Critical literacy
Independent thinking
Global citizenship
Global issues and perspectives
Those of us who attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. We will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of our own obsessions, our aggressivity, our ego-centered ambitions and our delusions about ends and means. - Thomas Merton
1. **What is OSDE?**

OSDE stands for Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry. It is a methodology for the introduction of global issues and perspectives in educational contexts, such as teacher, adult, higher and secondary education.

The OSDE methodology is being developed by a group of educators and researchers in 8 countries. This initiative is hosted by the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice at the University of Nottingham.

2. **What are the expected learning outcomes of this methodology?**

The development of critical literacy and independent thinking are the central aims of this methodology - these are transferable skills that can help learners in every subject in school and beyond. This approach can support the delivery of the National Curriculum in the UK in a number of ways [e.g. the global dimension, PSHE, citizenship, thinking skills, etc.].

A curriculum for citizenship will be enquiry based, with students making connections between their own and others' experiences, learning to think critically about society and take action for social justice.

*citizED Statement on Citizenship Education*

3. **Why are critical literacy and independent thinking important?**

Learning to live together in a 'global', interdependent, diverse and unequal society involves the development of skills that can support learners to negotiate and cope with change, complexity, uncertainty and insecurity in different contexts.

Critical literacy helps learners analyse the relationships amongst language, power, social practices, identities and inequalities, to imagine 'otherwise', to engage ethically with difference and to understand the potential implications of their thoughts and actions. It leads to more responsible practices/action.

Independent thinking is the basis for innovation and change. It is a necessary safeguard against fundamentalisms, dogmatisms and even peer/context pressures as it empowers learners to have more autonomy in 'writing' their identities, cultures and histories. It leads to an increase in confidence and self-esteem.

The combination of critical literacy and independent thinking develops learners' capacity to learn, to analyse their contexts and to make better informed and accountable decisions.

4. **What else can the methodology do for my students?**

The evidence collected so far shows that OSDE can also help learners:

- to feel ownership and enjoyment in learning
- to appreciate and respect each other both for their differences and similarities
- to participate actively in their own intellectual development
- to develop self-control
- to develop tools to understand and deal with complex issues of their specific ages such as peer pressure and bullying
- to enhance their communicative skills [especially listening skills]
- to improve relationships in the classroom
- to use and develop different learning styles

5. **How is it different from other approaches for teaching about global issues?**

In OSDE, we propose a set of procedures and ground rules to create 'safe spaces for dialogue and enquiry' to enable learners to develop 'Critical Literacy' and independent thinking, and to learn to relate to one another in different ways.

This project is different because:

- we are allowed to disagree
- we can listen to one another
- I learned that what I say counts
- even the teacher does not know all the answers

*Students in Y7 in Nottingham*

As learners need the skills to address the complexity and contingency of global issues, OSDE proposes that they should be exposed to different perspectives and be supported in developing the ability to question and interpret assumptions [including their own] and to analyse implications of ideas/statements [where perspectives might be coming from and where they may lead to]. This is linked to a different level of reading [the word and the world] that we call 'Critical Literacy' [see page 6].

OSDE conceptual framework draws on different approaches coming from areas such as conflict resolution, intercultural awareness and participatory and critical education, as well as from disciplines such as critical theory, cultural studies, philosophy, politics and sociology.
This approach, I feel, genuinely values dialogue. It provides a context in which people can share perspectives. This is a very refreshing contrast to political discourse concerned as a battle of wills - with each side convinced of the rightness of its own position. An ‘open space’ encourages a conversation in which one is open to learn from others - one is not simply battling to get others to accept our existing perspective. This idea helps us to let go of dogmatic fixed views that can blind us to the perspectives of others.

J.D. - Teacher

6. What is a safe space for dialogue and enquiry?

It is a space where participants feel comfortable to express themselves and ask any question without feeling embarrassed or unintelligent. In order to create such a space, we propose:

1. the discussion and adoption of basic principles
2. a set of procedures for structuring an enquiry
3. facilitation guidelines for creating an appropriate ethos for the relationships and exchanges within the group.

7. What are the OSDE proposed principles?

The principles refer to the notion that [within the space] everyone knows different things in different ways according to their experiences, that all knowledge is partial and that all perspectives should be questioned. The principles should be varied according to each educational context (there are different versions available on the website). The following are examples of proposed ‘ground-rules’ for secondary and adult/teacher education respectively.

