Pushing the boundaries

Dave Richards, Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC)

An English elephant

What kind of organisation helps to organise an open air salsa class for 250 people, sells organic cotton underwear made in India, hosts christening parties and features on Russian state TV news? To the charity commissioners, Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) is a ‘development education’ centre whose purpose is to raise awareness of development issues among the general public. However, to users of the 1400 square metre listed building it’s more like the proverbial elephant described by the blind men according to their own experience. In their quest to bring alive issues such as globalisation, sustainable development and human rights to a wider audience, the collective that runs RISC has created an unusual and innovative social enterprise which combines the desire to ‘change the world’ with the reality of paying bills and salaries.

Activities are wide ranging, reflecting the need to support local communities and address the global issues which affect the whole planet. They include:

- running the UK’s largest fair trade shop
- managing the Global Café which serves award-winning Ethiopian food, organic wines and beers from around the world, and provides exhibition space
- publishing teaching resources
- managing a conference centre and meeting rooms used by over 350 local community organisations and businesses
- providing low cost office space for local voluntary organisations involved in community development and global education
- organising public events which raise awareness of global issues and give a platform to voices from the global ‘South’, including arts workshops
- providing training in Global Citizenship for teachers
- providing work experience and training for volunteers
- developing an edible forest roof garden which has brought a procession of TV crews, architects and planners and the general public to the Centre.

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Initial timeline

RISC started life in 1984 – a time of great turmoil. The legacy of serious riots in several major cities, which had taken place in 1981, remained. These were the consequences of the Thatcher government's neo-liberal economic policies for deprived inner city communities, racial tension and distrust of the police and authority. By 1984 unemployment had peaked at 3.3 million and the year-long Miners Strike (1984-85) broke one of the country's most powerful unions, marking a watershed in the political influence of the trade union movement. In 1983 the Greenham Women's Peace camp protesting against US cruise missiles being based at the Greenham Common airbase (close to Reading) drew international attention and provided a focus for the women's movement.

Against this background, activists from Bracknell's (town close to Reading) World Development Movement secured funding from the EU and the UK government (a programme to provide work opportunities for long-term unemployed people) for a project to deliver development education to schools and communities in Berkshire. With a base in a redundant school in Slough, World Education Berkshire operated a mobile classroom – a double-decker bus (green and pink, colours of youth and energy).

A diverse group of long-term unemployed people were brought together – women influenced by the Greenham Peace Camp and gender politics, men and women from ethnic minorities concerned with the politics of race, as well as other 'alternative' perspectives – sexuality, class, environment… From these varied interests and experiences a range of group-based activities were devised to counter the cliché images of passive starving Africans reinforced by Bob Geldof's 1985 Live Aid Concert. From its early beginnings, RISC was committed to a justice/rights based analysis of global inequality and the appropriate strategies to deal with disadvantage, rather than the charity model which continues to pervade popular perceptions.

When government funding dried up, a core of workers decided to look for a town centre site in a conscious effort to reach a different audience. In 1987, with a grant of £1000, a run-down Georgian shop 5 minutes walk from the centre of Reading was transformed into offices, community meeting room and shop selling fair trade crafts and food, campaign T-shirts and books on internationalist issues – Reading International Support Centre was born. Support, because 'Solidarity' might be considered too radical and antagonise potential funders.

Many other development education centres emerged during this period, bringing the development agenda to the ‘alternative’ and sometimes radical politics of race, gender and class provoked in part by the social and economic impact of the Reagan-Thatcher alliance. These centres reflected the experience and interests of the groups and individuals who provided the energy and commitment to make dreams happen with few resources. Many were the initiatives of local branches of national development NGOs such as Oxfam or War on Want, and included teachers and returned Voluntary Service Overseas volunteers who wanted to build on their experience of working with poor communities in the Majority World. As a result, most concentrated on providing support for the formal education sector – providing schools and teachers with training and resources to bring development issues into the curriculum. The publication of teaching packs became an important area of work for which it was also relatively easy to find funding. The UK continues to have a well-founded reputation for producing development education resources tailored to the curriculum which use interactive methods to engage children and young people.

