Young People's Personal Engagement with Global Learning in Further Education

Clare Bentall

Development Education Research Centre, Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Hannah McGough

Development Education Research Centre, Institute of Education, University of London, UK

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' (2009–12) 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 a few students, and also some confirmation 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 indication 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' (2009–12) 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 engage students across a number of colleges with global issues. Although there are a range of studies into primary, secondary, and adult learners' engagement in this area, 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' (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.

First, 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 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 – sixth-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 sixth-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 (Hodgson and Spours, 2009).

All FE college qualifications fit a national qualifications framework consisting of nine levels: Entry level to Level 8. The majority of courses offered in FE cover Entry to 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, for example, 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 (DfES, 2004) and a focus on the global dimension in citizenship programmes within lifelong learning (Bourn, 2001). There have been some positive responses in the FE sector to these priorities (CEL, 2006, 2007), and its relevance for FE was also more recently re-emphasized (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 British Coalition government, policy has placed more emphasis on skills for those entering a global workforce and meeting the economic needs of the local community (BIS, 2011; LSIS, 2011), than on prioritizing 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) or skills for the global economy (Blum *et al.*, 2010), such as intercultural skills and problem solving (Bourn, 2011). This is in contrast to some of the focus in other learning contexts, such as participation in society (Roker *et al.*, 1999; Barber, 2009), the implementation of the global 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 prioritizes a global perspective (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 those 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 recognizing that 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 intercultural understanding, being able to work in different cultural contexts, and problem solving – are clearly important for learners coping with living in a more globalized 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 globalization 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 (Oberman *et al.*, 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 interpersonal ones by asking learners to commit to others, and overburdening 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 (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 (Barber, 2009; Standish, 2009; Kegan, 2000; 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 young people can achieve through critical reflection, 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 (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 that 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 *et al.*, 2009).
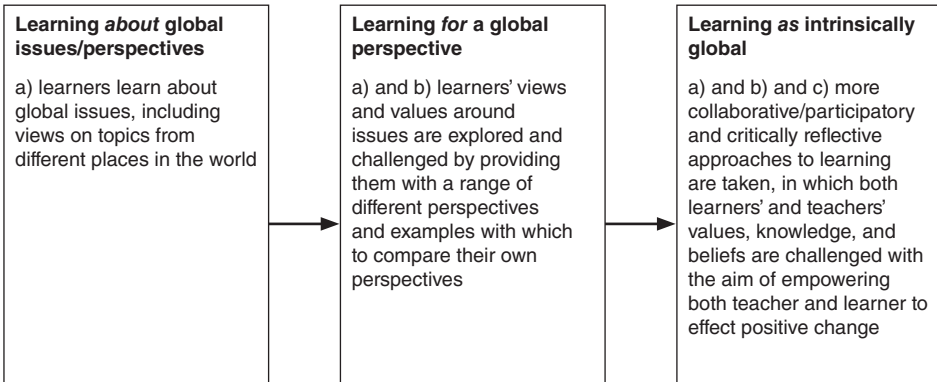
Method

In this section we provide an overview of our approach to the project, and the initiatives adopted by colleges. 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 made it a priority to maintain 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, resulting from 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 something that involved increasingly deep and critically reflective levels of personal engagement, ultimately with a 'shift in consciousness that alters how we are in the world' (Sterling, 2003: 111). Our model shares some similarities with Brown's model of different phases of engagement: 'raising awareness and creating interest, generating deeper consciousness of complex issues, support participating in change' (2013: 156). published after the project was completed. Although our model implies that action occurs at one end of the continuum, in our reference to positive change, in fact, our findings show that 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 that is undertaken.

