Young people's personal engagement with global learning in Further Education.

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Abstract

This article focuses on the degree to which students in Further Education (FE) colleges in England personally engage with global learning during specific initiatives to incorporate global learning in the curriculum, drawing on findings from the 'Global Learning for Global Colleges' (2009-2012) research and development project, funded by the UK Ministry for overseas aid, the Department for International Development (DfID). The findings illustrate various levels of engagement, with much learning about, and enthusiasm, for global issues. There is some evidence of some critical thinking around issues by some students, and also some evidence that first-hand experience of overseas settings has the potential to contribute to transformation. In terms of action there is evidence of activities, particularly more charitable ones, informed by feelings of gratitude and wanting to help others, linked to opportunities provided by colleges. But there is little evidence of questioning of such responses to global issues. The findings also highlight various emotional responses and forms of resistance by students to the more transformative aspects of global learning.

Keywords: global learning, young people, further education, personal engagement, transformation

Introduction

This article focuses on the degree to which students in Further Education (FE) colleges in England[1] personally engage with global learning during specific initiatives to incorporate global learning in the FE curriculum. The article draws on findings from the 'Global Learning for Global Colleges' (2009-2012) research and development project, funded by the UK Ministry for overseas aid, the Department for International Development (DfID), which focused on demonstrating the importance of global issues within the curriculum and learning experience of 16-25 year olds. One project objective was to get students across a number of colleges more engaged with global issues. Although there are a range of studies into primary, secondary and adult learners' engagement with global issues there is little on learners within FE. This article contributes to addressing that gap.

We link engagement directly to learning, rather than seeing it more narrowly as related solely to 'action' (see Bourn and Brown 2011), and argue that there are potentially different levels of engagement with global issues, from becoming interested in and learning about an issue, to a more critical and personal engagement and the possibility of transformation. We also argue that various forms of action reflect these different levels of engagement. The levels of engagement demonstrated by the young people involved in the project are the key focus of this article.

Firstly, we provide an overview of the English FE context and existing research on global learning within this sector. Secondly, we explore how global learning links to notions of personal engagement, drawing on existing research. Thirdly, we provide an overview of our approach to the project, the initiatives undertaken by the colleges, and the data collection methods used. Fourthly, we present the findings under three main themes. The first concerns students' understandings about global issues: whether and how they connect those understandings to their own contexts and experience. The second relates to the type of action

[1] Education in Wales and Scotland is locally determined by devolved government

students engaged in and the third looks at issues of transformation and how learners respond to challenges to their sense of self. Finally, we discuss the issues these findings raise.

Global learning and the Further Education sector in England

Further Education colleges in England provide education for learners aged 16 plus. Though there are two main types: 6th Form colleges and FE colleges, there is a great variety in practice (AoC 2012). At one end of the spectrum there are small, one site 6th Form colleges that provide pre-university education for 16 – 18 year olds. At the other, there are larger, multi-site colleges offering a broader range of courses, catering for all levels of need: learners with special needs, repeat education for those leaving school without sufficient qualifications, vocational education, university entry courses and adult education. The particular offer is determined by the needs of the community the college is aiming to serve (see Hodgson and Spours 2009).

All FE college qualifications fit a national qualifications framework consisting of 9 levels: Entry - level 8. The majority of courses offered in FE cover Entry – level 3, with each level including different types of equivalent qualifications. Entry level covers qualifications on basic skills and everyday learning. Level 1 (Foundation level) covers qualifications equivalent to grades D-G, and Level 2 grades A-C, in secondary school leaving qualifications (GCSEs[2]). Level 3 covers qualifications and courses equivalent to A[3] level (pre-university qualifications) (www.ofqual.gov.uk).

FE colleges also offer learners an 'Enrichment' programme, involving tutorials on cross-curricular themes, work placements and other college wide activities, such as events, or working towards alternative qualifications, such as youth work awards. They also offer an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which requires learners to research and write up an issue in depth, and make an oral presentation of their work. It can have a very practical focus, based on voluntary work or other activities outside college, or a more academic focus, depending on the learners' interests.

The focus on global learning in the FE sector has not been comprehensive, despite an existing government priority for the inclusion of an international dimension within education in England (see DfES 2004) and a focus on the global dimension in citizenship programmes within lifelong learning (see Bourn 2001). There have been some positive responses in the FE sector to these priorities (see CEL 2006, 2007) and its relevance for FE was also more recently re-emphasised (see DIUS 2008). However, FE is not subject to the same statutory requirements as primary or secondary education, therefore FE qualifications are not required to include a global dimension. Also, more recently, under the new government, policy has placed more emphasis on skills for those entering a global workforce and meeting the economic needs of the local community (see BIS 2011, LSIS 2011), than prioritising the international or global dimension. There is also a paucity of research on global learning in this sector. The few existing studies illustrate a focus on global issues within specific subjects such as geography (Lambert and Morgan 2011), or those with a development theme (Bowes 2011), and skills for the global economy (Blum, Bentall and Bourn 2010), such as inter-cultural skills and problem solving (Bourn 2011). This is in contrast to some of the focus in other learning contexts, such as on participation in society (Roker et al 1999, Barber 2009), the implementation of the global

[2] General Certificate of Secondary Education
[3] Advanced Level

dimension in the national curriculum (Bourn 2012a, Hunt 2012) and young people's development as global citizens (Niens and Reilly 2012).

