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'The English are all in Spain'
Educating European Citizens: Experiences from England

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Abstract

This paper reports on a European study where collaborators from Poland, Turkey, Spain and the UK have investigated students' concerns for the future of their local communities and the global future. It looks at their understanding of current global issues, what they currently do to work for change, what they think leaders have done and what they, as young adults, intend to do. The findings have relevance for all those concerned with educating young people for participation in a democratic Europe. The paper focuses on young people aged 11, 14 and 17 thus enabling us to see how their understanding changes and develops with age. This paper reports on data from 200 students in the south west of England.

Introduction

Within member states there have been many attempts over the past two decades to promote education for citizenship, based on a belief in the importance of encouraging an understanding of, and engagement in, democratic processes amongst young people. These have come at a time when the EU has expanded considerably, when borders are fluid and when there are concerns about the effects of migration and the need to foster respect for the many identities and cultures within Europe (Lastrucci, 2002). Cogan and Derricott's summary of the characteristics needed of world citizens apply equally well to the needs of an integrated Europe. They indicate that we need to educate young people who can work co-operatively, accept cultural differences, think critically, defend human rights, solve conflicts non-violently and participate in politics. (Cogan and Derricott, 2000).

Individual countries have promoted teaching about citizenship or civics education and in the UK education for citizenship became compulsory in 2002 for secondary pupils. However, there has been little comparative research across European countries about pupils' understanding of themselves as active citizens, and the extent to which schools have helped them become informed and participative members of the community.

This paper reports on a European study where collaborators from Poland, Turkey, Spain and the UK have investigated students' concerns for the future of their local communities and the global future. It looks at their understanding of current global issues, what they currently do to work for change, what they think leaders have done and what they, as young adults, intend to do. The findings have relevance for all those concerned with educating young people for participation in a democratic Europe.

This study takes as its focus young people aged 11, 14 and 17 thus enabling us to see how their understanding changes and develops with age. The research has been carried out in two contrasting areas in each of the four countries involved. The findings here report on data from 200 students in the south west of England, whilst Ross (forthcoming) reports on those from the London area.

Personal, local and global futures

The study asks students about their hopes and fears for the future and the extent to which they are optimistic about the future.   People's hopes and fears for the future influence what they are prepared to do in the present and what they are prepared to work towards. Hicks (2006) and others have suggested that images of the future are a critical measure of a society's inner well being, acting as a mirror of our times. Thus finding out the views of young people towards the future gives us insights into their current concerns, beliefs and actions and the extent to which they feel themselves to be active participants working for a better future.

As well as allowing students to speak freely about their hopes and fears for the future we also need to know what they feel about key issues which affect all communities. Hicks (2007) maintains that 'long standing global issues- those to do with poverty, environment, conflict and social justice- constantly take on new forms, whether in relation to the complexities of globalisation, the "war against terrorism" or global climate change' (2007:1). One of the focuses of the current study is to ascertain the extent to which students' feel optimistic or pessimistic about solutions to such current local and global issues, where they get their information from about these issues and the part school plays in facilitating their understanding.

The study builds on previous work into the hopes and fears of young people. Page (2000) and Elm (2006) illustrate how even very young children have an idea of the future they would like. Page, investigating the hopes and fears of four and five year olds in Australia, found that they 'were clearly engaged by current issues of pollution, the environment, contemporary music and warfare' and had an emerging awareness of the negative effects of deforestation, global warming and rubbish/litter (2000: 31). Elm (2006) researching the views of four to six year olds in Sweden, found that whilst children of this age want things to 'stay the same' they also want a future with less litter and 'more animals, trees and flowers'.

Research conducted in 1994 (Hicks and Holden, 1995) indicates that children aged seven and 11 have a growing awareness of social and environmental issues, including violence, unemployment, racism and a lack of facilities for young people in the local community. At a global level, these children were particularly concerned about war. The study was repeated in 2004. Whilst some concerns appear timeless (facilities for young people, lack of employment, global poverty) children a decade later were more optimistic that race relations would improve and more active in their schools in working for change but at the same time more concerned about the environment than their counterparts in 1994. (Holden 2007)