Figure 1: A continuum of global learning

Learning *about* global issues/perspectives	**Learning *for* a global perspective**	**Learning *as* intrinsically global**
a) learners learn about global issues, including views on topics from different places in the world	a) and b) learners' views and values around issues are explored and challenged by providing them with a range of different perspectives and examples with which to compare their own perspectives	a) and b) and c) more collaborative/participatory and critically reflective approaches to learning are taken, in which both learners' and teachers' values, knowledge, and beliefs are challenged with the aim of empowering both teacher and learner to effect positive change

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, in which all lessons had a global theme, or a day to launch a college group supporting the work of Amnesty International. Colleges C and E also incorporated global learning within their tutorial programmes. The colleges chose a diverse range of subject areas, both 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 had not opted for subjects such as World Development responded 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 chosen by colleges. They were often already involved in other global learning activities, but this article draws only on data from project activities.

Table 1: Overview of global learning initiatives

College	Global learning initiative
College A (sixth-form)	• A level Physics: extra-curricular 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-curricular 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 kwashiorkor, anaemia, female genital mutilation (FGM).
College B (sixth-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-curricular 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 mâché heads.[4] • Level 1 Business and Administration: exploration of diversity and cultural differences in greeting diverse range of visitors on open day.
College E (sixth-form)	• International Graduate Programme for A level Modern Foreign Language students: tutorials exploring various global issues including climate change, Fair Trade.
College F (sixth form)	• Level 2 Work skills for A level students: learning how to fund-raise for trip to partner country.

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; two project workshops, midway through and at the end of the project, where staff reflected on the impact on student learning.

The research activities included 38 classroom observations, observations of ten college events and student presentations, eight formal staff interviews, 18 staff questionnaires, collection of examples of student work, and 17 student focus groups. The focus groups had two advantages: they allowed more students to participate as they were more willing to speak in groups (Smithson, 2008), and were easier to organize 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 (from 7 to 20 students). However, attendance was unpredictable with some groups, meaning the sample 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, intercultural 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 (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 categorized it using both preordinate 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, organized them into hierarchies and subsets, moving from more descriptive to more analytical codes, leading to the more theoretical conclusions presented below (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). We also compared codes within a subject area or initiative within a college, compared that data with other data from the same 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 recognized (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

Although the findings presented below are the result of analysing all of 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 connected 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 of 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 EPQs, 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, FGM. 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 (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 a comparison of different cultural norms, but students reflecting 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 realizing 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 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.*

Challenges to deeper engagement

The evidence above could imply that 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. Learners' existing frames of reference are influential on subsequent learning (Mezirow, 2000; Sterling, 2003). These existing ways of interpreting the world are based on experience and developed in particular contexts. It is unsurprising therefore that learners use their existing understandings to interpret new information from new contexts. Teachers may therefore have to help learners to question those frames of reference if deeper and more critical engagement with global issues is to be possible. There was evidence in the data that some students did use their existing ways of thinking to interpret what they were learning about global issues, but that opportunities to challenge those frames of reference were not always taken. These students may have made a greater shift in their understanding 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 to 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 nor 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 emphasizes a 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 college activities, particularly around fund-raising, 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: fund-raising (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, teaching guides, and non-expensive kits for teaching about 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 (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 constituted 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 fund-raising 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, for example, 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 the lives of others overseas. Teachers recognized 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 among 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 that responsibility for solving global issues lay with those in power.

Level 3 students in College E who were concerned about taking action, but had no existing college partnerships, had 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, fund-raising 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 seen 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 emphasized transformation, with 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 ongoing, process. There was little evidence of this in our data. This is partly explained by factors unrelated to the students themselves. First, many of the college initiatives were relatively short, run by enthusiastic individual teachers and featured in only part of the students' curriculum. Even the longest (Food and Nutrition in College A) only engaged students for less than two years in one of their exam subjects. Also, none of the teachers identified '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 three Physics students (College A) who had 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.

First, 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 universal human rights were 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 that 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 while 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 (Tallon, 2012; 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 be 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 the opportunities for action provided by colleges. The findings raise a number of issues, we feel, that 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 their feelings of being overwhelmed by the enormity of issues, particularly if teachers choose materials that 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 (Bentall *et al.*, 2013). 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 that it has 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 that 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 engaging with global learning. This is something noted more widely (see a recent study of public attitudes to aid by Glennie *et al.*, 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 oversimplifying 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.*, 2013). 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 their 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 beyond their own circumstances is not clear. However, as we argue elsewhere (Bentall *et al.*, 2013), 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 that 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 task remains, however, to foster engagement that 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 organizations to offer opportunities for young people to participate in change around global issues that have the potential to be transformative, and therefore challenge some of the dominant 'helping' responses to global issues.

