What is the Background to Educating the Heart?

In 2013, Children in Crossfire launched an Educating the Heart initiative as part of its Development Education (DE) programme. The organisation’s patron, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, visited Northern Ireland, and addressed a private audience of educators, students, policy makers, and researchers to explore the theme of compassion and Educating the Hearts of ourselves and our young people, specifically, within education.

Inspired by the Dalai Lama’s vision for an education system that instils unbiased love, respect and compassion into the hearts and minds of young people; Children in Crossfire sought to explore if compassion training can be incorporated to the heart of its DE programme and across the school curriculum. The organisation asked itself if its ‘critical literacy’ approach to implementing DE was fully adequate for cultivating a sense of global citizenship amongst young people. Would a DE pedagogical approach which also seeks to nurture emotional literacy and well-being prepare young people more holistically for participating as compassionate global citizens in an increasingly interconnected world?

Based on these questions, Children in Crossfire hosted a series of consultation seminars with key stakeholders, including 200 educators and DE practitioners, and up to 50 young people. Educators and DE practitioners highlighted that “there is a need to develop a deeper level of emotional capacity alongside critical thinking so that young people develop more courage to take part in life in general, as well as working to build a more just global society”. The young people stated that “they have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders”, and it takes a “lot of energy and head-space to try to fix all the problems with our world”. Educators further stated that “young people are being failed miserably, as we as a society do not focus enough on their emotional skills for life and citizenship, and expect them to have positive values to act for peace and global justice without adequately skilling them at both an emotional and thinking level”.

What Did Educating the Heart Set Out to Achieve?

Recognising a possible gap in Children in Crossfire’s DE pedagogical approach, the organisation sought to develop its DE methods to nurture compassion and emotional literacy alongside critical
thinking and critical literacy. Further, it sought to combine curriculum elements such as well-being, personal development, critical thinking and active citizenship.

Through Educating the Heart, Children in Crossfire therefore aimed to:

- explore possibilities for evolving its DE towards a pedagogy which nurtures compassion and combines critical and emotional literacy approaches for engaging young people in global citizenship
- combine curriculum elements such as well-being, personal development, critical thinking and active citizenship
- develop a range of practical tools and methods for implementing the evolved approach in classroom teaching and learning
- explore and understand how young people themselves are impacted through engaging them directly in an Educating the Heart pilot programme
- develop a core competency framework for cultivating global citizenship through Educating the Heart

What were the Required Practical Steps?

1. In 2014, Children in Crossfire’s DE team initially undertook training to build knowledge, skills and understanding of emotional literacy learning approaches. This was conducted through a process of Cognitively Based Compassion Training (CBCT) under the direction of Dr Brendan Ozawa de-Silva and CBCT founder Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi

2. Drawing on CBCT learning, Children in Crossfire shaped a DE programme of learning which was conducted during 2015 as an eight week pilot intervention with students aged 11-12 from Oakgrove Integrated College in Derry. 2 classes (14 students per class) took part in the study. One class received an Inside-Out programme intervention - beginning with compassion training and emotional literacy elements (inside) as a building block for later applying DE issues through critical literacy (outside). The other class received an Outside-In programme intervention - beginning with DE issues through critical literacy (outside) as stimulus for later applying compassion training and emotional literacy elements (inside)

3. The research findings, alongside further consultations with stakeholders, indicated the need to break the siloed approach between Inside-Out and Outside-In. Thus, Children in Crossfire’s Development Educators undertook a further period of reflective practice, and evolved the approach in consultation with 10 educators and 12 young people. It was recommended to merge both approaches in symbiosis so that emotional and critical literacy operate as mutually interconnected aptitudes for exploring DE issues

What were the details of the Inside-Out and Outside-In Approaches?
The Inside Out methods were essentially designed to build a deeper understanding of self, others and compassionate interconnectedness. The intention was to methodically build skill sets around:

- relating to oneself with compassion
- relating compassionately to others in our day to day lives
- extending compassion to those we are interconnected to across the world
Basically, upon this foundation, the following was then explored through a critical literacy and active citizenship framework:

- the global injustices inherent in our interdependent world
- bias, perspectives and attitudes to poverty and injustice
- Active Citizenship

The **Outside In** Methods simply operated in reverse, beginning with the critical literacy framework, followed by understanding of self, others and compassionate interconnectedness.

### What were the key findings from the Pilot Study?

- By the end of the study intervention, the **Inside Out** Group demonstrated significant understanding of **Self** and **Other Compassion**
- Whilst the **Outside In** Group demonstrated significant understanding of Other Compassion, there was no significant change in their understanding of **Self Compassion**
- By the end of the study, the **Inside Out** Group extended their social circle to include concepts relevant to themselves e.g. my mind, my thoughts, my feelings, and my relationships. There was no change in the **Outside In** Group responses
- Both Groups demonstrated attitudinal change in relation to perceptions of people living in poverty, with the **Inside Out** Group moving from harsh judgement of those in poverty to an empathic awareness. The **Outside In** Group moved from harsh judgement to demonstrating
critical thought around the structures and conditions that caused those to be living in poverty

- By the end of the study, both groups had an increased awareness of development issues, with the Outside In Group demonstrating increased critical thought in relation to understanding the structural causes of poverty. The Inside Out Group did not demonstrate such critical thought.

