Ralston Primary – Applying political literacy skills in a whole school context – Transcript

**Ralston Primary School, Paisley**

**Practitioner 1** : When we first looked at political literacy, there was a bit of worry that it would be an additional aspect of the curriculum but, when you dig down, you realise that it’s actually very good skills development, looking very closely at how we communicate with each other, and involving children in the decision-making process, and then seeing how that would impact later in life in things like the Referendum, the General Election, or indeed the local elections.

**Practitioner 2:** We just didn’t realise that that was the umbrella term for it, or the lingo for it, sort of, these days. In class, we do lots of political literacy, with the children getting involved in discussions and debates and talking about where they stand in the world.

**Practitioner 3***:* I think, in political literacy, we want to develop individual … we want to develop political literacy and the four capacities. We want children who have confidence in their own opinion, we want children who have resilience, who are able to bounce back, and who can be inclusive for other children and other opinions and have a very good, positive self-esteem, and are able to make rationalised, reasoned evaluative judgments about a wide range of situations and apply those skills to a wide variety of contexts.

**Practitioner 4***:* So, for me, political literacy in Primary 1 is all about talking and listening, and developing your talking and listening skills.

**Child 1**: It’s important for people to listen to you, because you should be able to say what you think … And what you think it should be like.

**[Heading: Research and critical thinking skills]**

**Practitioner 2:** We tend to do it more as a … some of it as a home task, where you can chat with the parents, maybe ask them to go through the newspapers or watch the news, because I’ve found that, actually, a lot of children have told me, in my class, that they don’t watch the news - they don’t get to watch it. So, it is quite good as a homework task to maybe say, you know, sit and watch the news with mum and dad, have a chat about what’s happening in the world. When the children come in with all their stories, we get them to share them with the class, which then opens up a [unclear] discussion. And we talk about everybody’s different stories. And sometimes people have found out different information from different sources and we can work through them to see, well maybe, was that a reliable source you got that from? And it also highlights a lot of the issues that are affecting people in different countries.

**Child 2**: We’ve been doing the Nepal earthquake for natural disasters, and we’ve found out how devastating it is, and we’ve realised how lucky we are that we haven’t got earthquakes like this here.

**Child 3**: We’ve noted down in our current affairs and I found out that over 240,000,000 children don’t have schools any more and I guess that’s very lucky that we still have our education.

**Practitioner 3***:* Was Goldilocks right to eat the porridge? And it got us into all sorts of discussions about morals, and the children were very quickly … I feel they’ve made good progress in being able to respond to other people’s opinions. We have a very positive outcome, if there is a disagreement – we don’t have personal upset, we don’t have falling out or cross words, because the children recognize the value of having their own opinion and it’s ok to have a different opinion.

**[Heading: Debate and discussion skills]**

**Child 4**: I enjoy discussion, so I can find out more and listen to other people. It gives me more patience to listen to other people and finding out more.

**Child 3**: I like group discussions because it lets me see other people’s viewpoints instead of just my viewpoint, and I might like their one more than my one.

**Child 5**: I think talking and listening is a very good way of teaching children to stand up for themselves and think what they think and not to go with other people…. And so that they can maybe be a bit more braver in the future.

**Child 6**: Well, what we do is: we develop our skills by practising our talking and listening in groups of around fours. And if there is a little blip or someone disagrees, we do not fall out – that’s just an example of bad talking and listening. But if we don’t fall out, that’s an example of good talking and listening, and that’s what we’re aiming for.

**Practitioner 3***:* And we wanted to give … We also wanted to develop resilience, in terms of people giving their opinions, but it was ok to disagree and to have a different opinion. We wanted children to feel confident with that.

**Practitioner 5***:* As a class teacher, I sometimes feel as if I’m a conductor of an orchestra, because you have children who are, maybe, the violins and they’re playing too loud, or you have children who are the flutes are too quiet, and you need to try and encourage them to speak out a little bit more. And they may have opinions about things but they don’t play loudly enough. As a class teacher, it’s very important that you play devil’s advocate and you don’t express your own opinions. I would always play … have every side and ask the children – the starting point is asking the children their opinions about it, then, perhaps putting a counter-argument in: this is not my opinion, I’m making it quite clear to the children that I don’t really have an opinion about this, but it’s all right to express *your* opinions.

**Practitioner 2**: Nothing really shocks me any more since I’ve been a Primary 7 teacher and had to do the sex education chat whilst being seven-months pregnant. So, I was Exhibit A of what happens.

**[heading: Participation and rights]**

**Practitioner 4:** So, for example, we recently completed a topic on fairyland, and the children studied the fairytale of the three little pigs. And we linked it in with the pigs having the right to shelter, and building their three houses. We also completed a topic on welcoming a baby, through religious and moral education. And we visited our local church and re-enacted a christening ceremony. And, from that, the children were able to identify the right of all children having a name.

**Child 7**: We’ve been learning about if you … you need to have a name, because if you don’t get a name on time the government will be really angry with your mum and dad.

**Interviewer** [off-camera]: Why will they be angry?

**Child 7**: Because you won’t…because you won’t have a name and you can’t just be called ‘Baby’ all the time.

**Child 8**: I’d like to go to school. [Unclear] If you didn’t go to school you wouldn’t learn much and then you wouldn’t know which one and one is…

**Practitioner 5**: And how they can make an … be involved in the decision-making process for their country. We had the Referendum, recently, in Scotland, and I’m fortunate enough to be quite local, so I had taken the children with me when I voted, and they saw the polling station and saw the process of actually voting within the country.

**Child 9**: My family took… I think every family took a big interest in the Referendum, and it was the family dinner talk. It was everything we talked about, and it was quite hard to understand, at first, and it was quite hard to get why, get all the facts when a lot of adults were saying different things, and we were … and other people … And it was just: you’d have one person saying one thing but then you’d have the other person saying the other, and it was just quite difficult.

**Practitioner 5**: This also impacts … within the school, the children practise these skills with pupil council, with their healthy eating groups, with eco groups. And they get a chance to express their own opinions and have an impact on the direction of the school and on the issues that affect them within the school.

**Practitioner 6**: In my mind, political literacy promotes equality, as well, and it goes hand-in-hand with rights education, because you are trying to get the children to think about empathy and respect for others, and they go hand-in-hand. And it’s things that we are already doing within the school.

**Interviewer** [off-camera]: What are those things?

**Practitioner 6**: We’re already giving the children opportunity to be involved in everything that happens in the school, to have a voice and to make decisions. Global citizenship is very much linked to that, and that’s another step forward for next session. There are some of the stages in our school just now who are doing a global citizenship project, but we do realise that that has to be part of it as well, so that the children have an empathy for other children, and it’s global and not just local things that they’re thinking about. It’s just widening it for us, and making it more worldwide, rather than just what’s happening in Renfrewshire.