



operative  
learning

*creative approaches in action*



## Our Rights

An awareness raising project on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) conducted by Operative Learning with Abertillery Primary School using Mantle of the Expert

## Introduction

The project was devised by Paul Gibbins following a commission from Dean Taylor (head at Abertillery) to work with students, teachers and parents to develop the school's commitment to UNCRC and the desire to achieve the Schools Respecting Rights Award.

It was thought an excellent idea to use the Mantle of the Expert approach to teaching as this particular pedagogical approach is child-centred and relies totally on student inquiry and student voice, very much in line with the aims of the Rights themselves.

Paul worked initially with all students in years 5 and 6 who acted as catalysts to 'spread the word' and develop the school and community's awareness of the Rights and the implications for the humanising development of the young people of Abertillery.

Participants in mantle of the expert are *framed* as servicers committed to an enterprise. This frame fundamentally affects their relationship with knowledge. They can never be receivers "told" about knowledge. They can only engage with it as people with a *responsibility*. This responsibility is not to knowledge itself, although paradoxically, that is what the students are indirectly acquiring, but to the enterprise they have undertaken. Knowledge becomes information, evidence, source material, specification, records, guidelines, regulations, theories, formulas and artefacts, all of which are to be *interrogated*. This is an *active, urgent, purposeful* view of learning in which knowledge is to be *operated on*, not merely to be taken in.

### **Drama for Learning**

*Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Learning*  
Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton

## Learning with a Purpose

The purpose of the project was for the students to attain a knowledge and understanding of the Rights and to 'spread the word' about their importance and relevance to the school and its community.

It has been observed that some schools have taught the Rights by ensuring the children read them, learn them and are able to recite them. The approach at Abertillery was very different. Every activity (speaking, writing, calculating, designing etc.) was done for a purpose other than the usual one of doing what he or she was told. The students in this project had to discover the Rights themselves. Every learning activity had a clear purpose and children were at all times aware of the purpose. During the two weeks the mode of working was different and child-centred. It is a right of the child that he or she is listened to: this approach made that a necessity.

## Setting the context

Paul Gibbins (PG) worked with two year 5 and two year 6 classes. The original context setting sessions were the same for all: its development was steered by the students themselves with a variety of interventions that will be explained as they arise.



## The initial premise

Each group spent one session familiarising themselves with the background to the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Each student was given a child friendly copy (Appendix 1) of the Rights for future reference only. The history of the formation of the United Nations, the establishment of **unicef** as a children's organisation and its work was explained – the initial context was then given. The students were to be workers in a marketing company which promotes the work of companies through a variety of means such as advertising, events, promotional material and any other means seen fit. A reasonable amount of time was spent looking at how a company of this sort works: a company name was created by each group. They were:

Year 5 group 1 – The Blabbers

Year 5 group 2 – Info-Mission

Year 6 group 1 – Tellem

Year 6 group 2 – Accomplished Dreams

## Developing the Mantle

Each company was given a test case to try out, for example a student role-played a local hairdresser who wanted their new shop to be marketed in the area. Members of the company came up with a proposal of the methods they might use with this client. Activities such as the design, reproduction and distribution of A5 flyers; the design and reproduction of a logo for all advertising purposes; the attractive and inviting presentation of the shop front; signage in the town directing prospective customers etc. At this stage students became accustomed to the conventions of role-play whereby students assume a different character without 'acting', neither the teachers nor facilitator gave ideas and all suggestions were made by students as workers within the company. None of the material was actually produced, but merely suggested as a proposal for the client.

Name of Company	Initial Ideas	Some activities
The Blabbers	spreading the word to local comprehensive school	writing letter to head teacher; telephoning to make appointment; producing leaflets to take to school; meeting with head teacher; meeting with comprehensive school council; invitations to The Blabbers' workplace; creation of logo; creation of a display using fictitious time capsule written by children in the Warsaw Ghetto
Info-Mission	celebratory launch involving fun activities	examples of Rights displayed as play objects eg parachutes, songs, greetings cards; design and creation of logo; devising song (jingle) and dance; recording of interviews for radio; project and game based on the right to be yourself
Tellem	distributing advertising material to distribute in the local community	posters; radio interviews; filmed information programme; flyers; advertising material involving football players advocating UNCRC; distribute information to all other classes in the school; physical representation of Rights
Accomplished Dreams	targeting their primary school including early years	activities involving Rights for early years children; differentiated powerpoint productions; telephone contacting members of the community; assembly; playtime and lunchtime activities for other children in the school

Now that all groups were aware and happy with the way of working the main activity commenced, it was at this stage that they realised the importance of their contributions in that all suggestions were discussed and either accepted or dismissed by decisions made by members of the company. The students were now acting as members of a responsible group with a job to do.