- By the end of the study, the Inside Out Group demonstrated an increased understanding of interdependence, and how they themselves are interrelated with the issue of poverty and inequality. The Outside In Group did not demonstrate such understanding.

- By the end of the study, the Inside Out Group’s solution to poverty involved actions they themselves should take as individuals and a class. The Outside In Group’s solution to poverty involved actions others should take, such as the government, social services or institutions.

**What were the utilised Research Measures?**

A series of research measures were designed and administered for the pilot phase of the project. Methods included:

- Reflective practice journals for the practitioners
- Pre, Mid and Post tests for the pilot study participants including: qualitative questionnaires, social circle tasks, issue tree task on poverty, and quantitative questionnaires

The measures were intended to explore differences between the Inside Out and Outside In group in relation to:

- knowledge and awareness of development issues
- understanding of self and other compassion
- attitudes to poverty and inequality
- awareness of interdependence and interconnectedness
- evidence of thinking critically
- perceptions around solutions to injustice
- belief in the ability to be a change-maker

**What is the key learning to date?**

Overall, the research findings and further consultations with key stakeholders has highlighted the need to merge the Inside Out and Outside In approaches in symbiosis so that emotional and critical literacy operate as mutually interconnected aptitudes for exploring DE issues. This is also considered important to explore further how to embed various key curriculum elements to the heart of global citizenship learning. For example, with this approach, elements around well-being and personal development are connected to critical thinking and learning for life and work.

**How do Children in Crossfire propose to merge the Inside-Out with the Outside-In?**

Children in Crossfire have developed and termed ‘Emotional Literacy’ as a framework to break the silo between Inside-Out and Outside-In, and to meet a wide range of curriculum elements. The key
premise of ‘Emotical Literacy’ is to fuse ‘the heart’ and ‘the head’ for exploring DE issues through building a range of core competencies for participating as a global citizen.

The below Core Competencies are inherent in ‘Emotical Literacy’.

**Stimulus Competencies:**
- Exploring: global injustices issues, interdependency, interconnectedness, the promotion of values and emotions for maintaining injustice, relevant personal experience
- Cultivating: awareness of thoughts and feelings, emotional awareness, self-acceptance, gratitude, impartiality, empathic concern, perspectives, cultural understanding, solidarity, universal values, critical literacy, communication skills, self-expression, creativity, discernment, confidence, compassion

**Processing Competencies:**
- Affirming: inner conviction, inner courage

**Response Competencies:**
- Embodied Action: taking informed and sustained action for global justice

It is beyond the scope of this article to define each of the above competencies. Definitions, alongside curriculum links, will be available in Children in Crossfire’s final publication of the ‘Emotical Literacy’ framework. However, it is important to note that ‘Emotical Literacy’ is translated into a practical guiding tool to shape DE activities which explore relevant issues.

**‘Emotical Literacy’: A Guiding Tool**

1. **Emotional: Thoughts, Feelings, Emotions and Values**
   - My thoughts on the issue, and exploring the connection between my thoughts and feelings
   - The core emotion behind my thoughts and feelings
   - Exploring the emotion with mind and body
   - Considering the thoughts, feelings and emotions of others
   - Recognising the dominant values and emotions which are promoted to maintain the injustice
   - Understanding a range of emotions and values, and how to best connect to the issue to ensure well-being for all

2. **Critical: Perspectives, Assumptions, Bias and Implications**
   - My perspective on the issue, and exploring who, what and how my perspective was formed
   - Identifying and exploring the perspectives of others
   - The connection between perspectives and bias
   - Assumptions, beliefs and biases underpinning various perspectives
   - Implications of viewing the issue from the various perspectives
   - Identifying the most useful perspectives to connect to the issue

3. **Motivation: Embodied Change-Maker in the World**
   - Knowing how to sustain my participation as an Active Global Citizen with Compassion, Courage and Conviction
What are the Next Steps?

1. The ‘Emotical Literacy’ Framework remains a work in progress, and following further consultations with key stakeholders, it will be more extensively presented in relation to theoretical background, pedagogical approaches, curriculum links, and overall how all of these translate into practical implementation methods.

2. Innovative tools, methods and activities which can be utilised for cultivating the core competencies inherent in ‘Emotical Literacy’ remain in development.

3. The research report outlining findings from the initial pilot study will be published in January 2017.

4. In 2017 and 2018, Children in Crossfire will conduct a further pilot through the training of 120 primary and post-primary teachers across Ireland.

Children in Crossfire welcomes feedback and input from all those interested in the ongoing development of ‘Emotical Literacy’ and the underpinning practical tools and methods. Please contact the Development Education department on 02871269898 or caroline.murphy2@childrenincrossfire.org

Relevant Reading

The Founding Children in Crossfire Story of Compassion.
http://www.childrenincrossfire.org/who-we-are/richards-story/

The Dalai Lama has been a key inspiration behind Children in Crossfire’s Educating the Heart initiative.
http://www.childrenincrossfire.org/who-we-are/our-patron/

Towards Compassionate Global Citizenship: Educating the Heart through DE

Educating the Heart
http://www.childrenincrossfire.org/what-we-do/ireland-uk/educating-the-heart/

TIDAL (Teachers in Development and Learning) - Children in Crossfire’s overall Continuous Professional Development Programme for teachers. TIDAL will evolve in line with Children in Crossfire’s ‘Emotical Literacy’ approach.
http://www.childrenincrossfire.org/what-we-do/ireland-uk/tidal/