

‘I would like to say that things must just get better’: Young citizens from England, Kyrgyzstan and South Africa speak out.

By Cathie Holden, University of Exeter,
Rahat Joldoshalieva, Aga Khan University,
Duishon Shamatov, University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.



Cathie is Associate Professor and Head of Initial Teacher Education in the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter. Her research interests include education for citizenship, with particular reference to the views of children and young people about current global issues. She has researched the views of parents on education for citizenship and the teaching

of controversial issues and is particularly concerned to support practitioners who teach about these issues in the classroom.

Cathie will be one of the keynote speakers at the forthcoming SEAA conference in Adelaide in February 2010.

Children’s concerns: an International Study

What is it that concerns children growing up in the 21st century? How do they see the future? Are their concerns a reflection of events in their local communities or are there some hopes and fears which are constant to young people across the globe? The comparative study reported on here offers a unique opportunity to hear from children in

six very diverse countries about key issues affecting their lives and the extent to which they feel informed and prepared for active citizenship.

Images of the future: personal, local, global

People’s hopes and fears for the future influence what they are prepared to do in the present and what they are prepared to work towards. Hicks (2002) and others have suggested that images of the future are a critical measure of a society’s inner well being, acting as a mirror of our times. Ascertaining the views of young people towards the future thus serves as an indicator of their current concerns, beliefs and actions and as well as indicating the role they see for themselves as future citizens.

In studying children’s hopes and fears for the future, we need to understand their personal hopes as well as what they feel about key issues affecting all our lives. These key issues – identified in this study as poverty, environment, conflict, racism and health - relate both to local and global communities. The belief that young people should understand such issues is central to the revised Citizenship Education curriculum for England (2007, QCA) and underpins the requirement that schools should include a ‘global dimension’ (DfES, 2005). These initiatives reflect international concerns about how to educate young people effectively for global citizenship in the light of declining political engagement and social cohesion (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman 2001). This research on children’s hopes and fears thus includes a specific focus on global issues.

Previous research into European secondary pupils' concerns for the future revealed teenagers who were optimistic about their own future but feared an increase in unemployment, drugs and crime at a local level and poverty, overpopulation, war and environmental problems in the global community (Oscarsson, 1996; Rubin, 2002). Hutchinson (1996) also noted the sense of despondency and helplessness felt by many secondary students in Australia about the problems facing society.

Research conducted in 1994 (Hicks and Holden, 1995) explored the hopes and fears of UK pupils aged 7, 11, 14 and 18, making it possible to track the development of children's thinking. The study indicated that British children aged seven and eleven were less cynical and more optimistic than older pupils. Nonetheless, they showed an increasing awareness of social and environmental issues and were concerned that their local communities would be affected adversely by violence, unemployment and racism. Similar concerns were expressed at a global level, with children being particularly concerned about an increasing number of wars.

The initial study

The research carried out in 1994 (Hicks and Holden, op cit) was followed up ten years later with nine to eleven year olds in the UK (Holden, 2006). This UK study was then extended to ten countries across the world including Kyrgyzstan, South Africa, Spain, Korea and Pakistan. The study extended from 2004-2007. The research design was common to all countries as was the focus on children aged between nine and twelve. All children were given a questionnaire, which was translated as appropriate.

The first section asked children to write freely about their hopes and fears for their personal future, the future of the local area and the future of the world as there are often clear distinctions between these perspectives (Toffler, 1974). The open ended nature of the questions allowed for a variety of responses. Three closed questions asked if they thought life in the future would be better or worse for them personally, for those in their community and for 'people in the world as a whole'. The second section focussed on particular issues: unemployment, conflict, prejudice and racism, health, the environment and poverty, asking children if they thought that these issues would get better, stay the same or get worse in the future. The final section focussed on action for change, looking at what organisations children were involved in and what they had learnt about such issues at school.