Working with community groups

Although RISC continued to deliver support for the formal sector, it was unusual in having a commitment to the more difficult task of working with community groups. This involves building long term relationships which is time consuming. An important element in developing trust was providing free meeting rooms to groups and holding events which reflected their concerns and interests. Gradually a successful formula emerged, supported by a group of dedicated volunteers, a steadily growing shop turnover and grants from Oxfam, Christian Aid and the European Union. Book stock increased, volunteers became paid workers, the meeting room was booked every evening.

Workshops and public meetings on topical international events, giving a voice to speakers from the Majority World, were another key element. One of the highlights was a meeting during the First Gulf War (1990-91) which brought together Israeli and Iraqi dissidents, and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation representative in Britain, complete with Home Office body guard and sniffer dogs!

RISC established a reputation for challenging the development education status quo. Its second EU-funded project, Focus for Change, was at the forefront of efforts to critique stereotypical media images of the Majority World, including fund raising images used by NGOs[1]. This reflected a broader debate on the politics of

representation provoked particularly by groups marginalised by mainstream society. The arena of the politics of race had developed further in the UK than other European countries[2] and RISC's educational practice of using images was disseminated through European development education networks.

Another project which resulted in an action pack tackled the contentious issue of sexuality[3]. Many practitioners felt that it was not appropriate to raise the issue of lesbian and gay oppression within the context of development education. The deconstruction of stereotypical assumptions has been a continuing thread in much of RISC's subsequent work.

Other new initiatives were also successful. RISC helped to start Reading International Forum, a network of over 80 local groups with an international interest, ranging from Amnesty and Greenpeace to various Asian, African and Caribbean community associations. With support from Reading Borough Council, the Forum runs the annual Reading International Festival, two weeks of events as diverse as anarchist stand-up comedian Mark Thomas and 6th form workshops on human rights. Another major spin-off was the creation of Reading Refugee Support Group (RRSG) as a result of a RISC public meeting about the situation of refugees internationally and their often hidden presence in the town. RRSG is now an established part of the town's social infrastructure, whose clients reflect the changing pattern of oppression around the world.

For many years the Forum also organised the One World Tent at the Womad (World of Music, Arts & Dance) Festival which was an important part of Reading cultural life until 2006. Exhibitions, workshops, stalls and a stage featuring theatre, speakers and musicians, added a more serious note to the hedonism of the summer weekend. Fond memories include an Indian bullock ploughing up the site, the Mayor of Reading negotiating a simulated minefield long before Princess Di discovered anti-personnel weapons, and that aforementioned mass salsa class.

By 1993 RISC had outgrown its rented accommodation. Turnover had levelled off and the offices were overcrowded. The search for a new home was on… and eventually led to a former bookshop, courtesy of a bottom-of-the-market price, a loan from the ethical Triodos bank and a Housing Corporation grant (the property included three flats which were sold on to a housing association). On the surface it seemed an act of folly. The plans showed conference hall, meeting rooms, offices, cafe, shop… yet the structural engineer had marvelled at the finest examples of dry rot he had seen, a colony of pigeons had produced a highly fertile layer of manure

in one corner of the building, freelance entrepreneurs had stripped out copper and lead, blue sky (weather permitting) could be seen from the ground floor of a three storey building, the debris from a rave and other temporary inhabitants added to the wreckage… and the project was undercapitalised.

35-39 London St

In May 1996 the re-colonisation of 35-39 London St began. The story of the months leading up to the opening are best forgotten, especially the cancerous reappearance of dry rot, fire inspector, builders… But on 17 September, thanks to two dedicated builders and the efforts of hundreds of volunteers who wielded hammers, mixed concrete and applied paint… a grand opening party heralded the dawn of a new era and a rebranding – 'support' became 'solidarity' to more accurately reflect the organisation's role. Concern for the state of the men's urinals, dirty carpets, security for late night bars and mortgage deadlines appeared on the agenda of the weekly workers' meeting, alongside planning workshops and trade campaigns.

Thirteen years on and there has hardly been pause for breath. Triodos have been wooed for further loans to renovate the cafe and convert dusty attics into additional offices and a home for the artefacts library. The model of a social enterprise with a large number of stakeholders and a broad income base from grants, office rental, room hire and trading in the shop and café has meant mortgage repayments have been met and the growing number of employees paid, despite the ups and downs in the economy.

