; "*Find out as much as you can about your link country*"; "*Talk to other schools with links and share ideas.*"

Gambian teachers suggested that, "*a link committee could be the channel through which the link activities are organised and decisions are made,*" so that if one teacher leaves, the link doesn't collapse. They also stressed that, "*partners should respect each others' methods*" when there are cultural differences and that it was important that activities were jointly chosen "*as a result of discussions between the two schools*" and they "*need to be realistic and achievable.*"

Good Practice Case study

One of the schools present at the student conference was Peatmoor Community Primary School. This primary school has established a partnership with Dihlabeng School in South Africa and Leadon Hall, a private school in Salisbury. The partnerships provide an opportunity for pupils and staff from different geographical, cultural and social backgrounds to work together to learn new skills and share ideas, resources and expertise in a positive learning environment. Whole school communities are involved as well as extending to the wider communities The school states that the link's long term aims are to promote:

- Collaboration and co-operation between primary schools, serving culturally diverse populations in very different global settings
- Global links and development opportunities across both schools' curriculum
- The exploration of the full curriculum range in both partner schools
- Mutual support and advice at a management level
- Quality opportunities for international, staff professional development
- Wider community links in both locations to extend the range of expertise available for the benefit of the children and for further lifelong learning opportunities.

The school uses the key concepts of the global dimension as a framework for planning activities - *global citizenship, conflict resolution, diversity, human rights, interdependence, sustainable development, values & perceptions and social justice* – not attempting to tackle them all at once, but planning them into a sustained programme of work, for example:

Objectives for 2004/05

- To establish in Dihlabeng and embed in Peatmoor, a global dimension into the curriculum in line with the DFID Global School Partnerships guidelines. The focus for this year will be **citizenship, diversity and equality** and **sustainable development**
- To promote an inclusive programme of termly challenges between the partners
- To work in partnership to develop a science scheme of work at Dihlabeng in line with the South African OBE curriculum
- To share and explore SEN resources and expertise across the partnership and train specific staff to run programmes
- To continue to share expertise across the Early Years phase
- For Peatmoor to share their writing Genre Project to support Dihlabeng's Writers World resources
- During the Peatmoor visit Dihlabeng staff will observe shared and guided reading and writing as well as approaches to teaching and learning
- Peatmoor will share their international expertise across Swindon Schools through training opportunities and presentations
- To expand community links to promote lifelong learning opportunities at Dihlabeng through Dihlabeng Enterprises, to celebrate the achievements of the orphans programme and to encourage further cross cultural opportunities

One project explored children's **roles, rights and responsibilities** around the world. This involved sending questionnaires to children in partner schools in Europe and South Africa to find out about the different responsibilities that children have at home, e.g. cleaning, cooking, fetching water and working for money. They used the results to compare similarities and differences in children's responsibilities. Having discovered that 40% of the children they asked in the South African school were responsible for collecting water, pupils at Leaden Hall then supported UNICEF's Day for Change focusing on the right to clean water. Two South African students from Dihlabeng also gave presentations to students at a number of schools in Swindon that linked with work on the right to clean water. To increase their understanding of what it means to be a citizen, pupils from Peatmoor met their local MP and visited the Houses of Parliament, where they learnt about democracy, parliament and the government's roles, rights and responsibilities. In this way pupils were able to link what it means to be a local and global citizen and understand how they can be part of bringing about change.

Other termly challenges, which were part of a project called Building Bridges, included:

- A collaborative art project (which included the Head from Dihlabeng leading a workshop on making toys from recycled materials)
- A business management and community development challenge which involved the three schools working together to learn about the skills involved in running a business. The businesses included organising and running a craft market and music festival by Dihlabeng School, South Africa and a calendar making business by Peatmoor School (calendars were sold at the craft fair in South Africa.)
 - A music, dance and drama video project
 - 'Swindon Our Town' - a project that explored the **diversity** of Swindon - a town where over 200 languages are spoken. For one week, pupils and teachers from Peatmoor and Dihlabeng were involved in an intensive project promoting the

exchange of ideas between two culturally different Swindon schools through workshops and debate. The projects were shared through visits, email and photographs and the schools have produced three newspapers and a website which gives information about the activities.