Global learning and personal engagement

Global learning is one of various terms used to describe an approach to education that prioritises a global perspective (see Bourn 2012b). Scheunpflug (2008:19) sets out the rationale for such an approach:

> "it is necessary to prepare people to live in a more and more globalised world, in a way that enables them to respond to the challenges of an interconnected world, to take responsibility for, and to advocate for, global solidarity and social justice".

There are various debates on the content and approaches to global learning (Scheunpflug 2008, Andreotti 2010, Bourn, 2012b). The content is often described in terms of global topics, particularly ones that link to learners' experience of their local context, such as environmental issues. There is also an emphasis on exploring notions of development, power relations and social justice worldwide (Foghani-Arani and Hartmeyer 2010) and the development of particular values or skills, such as recognising others have equal worth, or considering how local and global issues interconnect (Serf 2008).

Also important is a focus on learners taking action, which does not necessarily result from being more aware of issues (Bourn 2008), but requires developing the ability to act (Asbrand 2008). The aim is to develop learners committed to action for a better world (DEA 2008), but without specifying what that action should consist of (Andreotti 2010). As Scheunpflug (2008:20) states, a learner needs to become "a free, self-determined world citizen, responding to the needs of others".

This understanding is broader than that reflected in studies of global learning within FE outlined above. Although the emphasis on skills, such as inter-cultural understanding, being able to work in different cultural contexts and problem solving, are clearly important for learners coping with living in a more globalised society, unless global learning incorporates "essential skills in critical engagement and also leads to the adoption of impact-orientated behaviours, learning will be ineffectual" (Newell-Jones 2007:5). This focus on social justice, critical thinking and committed action asks learners to move beyond considering the impact of globalisation on their lives, to thinking about how they learn and what they do with that learning.

There are, however, important issues to consider about the level and type of engagement young people are capable of, or should be expected to demonstrate, such as whether it is appropriate to ask younger learners to engage personally with complex global issues (see Oberman, Waldron and Dillon 2012). Standish (2009) argues that focusing on personal engagement narrows learning, resulting in an emphasis on 'relevance', when there are bodies of knowledge that young learners need to understand, regardless of future relevance. He also warns against reducing political issues to inter-personal ones by asking learners to commit to others, and over-burdening young people with a sense of responsibility, when they have little influence and power. One could also argue that education is about learning, not about asking learners to solve social problems through their activities (see Scott 2002) and that young people's priorities may be about joining the world, rather than changing it (Barry et al 1997). There is also the danger of encouraging young people to adopt, rather than question, prevailing

adults' views, under the guise of developing their maturity and critical thinking skills (see Barber 2009, Standish 2009, Kegan 2010, Tallon 2012).

Other critiques focus on the difficulties of critical reflection and the emotional aspects of learning. Mezirow (2000:26) questions what degree of transformation through critical reflection young people can achieve, suggesting that "although adolescents may learn to become critically reflective of the assumptions of others, becoming critically reflective of one's own assumptions appears to be much more likely to occur in adults". In terms of emotional reactions, young people can feel helpless or pessimistic in response to issues such as climate change (see Connell et al 1999). A sense of hope is important if young people are to engage positively (Ojala 2012). They can also feel coerced into taking action as a result of feeling guilty at being more fortunate (Tallon 2012). Such negative emotions can lead to short-term responses, such as donating money, rather than sustained engagement and commitment to social action (Brown 2013).

Global learning should therefore aim not to teach young people what to think, but how to do so critically, so any action is informed and ethical (Andreotti 2006). In order to create the necessary space for young people to develop their own opinions, educators need to question their own frames of reference. Global learning, if it is to encourage personal engagement by young people without the negative consequences discussed above, needs to be participatory in approach, with both teachers and learners reflecting critically on their own values and assumptions and jointly considering what action they may take (Scheunpflug, Lang-Wojtasik, and Bergmueller 2009).

Method

In this section we provide an overview of our approach to the project, and the initiatives colleges adopted. We then outline the data collection methods we used.