It has not been a completely smooth ride and there have been some difficulties resulting from the rapid growth of the organisation into new areas of work, a lack of experience coupled with the collective management structure and, sometimes, an unwillingness to make hard business decisions. For many years, the café, with its rapid turnover of part-time staff who were less committed to RISC's ideals, was a drain on time, energy and money rather than the hoped-for 'Golden Goose'.

RISC has had to adapt to the changing funding climate. Increased competition for funds in the voluntary sector and changes in the criteria used by funders, particularly the EU, have also meant fluctuating income. Although its core values have remained the same – raising awareness in order to promote local action for global justice – new areas of work have been added to trade justice and support for the formal education sector which were originally at the heart of its activities. The

increased space of the new building meant the Centre's support for community groups could expand and provided access to different funding streams. Many voluntary sector organisations have great difficulty finding funding for core work rather than one-off projects. RISC has been fortunate enough to secure long-term core funding for its community support activities from a local charity, the Earley Trust.

Large capital grants from the National Lottery (started in 1994) have made possible major renovation of the building, construction of an edible roof garden and improvement of the Centre's facilities, especially for disabled users. The Lottery also funded a three-year salaried post to provide training and work experience opportunities for volunteers working in RISC's office, shop and other projects.

Global dimension and learning

Another major funding source has been the Department for International Development (DFID) set up in 1997 by the new Labour Government. For the first time development education activities in communities, schools and the wider formal education sector received government funding as part of a strategy to 'build support for development'. The first DFID-funded project, *Food for Thought*, used the Café as a tool to raise awareness, with exhibitions on global themes and feasts, which combined speakers from the Majority World talking about issues affecting their countries with traditional food.

One of DFID's major objectives has been to embed the 'Global Dimension' into the UK school curriculum with the aim of ensuring that every child should be educated about development issues so that they can "understand the key global considerations which will shape their lives".

"Including the Global Dimension in teaching means that links can be made between local and global issues. It also means that young people are given opportunities to critically examine their own values and attitudes; appreciate the similarities between peoples everywhere, and value diversity; and develop skills that will enable them to combat injustice, prejudice and discrimination. Such knowledge, skills and understanding enable young people to make informed decisions about playing an active role in the global community.[4]"

The eight key concepts contained in DFID's Global Dimension framework (Global Citizenship, conflict resolution, diversity, human rights, interdependence, social

justice, sustainable development, values and perceptions) are all issues which have always been at the core of RISC's work. This has meant that it is well placed to bid for DFID funding which places a premium on making a measurable impact on attitudes and behaviour and value-for-money.

Two recent projects illustrate the value of having a relatively large team of experienced development educators with a wide range of interests and a proven track record of implementing innovative projects – the *Global Schools* (GS) project funded by DFID and *Growing Our Futures* (GOF) project, initially funded by the National Lottery. Both sets of outcomes have exceeded all expectations, created national interest and given rise to more exciting initiatives.

How Do We Know It's Working?

Since 2004, RISC's education team have been engaged in the GS project with a network of local schools. This aimed to develop a whole school model for delivering global citizenship, working with all stakeholders in the school community to embed the global dimension throughout the curriculum. This aimed to address the problems arising from the 'specialist teacher' approach adopted by the majority of schools trying to introduce government initiatives such as Global Citizenship. Surveys have found that awareness and understanding was often patchy or non-existent because of a lack of support from senior management, inadequate training and poor internal communication. As a result, initiatives such as Global Citizenship became marginalised.

Baseline audits of knowledge and attitudes towards the Majority World provided the basis for curriculum planning and training for teachers, support staff and governors within each school. A second audit revealed how successfully the objectives of the initiative were being achieved.

"…This… was the best Inset day we'd had for a long time, with staff inspired by the wealth of resources available at RISC and the stimulating Global Citizenship ideas which the education team shared with us. We reviewed our practice as a school which claimed to be inclusive and to address global awareness. We came away celebrating much of what we were doing but with our eyes opened as to how much further we could develop our expertise."

Headteacher, 2007

“For some schools, Global Citizenship became embedded throughout the school: impacting on the curriculum, school ethos and the wider school community of pupils, teachers, teaching assistants, governors, school council, parents and visitors. In these schools, responses to the audit activities indicated shifts in pupils’ attitudes were taking place in line with the objectives of the initiative.