Dr Clare Bentall is a lecturer in education and Associate Director of the Development Education Research Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London. She teaches on the MA in Development Education and the MA in Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education.

Hannah McGough was a research assistant on development awareness projects at the Development Education Research Centre. These included the role of global learning in further education and in initial teacher education. Hannah's background is in citizenship teaching and informal environmental, outdoor, and vocational education in the third sector.

Endnotes

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

2 General Certificate of Secondary Education.

3 Advanced level.

4 A form of sculpture involving paper and glue.

5 Least Economically Developed Country.

6 A food certification scheme guaranteeing quality and pure UK origins.

7 Stealing a car and driving it for fun.

References

Andreotti, V. (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship'. *Policy and Practice – a Development Education Review*, 3, 40–50.

— (2010) 'Global education in the "21st century": Two different perspectives on the "post-" of postmodernism'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 2 (2), 5–22.

Asbrand, B. (2008) 'How adolescents learn about globalisation and development'. In D. Bourn (ed.), *Development Education Debates and Dialogues*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Association of Colleges (AoC) (2012) *Colleges Key Facts 2012*. London: AoC.

Barber, T. (2009) 'Participation, citizenship, and well-being: Engaging with young people, making a difference'. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 17 (1), 24–40.

Barry, M., Davies, A., and Howard, W. (1997) 'Debate: An open response to the concerns of the Centre for Social Action in Issue no 60'. *Youth and Policy*, 62 (60), 67–70.

Bentall, C., Bourn, D., McGough, H., Hodgson, A., and Spours, K. (2013) 'Global learning for global colleges: Creating opportunities for greater access to international learning for 16–25 year olds'. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*.

BIS (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances: Next steps to implementing the further education reform programme.* London: BIS.

Blum, N., Bentall, C., and Bourn, D. (2010) *Learning and Skills for a Global Economy: The response of further education college and training providers to the challenges of globalisation.* Coventry: LSIS.

Bourn, D. (2001) 'Global perspectives in lifelong learning'. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 6 (3), 325–38.

—— (ed.) (2008) *Development Education Debates and Dialogues*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

—— (2011) 'Global skills: From economic competitiveness to cultural understanding and critical pedagogy'. *Critical Literacy*, 5 (2), 3–20.

—— (2012a) *Global Learning and Subject Knowledge*. DERC Research Paper No. 4. London: IOE.

—— (2012b) 'Development education'. In J. Arthur and A. Peterson (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Education*. London: Routledge.

Bourn, D. and Brown, K. (2011) *Young People and International Development: Engagement and learning*. Research Paper No. 2. London: IOE.

Bowes, E. (2011) 'World Development A-Level: Its perception and status amongst students, teachers and universities'. MA dissertation, University of East Anglia.

Brown, E.J. (2013) 'Transformative learning through development education NGOs: A comparative study of Britain and Spain'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham.

CEL (2006) *World Class Leadership for Global Excellence.* Coventry: CEL.

—— (2007) *The Leadership Challenges of Globalisation*. Coventry: CEL.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2011) 'The ethics of educational and social research'. In *Research Methods in Education* (7th edn). New York: Routledge, pp. 75–104.

Connell, S., Fien, J., Lee, J., Sykes, H., and Yencken, D. (1999) '"If it doesn't affect you, you don't think about it": a qualitative study of young people's environmental attitudes in two Australian cities'. *Environmental Education Research*. 5 (1), 95–113.

Davies, L. and Lam, E. (2010) 'The role of first-hand experience in the development education of university students'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 2 (2), 35–52.

DEA (2008) *Global Learning Matters: Case studies*. London: DEA.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004) *Putting the World into World Class Education.* London: DfES.

