

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Swansea University
Unit of Assessment: 21 - Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Military literacy in an age of terror: influencing educational organisations and publishing stakeholders in the provision of curricula and texts for children on global politics
1. Summary of the impact

Dr Brocklehurst's research has provided a challenge to conventional wisdom on the school age teaching of global politics through critiques of approaches that under-estimate children as political bodies. Her research has subsequently influenced a global provider of education, the International Baccalaureate organisation, in the planning of a service, namely a new Global Politics curriculum. Her research has also stimulated practitioner debate among stakeholders in the publication and provision of global politics texts for children to review them for risks posed by bias, inaccuracies, insensitivity and militarism. Her research has provided resources to enhance professional practice among stakeholders to help them to interpret problems in existing texts, and her research has led to her delivering training for stakeholders and teachers. Her research has also changed practice among stakeholders towards the adoption of a review culture to identify problems and improve children's literature in these sensitive subject areas.

2. Underpinning research

Dr Brocklehurst's research is concerned with International Relations (IR) and the nature of its engagement with children and childhood. She was the instigator of this research area and since joining Swansea University in June 2001 as an ESRC Research Officer, and subsequently Lecturer in International Relations, she has been credited with establishing a new sub-field in IR and in Security Studies. Her monograph: *Who's afraid of children? Children, Conflict and International Relations* (R2) argues that concepts of children are premised on a notion of childhood as an experience which has or should have little in common with the political – and that the discipline of IR has itself exhibited a problematic and unparalleled disengagement with childhood. Such 'fear', disruption and denial of a meaningful place for children in the adult-centric study of IR, ultimately masks and distorts children's many roles as complex consumers of international politics. Children apparently protected 'from politics' are also potentially denied recognition as 'political bodies' and left ill equipped to think critically about the world they are in. Consequently apparently child-friendly societies can side-line children, sending mixed messages about their contribution as future citizens and as spectators, consumers and ultimately stabilisers of war.

For over a decade she has commented upon societal and disciplinary challenges to the uncovering of 'political children' and childhoods, and explored children's relationship to, and representation within, war (R3). In an age of digitalised and increasingly militarised play and learning, she argues that failure to engage young people (with attendant capacity for reasoning in cognate fields) in the mechanics of IR and the meaning of power, infantilises them (R2) and leaves their potentialities as citizens and persons underdeveloped.

From 2001 to 2003, and in 2005, she participated in ESRC-funded research on identity, school textbooks and History in the UK, drawing attention to the challenges of interpreting and evidencing the 'national' dimension of school curricula (R1). Since 2008 her research has focused on young consumers of global politics and the production and circulation of literature on war and terrorism intended for juveniles (aged 3 to 18). Her most recent work demonstrates how a weak bridge between the academy of IR and the world of children is particularly problematic in the education sector. Brocklehurst found that a new genre (R4) of 'generic' books on war, terrorism, 'the war on terror' and extremism were being published and sold to school book sellers, public libraries and purchasable online. This significant body of informational – albeit often also simplified and sensationalist literature – attracts virtually no research interest and can pass below the radar of parents, teachers and public bodies in the UK. A pioneering study on extremism and citizenship education in the USA and UK also noted that even (formal) curriculum '*textbooks seem on the periphery of developing substantive lesson plans around September 11th*' (Geruluk, 2011) – highlighting the risks posed by the significant growth of 'trade' texts in the last decade.

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In 2011 Dr Brocklehurst used University funding and sabbatical leave (G1) in a project, *'From citizenship to security: Military literacy and young people'*, to support the purchase and research of an archive of several hundred children's books on terrorism published after 2001, investigating their narrative and pictorial content, sales and availability. Although some texts were commendable, many were replete with historical and political inaccuracies or simplifications and problematic articulations of the role of religion, Islam and Jihad. Although texts also varied widely in terms of approach and content - narratives of fear, fatalism, and difference are common – seemingly drawing on the tradition of 'realism' in IR. Contrasting 'liberal' or institutional dynamics of global politics are rarely cited (R4) – an imbalance which fosters children's perception of a hostile and hopeless world. A related major finding was that texts were not subject to any reviews and receive almost no attention – which is itself typical of effective 'militarisation'.

In her research Brocklehurst found that librarians and teachers typically select texts without confidence whilst publishers obscure and lower reading ages to generate more sales. Particular texts may be marketed to young boys in response to their literacy needs and children can currently browse such texts independently of adults in many children's libraries. More generally Brocklehurst established that there is little agreement about the place of 'war' or politics in the official curriculum and that subject guidance could be poor, for example, weak Wikipedia extracts on terrorism and extremism in a leading award body's (OCR) *GCSE Religious Studies Resource Guide*.