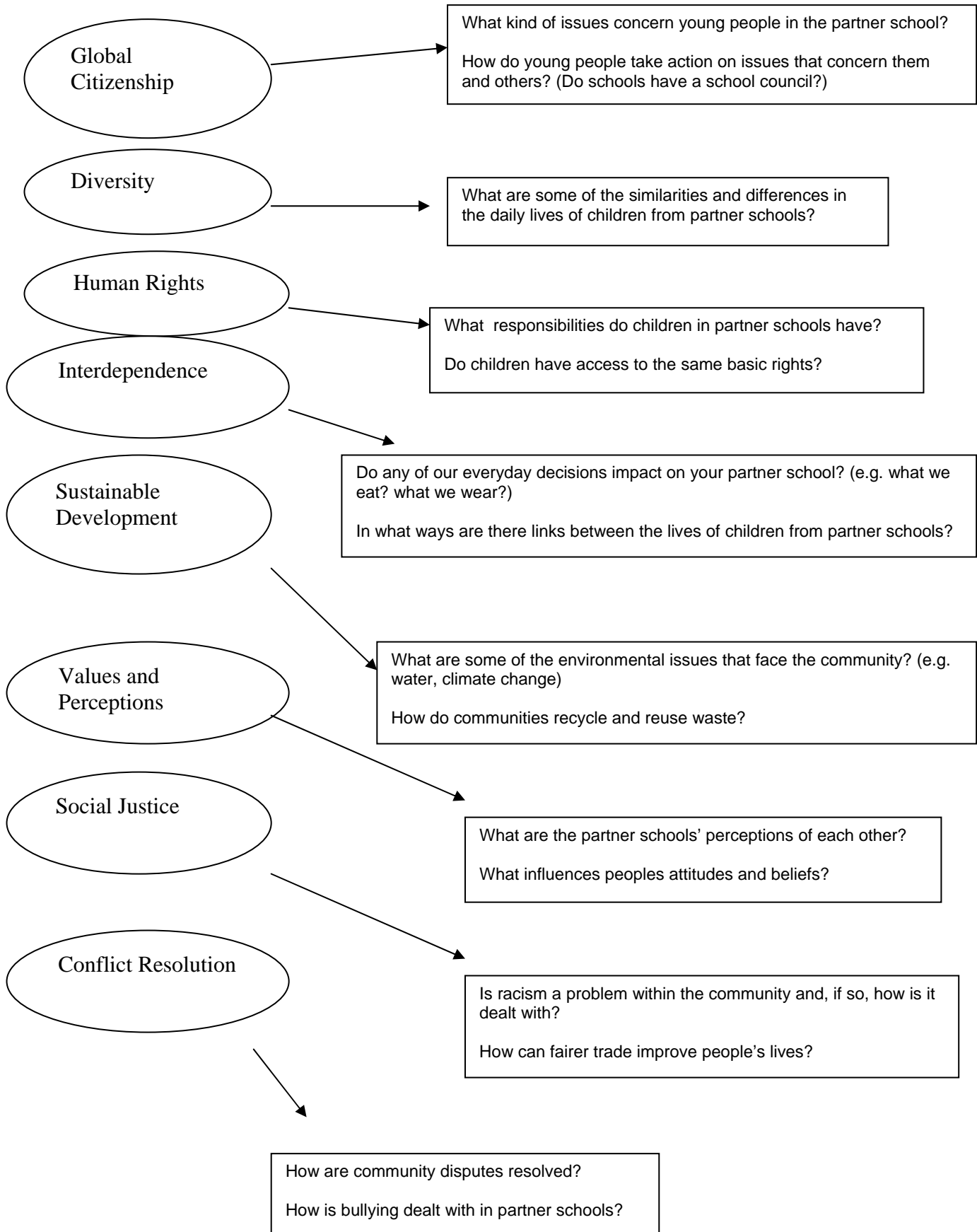
The linking partnerships contributed to the school achieving the International School Award and the Eco School bronze and silver awards. An extract from their Ofsted report highlights the impact a school partnership based on the principles of global citizenship can have:

'Pupils show great enthusiasm for learning and really enjoy being at school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They develop an excellent awareness and empathy for social and cultural diversity. Pupils learn effectively about children in other countries, which expands their horizons considerably. Projects such as setting up a calendar company, along with gaining basic skills, do much to promote their future economic well-being. Pupils contribute very well to the school, and the local and wider community. They feel they have a real say in what happens.'