DIUS (2008) *Globalisation – Meeting the Challenge: An international strategy for further education in England.* London: DIUS.

Flick, U. (2006) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (3rd edn). London: Sage.

Foghani-Arani, N. and Hartmeyer, H. (2010) 'Global learning in Austria: Towards a national strategy and beyond'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 2 (3), 45–58.

Glennie, A., Straw, W., and Wild, L. (2012) *Understanding Public Attitudes to Aid and Development*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research and Overseas Development Institute.

Hodgson, A. and Spours, K. (2009) 'Collaborative local learning ecologies: Reflections on the governance of lifelong learning in England.' Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning Sector Paper 6. Online. www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/IFLL-Sector-Paper6.pdf (accessed 11 October 2013).

Holton, J.A. (2007) 'The coding process and its challenges'. In A. Bryant and K. Charmaz (eds), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. London: SAGE.

Hunt, F. (2012) *Global Learning in Primary Schools in England: Practices and impact*. DERC Research Paper No. 9. London: IOE.

Kegan, R. (2000) 'What "form" transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning'. In J. Mezirow, and associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lambert, D. and Morgan. J. (2011) *Geography and Development: Development education in schools and the part played by geography teachers*. DERC Research Paper No. 3. London: IOE.

Lincoln, Y. (1995) 'Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1, 275–89.

LSIS (2011) *New Freedoms: New focus: Towards a strategic framework for improvement and development in the learning and skills sector*. Coventry: LSIS.

Machin, J. (2008) *The Impact of Returned International Volunteers on the UK: A scoping review*. London: VSO.

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994) *Beginning Qualitative Research: A philosophic and practical guide*. London: Falmer.

Mezirow, J. (2000) 'Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory'. In J. Mezirow, and associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Newell-Jones, K. (2007) *Global Skills and Lifelong Learning*. London: Development Education Association.

Niens, U. and Reilly, J. (2012). 'Education for global citizenship in a divided society? Young people's views and experiences'. *Comparative Education*, 48 (1), 103–18.

Oberman, R., Waldron, F., and Dillon, S. (2012) 'Developing a global citizenship education programme for three to six year olds'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 4 (1), 37–60.

Ojala, M. (2012) 'Hope and climate change: The importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people'. *Environmental Education Research*, 18 (5), 625–42.

Roker, D., Player, K., and Coleman, J. (1999). 'Young people's voluntary and campaigning activities as sources of political education'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 25 (1–2), 185–98.

Scheunpflug, A. (2008) 'Why global learning and global education? An educational approach influenced by the perspectives of Immanuel Kant'. In D. Bourn (ed.), *Development Education Debates and Dialogues*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Scheunpflug, A., Lang-Wojtasik, G., and Bergmueller, C. (2009) 'Global learning in the Third Age: Findings from a German project'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 2 (1), 31–46.

Scott, W. (2002).'Education and sustainable development: challenges, responsibilities, and frames of mind'. *The Trumpeter*, 18 (1).

Serf, J. (2008) 'Global learning in a changing and unpredictable world'. *Forum*, 10 (3), 411–8.

Smithson, J. (2008) 'Focus groups'. In P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman, and J. Brannen (eds), *Sage Handbook of Social Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Standish, A. (2009) *Global Perspectives in the Geography Curriculum: Reviewing the moral case for geography*. London: Routledge.

Sterling, S. (2003). 'Whole systems thinking as a basis for paradigm change in education – Explorations in the context of sustainability'. PhD thesis, Centre for Research in Education and the Environment, University of Bath. Online. www.bath.ac.uk/cree/sterling/sterlingthesis.pdf (accessed 11 October 2013).

Tallon, R. (2012) 'Emotion and agency within NGO development education: What is at work and what is at stake in the classroom?'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 4 (2), 5–22.

Vare, P. and Scott, W. (2008) DEA Think Global Thinkpiece: 'Education for sustainable development: two sides and an edge'. Online. www.dea.org.uk/thinkpieces (accessed 11 October 2013).