This comparative study provides a unique opportunity to compare children's views from very different countries: new democracies, established democracies, countries which are relatively wealthy and countries where children witness poverty and violence daily. The study enables us to see which concerns are common to children wherever they live and which reflect local circumstances. It also provides a fascinating insight into which children are the most optimistic about the future and which feel engaged in working for change.

The study has implications for all involved in citizenship education: both for teachers wishing to understand children's thinking and for

policy makers wishing to ensure that the curriculum is effective in preparing young people for active citizenship in the 21st century.

International Study: England, Kyrgyzstan and South Africa

This section reports on findings from the international study into children's concerns for the future. We hear from children in England, a long established and relatively affluent democracy, children from Kyrgyzstan, a small landlocked country of five million in Central Asia, and children from, a country struggling to free itself from the yoke of apartheid and years of underdevelopment. The children speak about their hopes and fears for their personal, local and global futures, their views on key global issues, and action for change. The study allows us to see where children share common hopes and fears, regardless of circumstance, and where politics, poverty or the environment influences their thinking. It reveals interesting comparisons by gender and insights into the varying degrees of optimism felt by children about the future. In reporting from young people in such diverse countries, it brings new perspectives to the international literature on education for the future (Hicks 2002).

Setting the scene: the three countries

The English study was the first to be undertaken in 2004. The study in the other two countries took place over 2005-6. The findings are reported country by country for each section and then comparisons are made between each country. In order to contextualise the findings, a snapshot of each country is given below.

England

In 2004 the Labour party was in power with Tony Blair as prime minister. George Bush had just been re-elected as president of the USA and both countries were involved in an unpopular war with Iraq. Unemployment was running at 5% and one quarter of the population claimed to have been a victim of crime. (www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy) Whilst these figures were lower than they had



Grade 6 group, Rosebank Primary School, England

been for a decade, house prices were rising rapidly and the poor/rich divide was increasing. The Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) had legislated for positive action to aid integration of and respect for ethnic minority groups but there was much concern in the media over asylum seekers and refugees (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism>). Environmental issues were often in the news with many claiming that the flooding in Boscastle, a seaside village in Cornwall, was a direct result of climate change.

The schools

Schools were selected from a cross section of urban and rural environments and a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Two of the schools were inner city and multi-ethnic to ensure that the voices of both black British children and recently arrived migrants were heard. All the pupils were aged between nine and eleven.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan, officially the Kyrgyz Republic, is a small, landlocked and predominantly mountainous country of 5 million people in Central Asia, bordering China to the east, Tajikistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west and Kazakhstan to the north. It was previously one of the 15 union republics of the Soviet Union (USSR), but had its language officially recognised in 1989 and gained independence in 1991. It has since gained a reputation as a leader of democracy in Central Asia with its president's reforms being supported by the West. In March 2005, however, President Akaev was overthrown and fled to Russia, with Bakiev being elected president. The study was conducted soon after these events.

Despite independence, economic conditions remain harsh especially in rural areas. In 2001, a World Bank report indicated that 68 % of Kyrgyzstan's population lived on less than US\$ 7 a month and the average annual salary was US\$ 165. Mass migration to the towns has contributed to urban problems with law and order and drug abuse as well as shortages of housing, educational and health facilities. These conditions, and an increase in prostitution and HIV/Aids, have reduced life expectancy. In addition, poor nutrition, inadequate sewerage systems, poor sanitary conditions and chemicals widely used in agricultural fields have contributed to an increase in infectious diseases.



International health organisations such as Médecins Sans Frontières are now working in the area. Drug trafficking is a particular problem in Osh oblast (where the study was conducted), which lies on one of the major routes from Afghanistan through to Eastern Europe. Another cause for concern is the rise of Islamic extremism among disillusioned youth (Shamatov, 2005).