Secondary Schools:
- There should be a good atmosphere
- No one should feel left out
- No one should tell you what you should think.
- No one - even the teacher - has got all the answers
- Everyone should do their best in relation to the three key challenges: staying focused, thinking hard and working as a team

Adult/Teacher education:

1. That every individual brings to the space valid and legitimate knowledge constructed in their own contexts

We look at the world through lenses constructed in a complex web in our contexts, influenced by several external forces (cultures, media, religions, education, upbringing), internal forces (personality, reactions, conflicts) and encounters and relationships. The image these lenses project represent our knowledge of ourselves and of the world and therefore, whether they are close or far from what is considered ‘normal’, they have a history and their validity needs to be acknowledged within the space

2. That all knowledge is partial and incomplete

As our lenses are constructed in specific contexts, we lack the knowledge constructed in other contexts and therefore we need to listen to different perspectives in order to see/imagine beyond the boundaries of our own lenses

3. That all knowledge can be questioned

Critical engagement in the project is defined as the attempt to understand where perspectives are coming from and where they are leading to [origins and implications]. Therefore, questioning is not an attempt to break the lenses [to destroy or de-legitimise perspectives], but to sharpen and broaden the vision.
8. What are the OSDE procedures for enquiry?

The following are examples for secondary schools and adult/teacher education:

**Procedures for secondary schools:**
1. Looking at PERSPECTIVES: image, film, cartoon, song, story
2. Drawing or writing your FIRST THOUGHTS and sharing it
3. Making QUESTIONS in pairs
4. VOTING on a question
5. TALKING about it
6. SHARING what we have learned

**Procedures for adult/teacher education:**
1. Engagement with stimulus (prompting cognitive dissonance) & Airing of views - in pairs
2. Informed thinking - where to find out more
3. Reflexive questions - individually (related to own perspectives)
4. Open Space questions - in small groups (focus on different logics and power + origins and implications of perspectives)
5. Responsible choices - in small groups (decision making processes related to the theme)
6. Debriefing (reflection on learning process and quality of the space)

9. What are the guidelines for facilitation?

Effective facilitation is one of the greatest challenges in the creation of ‘safe’ spaces as teachers (now in the role of facilitators) need to relate to the students in a different way, model and encourage specific behaviours and create an ethos of trust, relative equality, respect for difference and critical engagement.

The effectiveness and ‘safety’ of the space depend on a number of factors. In order to engage in dialogue, participants need to be willing to listen, be aware of their own partiality, and to be ‘open to the other’ (ready to engage with difference at an equal level). For an enquiry to take place, there needs to be a willingness to question and to analyse assumptions and implications (especially those of common sense). In order to create safety, participants should be allowed to ‘disagree’ with each other and with the teacher/facilitator without being silenced or put down. For the methodology to work, there needs to be an ethos that emphasises reflexivity and a suspension of belief that any belief is universal (that everyone thinks or should think like us).

The facilitator is responsible for modelling behaviour, opening, holding and closing the time/space, guiding participants through the stages and, during discussions, playing the role of devil’s advocate, exploring different angles and moving the group away from consensus. Facilitators should avoid privileging or imposing their own perspectives (and this can be very difficult). Therefore, the training of facilitators in ‘critical literacy’ is extremely important.

More info:
www.osdemethodology.org.uk
OSDE methodology
Facilitation
10. How is critical literacy different from other forms of reading?