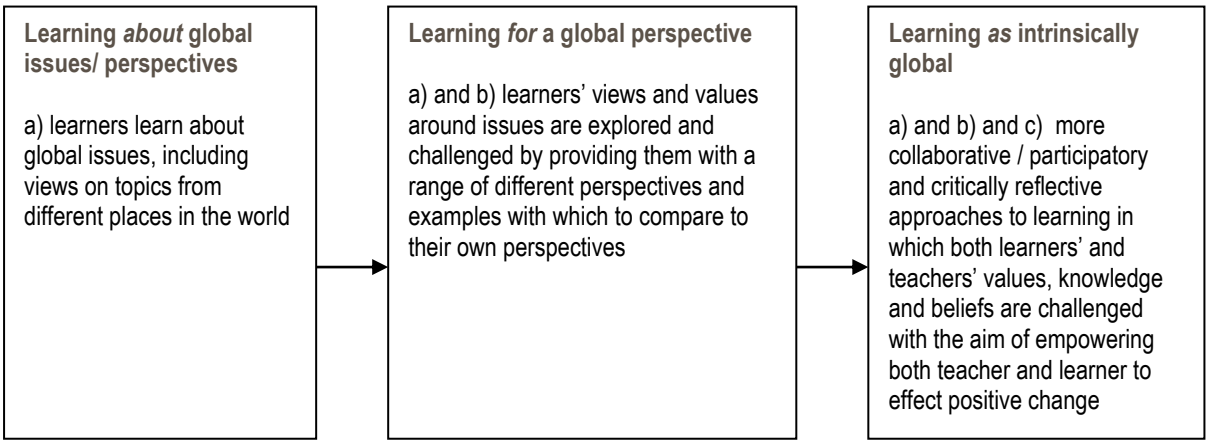
The project was primarily developmental, with integrated research activities, and aimed to support colleges in contributing to student learning. Lincoln's (1995) criteria for the design of academic study governed our approach, with the project being mutually beneficial, collaborative and not based on a premise of researcher superiority. We also prioritised maintaining an ethical and critically reflective approach, in line with our understanding of global learning.

In order to begin reflection and dialogue with colleges we developed a simplified model of global learning as a starting point for discussion (see Figure 1 below). The aim was to offer staff in colleges a framework for identifying their current practice and potential directions for development. The continuum simplifies what is in reality a more complex and cyclical process of learning. However, it provided a catalyst for discussions about moving students from learning about a global issue, with teachers presenting information on that topic in a more neutral form, to a more critically reflective, participatory approach to learning, in which values and beliefs are challenged, multiple perspectives are incorporated and teachers and students are increasingly engaged in aiming to effect positive change.

Our representation of a move from 'about', through 'for', to 'as' reflects Sterling's (2003) model for sustainable education. It also shares elements with Vare and Scott's (2008) two approaches to education and sustainable development and Andreotti's (2006) notions of 'soft' and 'critical' citizenship education, which all stress the need to combine awareness raising with critical

thinking on global issues. At the 'about' end of our continuum there is incorporation of what is learned within existing frames of reference. Under 'for', there is the beginning of some reformulation, as differences between new perspectives and current understandings appear. 'As' represents transformation, as a result of critical reflection, involving exploration of values as well as understanding. Although acknowledging that learning is not so neatly staged, we were attempting to present global learning to staff as involving increasingly deep and critically reflective levels of personal engagement, with ultimately a "shift in consciousness that alters how we are in the world" (Sterling 2003:111). Arguably Brown's (2013:156) model of different phases of engagement: 'raising awareness and creating interest, generating deeper consciousness of complex issues, support participating in change', published after the project was completed, would have more effectively represented such levels. Our model also implies that action occurs at one end of the continuum, in our reference to positive change. In fact, action comes in many forms at different levels. For example, young people report undertaking charitable activities for fun, without necessarily sustaining a commitment to achieving change (Niens and Reilly 2012). A deepening level of engagement is therefore arguably linked to a similar shift in the type of action undertaken.

Figure 1: A continuum of global learning



Despite its limitations, the model emerged as particularly useful in shedding light on teachers' understandings of their own engagement with global learning. Some self-identified as being more concerned about their knowledge of issues, than on critically reflecting on their own values and potential action they might take. Teachers' existing levels of engagement in turn influenced their work with their students. Therefore the levels of student engagement partly reflected how their teachers chose to approach particular global learning initiatives.

The participating colleges

Initially the project involved three FE and two sixth form colleges in England. After one withdrew two other sixth form colleges joined for the final year.

Colleges chose combinations of four different approaches to global learning: curriculum development through particular subject areas; building on overseas partnerships; tutorials and specific events. All colleges focused on specific subject areas. Colleges A, C and F also had existing or developing partnerships with countries in Africa. Colleges A and D focused on

events, such as a Global Day or an Amnesty Launch, and Colleges C and E incorporated global learning within their tutorial programmes. The colleges chose a diverse range of subject areas, academic and vocational, at different levels. None of the subjects chosen had an existing focus on global learning, allowing us to investigate how students who have not opted for subjects like World Development, respond to the inclusion of global learning. Students' level of exposure to global learning therefore varied according to the time available. For example, students studying an A level with a global specification in the coursework (College A) could spend more time engaging with the issues than those encountering global learning in one course unit (College B).