The schools

The study involved 100 children aged 11 to 12 from four schools in Osh oblast of Kyrgyzstan. These schools were selected to provide a balance of urban and rural environments and socio-economic backgrounds. Two of the schools were urban and multi-ethnic to ensure that the voices of ethnic groups were heard. One urban school was Russian-medium with children from Russian, Tatar, Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnic backgrounds. The other three schools were Kyrgyz-medium. One rural school was on the outskirts of Osh, while the other was in a mountain village about 150 kilometres away. The urban students were normally from better off families than rural school students. The questionnaire was translated into Kyrgyz and Russian.

South Africa

It is just over ten years since the first democratically elected government took office in South Africa. South Africa has been highly industrialised since the mid C20th, and its white population was among the wealthiest in the world. But after 50 years of apartheid the challenges are enormous. Despite improvements and a transformed political system, economic equality between the different ethnic groups is not yet reality, nor have the considerable efforts towards positive action compensated for years of inferior health, housing and education for the black communities. AIDS is decimating the black communities, and violence and crime affect everyone, though blacks are the main victims. Drug addiction is a serious problem, particularly among unemployed youth and older school pupils.

The schools

The three schools selected were in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Two of the three were formerly 'whites only' but now take children from the black townships as well as Indian and Coloured children and some whites. The third school is mainly Coloured (mixed heritage), but now admits a substantial minority of black children from the townships. Some of these children come from homes without parents (decimated by AIDS); many are surviving below the bread line, but some are part of the burgeoning black middle class of South Africa. The majority were reasonably proficient in English, though refugees (from Central Africa) and some township children were less fluent.

The findings

We have, then, children from three very different countries speaking about their concerns for the future. This comparative study seeks to find the commonalities and differences between the children and the extent to which what they think and fear is a reflection of events in their local communities. Inevitably only the 'headlines' can be reported in such a study. The findings from South Africa are discussed

in more depth in Claire (2006), the findings from England in Holden (2006) and the findings from Kyrgyzstan in Joldoshalieva and Shamatov (2007, 2008).

Children's hopes and fears for their personal futures

The following section looks first at children's hopes and fears for their personal futures, followed by their concerns for the future of their local and global communities with reference to key issues. A final section looks at action for change.

The personal future

Percentage of children mentioning these hopes.	England	Kyrgyzstan	South Africa
Employment/ a good job	79	100	64
Material possessions	60	28	48
Relationships (family, friends, partner)	53	37	51
Ambitions	39	49	59
Education	16	17	14

Table 1: Hopes for their personal futures

Across all three countries, the majority of children talked about getting a job with the Kyrgyz children all mentioning at least one job they aspired to, reflecting the high unemployment in the country at the current time. The English children mentioned sport, the professions and jobs in the arts (actor, singer), whereas the Kyrgyz children named teaching, medicine, politics and interpreting. The reference to interpreting reflects the recent rise in international companies in the country, and the realisation by children that this is a good well paid job. South African children also mentioned teaching and medicine as well as hoping for jobs in sports and business. Across all countries there was a gender divide: girls were more likely to aim for teaching and caring professions; boys were more likely to aspire to jobs related to sports and or 'a good job with lots of pay'. Material possessions were also mentioned much more often by boys than girls (houses, cars, 'lots of money') across all three countries although it is interesting that English children were more likely to aspire to material goods.

The importance of good relationships was also evident from their comments about having a partner, children and good friends. Even though the Kyrgyz children appeared to mention family and friends less often, it was evident from their comments that many were very concerned to meet the expectations of their parents. Personal ambitions relate to all comments on things children wanted to do in the future such as travel and have

holidays (England), have a better life (SA) and be happy and 'serve my country' (Kyrgyzstan).

When asked about their fears for their personal future, the children answered as with one voice: they feared what might happen if they were not successful (no job, homelessness), failure in their relationships and 'bad things' happening to their families (divorce, illness). They also feared being a victim (mugged, raped) and ill health.

In summary it would appear that children from all three countries aspire to a traditional future. Whether they are growing up in relative comfort or living in circumstances of great disadvantage and uncertainty their hopes seem sensible rather than fanciful. They want success in their jobs, in their relationships and to a lesser extent material success.

