

Giving a voice to pupils through the Global Learning Programme (GLP)

“Having a voice and being treated as an equal is a good way of learning.” Pupil, aged 9.

The pupils at Armathwaite Community Primary School certainly value the opportunity to feel a sense of ownership for their school and learning.

From the outset, the staff at Armathwaite were keen to involve their pupils in their role as an Expert Centre for the new Global Learning Programme (GLP). Through its involvement with the GLP, Armathwaite receives funding, training, local support and resources, which is partly used to help them run a series of ‘twilight sessions’ with their Partner School network. Armathwaite felt that if the purpose of the programme is to help Partner Schools to inspire pupils by deepening their understanding of global issues, it seemed only right that their pupils had an opportunity to have a voice in those sessions as well.

The pupils were involved in the GLP twilight sessions in a number of different ways including: trial of activities, participation in activities as an equal, demonstration and informal conversation. Armathwaite wanted to involve the children in meaningful and critical thinking opportunities, avoiding input that was purely ‘presenting what they have done’.

Trial of activities

Prior to the first GLP twilight session, the pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 undertook the same activities that would be used with the Partner Schools in the first half of the session. These were:

- an icebreaker activity called Geoscapes, which involved making personal global connections on an imaginary map
- an activity identifying:
 - what life is like for young people in the 21st century
 - what knowledge, skills and attitudes are needed to live in this world.



Geoscapes activity

Not only did this process provide an opportunity for the Expert Centre co-ordinator to trial before presenting to the Partner Schools, but the outcomes were shared at the GLP twilight session itself, and provided a visual recognition of the similarities and differences between what pupils and adults think. Involving all the older pupils was a positive experience and took away any air of mystery about what was happening 'down in the hall'.

"Getting the children to trial the activities before the first twilight session meant they were put at the heart of the process. They were really interested to see if the teachers had similar ideas to them." Headteacher, GLP Partner School (Primary).

The first twilight

As part of the first GLP twilight session, the Partner Schools undertook an activity where they collectively identified the main reasons they had become involved in the GLP (as taken from the GLP Whole School Audit). The two highest responses were: to develop critical thinking skills, and to develop active citizenship, responsibility and voice. Many of the Partner Schools had also requested to find out more about Philosophy for Children (P4C), with a view to future CPD.

Prior to this twilight session, pupils were asked to look at two stimuli around the concept of 'interdependence' in order to generate philosophical questions for enquiry. These were a poem based on the famous speech made by Chief Seattle about the 'web of life' and a series of colourful illustrations and quotes about interdependence. After a brief introduction to P4C, ten children then joined the GLP twilight session and sat in a circle, with the teachers forming a second circle in a 'goldfish bowl' format. Soon all evidence of nervousness was calmed, as the children eased into a lively enquiry demonstrating a deep level of engagement about the concept of interdependence. The pupils' comments included:

- "I think we all play our own little part in looking after the earth."
- "We're sort of...part OF the earth."
- "We've damaged the world more than we've helped it...it's kind of our fault it's happening ...we've done more bad than good."



Pupils engaging in a P4C enquiry observed by teachers

There was certainly much to continue to reflect upon for both teachers and pupils. The experience has also had a lasting impact on the whole class as, by giving the pupils an opportunity to 'rise to the occasion', they consciously fine-tuned some of their skills such as 'building on from others' ideas' and 'enabling participation by all'.

"Experience of a P4C session in action gave me some ideas. Thinking about my own understanding of the concepts, and ways in which I can approach concepts with children."
GLP Partner School.

As a result, the next GLP twilight session will see the teachers taking part in an actual enquiry with a stimulus about poverty and development. Prior to this session, a parallel session will be organised with the children, using the same stimulus, so questions generated and content of the enquiry can be compared.

Participating in activities as an equal to adults



Armathwaite pupils working alongside teachers from GLP Partner Schools

By enabling pupils to work alongside adults during the twilight session, the traditional roles of teacher and pupil become blurred as the role of the teacher is no longer the 'expert' but that of a 'co-learner'. This is something Armathwaite has strived to achieve over many years through their child initiated independent learning area of the curriculum.

Although the pupils are used to working as co-learners with adults, it was more challenging working with adults they had never met before. They worked in small groups with teachers from the Partner Schools to think about two different types of global learners, and then considered how this would apply to a global learning topic about the Olympics. They also wrote a statement about their vision of a global learner. The activities were not adapted or made 'child-friendly' and the adults were encouraged to see the pupils as equal participants in the activities rather than facilitating for the pupils. Both teachers and pupils commented that it had been a positive experience and the impact it had on the children cannot be underestimated.