Table 1 offers an overview of the global learning initiatives colleges chose. They were often already involved in other global learning activities, but this article only draws on data from project activities.

Table I: Overview of global learning initiatives

College	Global learning initiative
College A 6th Form	• A level Physics: extra-curricula activity to develop books for teachers in partner countries on teaching Physics in low resourced contexts, plus reusable kit for building an electrical circuit • A level Food, Nutrition and Health: coursework on developing a food product taking into account the global dimension; extra-curricula activity to develop booklet on basic nutrition for use in partner country • Global Day: cultural activities and all subject lessons with global perspective • Extended Project Qualification (level 3) projects on Kwashikhor, anaemia, female genital mutilation (FGM)
College B 6th Form	• Level 2 Data Handling, Use of Maths and Level 2 Information Technology Qualification: exploration of global statistics on smoking related deaths, traffic accidents, obesity and malnutrition
College C FE college	• Level 3 Travel and Tourism: unit and coursework on sustainable development • Level 1 Art and Design: printmaking based on Tinga Tinga art • Level 1 Personal Social Development tutorials: discussions of diversity
College D FE college	• Cross college extra-curricula and enrichment activities, including specific events, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) day. • Level 3 Art : exploration of Human Rights issues through papier mache heads[4] • Level 1 Business and Administration: exploration of diversity and cultural differences in greeting diverse range of visitors on open day
College E 6th Form	• International Graduate Programme for A-Level Modern Foreign Language students: tutorials exploring various global issues including climate change, Fair Trade
College F 6th Form	• Level 2 Work skills for A level students: learning how to fundraise for trip to partner country

[4] A form of sculpture involving paper and glue

Development and research activities

Here we discuss the development and research activities related to generating qualitative data on student engagement.

The development activities consisted of staff development workshops on their experiences of introducing students to global learning; discussions with staff, via email, phone or skype, as well as formal and informal meetings; and two project workshops, mid-way and at the end of the project, where staff reflected on the impact on student learning.

The research activities included thirty-eight classroom observations, observations of ten college events and student presentations, eight formal staff interviews, eighteen staff questionnaires, collection of examples of student work and seventeen student focus groups,. Focus groups had two advantages: allowing more students to participate as they were more willing to speak in groups (Smithson 2008), and being easier to organise in college time. However, four students who had completed individual projects also agreed to be interviewed separately.

The timing of data collection depended on when staff implemented the initiatives. For subject specific initiatives, we observed classes at the beginning, middle and end of units or courses, as a minimum. We also carried out focus groups with all the groups of students involved, including different year groups if colleges repeated units, also at the beginning and end of initiatives.

Our sample size was determined by the size of the groups or classes participating in a particular initiative, which ranged from 7 to 20 students. However, attendance was unpredictable with some groups, meaning the sample of students was not always consistent for the duration of a particular initiative. Differences between groups were considered in our analysis and are reflected in the findings presented below.

With permission, we recorded and transcribed all interviews, focus groups and presentations. Respondents were asked to check transcripts and confirm permission for use in publications. We used a classroom observation schedule focusing on the key aspects of global learning outlined above: awareness raising about global issues, linking global to local issues, understanding different perspectives, inter-cultural understanding, exploration of learners' values, critical thinking, changing learners' behaviour and taking action for a better world. We also recorded the teaching activities used and student contributions to class discussions. We developed semi-structured questions around the same themes for all focus group, individual student and staff interviews. All data collection was carried out with the informed consent of participants and anonymity has been preserved, in adherence with both British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines and the ethical values underpinning our understanding of global learning.

Our data analysis followed the principles of qualitative content analysis. This approach allowed for a systematic analysis of a large quantity of data in different forms, from different sources, particularly as a more sequential analysis of the data related to individual cases demanded by alternative approaches such as hermeneutics was not always possible (see Flick 2006). Initial global analysis of each set of data as it was collected helped us identify data relevant to student engagement. Once relevant data was identified we categorised it using both pre-ordinate and responsive categories, the former informed by the key aspects of global learning we set out to observe. We compared codes across different data sets and across different

groups of respondents, organised them into hierarchies, and sub-sets, moving from more descriptive to more analytical codes, leading to the more theoretical conclusions presented below (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011). We also compared codes within a subject area or initiative within a college, compared that data with other data from that college, and finally across colleges, as well as revisiting previously analysed data each time a responsive category emerged (Holton 2007). Draft findings were also submitted to respondents for comment, in order to ensure that we were presenting a reality that they recognised (Maykut and Morehouse 1994).

Although the findings presented below are the result of analysing all the relevant data from both staff and students, we have chosen to illustrate them with the students' voices.