“However, in two of the six schools, the challenge of engaging the whole staff in the initiative proved greater and Global Citizenship did not become embedded across the school. Global dimensions were introduced by individuals within some subjects, sometimes bolted on to existing curriculum plans and often without consideration to cross-curricular plans. Where this was the case there was no measurable change in pupils’ attitudes, and responses to some activities indicated that pupils’ stereotypical had been reinforced.”[5]

The results of the project, *How Do We Know It’s Working? A toolkit for measuring attitudinal change*, were published in 2008. A second edition is being produced after the initial print run of 1500 was sold out. The model has created interest nationally, with some local authorities placing large orders and a series of well-attended Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training courses for NGOs and teachers.

“The attitudinal change being measured through the toolkit is an aspect of learning that presents particular challenges for assessment. It is about deep learning that impacts on who we are and how we choose to live our lives. This learning informs our values over time as members of our community and as national and global citizens. To strengthen the place for this in schools it is vital to seek ways of evaluating its impact, and to add those to our repertoire of assessment strategies. These materials have been trialled and developed through rigorous experience, adding significantly to good practice in assessing the learning that really matters.”

“Assessment for Learning engages the learner as an active partner in judging progress towards the learning objectives set. Teachers need to take account of the learner’s progress towards these objectives in planning the next steps of the learning journey. In this toolkit learners are respected as partners. The shared dialogue created by this approach can feed into decisions by both teachers and learners on how to develop knowledge and understanding as effectively as possible.”[6]

Judy Dyson, Senior Adviser, Partnership Development & Extended Learning,

Oxfordshire

A follow up project, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: making the global dimension sustainable*, has recently been approved by DFID. This will move beyond intensive input into a small network of schools, to promote the GS model amongst policy makers at local authority level. They will be encouraged to commit to taking responsibility for embedding and promoting Global Citizenship and the Global Dimension within their constituencies, changing the practice of schools and teachers. Essential to this is the need to understand the difference between 'any Global Citizenship/Global Dimension activity' and 'effective Global Citizenship/Global Dimension activity'. Evidence from schools of the positive impact of effective Global Citizenship/Global Dimension on knowledge, attitudes and willingness to take action will be used to influence decision makers. An indicator of success is the extent to which partners make explicit their commitment to Global Citizenship/Global Dimension, through their publications and websites; embedding it within their training programmes for teachers, teaching assistants and governors; and promoting it through their regional and national networks. The success of this model will be disseminated through these and other networks in the final phase of the project.

Growing Our Futures

The second example of the evolution of an idea into a completely new, but related, area of work is the *Growing Our Futures* project which started life as a solution to a leaking flat roof. The idea of a green roof slowly gained momentum as internet research revealed its advantages in terms of improving sound and heat insulation and reducing flows into the storm water system. It soon became obvious that a garden would not only extend the scope of RISC's educational work but also appeal to funders. The National Lottery took the bait and provided us with £34K topped up with a grant of £13K from SEED, a fund which allocates income from landfill tax to environmental projects.

The design brief for the 200m^2 site (32x6m) emerged from brain-storming sessions among the Collective: a garden which could be a tool for making connections between the local and global, including sustainable development, as well as the economic, cultural and historical importance of plants. We collaborated with Paul Barney, a local permaculture designer.

Permaculture is about "designing sustainable human settlements through ecology

and design. It is a philosophy and an approach to land use which weaves together micro-climates, annual and perennial plants, animals, soils, water management and human needs into intricately connected productive communities”[7]. The design is based on the forest garden principles championed by Robert Hart in the 1970s. Hart was inspired by ‘home gardening’ – a system of multi-story cropping that is widespread throughout the tropics – that can have up to 13 layers of vegetation. Home gardening is one of the oldest land use activities, dating back 7,000 years and developed in response to the stresses of an increasing population and a decreasing resource base. Hart was amazed at the productivity and diversity of these small plots, citing the example of 3.5 million home gardens in Kerala, India that provide the majority of food for a population of 32 million in an area the size of Switzerland. He decided to these principles to the temperate climate of England and labelled it as ‘forest gardening’ but edible landscaping, permaculture, agroforestry, food forestry all have the similar theme of perennial polycultures, which can be applied in a diversity of climates.[8]

The design takes into account every aspect of the site, surrounding buildings and makes full use of the local resources. For example, the Centre produces large amounts of organic waste which are composted and help feed hungry plants, while minimising landfill waste. Shredded paper from offices is high in carbon, while vegetable peelings from the Café and tea bags from the meeting rooms are high in nitrogen – the perfect combination for rapid decomposition. In exchange, herbs and cut flowers are used in the café. Water from surrounding roofs is harvested for the drip-feed irrigation system which is powered by a small wind turbine and photo-voltaic array. The hard landscaping uses a combination of reused, renewable and recycled materials – old bricks destined for landfill, paths made from woodchip and edged with cordwood (tree surgeons’ waste which would otherwise be burnt), fencing and raised beds made from locally coppiced hazel and willow.