Critical literacy is based on the idea that language constructs reality and the lenses we use to make sense of the world, therefore it prompts students to unpack those lenses (their assumptions and how those are constructed) and their implications. The table below shows a representation of the differences between 3 types of reading in terms of questions prompted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Reading</th>
<th>Critical Reading</th>
<th>Critical Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of questions:</td>
<td>Types of questions:</td>
<td>Types of questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Does the text represent the truth?</td>
<td>☐ What is the context?</td>
<td>☐ What are the assumptions behind the statements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Is it fact or opinion?</td>
<td>☐ To whom is the text addressed?</td>
<td>☐ How does the author understand reality? What is shaping his/her understanding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Is it biased or neutral?</td>
<td>☐ What is the intention of the author?</td>
<td>☐ Who decides (what is real, can be known or needs to be done) in this context? In whose name and for whose benefit? What are the implications of these claims?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Is it well written/clear?</td>
<td>☐ What is the position of the author (his/her political agenda)?</td>
<td>☐ What are the sanctioned ignorances [blind spots] and contradictions of this perspective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Who is the author and what level of authority/legitimacy does he/she represent?</td>
<td>☐ What is the author trying to say and how is he/she trying to convince/manipulate the reader?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ What does the author say?</td>
<td>☐ What claims are not substantiated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus:</td>
<td>Focus:</td>
<td>Focus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content, authority and legitimacy of the speaker and the text.</td>
<td>Context, intentions, style of communication.</td>
<td>Assumptions, knowledge production, power, representation and implications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim:</td>
<td>Aim:</td>
<td>Aim:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop an understanding of the content and/or to establish the truth-value of the text.</td>
<td>To develop critical reflection (ability to perceive intentions and reasons).</td>
<td>To develop reflexivity (ability to perceive how assumptions are constructed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language:</td>
<td>Language:</td>
<td>Language:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is fixed, transparent and gives us access to reality.</td>
<td>Is fixed and translates reality.</td>
<td>Is ideological and constructs reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality:</td>
<td>Reality:</td>
<td>Reality:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exists and is easily accessed through sensory perceptions and objective thinking.</td>
<td>Exists and is accessible, but it is often translated into false representations.</td>
<td>Exists, but is inaccessible [in absolute terms] – we have only partial interpretations constructed in language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge:</td>
<td>Knowledge:</td>
<td>Knowledge:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal, cumulative, linear, right vs wrong, fact vs opinion, neutral vs biased.</td>
<td>False versus true interpretation of reality.</td>
<td>Always partial, context dependent (contingent), complex and dynamic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. What does OSDE want to achieve in the long term?

Our vision of the future is based on the concept of planetary citizenship. Four key dimensions of this vision are:
- the interdependence of all living things
- the idea of participatory democracy
- an ethical engagement with difference
- balancing ‘rights and justice’ with ‘care and responsibility’

More info:
www.osdemethodology.org.uk
OSDE methodology
Educational agenda

12. Where can I find examples of materials?

Free online activities for 16+, higher and teacher education can be found at:
- www.osdemethodology.org.uk
- sample units

Free online activities for secondary schools can be found at:
- www.osdemethodology.org.uk
- sample units
- secondary schools

13. What are the risks of using this methodology?

The methodology has been piloted in several educational settings with very positive outcomes, but there are no universal standard educational ‘recipes’ that can be 100% effective in every context. Creating the space for developing critical and independent thinking can already be considered a ‘risk’ in certain educational contexts. Therefore, teachers/facilitators should evaluate carefully whether OSDE is appropriate and what risks can be associated with it in their specific setting. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on the website addresses common concerns about using the methodology in schools. The FAQ is available at:

FAQ:
www.osdemethodology.org.uk
OSDE methodology
FAQ

14. How can individual educators get involved?

There are a number of ways educators can get involved. The easiest are to take part in one of the training events or try out the free online resources and tell us how it went. You can also join a research project and explore the learning outcomes of the methodology that you find most interesting.

15. How can schools get involved?

Schools that use the methodology as part of their curriculum (e.g. in PSHE, citizenship or world studies) or that are taking part in the research project may choose to join the school network of the OSDE initiative.

Schools can also contact the project to organise workshops or INSET courses on: the OSDE methodology, critical literacy, global issues and global citizenship. CSSGJ also offers a postgraduate certificate [PGCert] on Social and Global Justice (equivalent to 1/3 of a Master’s).
Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry

For information on:
Workshops and Training [INSET] on OSDE, critical literacy, global issues or global citizenship education
Research on OSDE
Collaborative educational projects, events and seminars
Accredited learning for teachers
Feedback on OSDE units

Please contact:
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website: www.osdemethodology.org.uk

OSDE Project coordinator: Vanessa Andreotti – taxvoa@nottingham.ac.uk

Learning about Others, Learning about Ourselves is an educational project funded by DFID to pilot the OSDE methodology in secondary schools in the East Midlands.

It is developed in partnership between MUNDI (Nottingham), Global Education Derby, the Centre for Citizenship Studies in Education (Leicester) and the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice.

Check their website: www.learningaboutothers.org.uk to find out more about the work that has been going on in the East Midlands!