Findings

The findings, presented in three main sections, with sub-themes, focus on the degree to which students engaged personally with global learning. The first concerns students' growing understandings about global issues: whether and how they connect those understandings to their own contexts and experience. The second considers whether and how students engaged in action and the final section examines transformation, in particular the challenges to that process.

Understandings and making connections

Learning about global issues, generating interest and awareness, is central to global learning and a starting point for engagement. Increased personal engagement arises when learners begin to make connections between those issues and their own lives. There was some evidence of this in the data.

Learning about global issues

All the students engaged in learning about global issues, with interest, even though most topics were chosen by their teachers. There was no explicit refusal to engage at the level of learning about the topic, though there was more resistance to the deeper levels of engagement (see section on transformation). Students who had more choice over their topics, such as those doing Extended Project Qualifications, and more time to devote to them, had higher levels of interest. The issues students learned about were either presented as global issues: deaths worldwide from smoking or traffic accidents; global rates of obesity and malnutrition; human rights; sustainable tourism and other environmental concerns, such as climate change, or explored in relation to a particular Southern country and then comparisons made with the students' home context: food and nutrition; teaching practices for practical subjects in low resourced environments; art traditions; female genital mutilation. Most students were left better informed. Raising awareness and creating interest (Brown 2013) were therefore relatively easily achieved with all groups of students, with many expressing a desire to learn more about global issues, though not necessarily envisaging pursuing this outside the classroom.

Making connections to their own lives

There were two ways in which some students made connections between the issues and their own lives, and therefore engaged at a deeper level: through comparison of different cultural perspectives resulting in increased intercultural understanding (see Bourn 2011) and by

developing some limited sense of interconnectedness and interdependence (Serf 2008) with other parts of the world.

Intercultural understanding was either a side effect of particular activities, or an explicit focus. For example, students preparing for an overseas visit to an African country saw the need for greater intercultural understanding in their future work lives and listed "understanding diversity and different cultures in order to create a common ground" as their motivation for the trip (College F). Others had understanding diversity as a key course topic, again because of the relevance to future work. For example, students in the Business and Administration group (College D) researched cultural norms of different groups in order to prepare to greet people at a college open day. Given the diversity of the college's intake, this required the students, themselves from a variety of backgrounds, to learn to deal appropriately with a range of people.

Developing a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence was more challenging as it required not just comparison of different cultural norms, but reflection on their own actions and choices. However, there was evidence that some students, particularly those at level 3, were able to demonstrate Brown's (2013) second phase of engagement: generating deeper consciousness of complex issues. For example, students studying sustainable tourism (College C) learned how the tourist trade can either exploit a local context or contribute to its development. They considered tourist behaviour, including their own, and its effect on local people and related this learning to their future work in the industry.

For some students it was the shock of realising how their own lives could be affected by global issues that helped them appreciate their interconnectedness: "For me it was the climate change thing where we watched the videos where London was flooded, the impressions of London, that's what shocked me the most. I didn't think it would have such an impact" (student College E).

The most critically reflective example involved the Food and Nutrition group (College A). This group had a piece of coursework on designing a food product to complete and significant class time to devote to it. They examined how importing food from developing countries to the UK relates to environmental issues, such as food miles and the export of drought, and drew conclusions about the relative benefits of importing Fair Trade goods compared with sourcing food locally. Their increasingly complex and critical understandings of the issues were evident in their coursework, sometimes resulting in decisions not to follow the commonly advocated option of buying Fair Trade.

For example, one student discussed these tensions in planning her food product, explaining her decision to source locally:

> "However, foods from LEDC[5] countries under the Fair Trade plan then this can massively have an impact on the people's lives. On the other hand, it is also important to understand the lasting effects that exportation of food is having on the planet and that it should be a thing to minimize. This can be done by buying foods from the UK, particularly those sourced locally. This is when the Red Tractor[6] scheme comes into place, which proves that all of the food components are of British produce, and they are achieving good agricultural standards".

[5] Least Economically Developed Country

[6] A food certification scheme guaranteeing quality and pure UK origins

Challenges to deeper engagement

The evidence above could imply encouraging students to move beyond being more aware of issues to deeper and more personal engagement is unproblematic. However, learning is not necessarily that straightforward and students need assistance in making such a shift. Existing frames of reference are influential and may need challenging (Mezirow 2000, Sterling 2003). There was some evidence of students using their existing frames of reference to understand global issues, resulting in some interesting, but unexpected, interpretations, which were then not challenged. These students may have made a greater shift and achieved a deeper level of personal engagement if such opportunities for critical reflection had been exploited.

There were two particularly clear examples. The first involved a student (College B) reflecting during a class on reasons for high road death rates in developing countries. He suggested: "poor countries in Africa and stuff,...it could be a lot of crime, joyriding[7] going on, because obviously some people can't afford a car so they steal cars and joyriding, which can cause accidents". We concluded he was using existing frames of reference to understand the issues, as there was nothing in the teaching materials offering this explanation. There was no discussion with him about his perception and no alternative interpretations were offered. He therefore had no opportunity to reflect critically on a range of perspectives or his assumptions about people's responses to their circumstances.

