

We must find 'space'

Kevin Bailey

On my first visit to a school in The Gambia in 1993 I was a young head with limited experience of European holidays and a comfortable year teaching in Australia. My own rural English school felt free and full of possibilities for both my students and me. A National Curriculum was only just being whispered about and I could plan the curriculum I felt best suited my school, the interest of the teachers, and the skills we could draw on. Heady days, when a child's personal discovery could lead to a whole school investigation. The memory still lingers - of breaking Roman pottery sent in by supportive grandparents and magical interviews with elderly ex-pupils whose names had been discovered in the ancient tombs of school records and brought to life in front of giant video cameras.

In this context school partnerships flourished and journeys of exploration wound their way around children's creative minds through the school corridors and out into the wider community. Exchanging cassette tapes of singing and sounds brought genuine shrieks of excitement and a motivation to learn more that sometimes left me struggling to keep up. Mistakes were often made and, despite a growing awareness of the uneven power dynamics, a positive interest and appreciation of a very different place with many similar needs was explored.

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Curriculum change was quick and dramatic:

'Where do I fit this in?' was an understandable cry from classroom teachers desperately balancing demands. **Schools now operate in a world of competing demands.**

External assessments of a narrow part of learning can lead to further restrictions on the curriculum not allowing creative avenues to be explored.



Solar lights open up learning opportunities in Central River Region, The Gambia

Some of these pathways turn out to be dead ends; however, engagement in creative, open-ended enquiry supports a wide range of important learning opportunities. It is, therefore, vital that young people have this opportunity and experience the curriculum set in interesting, relevant and motivating contexts.

We must find this space again!

In a fast changing, interdependent world, global learning supports and enriches learning and teaching of important concepts such as diversity, equality, human rights, and fairness and justice. Personal skills and attributes such as identifying 'unhelpful' thinking traps, generalisations and stereotypes can be made relevant and meaningful. A range of attributes can also be developed - empathy and compassion, respect for others and many skills for employability - especially through a critical thinking approach.

Important aspects of global learning can be built into the curriculum using real life contexts and also enhances and makes relevant subjects that could remain sterile and irrelevant. An example of this is explored in *'Teaching PSHE & R(S) HE In Primary Schools'* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

'Intouch Gambia' is a Gambian organisation with a vision to support access to high quality solar lamps, reducing reliance on traditional lighting methods such as candles, oil lamps and torches. Solar lights are distributed to rural, off-grid schools and rented to pupils on a weekly basis for the cost of a candle. Profits from the programme enable schools to reinvest in replacement lamps and to grow their solar library to enable more students to have access to lamps. See for example **'Switched on Gambia'**.