The planting uses a carefully selected combination of perennial herbaceous plants, shrubs, trees and climbers in a planting scheme which mimics a multi-layered woodland ecosystem. This creates the conditions which support great diversity. Once established, forest gardens require a little pruning and lots of harvesting from early spring to late autumn. Conventional vegetable plots can also be included. The use of a 75mm layer of mulch and ground cover plants, such as herbs and strawberries, helps to conserve moisture and suppress weeds.

From the outset, the garden was intended as a tool to communicate RISC’s local-global message to a wider public. It has been an overwhelming success from this

point of view. There are about 750 visitors a year, mainly in summer. For a time, the gate was left open so people could just drop by, but it was used by junkies, so now it is open by appointment for school and gardening groups, and to the general public for four weekends during the summer as part of the National Gardens Scheme which raises money for cancer care and research. In addition, groups using RISC's conference facilities and meeting rooms often use the garden as a break-out room or respite from intense work-shop activities. Performance artists have also used the garden in their productions.

Visitors can have a guided tour which explains the principles behind the garden and the stories behind some favourite plants. The ultimate must be Emmer wheat, *Triticum dicoccum*, first domesticated in the Fertile Crescent 10,000 years ago, and the foundation of several civilisations. Interpretation materials have improved – all-weather UV resistant information panels, detailed labels listing uses and leaflets. New features have been added to the garden which demonstrate sustainable gardening techniques – siphons to empty bathwater, low cost rain-fed irrigation systems using 200 litre containers originally used to import mango chutney from India and porous pipe made from recycled car tyres.

The garden has become a demonstration of sustainable urban living, an illustration of practical solutions to the daunting challenges posed by global climate change and 'Peak Everything' (energy, water, food…).[9] Although the low cost technologies and simple methods are well established among sustainable living advocates, the added dimension of an edible forest growing on a roof in the middle of a busy city has caught the attention of the media. Articles regularly appear in gardening magazines and the lifestyle sections of Sunday newspapers, as well as TV programmes in Russia, France and the UK.

Urban green roofs and Transition towns

Another category of visitor are professionals who are interested in green roofs. We open during the Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) Architecture Week and receive a steady stream of students, facilities managers and other people interested in the growing field of sustainable landscapes – particularly green walls and roofs and Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs). More recently, there has been increased interest in the food growing aspect of the roof garden, as part of a strategy to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce food miles by encouraging urban agriculture[10].

An unexpected result is that RISC has now been drawn into Transition Initiatives[11] and the international urban agriculture network[12], with the garden featuring in exhibitions and papers presented at conferences. Although promoting sustainable development has always been a key element of the RISC's work, the garden has given this a new dimension based on its own engagement with local communities. The link between local and global solutions has become more tangible and added strength and credibility to the organisation's solidarity work.

The garden has been incorporated into RISC's formal education work. Activities for children have been devised which encourage them to explore the garden and discover the importance of plants. Being asked to be on the lookout for the plant which could poison them is a foolproof way of focusing young minds. The leaves of American pokeweed, *Phytolacca americana*, undermine the immune system, but in the USA the toxins are neutralised by cooking and the spinach-like leaves canned and marketed as poke salad, inspiring Tony Joe White's 1969 hit, *Polk Salad Annie*, which was part of Elvis Presley's 1970s repertoire. One spin-off from our education work has been the construction of school forest gardens inspired by the RISC model, nine to date, though all on terra firma[13].

Participants in Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development courses run by RISC visit the garden as a demonstration of how school grounds can be used to meet the government's strategies for sustainable schools and outdoor learning. Since 2006, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has promoted its Framework for Sustainable Schools.

"Sustainable development is a way of thinking about how we organise our lives and work – including our education system – so that we don't destroy our most precious resource, the planet. From over-fishing to global warming, our way of life is placing an increasing burden on the planet, which cannot be sustained.