Research into secondary pupils' views shows they have similar concerns to primary children but become increasingly pessimistic about both local and global futures as they grow older. A study from Finland shows young people optimistic about their own future but less optimistic about the future for their country. They fear that it will descend into 'a society of corruption, unemployment, growing environmental problems, drugs and dirty urban centres full of poor people struggling for their livelihood' (Rubin, 2002: 103). Their concerns for the global community centre on poverty and hunger, wars, overpopulation and environmental pollution. British fourteen year olds surveyed in 2004 (Holden, 2007) had similar concerns, with violence and crime being a particular fear. Like the primary children in the same survey, they were particularly concerned about the environment. Comparative international research on 'youth futures' has been brought together by Gidley and Inayatullah who note that 'the youth who speak through these pages have a destiny that comes with being born into these crucial times. Many of them, angry about the damage to the earth they have inherited from previous generations, are strongly committed to trying to change things for the better' (2002: 242).

The study

Firstly, students were asked to write about their hopes and fears for their personal future, the future of their local area and the future of the world. The open ended nature of the questions allowed for a variety of responses. Secondly, there were closed questions which focused on particular issues, such as conflict, tolerance of others, environmental concerns, health and poverty. In each case students were asked if they thought the issue would be more or less important in the future or would stay the same. Finally, students were asked whether they were involved in any organization that was working for change, how they might affect change, the role of leaders and politicians in affecting change and whether they had learnt about such issues at school. A small group of students from each class was then invited to say more about the thinking behind their responses to specific questions.

The findings

The findings reported here focus on the responses of students in the South West of England to the open ended questions on local and global futures. Responses to other aspects of the questionnaire will be reported later. The tables report results by gender but the discussion gives further information of percentages by age (11,14,17) when relevant.

Hopes and fears for the future of their local communities

Table 1: Hopes for their local area

	Boys	Girls	Total
Environment	41	55	49
Facilities	42	42	42
Crime and violence	31	39	36
Community relations	24	27	26
Health	6	19	13
Traffic	10	11	11
Housing	4	13	9

(percentage of students mentioning these hopes. N=200)
(Note: Because students could name up to three hopes or fears, the percentages in tables 1 – 4 total more than 100%.)

Table 2: Fears for their local area

	Boys	Girls	Total
Crime and violence	41	49	46
Environment	24	32	28
Community issues	24	21	22
Local economy	18	22	20
Poverty	10	14	12
Health	6	11	9
Traffic	4	8	6

(percentage of students mentioning these hopes. N=200)

Tables 1 and 2 show a picture of the kind of community young people want. Their hopes for their area focus principally around the environment and the local facilities they wish were available. The facilities they most frequently hope for are more parks, areas to play and places to have fun and this is true for all three age groups. Linked to this is are comments categorised under 'local economy'; where there are concerns on the one hand about too much building and development and on the other about fewer tourists to service the economy, fewer public services and the area becoming run down with facilities closing. As one 14 year old boy explained: 'Everything will be industrial and there won't be any countryside, it will all be factories and cities, industrial estates everywhere'.

Violence and crime are major concerns for these young people. One third of all pupils hope for a future where there will be fewer gangs and less violence, crime and vandalism and where they 'can be safe'. This ties in with their desires for better community relations. They want less racism, more people 'being friendly' and, for the older girls, more community spirit. The 17 year old girls are also particularly keen that there should be affordable housing. Health concerns focus on the effects of what might happen if there are 'more drugs around', more alcohol and 'more people smoking' and are mainly voiced by the 11 year olds. Two new issues not mentioned in the 2004 data (Holden 2007) are a concern about increased immigration including foreign migrants and a hope for stricter sentencing or a greater police presence.

Listening to the young people talk in interview about what they think the future will bring allows us to understand the thinking behind some of the questionnaire responses. A 14 year old girl explains why, in her opinion, people will be more tolerant in the future:

> I think it will get better because we're getting so many more people like Muslims in our communities that it's going to come to the bit where you're going to have to tolerate other people's communities, other people's religions ….

On the other hand, a 17 year old girl from a rural school has a very different view, based (she says) on what her father has told her and what she has seen:

> I think that there's so many immigrants coming to this country that English people are getting offended and they're just getting more and more racist and cause of that it's not helping the racist issue…. I've watched so many videos on how the government don't actually know how many people are coming here …

it's ridiculous really because this country is basically not England any more, all the English people are in Spain.