Key Concepts of the Global Dimension

Linking based on the key concepts of the global dimension avoids looking at the 'UK' or 'The Gambia' for example, in a way that could lead to generalisations, but instead encourages pupils to find out about specific issues that affect individuals and communities connected with their link school. It enables teachers and pupils from both schools to explore such things as fairness, equality and diversity, identity, rights and responsibilities, the environment, trade, religion and so on from different perspectives, discovering what connects us and what makes us different. There are many good examples of schools exploring Fairtrade through their link with Ghana, for example, or exploring rights and responsibilities by children comparing their daily lives. These learning experiences can help pupils form opinions, develop a sense of social justice and moral responsibility and begin to develop as *'informed, active, responsible citizens.'* (The National Curriculum Handbook for Primary Teachers QCA/99/457). They can also contribute to the school working towards becoming a Fairtrade Friendly School or Rights Respecting School or a Global School so that the impact of the learning gained through the school partnership is embedded into the ethos of the school.

These are some questions that could be explored by partner schools using the key concepts of the global dimension as a framework:



Conclusions

In 'Making Sense of Citizenship: A Continuing Professional Development Handbook' (edited by Ted Huddleston and David Kerr. Hodder Murray 2006), Citizenship issues are described as being

- real – actually affect people's lives
- topical – current today
- sometimes sensitive – can affect people at a personal level
- often controversial – people disagree and hold strong opinions about them
- ultimately moral – relate to what people think is right and wrong

This also applies to issues relating to school linking partnerships and so partnerships can contribute to the development of these aspects of citizenship. Seeing the kind of learning that was taking place amongst students at the conference, the positive impact of school linking partnerships was clear. These were children who, through making contact with other children in a different part of the world, were making friends and beginning to learn about very complex issues. They were at different stages of understanding and development, but they were learning about respecting differences and they were gaining the knowledge, skills and understanding to help them become informed, active, global citizens. These were links that had gone beyond fundraising and were not simply based on charity. Fundraising alone creates dependency, unequal relationships and reinforces stereotypes and power structures. Poverty is a fact in the lives of many of the children from the partner schools in developing countries. It is a fact that children in the UK need to question and challenge. But linking should go beyond children feeling 'good' because they've 'helped' someone poorer, it's about empowering people to have more opportunity and choice in their lives. That may be through professional development of teachers or the building of a new classroom, but it needs to be educational and developmental. Linking can enable children to learn more about the 'bigger picture' to see beyond the stereotypical images of life in the partner country, see worth beyond material wealth, explore the causes of inequality and examine the way we live our lives. As one Gambian teacher commented, *"Linking can be an agent for change."* One primary Head teacher in The Gambia, said that linking partnerships helped to contribute to **'quality'** and 'relevant' education because *"to know oneself better one has to know about other people. The more you learn about other people, the more you understand your own position."*

Not all linking is successful or a positive experience for those involved. And linking doesn't automatically turn children into global citizens. There is still a lot to be learned by both teachers and students. If anything, school linking partnerships create more questions than answers! And linking is hard work. Peatmoor Community Primary School was used as a good practice case study, but it's important to say that the Acting Head was realistic and vocal about the challenges. She said how difficult it was to sustain the link with all the new initiatives that schools have to deal with; how hard it was to maintain communication, share work, be diplomatic, support the partner school without 'imposing' and deal with staff changes that affect the link. But the positive aspects of an 'enriched curriculum' that develop the whole child as a confident, responsible citizen interested in global issues made the hard work worthwhile. It seems that school linking partnerships based more on the principles of global citizenship and less on charity provide a learning environment that can help children develop their thinking skills, challenge attitudes and change behaviour. With an understanding that global issues such as poverty, inequality and sustainability are fundamentally about human rights, partnerships can bring creativity, friendship and a real global perspective into the life of a school, helping to create a climate for positive change.

The last word is from Michael, a student from Ghana:

"I believe that linking schools and communities is a good idea because it's the best and only way those linked can learn about each other's way of life and culture. It also promotes international friendships. An example is ours...." Michael Akpabli,
Okupemman School, Ghana

Useful Contacts:

BBC World Class www.bbc.co.uk/worldclass (register your link on this website and share experiences with other linked schools)

DfID Global School Partnerships www.britishcouncil.org/globalschools

Global Gateway www.globalgateway.org.uk

Link Community Development www.lcd.org.uk



Marlborough Brandt Group including Wiltshire Global Education Centre www.mbg.org

UKOWLA (One World Linking Association). www.ukowla.org.uk

The website has a Toolkit for Good Practice that can be downloaded.