Similarly, an exchange in one of the Art and Design classes (College C) seemed to be influenced by current concerns about city life in the UK. The students had learned about the Masai tribe in relation to art from East Africa and one student then equated tribes with gangs.

> Student 1: Is there gangs in Africa?
> Teacher: Yes.
> Student 2: There were tribes down there.
> Student 1: That's what I was saying. There are tribes.

Again the reasons why the student made this interpretation were not explored, neither were alternative explanations offered.

In summary, most students were genuinely interested in what they were learning and were more informed as a result. Information that shocked students helped some re-evaluate their existing understandings about how the world is connected. There was evidence of some critical engagement, when encouraged by teachers. However, some students' interpretations were not challenged or explored, missing opportunities for critical reflection and therefore more of a shift from learning 'about' to 'deeper consciousness of complex issues' (Brown 2013).

Action

As argued above, global learning is concerned not just with understanding but also action for a better world (DEA 2008). This action can take many forms, including awareness raising and charitable activities. However, global learning emphasises the need for action that is based more on a concern for social justice and therefore challenges the dominant paradigm of the North helping the South (Andreotti 2006). There was no evidence in the data of the last of these, but there was evidence of students taking action in the form of engaging with existing

[7] stealing a car and driving it for fun

college activities, particularly around fundraising, helping with overseas partnerships, as well as more general awareness raising. Again opportunities for critical reflection and challenge to existing frames of reference were not always exploited. There was also evidence of different levels of engagement and challenges in relation to taking action.

Action to help others

There were two main types of action students took to address global issues directly, both of which were fuelled by a desire to help others: fundraising (Colleges A, C and F) and developing materials for people in partner countries to use to improve their circumstances. For example, College A students developed an illustrated booklet about nutrition and teaching guides and non-expensive kits for teaching electricity in low resourced environments. These were taken out to partner countries to be used locally.

Such actions seemed to relate to feelings of gratitude (see Brown 2013) and recognition of how fortunate they were. For example, College F students felt that they took education for granted, compared to their peers in the partner country. Those learning about the consequences of insufficient nutrition overseas (College A) were aware of how fortunate they were and wanted to help those less so. One said: "I really want to go out to a place like X and somewhere else that hasn't that much money and see how I can help and maybe show them what I have tried to do". This desire to help also reflected some college and staff understandings of what was an appropriate response to the issues. Students (College A) developed the idea of the nutrition and physics resources in discussions with their teachers, after their teachers' chose to share their own experiences of the challenges people in their partner countries faced. Students in Colleges A, C and F were very comfortable with the idea of fundraising and those producing materials to help others (College A) felt good about doing something useful.

This moral and charitable perspective on development (Brown 2013) was clearly considered appropriate by these teachers and students, and was not explicitly questioned. Discussions in classes we observed of the kind Andreotti (2006) advocates, around the rights and wrongs of fundraising or charitable work, and whether such activities challenge or support the dominant development paradigm in which the North helps the South, did not occur. There were, though, examples of the teachers and students thinking about the complexities of such activity, such as how difficult it is to give people money to use in their own communities and yet be accountable to the donors (College A). There were also missed opportunities for more critical reflection. For example, in College C, students discussed a donated minibus not reaching its destination. One commented: "It wouldn't be fair. We'd be doing it for a purpose and if that purpose gets destroyed when it gets there than it feels like there's no point". There was no critical exploration of the feelings that arise when helping others does not go according to plan and the perceptions of others that might give rise to those feelings.

Interestingly, this deeply held existing frame of reference in relation to development issues was mostly evident with higher level students, who could envisage how they might contribute in their future lives. Many of those at lower levels (for example level 2 students College B), who struggled with everyday concerns, such as attending college, found it much harder to think about their future. They seemed more detached from the issues and did not express the same sense of gratitude. Some could see their circumstances were different but this did not lead to an explicitly stated desire to make a more personal connection with lives of others overseas. Teachers recognised the challenges these students faced and tailored their efforts to engage students in global learning accordingly, focusing mainly on awareness raising.

Challenges to taking action

Students who did not have an avenue for action through college partnerships, or similar activities, also seemed to feel there were fewer opportunities to engage. Again responses varied. Lower level students interested in the issues restricted their action to awareness raising amongst friends and family, and discussing small changes to their own lives. For example, students in College B displayed posters on smoking, traffic accidents and obesity / malnutrition rates worldwide, and these prompted discussions with others in college. They also said they would eat less and drive more carefully. However, they saw little personal connection with other types of action, such as lobbying parliament or campaigning, and felt responsibility for solving global issues lay with those in power.

Amongst level 3 students in College E who were concerned about taking action, but had no existing college partnerships, there were mixed feelings about their ability to effect change.