"It was good to work with the teachers and think that what we might do or say might lead other schools to do global learning – spreading like a good disease." Pupil, aged 9.

"I particularly valued the activities with the children – it gave me a much clearer vision of what could be achieved." Assistant Head, GLP Partner School (Secondary).

Involving pupils in the session in this way is something Armathwaite would like to develop as part of the GLP, but also for future training opportunities. They recently took a group of children along as co-facilitators for their workshop as part of a county-wide creative curriculum conference with a focus on children leading the learning.

"If you just let the teachers decide, then how do you know if it's what the children need? If you have a say then it's everyone's responsibility. I think it makes us more interested and motivated, too." Pupil aged 9.

Informal opportunities for conversation

The programme for the GLP twilight session was planned with a break after any involvement with the children which provided additional, and a more natural opportunity for informal conversation. This kind of opportunity cannot be underestimated, as the structure of the previous activities led to some of the most interesting conversations between adults and pupils. It also provided the opportunity to discuss and find out more – not forgetting how grown up the pupils felt having refreshments alongside the adults!

"I'm so glad we chose to involve the pupils in the ways that we did. We've never held training during the school day and I think if the children hadn't been involved there would have been an air of mystery and they would have thought it was nothing to do with them. But of course it's all about them!" Jane Yates, Armathwaite's Expert Centre Co-ordinator.

What next?

As well as Partner Schools and Armathwaite pupils taking part in parallel P4C enquiries as part of the next twilight session, Armathwaite is also exploring ways of involving pupils from their GLP Partner Schools; especially those who have already undertaken awards suggested in the Action Plan, such as the International School, Fairtrade School, Global School and Rights Respecting School.

Conclusions

One of the main lessons learnt from involving pupils in the GLP training was about getting the balance right. Having the pupils in for the whole session (3 hours) would not have been appropriate, but equally pupils needed to be in for long enough to appreciate the depth. It was also appreciated that coming on a training course is a chance for teachers to take a breath of fresh air away from teaching pupils.

Involving pupils in the sessions, allowed teachers to see what young people are capable of. It is easy to assume that the key concepts of the GLP of globalisation, interdependence, poverty, development and sustainability, might be too complex for pupils to understand, and Armathwaite hopes it has gone some way towards enabling teachers to see how pupils can begin to interact with such concepts.

“Being an Expert Centre for the Global Learning Programme is not about being an ‘expert teacher’ in your school. It’s about developing expertise, where pupils and other members of the school community are part of that development too.” Jane Yates

About Armathwaite Community Primary School

Armathwaite Community Primary School, a rural school in the North of Cumbria, has a strong ethos of pupil voice and involves its pupils in many aspects of the running and development of the school. The school works very closely with the school community, which is essential, as it is located in one of the most sparsely populated districts in the country. Armathwaite School also has a long history of running Philosophy for Children (P4C). Over ten years ago, all staff completed a two-day Level 1 course (SAPERE validated) which has had a huge impact on the development of speaking and listening opportunities across school. Jane Yates, the Expert Centre co-ordinator has since become a registered SAPERE trainer and regularly facilitates P4C training for schools in Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and the Wirral through Cheshire Development Education Centre (CDEC); as well as all over the UK and internationally, including India, Mexico City, Nepal and Spain.

Since gaining full primary status three years ago from being a first school, it is the first year the school has ever had Year 6 pupils. These pupils have taken part in a weekly P4C session since Reception and are highly skilled in collaborative, caring, critical and creative thinking (the 4 ‘cs’ of P4C) and have become increasingly reasonable, reflective and articulate learners.

Useful resources

- ‘Can you buy the sky?’ taken from Stories for Thinking by Robert Fisher (1996) Nash Pollock Publishing
- National Charity for P4C: www.sapere.org.uk
- Jane runs termly P4C Level 1 courses for Cheshire Development Education Centre www.cheshiredec.org
- P4C and Global Citizenship Level 1 P4C courses are facilitated by several Development Education Centres including Cheshire DEC, Cumbria DEC: www.cdec.org.uk and DECSY(South Yorkshire): www.decsy.org.uk
- www.janeyates.net
- www.armathwaite.cumbria.sch.uk