Global Citizenship and the school curriculum

"Things which were once taken for granted such as a secure supply of energy or a stable climate do not look so permanent now. We need to help people in all parts of the world to find solutions that improve their quality of life without storing up problems for the future, or impacting unfairly on other people's lives. Sustainable development means much more than recycling bottles or giving money to charity. It is about thinking and working in a profoundly different way."[14]

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The Global Dimension is one of the eight doorways and so the Framework offers an ideal opportunity to integrate Global Citizenship throughout the curriculum. The Sustainable Schools Framework also ties in with another government initiative launched in 2006, the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, which affirmed learning outside the classroom builds bridges between theory and reality, schools and communities, young people and their futures".[15]

"Education is not something to keep in a box, even when the box is classroom-shaped. The habit of learning, an urge to find out more, is developed when we feel inspired. The world outside the school is richly inspiring, constantly re-energising what takes place within the classroom. It is the source of all our learning – about our history, about our culture, about our place in the natural world and our relationships with each other. This two-way flow can be embedded in every child's education, entirely at ease within any school's ethos."[16]

As a result of these initiatives, schools are increasingly seeing their grounds as an 'outdoor classroom' for its true potential as a resource for helping to deliver all areas of the curriculum, as well as fitting in with two other important government programmes – Healthy Living and Every Child Matters[17]. School allotments are becoming increasingly popular, especially in primary schools. National garden charities such as the Royal Horticultural Society, Garden Organic and Soil Association as well as government supported initiatives – Growing Schools and Learning from Landscapes – have developed excellent online resources to help schools with the practical skills to grow fruit and vegetables as well as guidance on how they can be integrated into the curriculum.

However, browsing through these websites, there is one glaring omission – the Global Dimension. There have been a few initiatives, such as the Eden Project's *Gardens for Life* and Save the Children Fund's *Mission Nutrition* collaboration with Blue Peter, which provide some ideas for using school allotments as a starting point for exploring global themes, but there are few resources which help teachers to make the connections between the food grown by school gardening clubs and global food supply chains, climate change and Peak Oil. School gardening stops at making compost and how to grow healthy vegetables. These are important life skills which will 'future proof' our children, but there is a missed opportunity to enable children and young people to understand the scale of the challenges faced by the human race, and their role in being part of the solutions.

Sir John Beddington, the government's Chief Scientific Advisor, recently warned of

the likelihood of the world being consumed by the ‘perfect storm’ by 2030 as the consequences of a global population of about eight billion combine with increased demand for food, water and energy, against a background of global climate change. The result is likely to be mass migration, civil conflict, resource wars and hungry people.[18] His analysis echoes a 2008 Cabinet Office Strategy Unit discussion paper which analyses food issues, from global supply chains to consumer health and the implications of climate change.[19]

Potentially, the school organic vegetable plot – producing low mileage food using composted kitchen waste, harvested rainwater, constructed from reused or recycled materials – is an ideal springboard for developing a practical understanding of what a sustainable future looks like. In the world of an impending perfect storm, the issue of food security unites people and communities around the world.

A centre for change promoting local-global school/community allotments

RISC has just started two new projects which bring together these elements. The *Food4Families* project, funded by the Big Lottery, will create 15 new school/community allotments in Reading over the next three years. This will tick lots of boxes – children and their parents will learn growing skills, introduce fresh produce into their diets and learn about sustainable living, while schools will integrate the outdoor classroom into the curriculum through practical activities. Progress on the ground has already begun to demonstrate the validity of the model in achieving one of the Sustainable Schools doorways – community cohesion. In the words of one participating headteacher, “We have been trying to engage with parents for many years. For the first time, the allotment project has motivated parents to join their children in school activities”. This is echoed by one of the mothers, “It’s good that the kids and parents are involved – we can do things together and it’s spreading back home.”

The *Global School Gardens Network* is another three year project, funded by DFID, but with a nationwide reach. With partners, Garden Organic, Food for Thought and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, RISC will work with pilot school gardens around the country, exploring ways to make the connection between the potatoes or beans grown in their gardens to the plantain or cassava grown in gardens in other parts of the world. How do children/people around the world ensure their crops thrive, how are they being impacted by climate change,

does trade liberalisation offer new opportunities to increase incomes in a globalised market place or present a threat from cheaper imports? A website will disseminate examples of good practice and resources to support this global dimension.