A boy in the same interview group rebuffs her and says there will be less racism as 'there are more jobs being available' so that people will stop resenting newcomers.

Fears about an increase in crime and violence in the community are illustrated by two 14 year olds from different schools:

I think it will get worse because there is a lot more violence, particularly in a lot of city areas like London. They had something really odd on the telly the other day. I think it was one in three people own an assault rifle in London. [Editor's note: this is not the case, or even remotely so]

I think it will be more violent because, well, seeing all the news reports and everything - that's all been about teenagers ganging up on strangers, there's a lot more of it on the TV than there was a few years back.

Other discussions in interview focussed on the rise in fast food and obesity, the dangers of drugs and alcohol and the difficulty of finding jobs. It is evident that students' visions of the local future vary according to what they have heard from their parents, the media and school. Some are optimistic, some less so, some are well informed, some less so – but they all appear to have a vested interest in the future of their local community and a desire to know more about these issues.

Hopes and fears for the global community

Table 3: Hopes for the global future

	Boys	Girls	Total
Environment	53	74	65
Peace/ absence of war	43	55	50
Poverty	23	44	35
Crime and violence	23	14	18
Relationships	8	15	12
Politics	6	17	13
Health	7	11	9
Technology	7	4	5

(percentage of students mentioning these hopes. N=200)

Table 4: Fears for the global future

	Boys	Girls	Total
War	54	54	54
Environment	41	55	49
Disasters	26	23	25
Poverty	11	23	18
Health	8	15	12
Violence and crime	8	9	9
Politics	5	7	6

(percentage of students mentioning these fears. N=200)

The environment emerges as the greatest focus for hope. It appears to be more important to girls than boys and especially to older girls. It is interesting to note that whilst half of

the students cite global peace or the absence of war as a hope, it is mentioned less than in the 2004 study when the UK's involvement with Iraq was in the headlines almost daily. One third of the sample (with more girls than boys) hopes for an end to global poverty, talking about an end to famine and improvements in the developing world. Comments coded under 'relationships' refer to hopes for an end to racism and more understanding between countries. Hopes related to 'politics' are mentioned by a few 11 and 14 year olds but by one third of 17 year olds who want an end to 'corrupt governments', lower taxes, more democracy, justice and fairness and the resignation of George Bush.

A concern about increased global conflict increases with age, as four out of five 17 year olds cite 'war' as their greatest fear compared with one third of the 11 year olds. Health scares often relate to pandemics (eg bird flu) again reflecting stories in the media. Many students fear that some cataclysmic disaster will destroy the planet or end the human race. Political fears relate to 'more corrupt governments', greater migration and less justice.

Discussions in interview showed again the wide range of understanding amongst students as illustrated by these two 17 year olds discussing global conflict:

> Boy: Yeah (there will be more conflict) because we've got America going into Iraq blatantly for oil. There's going to be a backlash cause Iraq just aren't going to take it.. And there's Afghanistan with the Taliban.

> Girl: I don't know what's going on in Afghanistan at the moment

> Boy: Al Quaida and the Taliban and stuff.

> Girl: I think though, I think it's soon going to be like Australia and Germany because we're allies to America, they don't really speak to the Australians.

> Boy: I don't think Australia has got that great an army to be honest.

Both are discussing global conflict in earnest, but one from a position of relative knowledge whilst the other appears ill informed.
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Comments about the environment from a 14 year old girl reflect the concerns voiced in the questionnaire. She feels that people should be taking action on environmental issues but is not sure if this is happening in reality:

> I think it's going to get a lot worse because I don't think anyone's really that into it at the moment, they're all really worried about how much it's going to cost to run stuff that's environmental. They don't really think about the long term, they think more about what's now.

The global economy (and the alleviation of poverty) proved complex even for the oldest students. Again, some students were better informed than others:

> I think particularly in Africa I think it's getting better at the moment because you've got the fair trade things out now so they're getting a better wage
>
> But because countries in poverty take out loans from governments to help themselves, then the government charge so much interest on that that and it's basically causing them to get in to more and more debt …. they won't be able to get out of it unless the government just cancels the debt.
>
> I think it's related to a lot of the poor countries are around the equator so it's hard for them to like grow any decent food because there's not enough nutrients in the soil for the plants to even grow properly.

