

Just Living, a secondary school resource pack to help young people develop a rights-based approach to economic well-being, UNICEF 2011

This is an article cum review and has merits in both guises. For teachers dealing with economic well-being or who are involved with PSHE or citizenship programmes, this resource may prove to be a useful addition to the resource library.

It is supported by Barclays and available as a free hard copy in very limited quantities and as a free download from <http://www.unicef.org.uk/justliving>

Just Living is a 69 page A4 spiral bound book, with an additional fifty resource sheets included along with a DVD holding electronic versions of the resource sheets, PowerPoint presentations and six video clips. The UNICEF website describes it thus:

'An exciting, new secondary school teaching resource to support the teaching of Citizenship and PSHE. Based on Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the right to a decent standard of living – this thought provoking resource explores global citizenship and economic well-being.'
<http://www.unicef.org.uk/justliving>

As such, it represents a substantial and distinctive addition to the resources available for this, all too often, neglected area of the curriculum. As OFSTED commented in July 2010:

'Nearly all the secondary schools visited in the final two years of the (PSHE) survey were aware of the new programme of study for economic well-being and financial capability. However, the early evidence from the survey suggested continuing issues of concern in this area, with the provision for financial capability weaker than that for enterprise or careers education.'

OFSTED, 2010 p3.

In addition, being free to download, *Just Living* becomes both more accessible and more flexible in use with obvious possibilities for linking it into school intranets and virtual learning environments. The resource is divided into six units. Each is set out



as a fifty-minute session, linked to Citizenship and PSHE learning outcomes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Units

- Unit 1: Global Citizens and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Unit 2: Surviving and thriving: Article 27 – the right to a decent standard of living
- Unit 3: Work, money and YOU
- Unit 4: Caroline's story (the perspective of a 17 year old from São Paulo, Brazil)
- Unit 5: Challenging poverty
- Unit 6: Entrepreneurship and economic well-being



Appendices provide a more detailed overview, a curriculum mapping against learning outcomes, ideas for further study, assessment and links to additional resources.

Approach and benefits

So how does such an apparently attractive, free good look on closer inspection?

First, be aware that this is no shrinking violet of a resource. *Just Living* avoids the (all too often spurious) neutrality claimed by many PSHE/Citizenship resources. Instead, it wears its heart on its sleeve. The values and principles embodied in the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child are threaded through every aspect of the package. This conjunction of the economic with the UN values and principles seems to me an excellent way of illustrating the value-laden nature of all economic contexts and the potential of economic thinking to identify and to work through alternatives in the light of these values. Making the assumed and unspoken in economic contexts explicit and contestable is, surely, what we are all trying to help our students do with their Economics and Business learning. There is a danger in such a values led approach, of course; are students allowed to contest the UN values as well as those of other perspectives and practices? *Just Living* has recognised this and makes overt demands on students to do just that. In Unit 2, for instance, the whole notion of what we mean by a 'decent standard of living' is for them to debate and question.

Second, there is also a strong feeling of gritty realism through the materials that will engage learners and help teachers motivate them to think through the different scenarios. Unit 3 includes the Cost of a Big Mac while Unit 4, Caroline's Story, uses video clips to provide realistic and thought-provoking contexts for students to think through.

Third, the learning questions in each Unit are purposeful and help to avoid the over-reliance on the government-devised learning outcomes from Citizenship and PSHE. The design of the activities shows originality and a lively appreciation of the need for us, as teachers, to draw on students' own ideas and experiences as the basis for helping them to learn. The resource also appreciates the hard-pressed nature of many teachers' working lives and so identifies practical and effective classroom strategies such as speed debating, used in Unit 3, to help us plan quickly and effectively for learning.

Fourth, the overall quality of the resources is generally excellent. There are fifty resource sheets in the appendices to supplement the video clips and PowerPoints and, together, these provide numerous opportunities for use across the curriculum in a variety of subject areas, not just in PSHE/Citizenship.

Downsides

So what are the downsides to this, seemingly, very attractive resource pack?

First, *Just Living* is a large package, in hard copy or electronically. Certainly, it is available online, but that version is, essentially, a PDF of the paper version plus the disk materials. It is a paper resource pack on the Internet. Does this paper-based layout make it sufficiently navigable to a hard-pressed teacher in school? Would a more fully web-based and more interactive approach have helped here? With web 2.0 technologies increasingly available, I wonder if an opportunity has been missed.

Second, the time allocations look tight. These are indicative and in, nominally, fifty-minute sessions. However, the more the Unit session plans are examined, the more demanding the timings look for the kinds of intended learning to take place. This is a



difficult dilemma for any author to resolve knowing, as we all do, the limited time often available for Citizenship and PSHE in most school timetables. However, perhaps a 'less is more' alternative might have been offered to those teachers facing more constrained situations with recommendations for core learning outcomes and associated use of the resources.

Third, how are we to regard the role of Barclays and global banking in supporting such a resource and will students be able to consider this issue? This is particularly important if the resource is used by non-specialist teachers. As the recent OFSTED report states:

'Many of the teachers deployed to deliver aspects of enterprise education were non-specialists, who had little or no training or experience of this area. This limited their confidence and ability to teach effectively. This was particularly the case in relation to economic and business understanding and financial capability for students in the secondary schools.'

OFSTED, 2011, p7.

The guidance for Unit 3G, 'choosing the right bank', identifies some significant learning questions, including that of 'responsible banking'. Are the Unit questions matched by opportunities for learners (and

teachers) to access valid and reliable evidence through which to approach the whole issue? John Varley, Barclays' Chief Executive, is quoted as stating: 'The success of a bank must not come at the expense of society'. Their support for this resource is to be commended. The capability to review, critically, the quotation above, however, should form a key outcome for any student working through *Just living*.

Fourth, the whole package has been developed with teachers and students. The guidance would be strengthened considerably by more direct reference to evidence of learners and teachers trialling each Unit, indicating how people had used them, the different contexts used, the kinds of learner response generated and how these were used to support learning.

Finally, the use of learning outcomes that only refer to PSHE/Citizenship is a little disappointing, especially given the uncertain nature of both areas in the policy thinking of the Coalition. The use of other learning outcomes would help teachers to think their way through the use of the materials more thoroughly. For instance, these might be Unit-specific but more useful would be the learning outcomes used by the trialling teachers, or the subject outcomes they used the materials to help learners achieve.

Notwithstanding these issues, *Just Living* is a really commendable initiative. It is free to download. The explicit linking of values to Economics with some opportunities to debate these is rare and all the more important for that. There are ample support materials, suggested activities and additional links to allow us as teachers working in a wide range of contexts to use them to good effect with students providing we allow some of the big issues to be discussed too, such as Barclays and the banks. The examples used will be, broadly, appealing and relevant to students.

Overall, therefore, *Just Living* is well worth looking at seriously. I would advise you to go to <http://www.unicef.org.uk/justliving> and see what you think.

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References

OFSTED 2011, *Economics, business and enterprise education, A summary of inspection evidence: April 2007 to March 2010*, London, OFSTED (Ref: 100086).

OFSTED, 2010, *Personal, social, health and economic education in schools*, London, OFSTED (Ref: 090222).

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