A key element will be to highlight examples of sustainable farming in the Majority World, for example the hugely successful transition to organic production forced on Cuba by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its cheap supplies of oil. Just as Robert Hart and other permaculturists have been inspired by the rich heritage of traditional agricultures, we have a lot to learn from communities which have been forced, for reasons of history or geography, to make the most of limited resources and worked with natural systems rather than trying to impose their industrial might over them.

Over the past 25 years, RISC has been transformed from a project to an organisation which is making a contribution to local, national and international initiatives to make another world possible. It is a case study in how an organisation can pursue this objective through changing political and economic conditions. The key ingredient in ensuring its survival through difficult times has been the commitment of the Collective, their willingness to sacrifice personal time and money for the greater good, the ability to continue pushing at the boundaries of what constitutes ‘development education’, and formulate innovative projects which appeal to funders. The measure of its success is the impact of its work, from Reading becoming a Fair Trade town to the roof garden being shortlisted for the Observer Ethical Garden Award in 2009. Many similar ‘Centres for Change’ set up in the 1990s by social activists around the country have not been so lucky.

As the original group of pioneers reach retirement age the question is, how can the vision, energy and commitment which have brought the organisation thus far, be maintained to address the huge challenges we all face in the future? This is a challenge faced by many other organisations which emerged out of the struggle against neo-liberal Thatcher/Reaganomics and the coming of age of feminism and environmentalism. This may be the greatest challenge of all.

Notes

[1] Sally Meachim, Dave Richards & Olukemi Williams *Focus for Change: class, gender and race inequality & the media in an international context* RISC, 1992

[2] Peter Fryer *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* Pluto Press 1984

[3] Andrew Brearley, Anne Cronin & Barbara Lowe, *Human Rights for All? a global view of lesbian and gay oppression and liberation*, RISC, 1992

[4] *Developing the Global Dimension in the school curriculum* DFID, DfES, QCA and DEA, March 2005

[5] Barbara Lowe, *Embedding Global Citizenship in Primary and Secondary Schools: developing a methodology for measuring attitudinal change* , in International Journal for Development Education and Global Learning, Vol 1, No 1 October 2008

[6] Liz Allum, Barbara Lowe & Louise Robinson *How Do We Know It's Working? a toolkit for measuring attitudinal change in global citizenship from early years to KS5*, RISC 2008

[7] Bill Mollison and Reny Mia Slay *Introduction to Permaculture*, Tagari Publishers, 1991

[8] Robert Hart *Forest Gardening* Green Earth Books 1996

[9] Richard Heinberg *Peak Everything* New Society 2007

[10] *Edible Cities – A report of a visit to urban agriculture projects in the USA*, London Food Link 2008

[11] Rob Hopkins The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience Green Books 2008

[12] Andre Viljoen, *Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes: Designing Urban Agriculture for Sustainable Cities*, Architectural Press, 2005

[13] Dave Richards, *The Outdoor Permaculture Classroom*, Permaculture Magazine, Number 54, 2007

[14] *National Framework for Sustainable Schools: the eight doorways* DfES 2006

[15] *Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto* DfES, 2006

[16] *Out of-Classroom Learning* Real World Learning Partnership, 2006

[17] Every Child Matters: Change for Children is a UK government programme launched in 2004, following the official report on death of Victoria Climbié, the young girl who was horrifically abused and tortured, and eventually killed by her great aunt and the man with whom they lived. It is “a national framework for local change programmes to build services around the needs of children and young people so that we maximise opportunity and minimise risk. The services that reach every child and young person have a crucial role to play in shifting the focus from dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children?s lives to preventing things from going wrong in the first place. The transformation that we need can only be delivered through local leaders working together in strong partnership with local communities on a programme of change.” Healthy Living Strategy, launched in 2008 by the UK government, to support everyone in making the healthy choices which will reduce obesity, especially among children. The aim is that by 2020 the trend in rising obesity and overweight among children will be reversed to 2000 levels. Rates of obesity in adults will also be addressed.

[18] Paper presented at SDUK 09: Time for Change 19 March 2009

[19] Cabinet Office Strategy Unit *Food: an analysis of the issues* January 2008