The second student indicates an awareness of the Make Poverty History campaign whereas the last student appears unaware of the ability of developing countries to grow crops and lays the problem at their own feet.

As with their opinions on the future of their community, what the students had to say about the global future indicates that whilst all may be concerned about global issues, some are misinformed and take their views from parents or the media, needing more guidance from school.

Action for change

A number of open questions asked the students about action for change: both their own role and the part they felt leaders could play.

When asked if they were involved in any local or national organisations working for change, a total of 41% gave evidence of things they did. Much of this involved fundraising, particularly for charities involved in world development (Oxfam, Comic Relief, Sport Relief). Girls showed more support for such organisations than boys, with older boys being the least motivated.

When questioned about how they make their community and the world 'a better place', many students returned to the organisations they support and fundraising. Two thirds also cited environmental action such as recycling, saving energy and walking to school. Looking to the future, they thought they would continue these actions as adults but in addition might do things such as work in a developing country, not drive a car, 'live in a low emission house' or 'be a [local] councilor'.

Students were asked to give examples of what politicians or leaders had done to improve things. Responses mainly focused on the environment (encouraging green lifestyles) and global issues (stopping wars, helping poor countries). The 17 year olds were the most specific, giving the G8 summit, Jubilee 2000 and Kyoto as examples. Students were then asked what they could do to influence such people about these issues. Of the 11 year olds, 20% thought they could do something, mentioning writing to their Member of Parliament (MP) and making posters. Half of the 14 year olds were able to give examples of ways they could influence leaders, saying that they could vote, sign petitions, or organise a campaign as well as write to their MP. All of the 17 year old girls

and most of the boys knew how to use their influence. As well as the examples given by the younger children, they mentioned writing to the press, joining a political party or the Youth Parliament and standing as an MP.

The final open question asked students to give examples of what they had done at school about the above issues.   They cited learning about the environment and global issues (war and peace, poverty, other cultures, fair trade, globalization) in science, geography and religious education, and learning about health issues in personal, social and health education (PSHE). They also mentioned being a school councilor and fund raising. Despite this coverage, four 17 year olds looked back on their time in school and commented:

> I wasn't taught in school [about employment] but would've liked more education about it.

> We needed to learn about contemporary and realistic issues.

> We were taught about discrimination in school, but not about different ethnic groups – most people knew racism was wrong, but it still went on.

> Schools shouldn't lecture us about tolerance – they need to develop an understanding, like invite speakers to get rid of misconceptions about a religion.

Conclusion

These students portray a picture of young people concerned about the future of their community and the global future. The community is not something distant to them: it is real and it matters. They want better facilities, less crime and violence, more tolerance and respect, and more attention to environmental issues. Politicians – local and national- would do well to listen to their plea for better facilities and 'more to do'. These are not young people who wish to be anti-social but students with genuine concerns. Their views are based on what they see around them, what they have heard from parents and what they have seen in the media. Whilst some are well informed, a number are not and it is worrying to hear a 17 year making unsubstantiated claims about migration, including the belief that 'all the English are in Spain'. There is a clear need for discussion of issues current in the community.

Concerns for the global future focus on global conflict, poverty and injustice and environmental issues. Again we see students try to grapple with the complexity of the issues. Some appear to have a sound understanding, whilst others argue from a position of ignorance. It would appear that global issues are more likely to be covered in school than local issues, but it is evident that there is scope for more informed discussion of these topics.

Just under half of all students appear to be engaged in organisations working for change, mainly fundraising activities organised through the school. This is reassuring and may reflect the introduction of citizenship education with its emphasis on action alongside the high profile of many major charities. Students appear well informed about other things

they can do, though actions concerned with the environment seem limited in scope. As they get older, students are increasingly aware of the role of leaders in working for change and of their power in a democracy to influence them. Whilst this is positive, we also need to be aware of the gender differences: girls appear more likely to be involved in organisations working for change and more knowledgeable about how to influence politicians. There is work to be done to ensure that the enthusiastic boys of 11 do not become disengaged at 17, when they are about to become voters and truly active citizens.

The next part of this study will involve comparison with both the London students and those from Spain, Turkey and Poland. We hope thus to learn from each other and build up an understanding of European youth so that we may move forwards in designing effective citizenship education together.

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