

Migration and Xenophobia in Schools (MIXES): Raising Awareness in the Classroom

In July 2019, a group of staff and students from UCL's Institute for Global Health delivered sessions on global migration, xenophobia and health to the students of UCL Academy. Led by Dr Delan Devakumar, Clinical Senior Lecturer in Public Health at UCL and a lead author of the UCL-*Lancet* Commission on Migration and Health, the aim was to engage students on the topics of migration and discrimination and the health consequences and to develop learning materials which could be used to educate young people across the country.

Records show that in 2018 [one billion people were either migrating or had migrated globally](#). While migration is far from a new phenomenon, overall numbers have increased and migration patterns – areas that people migrate to and from - have changed in recent years. These changes have led to migration becoming increasingly politicised and the deliberate spread of misinformation and negative discourse has become more common. By providing young people with the facts on migration and the impact it has on health, economies and communities, the project intended to increase knowledge, challenge prejudices and encourage conversations that would continue outside of the classroom.

The sessions were developed by UCL staff and medical students, with expertise in migration, education, health and discrimination. Using the [SAPERE](#) (philosophy for children) technique as a framework, the group spent two days brainstorming how best to create a safe space for the students to share their thoughts and devised a range of classroom-based activities that would encourage conversation and learning. SAPERE was selected due to its approach to learning, which enhances children's thinking and communication skills by approaching life's 'big and philosophical' questions using stories, video clips and images. By the end, the group had devised two hour-long sessions made up of hypothetical and real activities and scenarios. These included a presentation of newspaper headlines to show representation of migration in the media, case studies which highlighted the impact of migration on health, and quizzes to clarify the numerous and often confusing terms associated with migration.

Once in the classroom it was time to put the activities and teaching skills to the test. Session leads worked in pairs with groups of 10-15 year 9 students in four parallel sessions. After a quick introduction and agreement on classroom safety, the activities began. Overall, students were interested in the topics and keen to share not only their thoughts and opinions, but their personal experiences. The warm-up exercise which had students imagine themselves on a journey of migration was a great way to start discussions and using familiar newspaper headlines proved to be a popular and effective way to dismantle misconceptions. UCL Academy teachers gave positive feedback, both for the session content and it's resonance with the students, stressing the importance of having a space for students to express their views and develop their opinions. Feedback from the session leads was also positive. Overall, they felt comfortable with their level of knowledge and ability to answer all of the questions, agreed that would be good to incorporate games with the exercises to keep the students' attention and acknowledged the importance of having teachers present to monitor student behaviour.

So, what's next for the project? The time spent at UCL Academy showed there is demand for education in this area and provided insight on how better to improve the content and delivery. Staff at the Academy have already expressed interest in holding sessions for the next year group. In the future, we hope to expand the project to other schools, to work with younger age groups and schools with different demographics. UCL Academy is a diverse inner-city school in which migration is central to a lot of staff and students lives. Going forward, it would be interesting to run sessions in suburban/rural

settings and see if there are differences in how the activities are received. If you are interested in finding out more about the project or have run similar projects and are interested in collaborating, please get in touch using the email below.

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