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## **Art and Global Citizenship; Is It Working?**

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### **Background**

There is a significant concern that many children and teachers hold stereotypical images of other cultures which are reinforced through art. 'African Art' projects in school for example, whilst seeking to celebrate diversity, inadvertently emphasize these negative stereotypes. For example, teachers tend to focus on masks and drums when attempting to develop children's understanding of African culture. By only engaging with traditional arts teachers reinforce, however unintentionally, the notion of a non progressive art culture i.e. 'primitive'. Although it is important that diversity and uniqueness are celebrated and valued, it is equally important to identify commonalities, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age. Doing so encourages children to become Global Citizens who recognize and are prepared to challenge the prejudice and discrimination that causes tension in communities. Art and the primary classroom are ideally placed to begin to develop a more balanced cultural understanding in children with the classroom teacher therefore clearly key.

Whilst teachers are required to address issues of diversity and identity, responsibility and justice, many teachers struggle to find resources and activities that deliver this (DfEE & QCA, 1999). In an attempt to address this and at the same time broaden trainee teachers cultural awareness and thus the knowledge they take into the classroom, for the last five years the BA (Ed) in Art that I run has incorporated a number of initiatives into its teacher training programme. Through the Embedding Global Citizenship project, devised and developed in conjunction with RISC (Reading International Solidarity Centre), the project aims to challenge stereotypes and broaden trainees' understanding of cultural diversity. For example, a focus on artists beyond Europe alongside practical explorations as to how such artists might be used to inspire a range of artwork with children has been trialled as well as using recyclable and reclaimed materials to address issues of sustainability.

### **Research Questions**

This paper will present the main findings from a small scale study exploring the impact of the Embedding Global Citizenship project on trainee teachers' cultural understanding, teaching practice as well as their own practice as artists.

### **Methods**

Data collection for this small scale study is on-going and is being collected in two stages.

In the first stage, prior to the commencement of the programme of activities in the Embedding Global Citizenship project, data was collected via a survey questionnaire and was used to capture first year BA (Ed) Art students' understanding of cultural diversity. This was to provide a baseline of attitudes and cultural understanding. For example, a series of closed and open-ended (but primarily open) questions explored broad perceptions of majority world environments, people and society, economic activity and culture and history. Data from the questionnaire was analysed in SPSS, with open-ended responses first pre-coded around themes, explored in terms of patterns and cross-tabulated to explore for differences in terms of gender and age. Results from the questionnaire are being used to inform the second stage of the data collection

The second stage of data collection will be completed after students have participated in the Embedding Global Citizenship programme. A second questionnaire will be used to capture changes in attitudes and perceptions to issues of cultural diversity and again will include a range of

predominantly open ended questions. Following on from an analysis of the survey data, two focus groups will be conducted with student volunteers to explore questionnaire responses in more depth.

### **Frame**

This study is framed under the premise that in order to challenge and change negative stereotypes we must first understand and interpret the meanings that individuals hold and apply. Therefore, whilst adopting a mixed method approach, this research aims to adopt an interpretative analytic approach, in that the main ideas that help explain current perspectives, and any subsequent changes, will only be evident by an inductive approach to the data.

### **Research findings**

The findings from this study will enable us to begin to explore the potential to impact and promote change (or revision) in student teachers' cultural perceptions, assumptions, attitudes and understanding. A report by Ofsted (2010) notes a significant gap in the provision and quality of citizenship teaching in some schools. As teachers are at the front line in terms of what gets taught in classroom, the results of this paper will hopefully be of interest to those engaged in Initial Teacher Training.

Research into the extent that the study of artists or engagement in contextualized art making activities can influence or generate change in the attitudes or assumptions is limited and to my knowledge virtually non-existent in the field of Art and Global citizenship. Consequently this paper aims to not only tackle the important issue of cultural diversity and tolerance but will also hopefully significantly contribute to this limited body of knowledge. This project is therefore likely to be of significance for educators and policy makers because of its potential to improve our understanding of both policy and practice.