Concerns for the future of the local community

Percentage of children mentioning these concerns	England	South Africa	Kyrgyzstan
Crime and violence	76	78	35
Environment	32	14	6
Community issues	21	15	4
Poverty	15	15	9
Ill health	13	24	57
Disasters	7	1	100
Politics	0	5	0
Local conflict/instability	0	0	57

Table 2: concerns for the local community

It is here that we begin to see sharp contrasts between the children, reflecting the communities in which they live. Both English and

The contrast with the Kyrgyz children is stark. Whilst one third worried about crime and violence it was disasters, local conflict and health issues which concerned them most. All of the children feared some kind of natural disaster, most commonly floods, earthquakes and landslides.

South African (SA) children were very concerned about crime and violence in their communities, even though the contexts in which they live may be very different. Reflecting both sensationalist media reporting and personal experience, the SA children worried about being attacked, mugged and raped and were frightened of 'gangsters' and people with guns. The English children had similar fears but also mentioned terrorism (being bombed), and vandalism. The second area of greatest concern for the SA children was health: they mentioned

drug addiction, drink problems and the rise in HIV/Aids. By contrast the English children's next layer of concern was around the environment where they talked about the dangers of increased pollution from cars and factories, more litter and the loss of countryside.

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issues which concerned them most. All of the children feared some kind of natural disaster, most commonly floods, earthquakes and landslides. Their teacher commented: 'earthquakes were registered in several seasons this year in southern Kyrgyzstan and children may have heard of the earthquake in Pakistan'. As a mountainous region, both floods and landslides are a real possibility. Concerns about local conflict and instability relate to fears of revolution or invasions. The teacher explained that 'children related to the recent March revolution in Kyrgyzstan to overthrow the president and fear revolution and war in Kyrgyzstan...Due to political instability after the revolution . . . children also fear conflicts between the MPs.' Over half the children had worries about health issues, citing 'diseases', drug addiction, anthrax and Aids. When talking about what they would like in their local area in the future, these children said they wanted more jobs, more factories and to maintain their language and identity.

Optimism about the future of the local community

The children were asked whether they thought certain key issues would worsen, stay the same or improve in their local area. Without exception, the English children were the least optimistic, fearing that levels of violence, poverty, unemployment, ill health, racism along with environmental problems would get worse or stay the same. They were particularly pessimistic about the environment. Kyrgyz and South African children were much more optimistic about the future for their local community, with the former being particularly hopeful that health issues would improve and the latter being very optimistic about an improvement in race relations. This appears to reflect the historical context they are growing up in, with the horrors of apartheid fresh in adult minds.

When asked to say more in interview, the English children focussed on crime and violence. One who was optimistic that there would be less violence explained that 'in the old days there was quite a lot of violence and it's been decreasing ever since' whereas those who feared more violence mentioned guns, gangs and 'terrorists'. There was recognition by some children of a widening rich/poor divide. One child commented that 'more people are getting richer like famous people and stuff but more people are getting poorer'. An area of particular concern was house prices. 'There's people in homeless homes and hostels' said one, 'because the house prices have gone right up so they're not able to have a house'. Compared to their attitudes to the other key areas, the English children were relatively optimistic about race relations. Whilst half still thought attitudes would stay the same, a third thought there would be less prejudice and racism. Those who were optimistic based this on improved relations, with 'Muslims and white people getting

along with each other. . . becoming partners, workmates, husbands and wives'. They cited children from ethnic minorities in their class whom they accepted and said that 'most people are getting used to it' (a multi-ethnic society). Other children, however, spoke about the difficulties some new ethnic minority children faced in their schools, and children from a rural school thought there would be more violence and racism if 'people from different races' came to their area,.