> "I don't think you can change what the government thinks because they have so much power that whatever you say, they don't really care about it, so I don't think you can change it".

This partly related to the scale of the issues: "it's too late to do anything". However, not everyone was so pessimistic. One student was convinced that young people could make a difference, possibly by focusing on their immediate context:

> "You could talk to people in government and give petitions and as far as images of the government these days there are people who are interested in that kind of thing and, if you get involved, people will listen to you no matter how young you are, I think. Even so though, at colleges, if you think about climate change you could talk to the principal of the college and say, you know, a lot of us want to get involved in recycling, using less water and lots of people would listen to that".

In summary, certain types of charitable, fundraising activities were a common response to learning about global issues, particularly in colleges where opportunities for helping people overseas directly were encouraged or already in existence. However, critical thinking around this common response to global issues was not engaged with. It is also important to note that in Colleges A and F students had a sense of the individual people who would benefit from their contributions, having met them in person or through photos and reports from staff visits. This increased their enthusiasm for taking action and their sense of their own personal connection. Where these opportunities were not available not all young people felt they had the power to make positive changes. Again responses also varied according to the level of the students.

Transformation

In our discussion above we emphasised transformation, personal engagement leading to a "shift in consciousness that alters how we are in the world" (Sterling 2003:111), as the deepest level of global learning. This is difficult to achieve (Mezirow 2000) and is a long, arguably on-going, process. There was little evidence of this in our data. This is partly explained by factors unrelated to the students themselves. Firstly, many of the college initiatives were relatively short, run by enthusiastic individual teachers in only part of the students' curriculum. Even the longest (Food and Nutrition in College A) only engaged students for less than 2 years in one of their exam subjects. Also none of the teachers gave 'transformation' as an explicit aim of their

teaching. Discussions with them about their own engagement in global learning indicated that this was not something they had all personally experienced. Given that their own experience influenced how they worked with students, and that students needed support and opportunities provided by teachers and colleges to engage more deeply, this lack of transformation is not overly surprising.

The only students who talked about their engagement in global learning in any transformative sense were those fortunate enough to travel overseas. The 3 Physics students (College A) who had the opportunity to demonstrate their teaching materials for electricity to teachers in one African partner country, described their experience as 'life changing' and there was evidence that they had undergone the beginnings of a shift in their perceptions, resulting in a desire to respond differently. For example, having been impressed by a local man setting up and paying for a nursery school in his own community, they wanted to challenge other people's perceptions that poor people cannot help themselves. One had also changed his feelings about donating to charities: "I would always want to make sure that I am actually helping properly, as opposed to just giving money".

These students, however, were the exceptions. In fact, others demonstrated degrees of resistance to the process of transformation, as their sense of themselves was challenged by what they were learning.

Firstly, some students were just frightened or overwhelmed. For example, one discussing climate change (College E), said "I don't really like this. It's a bit scary". Another studying Human Rights (College D) was very pessimistic and thought it unachievable. One from the Maths group (College B) commented: "Well I don't really want to know how many people die in cars because it's gonna put me off driving. It's one of those things I can do without knowing". Another in College D said he walked out of a Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender day as soon as he heard the African speaker was gay. Another studying sustainable tourism (College C) said: "It's boring and I don't care. I'll be dead before it has any effect so I don't need to worry about it until then".

Secondly, there was a difference between students being willing to imagine living differently and the reality of actually doing so. For example, one particularly engaged student (College C) had started noticing sustainable tourism practices whilst on holiday, such as hotels not washing towels every day. He talked enthusiastically about his plans to run a hotel overseas sustainably, employing local people and using local produce. However, he simultaneously expressed his existing fears and discomfort around interacting with local people overseas:

> "When I go away I try and talk to the….it all depends on where I go. Places like Gran Canaria and that, I wouldn't really go and chat to the locals 'cos they're all dirty and that, but other places, yeah I would go chat to the locals and interact. But some of them look scary you know. They could mug you or anything".

Another (College E) summed up, with great honesty and humour, how difficult it is to put into practice the values he espoused:

> "We were saying that maybe we shouldn't endorse the big brands. However, in a capitalist society that we live in, that would be hard. Because…I don't know…I can't live without trainers".

Thirdly, there was resistance to engagement in response to feeling manipulated by charity campaigns (see Tallon 2012 and Brown 2013): “yeah and sad kids and everything. They try to make you feel guilty and that” (student College D). One focus group exchange (College E) showed a particularly insightful understanding of their own resistance to this sort of campaigning, even though they were personally convinced they should take action.

> Student A: “I agree we live in an ebb and flow society and quite a complacent one as well, so I think unless it’s happening on your doorstep, not a lot of people care. I’m going to be completely honest now, I’ve given money to charities. But when I see the charity with the little Asian girl with two buckets of water I just think, I’ve been seeing this same advert since I was 5.
>
> Student B: She must be in uni now.
>
> Student A: Yeah, surely either she’s dead or okay.

