

Q&A with Think Global's Global Educator of the Year 2018 winner, Samantha Olubodun.

Q. What challenges have you faced in integrating global learning into the national curriculum? How have you balanced introducing new topics against requirements from the curriculum?

Integrating global learning into the school curriculum has been a gradual process. It has been a process of trial and improvement, taking into account other professionals knowledge and understanding about global learning, as well as working out which elements had the greatest impact on the children. Many years ago, I considered global learning to be learning about different cultures, nationalities and ways of life. We linked with a school in Ghana and planned joint projects such as questionnaires, a water-aid challenge and geography based activities. This was very successful at the time, but I felt that the relationship between the two schools was viewed in a vertical manner and not a horizontal manner. By this, I mean that our partner school was viewed as the 'poor' school who needed our support, and our school was viewed as the 'wealthy' school that was able to provide support. I was aware of this perception from both sides of the partnership. The school community was eager to raise money for the Ghanaian school, and the Ghanaian partners became less interested in the joint learning opportunities and more interested in the visits. The visits were extremely time consuming and I did not feel that the learning opportunities for the children on both sides were being maximised.

Following this, I went down the route of training staff on Global Learning in terms of, at the time, five key themes: Globalisation; interdependence; peace and conflict; diversity and sustainability. I was able to make links between our Contexts for Learning and each of these themes, aiming to ensure that learning was relevant and linked to real current events. This developed over time, with me continuing to train staff and then becoming involved in the [Global Learning Programme](#). The concept of global learning broadened again, and the umbrella of SMSC (Social Moral Spiritual Cultural), for which I was responsible in my school, encompassed the concepts of perceptions and values, poverty, MDGs/SDGs/Global Goals as well as work I was developing in the realm of body image, mental health, challenging homophobia etc. Many of the areas of global learning overlapped with general societal values so I started to rewrite the SMSC/PSHE curriculum to teach about all of these issues explicitly, as well as encourage other teachers to explore them through literacy. The new English curriculum encouraged free choice of texts by teachers, as long as the National Curriculum was being covered.

I had been teaching global learning through literacy with my Year 4 class for years and knew that it hooked them in, they were interested and therefore reluctant writers were eager to write.

More recently, I have introduced an entirely picture book based SMSC curriculum which encompasses many global learning themes such as: More in Common; Refugees and Asylum Seekers: who is behind the label?; No Outsiders; Equality etc.

I am also in the process of rewriting the broader geography/history curriculum to be entirely enquiry based, with big philosophical questions opening each unit/topic of work. Many of these big questions link to global learning themes such as inequality,

interdependence and social responsibility. For example, we look at the experience of evacuees compared to that of refugees and realise that there is no 'they', that 'they' have been 'us' in the past.

We look at our responsibilities in terms of deforestation and what we can learn from indigenous peoples.

We explore the history of the Commonwealth and how equitable relationships can be formed moving forward.

We look at the societal hierarchy of the Romans and make comparisons to events closer to modern day.

We learn about the ancient Greeks and learn about modern day democracy.

I feel that there are many opportunities within the existing curriculum to introduce global learning in a meaningful way, and in a way that will enhance any curriculum. History can't be about learning dates and remembering the order of monarchs, it must be about learning from the past, identifying warning signs and not repeating mistakes.

The biggest challenge, as a teacher, has been trying to communicate or express the importance of global learning as there are so many pressures placed on schools and the message about global learning has never filtered from the DfE down to headteachers and therefore teachers. It requires a lot of dedicated teachers to keep chipping away until evidence starts to show that global learning is important. Those who don't understand it, may view it as 'fluffy' subjects which is not a priority, especially where schools are struggling to achieve the required maths & English levels. It is a challenge to demonstrate that global learning could be the vehicle to raise standards in schools because children intrinsically want to make a difference to their world. They are invested and passionate.

Q. What role has global learning played in your teaching? What impact/benefit has global learning had for your students and your school?

Global learning has always been central to my teaching within my classroom. I have always looked for opportunities to make learning relevant for our children and in turn, this has created an atmosphere of passion, determination and action! Children want to pick up their pens and write to the Prime Minister about issues that they feel strongly about such as Education, or to supermarkets to pledge to buy sustainable palm oil, or to parents to re-educate them about South Africa. Children who are taught that they have a voice, and that this can be used to change their world, become empowered to use it and this reflects in the language, grammar, structure and content of their writing. It teaches them important life skills of independence, standing up for others and being proud of who they are and the values they possess. I feel that by having global learning at the centre of a curriculum, a school develops an ethos of mutual respect and integrity which are values that are essential within our communities.

Q. Why do you feel that global learning is important in schools?

Like our societies across the UK, our schools are very diverse. Each and every school differs, not only in the curriculum that it offers, but also in the demographic of the intake for that area. Schools are miniature societies. Some areas of the UK have very diverse intakes, both culturally and economically; others don't. Regardless of the intake of a school, I feel that global learning is essential. For some schools, it is about knocking down stereotypes and rebuilding them, because this type of learning will not be incidental. Children in school may echo the views of their parents or grandparents and may not have the opportunity to explore what they, themselves think about particular issues. In more diverse schools, children still need to develop critical thinking skills. Children may still come from homes where discussions about diversity, religion and sexuality do not happen, and views are instilled into the young people. We are not just teaching our children to read and write, we are teaching them how to be confident, unique, happy, secure, successful critical thinkers so that they can navigate their way through a complex world of differing opinions and views and a very unstable political climate. I believe that the media coverage of Brexit has created an interest in politics, and we have an opportunity of having a government in the future that represents the demographic of the UK for the first time.

Q. Do you think that winning the Global Educator of the Year Award will change how you work? If so, what impact do you think it will have?

I am still considering how winning Global Educator will change my work moving forward. I am fortunate to work within a school that is very forward thinking and with a headteacher who is completely on board with global learning. I also work within a Teaching School Alliance which is placing a strong emphasis on global learning. I will continue to do what I have always done, which is what I feel is right for the children I teach. I would love to further develop global learning across schools within the North West as I have such a clear vision, but unfortunately, most of the employment opportunities within this realm are based in the South or big cities. I would love to spread the word on a wider scale and guide other schools through the process. My work as an SLE may enable me to do this, but as this is unpaid on top of my teaching responsibilities, my scope is limited. If organisations like 'Think Global' were able to have hubs and representatives within each region, this would be my dream job. I am hoping that this year, I will find a way to follow my dream and make a living from developing global learning within schools whilst still being able to provide for my young family.

Q. What advice would you give other teachers who want to bring global learning into their classroom, school or community?

Global Learning is a passion. It is about core values and teaching children social responsibility. It teaches them to look outwards rather than inwards and provides a sense of empowerment. Global learning has kept me within education at times when the pressure has been so intense, that I have felt like leaving. I knew that what I was doing was right for my children and continued to follow my heart. If you make the curriculum real, rich and engaging, the data starts to take care of itself. If you are passionate about global learning, start to introduce it bit by bit. Where you see a link, explore it through a P4C approach. Talk to other colleagues about what their passions are and start to build your curriculum up around that. There are so many opportunities to incorporate global learning that it seems

nonsensical not to. Global learning encompasses so many different threads that it can be good just to follow one and see where that takes you. Examine the impact on the pupils in terms of enthusiasm, engagement and standards, and then consider what else you can do. Teachers generally go in to the profession to make a difference, and I can see no better way of making a difference to this generation, and the generations that follow, than by guiding children to be active global citizens.