The facilitator, in the role of a **unicef** officer made the first major intervention. PG told them that he had been asked by **unicef** to look for a company who could develop the awareness of UNCRC at Abertillery Primary School and the local community. **Unicef** was prepared to pay the company for a major marketing project to accomplish this. Each class established a working method of coming up with ideas and proceeded with the work in the way that best suited them. For all classes, this inevitably led to group work whereby different plans were formulated. Many, many ideas were forwarded and at a later stage discussed by the company as a whole for feasibility. It was at this point that each individual company created its own unique way of dealing with the commission.

## Interventions



Once the groups had established the working activities of the company they completed various pieces of work as part of their remit to raise awareness of the Rights of the Child, some of which are explained above. In Mantle of the Expert a series of interventions are used which challenge the students through a series of problem solving exercises. This ensures that the process is continuously challenging and all areas of the curriculum are covered. The interventions are usually pre-planned but are employed only when the facilitator thinks they are needed. In this project a variety of them were used and were presented at different times for each group, they all allow for the possibility of different outcomes. Some of them were devised before the project started whilst others were created to enhance

the particular way in which a group had individually developed the narrative.

## Intervention 1

Visitor from the community – the shopkeeper

The '**unicef** officer' told the company that he had been in the town centre to talk to people about UNCRC and had found that very few people had heard of it. One local shopkeeper had shown an interest in talking to the company about Rights. The 'shopkeeper' then visited the company for an open discussion. This character was played by the teacher in role and it was decided beforehand that she was to take quite a belligerent role in terms of what she thought of young people and their Rights. It was agreed that she should not be sympathetic and complain about the young people outside her shop. She believed that young people didn't need Rights and it became the job of members of the company to show her how mistaken she was. This led to a huge range of discussion and forced the children to be as persuasive as they possibly could whilst maintaining their professional status. This also afforded the class teacher to experiment to concept of teacher in role.

## Intervention 2

Letter from Kenya

A letter was created to each of the companies from a head teacher of a school in Kenya asking for help. This was delivered to the room by a member of the office staff and read by the students (Appendix 2). The website mentioned in the letter was looked at by the students who, as a company, discussed which Rights were particularly relevant to the school and how this information could assist the Head in his decisions of how to change the school. This activity gave an opportunity for the children to be aware of the different needs and separate ways of applying our understanding of the Rights. Each company decided on different routes of action but all replied to the head teacher formally. One group, in fact, decided not to pursue the matter at present as they thought their current commission was onerous enough.

### Intervention 3

#### Brenda

The 'unicef officer' was constantly pressurised by his boss who continuously asked for progress reports in a variety of means to be submitted to her regularly and promptly (one of the forms she wanted completed is to be found in Appendix 3). This shadow role became known as Brenda and was used as a constant threat in terms of quality of the work. Students were aware that she had high expectations and would often voluntarily redraft and sometimes redo material that they thought would not come up to Brenda's exacting standards. It was amusing that the students became very sympathetic about the 'officer's' heavy workload demanded by Brenda. Metaphorically she became an ideal device for assessment.

### Intervention 4

#### Back in the Warsaw Ghetto

In looking at the history of the UNCRC, the students had found out about Dr. Korczak's school in the Warsaw Ghetto, one group in particular spent a lot of time researching the details of this which they presented to the whole company. As interest grew it was decided to role play the school and look at how Korczak's children might react when an outsider arrived looking for sanctuary. Korczak himself allowed considerable autonomy for his orphaned children and the students were aware of this in their role play. In moving to another world in another historical period further widened their understanding for the needs for Rights and gave a specific context to their origins. It was fascinating to see how students grappled with the horrors of Nazi Germany at its worst and each group developed it in a highly individualistic way.

## The Exhibition

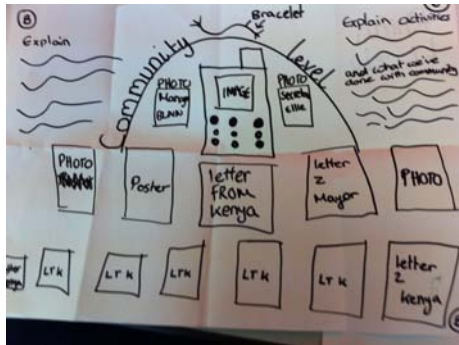
At a very early stage in the project all companies showed a desire to create an event that would afford the wider community of the school and outside an opportunity to understand and appreciate the value of the Rights of the Child. This was, after all, their original brief when setting up the companies. It was agreed by all that an exhibition would be mounted with activities and display materials for all members of the school, teachers and students, parents, governors and the community at large. This took place on the last afternoon of the two week project after considerable preparation and planning by all companies.