Transformation remains an important aim in global learning, but also the most difficult to achieve, needing sufficient time and sustained engagement. The potential forms of understandable resistance to this process by young people also need to acknowledged and anticipated.

Discussion

The findings illustrate a mixed picture of young people’s personal engagement with global issues during the project. This is partly due to the range of factors, such as the personal challenges different groups of learners face, the type and duration of global learning initiatives, teachers’ level of understanding of global learning and opportunities for action provided by colleges. The findings raise a number of issues, we feel, which have implications for teachers and FE colleges, as well as for other contexts in which educators are engaging young people in global learning.

On a positive note, young people learned about and were interested in global issues, suggesting that increased exposure, whether in FE or elsewhere, is something they welcome. One benefit is increased intercultural understanding, which can be achieved either by making it an explicit aim, or by engaging in other activities of which it is a part. Developing a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence is more challenging, not least as it requires more critical engagement beyond learning ‘about’ others. Developing students’ sense of interconnectedness also has a danger of exacerbating students’ feelings of being overwhelmed by the enormity of issues, particularly if teachers choose materials which bring home to the students the implications for their own lives. It is not surprising that feelings of being overburdened come with more critically reflective engagement that is personally challenging.

Although the research confirmed that young people can reflect critically it only seemed to occur when directly encouraged by teachers. This is difficult when curricula and exam specifications do not leave many opportunities for sustained engagement with global issues (see Bentall et al forthcoming). Taking action also seemed to be easier within the framework of existing college activities, particularly college partnerships. Without these opportunities the students were less likely to see past the difficulties of getting involved and less convinced they could make a difference.

When such opportunities exist teachers and institutions still face the challenge of how to help young people reflect critically on the type of action they are going to take. Charitable responses can be fun and an easy way to help young people feel they are making a contribution, but they do little to challenge the dominant 'helping' paradigm. Critical thinking needs leadership, with educators demonstrating their own ability to reflect critically on their responses to global issues (Andreotti 2010). However, activities such as those linked to overseas partnerships, rely on the commitment and enthusiasm of staff. If they have not examined their own values and beliefs about helping others overseas, questioning the purpose of the voluntary activities they are keen to engage in could diminish their willingness to participate, in turn limiting opportunities available for students to take action. Yet, if students' and teachers' engagement in such partnerships is to become more transformative, such a process of critical reflection is needed.

First-hand experience seems to be important in having the potential to challenge young people's thinking (see also Machin 2008, Davies and Lam 2010, Brown 2013). However, again sustained engagement is needed (Brown 2013), rather than the short exposure a half-term trip overseas might offer. Educational programmes, formal or otherwise, clearly cannot provide overseas trips for all. Creative thinking is therefore necessary around how to provide experiences that allow students to experience the perspectives of others from different parts of the world.

Clearly discomfort and resistance are issues for young people with global learning. This is something noted more widely (see a recent study of public attitudes to aid Glennie, Straw and Wild 2012). Educators, whether in formal or informal settings, therefore need to make careful decisions about which materials to use with young people and how to support their engagement with them. In FE, teachers need to be able to explain the issues clearly, to various types of students, introducing multiple and sometimes contradictory perspectives, without over-simplifying the complexities. They need to consider carefully how to use information or material that shocks, and how to help students navigate feelings of discomfort. Teachers and others working with young people need a certain degree of confidence in their own understandings of global issues, and a willingness to explore their own responses and frames of reference if they are to help young people do the same.

The final issue concerns the difference in responses between different levels of students, something we also discuss elsewhere (Bentall et al forthcoming). In general, those at level 3 were more able to think about their futures, and therefore see connections between global issues and their future careers. This sense of knowing what they wanted to do with their lives could explain the greater willingness to take action, even if it would be difficult. For young people who have more challenges dealing with everyday life, similar levels of engagement with global issues seemed harder to achieve. Whether their own concerns mean they feel less able to look out beyond their own circumstances is not clear. However, as we argue elsewhere (Bentall et al forthcoming), this is not sufficient reason to deprive them of the opportunities to engage with global issues, but rather a challenge to educators to find a way of engaging them that is meaningful.

Conclusion

This article makes a contribution to our understanding of how young people engage with global learning within the FE sector. The findings raise a number of issues which also have implications for wider work with young people. We cannot offer easy solutions, though some specific actions for FE, such as changes in curriculum specifications, training for teachers,

development of more FE resources on global issues, would help. The biggest challenge remains, however, to foster engagement which young people can cope with, which also challenges them and encourages critical reflection. A large responsibility lies with the educators to model this process and with organisations to offer opportunities for young people to participate in change around global issues which have the potential to be transformative, and therefore a challenge to some of the dominant 'helping' responses to global issues.

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