The South African children were generally optimistic that the future would be better for their local community despite talking at length about the problems in their country. One who was optimistic that there would be less racism in the future explained that 'the black people are now getting more than the white or coloured people . . . more black people are getting in to the colleges'. The children's discussion about what the government should do reflected their understanding of community issues. One explained that he was optimistic about change because of the government's efforts to solve the housing problem. However, another disagreed, citing a family in a shack with nine children and saying that 'the government needs to step in more and like rule our country properly instead of just letting everybody just do what they want'. Other discussions around health issues showed that these children were very aware of the high incidence of rape, unwanted pregnancy and HIV/Aids. They talked about both men and women with HIV who 'think that there's nothing in their lives, they just mess it up and like they go sleeping around and not using condoms'. Another

illustrated her understanding of the cyclical nature of deprivation and of the pressing need for change:

The people must stop drinking and they must look after their children and the young, the teenagers are also drinking and they also fall pregnant and they don't do abortion and they keep their children and they also drink as well and the children are, they're not wealthy and they also get violent and they also get killed and then . . . at night the gangsters will come and shoot them and I would like to say that things must just better and they must stop.

...it would appear that children of this age are well aware of the problems facing their local communities and have much to say about what should be done. They gain their information from those around them, the media and internet, but are sometimes misinformed and need to know more.

The children in Kyrgyzstan were, like the South African children, optimistic (or possibly wishful thinkers) about the future despite the poverty and health problems in their country. Many mentioned Bakiev, the president, who 'promised that life will improve' and 'will make life better'. There were many negative comments about Akaev, the former president, and the damage he had done and one child warned that 'if people get poor in Bakiev's rule they will remove him and put another one (president)'. They said they gained their information about politics from TV and the internet. Two children talked about how countries would help each other in the future, with the first child's comment on water reflecting its increasing scarcity:

Child 1: Kyrgyzstan will provide water. Uzbekistan will give gas and cotton to us.



Kyrgyz school children

Child 2: The world will help each other. Kazakhstan will give salt to Kyrgyzstan. We are also getting iron from Kazakhstan. China is also giving other things.

There was a great sense of optimism with one stating that ‘Kyrgyzstan will improve’, another claiming ‘there will be jobs for people’ and a third saying ‘big houses will be constructed’. Some children were even optimistic that there might be fewer natural disasters in the future when people were more educated and understood the reasons.

On the other hand, some problems appear to be universal. One child said that the rise in health problems was due to ‘people coming from different countries who are bringing diseases’ and two children from minority groups (Uzbek and Russian) talked about being bullied and told to ‘go home’.

In summary it would appear that children of this age are well aware of the problems facing their local communities and have much to say about what should be done. They gain their information from those around them, the media and internet, but are sometimes misinformed and need to know more. The English children, living in the most affluent conditions are the least optimistic that conditions will improve, whereas those living in poorer circumstances have the greatest hopes. Children in all countries are cognisant of the efforts of politicians to bring about change but it is the Kyrgyz children who have the most faith in their new president. Some problems seem universal, namely blaming immigrants for a variety of problems and marginalisation of minority groups.

Concerns for the future of the global community

Percentage of children mentioning these concerns	England	South Africa	Kyrgyzstan
War and conflict	61	36	41
Disasters	33	19	83
Environmental concerns	31	20	11
Poverty	14	16	6
Violence and crime	12	40	37

Health	10	17	44
Politics	3	1	0
Relationships	0	0	17

Table 3: concerns for the global community

In the UK, nearly two thirds of children cited concerns about global conflict, followed by fears relating to environmental issues and an increase in natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornados, meteorites and flooding. References to global poverty included concerns about a lack of jobs, overcrowding or overpopulation. A small group of eleven year olds worried about bad governments, the actions of Bush and Blair and ‘Muslim terrorists’. The SA children were concerned equally about global conflict and an increase in crime and violence, citing wars in general, gun crime, terrorism and rape as examples. Concerns for the environment were similar to the English children and focussed on global warming, pollution and the extinction of animals.