The event was attended by:

- teachers and students
- the governing board
- parents
- community police officer
- mayor
- community nurse
- faith leaders
- comprehensive school teachers
- comprehensive school council
- representatives of local education authority



## Outcomes



At the outset it was emphasised that the project shouldn't be a one off introduction to UNCRC, but a sustainable embedding of the Rights of the Child in the school curriculum as a whole. The awareness of the Rights was, and still is, clearly perceptible amongst all children in the school. Using a child-centred approach such as Mantle of the Expert ensured that their understanding of the material was thorough and deep. Their enthusiasm to raise awareness was maintained in their assumed role as professionals working for a responsible group. It was also highly significant that all students were listened to and that 'student voice' was significant and acted upon. All visitors and observers were clearly impressed by the students' understanding and knowledge which was identifiable and measurable.

Assessment for Learning was core to the process and through the devised nature of a workplace teachers and students were constantly assessing and reassessing their own and others' work. The nature of the method is such that assessment and recording are integral parts of the dramatic process and not an artificial add-on to justify the activity and satisfy the needs of external assessors.

# What's all this rights stuff about?

**You have rights, use them!**

UNCRC stands for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It's a list of rights that all children, everywhere in the world, have. The rights on the list are all the things that children and young people need to make sure that they are healthy, happy and safe. There are 54 articles in the list, and 42 of these are rights for children (the others are about how adults and governments should work together to make sure all children get all their rights).

**Want to know your rights?**

- Article 1:** Everyone under 18 has these rights
- Article 2:** All children have these rights no matter what!
- Article 3:** Everyone who works with children should always do what is best for each child
- Article 4:** The government should make sure that all these rights are available to all children
- Article 5:** Learn how to use your rights as you grow up
- Article 6:** You have the right to life and to be healthy
- Article 7:** Your right to a name and nationality
- Article 8:** The government should respect your right to a name, nationality and family
- Article 9:** Your right to be with your parents if this is what's best for you
- Article 10:** Your right to see your family if they live in another country
- Article 11:** Your right not to be taken out of the country illegally
- Article 12:** Your right to say what you think should happen and be listened to
- Article 13:** Your right to have information
- Article 14:** Your right to follow your own religion
- Article 15:** Your right to meet with friends and join groups and clubs
- Article 16:** Your right to have privacy
- Article 17:** Your right to honest information from newspapers and television that you can understand
- Article 18:** Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children, and they should always think about what is best for each child
- Article 19:** You should not be harmed and should be looked after and kept safe
- Article 20:** You should be looked after properly if you can't live with your own family
- Article 21:** Your right to live in the best place for you if you can't live with your parents
- Article 22:** Refugee children have the same rights as children born in Wales
- Article 23:** Your right to special care and support if you are disabled
- Article 24:** Your right to good food and water and to see a doctor if you are ill
- Article 25:** Children who are not living with their families should be checked on regularly to make sure they are ok
- Article 26:** The right to extra money if your family hasn't got enough to live on
- Article 27:** Your right to a good standard of living
- Article 28:** Your right to learn and to go to school
- Article 29:** Your right to become the best that you can be
- Article 30:** Your right to use your own language
- Article 31:** Your right to relax and play
- Article 32:** You should be protected from work that is dangerous
- Article 33:** You should be protected from dangerous drugs
- Article 34:** The government should protect children from sexual abuse
- Article 35:** You have a right not to be sold
- Article 36:** You should be protected from doing things that could harm you
- Article 37:** Your right to be treated fairly if you break the law
- Article 38:** Children should be protected during a war and not allowed to fight in the army if they are under 15
- Article 39:** Children should get special help if they have been abused
- Article 40:** Your right to legal help if you have been accused of breaking the law
- Article 41:** If the laws in your country protect you better than the rights in this list, those laws should stay
- Article 42:** The government must let children and families know about children's rights

**we have the right to be included**

**Know your rights**

Appendix 2

Kayete School  
Machacos  
Kenya  
March 6th 2011

Dear Accomplished Dreams,

We hear you are working on letting people know about the Rights of the Child. We have a school in Kenya and we have a lot of problems. I wonder if it is possible for you to produce some ideas of how we could help the children, parents and teachers become more aware of what children's rights are and how we can develop them at

the school. You can find out about the school and its problems at this website:  
<http://www.build-africa.org/schools.php?id=40>

Yours sincerely  
L Wakefield

Headteacher  
Kavete School  
Kenya

Appendix 3



Costs: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your company's name: \_\_\_\_\_

UNICEF needs to know how much your work is going to cost.

You can do the working out on the back of this sheet.

### Photocopying

	Cost per copy	Number of copies	Total Cost
Black and white			
Colour			

Postage. Think of anything you might like to send out by post.

Number of letters by first class post	Price of the stamp	Total Cost
Number of letters by second class post	Price of the stamp	Total Cost

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Your wages

How much do you charge for an hour of work?	How many hours have you worked this week?	Total Cost

Are there any other things you will need to buy?  
Write them here and say how much they cost.

Now add everything up and put the amount of money it will all cost.

Total cost

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the staff and children of Abertillery Primary School for their total involvement in this project.

Paul Gibbins