From 2008 her research was presented to five UK and overseas audiences before being submitted for publication in 2010. These included:

- 2009, February 11, Invited Paper "'A is for Anarchy: B is for Bomb": Childhood, Gender and International Relations', University of St Andrews, School of International Relations
- 2008, November 13-14, Invited Paper 'Education and the war on terror' in 'Securing Identities and Lives: Post 9/11 Gender Challenges' ESRC Research Seminar Series, University of Leicester.
- 2008, October 16 – 19, Invited, funded participant and presenter: 'Unquestioned Answers: Education in a Divided Society', for Ninth Berlin Roundtables on Transnationality on 'Civic Education in Divided Societies' Irmgard Coninx Foundation, Berlin.

3. References to the research

- R1. **Brocklehurst, H.**, and Phillips R., eds. *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, (Palgrave, 2004) ISBN: 978-1403912961
- R2. **Brocklehurst, H.**, *Who's afraid of children? Children, Conflict and International Relations*, (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006) ISBN: 0754641716.
- R3. **Brocklehurst, H.**, 'Childhood in Conflict: will the real child soldier please stand up?' In Gunning Jennifer, Holm, Soren and Kenway Ian, (eds.) *Ethics Law and Society, Volume 4* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2009). ISBN 0754676463
- R4. **Brocklehurst, H.**, 'Education and the war on terror: the early years', In M. Beier, ed. *The Militarization of Childhood: Beyond the Global South*, (Palgrave: New York, 2011) ISBN: 978-0-230-11576-7

Her research monograph R2 has been reviewed positively in 5 major journals:

- *'paves the way for future research on the interface between the volition–coercion axis in child recruitment and military participation'*; Podder, S., Review Essay: Doctrinal Challenges, Nation Building, Terror Tactics and the Power of the Child: A Tale of Three 'Sites', *Strategic Analysis*, 32, 1, January 2008
- *'poses important challenges to the academic field of International Relations'*, Christine Sylvester, Book Review, *Feminist Theory*, August 2008, 9: 253-255;
- *'the entry of childhood studies into the scholarly domain of IR'*, Kynsilehto, A., Review Essay: Problematizing Relations Between Children and Politics, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 2007, 42,3

G1. *'From citizenship to security: Military literacy and young people'*, Research Institute for Arts and Humanities (RIAH), Swansea University, £5000, PI: Brocklehurst, H., Awarded 2011.

4. Details of the impact

a) The development of the new IB Diploma Programme course:

Dr Brocklehurst's analysis of children's exposure to educational materials on war and terrorism and call for greater attention to their critical literacy has secured and informed her three-year contribution as external Curriculum Developer for the International Baccalaureate Organisation. In October 2009, Dr Brocklehurst was invited to participate in a multidisciplinary, international working group, developing a course for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme. The IB very rarely designs new courses but was responding to growing interest in current affairs and considering the revision of small specialist courses, including IR and Peace and Conflict studies, or the design of a new model to replace these.

In the first session of this process, chaired by the Curriculum Leader for Humanities, Social Sciences and the Arts (C1), she gave examples of her research on children's informal consumption of global politics and war (R4) and the risks of not encouraging their critical capacities given their exposure to partial accounts of power. She made the case for planning a global curriculum that was sensitive to children as political stakeholders and exposed, but did not privilege, the discipline of IR (R2). She was subsequently invited to participate fully in the development of the syllabus, and assessment models as a paid Curriculum Developer, including attendance at six, three-day, closed meetings over three years. Dr Brocklehurst framed 'global politics' as a useful overarching framework and emphasised the need for sensitivity in the way in which key concepts (such as power or cooperation) were positioned and weighted throughout the drafting process. A testimonial on this contribution (C1) states that Dr Brocklehurst was '*instrumental in helping shape the structure of the IB course, supporting the location of 'power' and 'IR' as compulsory core elements, within a context of critical thinking skills*'. The current IB Curriculum manager (C2) has stated that:

'Dr. Brocklehurst's expertise, academic background and enthusiasm have meant that she has been able to make a really significant contribution to the development of the new IB Diploma Programme global politics course – a course which will ultimately be offered to schools in over 140 countries around the world. She has been able to advise us on the importance of including elements of IR such as peace and cooperation in the course rather than it focusing primarily on conflict, and has continually emphasised the importance of developing a broad balanced course which develops student's critical thinking'