Reflecting their concerns for the local area, Kyrgyz children were most worried about natural disasters. After this, their fears centred on an increase in global conflicts and crime and violence. They were the most likely of the three groups to mention concerns about health, reflecting the health related issues in their own communities. The emergence of relationships as a category refers to the large number of children (nearly one in five) who talked about a lack of friendship or unity between nations.

Both South African and Kyrgyz children were much more optimistic than English children about the global future, with the latter being particularly hopeful about improvements in health and the alleviation of poverty.

Optimism about the future for the global community

As with the local area the children were asked whether they thought certain key issues would worsen, stay the same or improve. Once again the English children were the least optimistic, fearing that levels of violence, poverty, ill health and racism along with environmental problems would get worse or stay the same. They were again particularly pessimistic about the environment. Both SA and Kyrgyz children were much more optimistic than English children about the global future, with the latter being particularly hopeful about improvements in health and the alleviation of poverty.

The interviews revealed the extent to which children based their understanding of global issues on what was happening in or near their own country. English children talked about an escalation of global conflict through the war in Iraq or the war on terrorism, whilst the Kyrgyz children mentioned problems with Russia and the Ukraine over gas pipelines. Two Kyrgyz children discussed how global events influenced them:

Child 1: There is less oil; everything is getting more expensive. Americans entered Iraq because of oil.

Child 2: Yes. Things are so expensive. For example, potatoes are 20 soms¹ per kg which was 5 soms last year. Sugar was 24 soms but now it is more than 35 soms.

SA children in the following exchange also made local-global links as they tried to make sense of complex global issues:

Child 1: Mugabe is building what he likes and I'm not sure if it'll get better. They shouldn't take people's houses without building new ones.

Child 2: ...He is not thinking about others' lives. Children don't have food and houses and they're dying of hunger. In other places there's lots of violence.

Child 3: They blame us Muslims because of the war in Iraq. They say we did the London bombs. America has oil, it shouldn't take the oil from Iraq.

Child 4: People are bombing cities and some people lie – they say you'll go to heaven if you commit suicide. Some people still kidnap children for a ransom. But they kill the children. This happened in South Africa.

Children's opinions about whether health would improve globally also reflected what was happening in their own country. Children in the UK hoped that there would be less smoking, less obesity and drug abuse and 'more cures' for cancer and 'better medicines'. The SA children talked about drug addiction, pregnancy and HIV/Aids whilst Kyrgyz children mentioned bird flu, tuberculosis and cancer.

There was evidence that children based their opinions on information from both the media and what they had learnt at school. Kyrgyz children, for example, talked about the global impact of people cutting trees 'to make sumölök'² which they had learnt about in nature studies and cited TV as a source for their information on what Bakiev was doing to help their country re-gain disputed land from their neighbours.

In summary, it would appear that children have some understanding of global issues, especially as they affect their own country. All are concerned about an increase in global conflict but local conditions and the national media influence the degree of concern about other issues, e.g. environmental problems, disasters or violence and crime. Once again the children living in poorer circumstances are the most optimistic.

1 Som is the Kyrgyz national currency introduced in 1993. 1 US dollar was approximately equal to 40 som in 2005, and now it is equal to 35 som.

2 Sumölök is a national food made of wheat cooked collectively during Spring celebrations. Community members normally cook it throughout night of March 20th and this is accompanied by other festivities such as games, songs, dances and competitions.

Action for change

The majority of children from all three countries felt they could do a lot or a little to help make their community and the world a better place. The children from Kyrgyzstan were the most positive, followed by the SA children and then the English children. However when questioned on what they had actually done in terms of action, the Kyrgyz children did not appear to be involved in any organisations working for change but had rather taking small scale actions at a personal level or promoted by the school. They cited performing a concert for their mothers, taking part in Victory Day for veterans, helping at an orphanage and picking up litter.

One quarter of the SA children said they belonged to organisations working for change. These included the church and mosque along with RSPCA, Greenpeace, Mandela's Children Fund and taking part in the World Harmony run. They also took action themselves on environmental issues (saving energy, recycling, picking up litter) and were helpful to people. They said they had covered some of these issues at school, for example global warming, health issues and water use.

By contrast the English children who were the least optimistic about their ability to make a difference were the most likely to have been involved with organisations working for change.

Half of the children named work they

had done (mainly in school) with Comic Relief, Children in Need, Oxfam, the RSPCA and WWF for children amongst others. They were also active at a personal level and talked about recycling, saving energy, picking up litter, raising money for charities, being kind and helpful and walking or cycling to school. They had covered many of these issues at school, including global warming, rainforests, energy and learning about other cultures.

We have then, a situation where the optimism of the Kyrgyz children throughout the study is reflected in their belief that they can make a difference and yet they appear to be the least active as global citizens. Some of the SA children indicate that they are active in working for change and many can name global issues they have learnt about at school. The English children, the least optimistic about their ability to make a difference, nonetheless appear to have the most globally informed curriculum and to be the most active in terms of working for change.

Implications for Educators

This study set out to explore how children from three very different countries see the future. It has revealed both differences and commonalities and raises a number of issues for educators.

First, it is apparent that all of the children have very real concerns for their own, the local and the global futures. Their aspirations for their personal futures have much in common, despite their very different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. They aspire to success in their jobs and relationships, with boys in general and English children in particular being more likely to mention material success. Concerns for the future of the local community are much more diverse and reflect local circumstances, such as health related problems or crime and violence. They indicate the extent to which children are immersed in their communities, aware of the problems and mindful of the changes needed to bring about better living conditions. Concerns for the global future also reflect local concerns as children worry about conflicts on their doorstep. The ability of all the children to comment on global issues also illustrates the rise of information technology: even those in the remotest and poorest areas referred to the internet and TV.

Second, it is apparent that optimism about the future is not related to personal socio-economic circumstances. The children living in Kyrgyzstan were the most optimistic, followed by the SA children, despite the poverty, drug-related and health problems in both countries. Many of the Kyrgyz children pinned their hopes in their new president to bring about change; a noticeable contrast to the English children who had little faith in the abilities of Blair and Bush to end conflict in Iraq. Children in SA were noticeably optimistic about an improvement in race relations but like the English children were often sceptical about the role of politicians. Neither does optimism about the future relate to what has been done in school or action taken for change. The English children appeared to be the most active but again were the least optimistic. It could be that they are more realistic about the possibilities of change, reflecting the attitudes of many adults in our long established democracy who do not vote because 'there is no point' (Crick, 2000). Alternatively it may be that in very harsh circumstances one's instincts are to be optimistic in order to survive. In other words, for the Kyrgyz and SA children, all they can do is hope that things will get better.

Third, there are implications for educators. The very real concerns of children for the local and global future and the confusion exhibited by many as they tried to make sense of complex issues indicates the need for such issues to be explored in school. Children need to be taught how to look critically at the media (including the internet), divorce myth from fact, challenge stereotypes and reach informed decisions. Furthermore the desire of all children to make a difference indicates the importance of education for active global citizenship. Whilst some schools seem good at involving children in initiatives or activities around change, there is a real need for sustained action which arises from the children's own concerns. If these children are to grow up to become empowered and responsible citizens, it will be because they have learned and practised these skills in school (Hicks and Holden, 1995). If we do not provide such educational opportunities, there is every danger that they will turn into the pessimistic adolescents of previous surveys and, what may be worse, disaffected and disillusioned adults. In the words of two eleven year old boys:

It's important 'cause otherwise you can't do anything about it.

Say we didn't know anything about wars. . . , then, like he says, it's your future and you wouldn't know what to do or how to handle it.

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Correspondence: Cathie Holden, University of Exeter, EX1 2LU, UK. c.e.holden@ex.ac.uk