

Helen Gosnell's Development Work Collaborative projects with Ndeke High School, Zambia at Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden

Before becoming a teacher Helen had worked in the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) programme with a posting to Kitwe, a town in Zambia. When she returned home she kept in touch with people in Kitwe and with international development organisations. When she started teaching at Sir John Lawes (SJL) she was able to make good use of these connections. Her interest coincided with the government's White Paper (DFES, 2004) which aimed to enable schools to establish partnerships with schools in the developing world. Funding for joint curriculum projects was made available through the 'Global School Partnerships' programme and Helen was able to draw from this source to support her development work.

Helen's personal commitment echoed what she read on the One World Linking Association's website about the benefits of such work (UKOWLA, 2006). It helps to challenge stereotypes, develop empathy and understanding, recognise interdependence, value diversity, and involves pupils as active agents for change, tackling inequality and injustice.

Helen contacted Ndeke High and invited one of their teachers to visit SJL. She then worked with the Zambian teachers to develop a unit of work for her Year 8 students: Zambia as a case study of a developing country. Her Year 7 students made a collage called 'Exploring the UK' for the Zambian students. This portrayed key landmarks, geographical features and traditions. A project with Year 10 students involved collaboration with students at Ndeke High School in which they used primary and secondary sources to investigate 'Nurse migration'.

Figure 1: A piece of artwork from students at Ndeke High School



This work was challenging in a number of ways. Pupils found the delays in receiving resources and feedback from Zambia frustrating, highlighting the need to establish web-based links. Other communication problems centred on language. Both students and staff struggled to understand Zambian English used in the video footage they saw.

Having explored a range of possible curriculum development projects herself, Helen wanted to support the development of curriculum projects in other curriculum areas so she established a ‘Global Working Group’. She worked alongside individual colleagues sharing her expertise and building the school’s capacity for further development. She also used opportunities such as staff meetings and the annual staff residential conference to share her work with colleagues and encourage them to become involved. This helped to establish projects across the school which included:

- A Design and Technology project undertaken in both schools using recycled materials. Pupils were given a design brief to make a product which has some value or use. Photographs of the activity were exchanged and used to stimulate discussion about the importance of the sustainability of resources.
- Video footage from Zambia was used at SJL to develop a series of lessons focusing on ‘Access to water’. Pupils engaged in role plays of public meetings to discuss what should be done about water shortage.
- The Global Working Group organised an International Day. Year 7 English lessons focussed on Fair Trade, writing ‘persuasive poetry’ for the Divine Chocolate Poetry

Competition. Year 10 students worked on 'Movement of people around the world' through dance and drumming with a Zimbabwean musician and viewing extracts from the film 'Amistad', illustrating the impact of slavery.

The impact of Helen's development work has been considerable. Feedback from students indicates that it has made the issues of poverty real, enabling them to understand more deeply the issues facing the developing world. Teachers believe that the international work has led to a richness of experience for pupils and teachers at the school and also has given teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own practice when planning joint projects with the link school. One of the Assistant Headteachers said that this work has helped students to believe they can make a difference through social action. Students have had opportunities to engage politically, campaigning for change. For example, a group of pupils went to Kenya to make a film for the 'Global Campaign for Education'; students visited Downing Street and interviewed Gordon Brown about the campaign for 'Every Child Needs A Teacher' and a group of pupils went to the G8 summit in Germany to lobby politicians.

Helen extended her work beyond the school. She organised a series of master classes on International Development for Year 9 pupils in local schools. In the classes she used video material and examples from Zambia. She enriched the programme with input from other professionals from Christian Aid and Oxfam. The classes focussed on topics such as education, aid, debt and trade. The culmination of the work was a series of presentations from the pupils to an audience of pupils and parents. She also shared her knowledge and expertise with other schools in Hertfordshire by organising a conference entitled 'Developing the Global Dimension in the Curriculum' which 35 teachers attended.

Helen has also developed her own leadership capacity through this development work. In her portfolio of evidence she reflected on the professional culture in the school and the pivotal role of the leadership team in giving the encouragement and freedom to develop this initiative. As a novice teacher leading an important area of work she was concerned about how she would be perceived by colleagues, but her previous experience and specialist knowledge gave her authority. Helen has collaborated with many colleagues at school to ensure that the development work will endure even if she leaves the school. As a result of her development work Sir John Laws School

was awarded 'International School' status and, according to one of the teachers at Ndeke High School, Helen's work 'has opened people's minds to development work'.

References

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