A fellow curriculum designer (C3) and teacher of International Relations in IB schools stated that she had an '*invaluable role in, and contribution to, the curriculum development phase*' and that '*her teaching and research interests in the situating of war/IR has been evident throughout her participation in this project*'. Dr Brocklehurst was the only consultant external to the IB, and the only academic in International Relations during the drafting process. She is now an External Examiner to the IB until 2015. The finalised pilot was first taught in 17 schools worldwide from 2012 and from 2015 the Global Politics Diploma will be available in 3294 schools worldwide and eventually taken by an estimated 20,000 children each year.

b) The development of best practice guidance and contribution to Continuing Professional Development on the teaching of sensitive issues in global politics:

In her research on children's books Brocklehurst has made clear how the absence of oversight or critical reflection in education sectors is symptomatic of the problematic relationship between children and politics and with International Relations in particular (R2). Her research has greater urgency however in recognising and addressing how sensitive topics such as terrorism can be better resourced for children both inside and outside the formal curriculum.

The book archive was critical in allowing UK stakeholders, to see the extent of this challenge. In a workshop, *Non-fiction? Children's book, military literacy and the war on terror*, held in Swansea in July 2011, she effectively challenged the conventional wisdom that educational organisations provide sufficient protection for children in this sensitive area. The workshop provided an opportunity to widen the reach of the research to Subject Associations – including RE, Citizenship and History and to teachers and librarians. At this event an author of the only review of textbooks in a cognate area – a government report entitled, *Materials used to Teach about World Religions in*

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Schools in England (2010) DCSF-RR197, observed that they had been powerless to expose texts identified as problematic and that their own audit had overlooked books in the archive which covered fundamentalism and extremism. Prior to the workshop the invited UK Publishers Association also shared their concern over less robust 'texts'. Stakeholders agreed to raise awareness of the harms associated with poor quality material and address it through training or critical engagement. National organisations such as the School Library Service and History Association committed themselves to increasing reviews of non-fiction and observed that they needed such partnerships to shed light on how they were contributing to children's vulnerability to partial accounts or insensitive offensive narratives and images. The School Library Association Reviews editor (C4) said that the workshop was:

'brilliantly informative, raised crucial issues, offered practical developmental possibilities and it was all so well prepared and resourced....Your subject is so important and the potential for creating informed and balanced teaching and educational awareness is a very welcome aspect of research and exploration.....Teachers / librarians / educationalists are indeed very uncertain of how to approach such sensitive and politically charged issues and need, really do need, the confidence of informed advice as well as information on recommended resources'.

Brocklehurst has stimulated debate within organisations and created resources to underpin her partnership with them. She provided a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) session on 'Military literacy and the challenges of teaching contemporary conflict' at the Historical Association annual conference in 2012. The CPD manager (C5) subsequently solicited her future participation and resources, noting that her 'work on terrorism texts has a ready audience and will provoke both thought and action in the classroom'. In response Brocklehurst circulated documents, authored by her, on best practice in teaching and writing on sensitive topics in global politics – including the military recruitment of children (R3). These provided resources, guidelines and reflective exercises for children and teachers and guidelines for authors and commissioning editors (pre-production). It was anticipated that widespread adoption of guidance in these documents could in time pave the way for creating a jointly authored 'code of conduct', endorsed by a number of professional and subject associations.

Brocklehurst's claim that these broader relationships need to be engaged with, and bridges built between Politics' professional bodies and educational providers, was endorsed by the National Union of Students in Wales. She was identified as a key thinker in the empowerment of children and was one of four consultants recently invited in June 2013 to contribute to their formulation of strategy. The President (C6) stated: *'Helen led a session at one of our 'Imagine Education' Commissions; the content was absolutely thought provoking and has influenced our thinking and focus of work.'* The book archive was updated up to 2013, and stored as a University Callaghan research centre resource, allowing teachers and educationalists to explore these texts for themselves. This forms the continuing basis for the research to engage multiple stakeholders across the UK to contribute to a better formulation of global politics for children and young people with consequent societal impacts and benefits.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. Former Curriculum Manager IB Humanities, Social Sciences and the Arts; Subject Officer, Welsh Joint Education Committee, 245 Western Avenue, Cardiff, CF5 2YX

C2. Curriculum Manager- Philosophy, History and Global Politics, International Baccalaureate, Churchillplein 6, 2517 JW, Den Haag, Nederland

C3. IB Coordinator, International School of Nice, 15 Avenue Claude Debussy, 06200, Nice, France

C4. Review Editor, School Library Association, 1 Pine Court, Kembrey Park, Swindon, SN2 8AD

C5. CPD Manager The Historical Association, 59a Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4JH

C6. President, NUS Wales, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL