

LEARNING TO READ THE WORLD? TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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The Study

This Research Briefing contains key findings and recommendations from the study '**Learning to Read the World? Teaching and Learning about Global Citizenship and International Development in Post-Primary Schools.**' The overall aim of the study was to identify the strengths, possibilities and limitations in existing curricular, teaching and learning approaches to Global Citizenship Education across a range of subjects at post-primary level in Ireland.

Combining a **critical discourse analysis** of curriculum materials (including 75 lesson plans and a similar number of textbooks) as well as **in-depth interviews** with 26 in-career teachers currently teaching Global Citizenship in a diverse cross-section of post-primary schools, the study provides a comprehensive portrait of Global Citizenship Education at second-level.

Key Findings

- Global Citizenship occupies a very marginal status within the formal post-primary curriculum.
- The exam-driven focus of the education system is a major obstacle to meaningful engagement with Global Citizenship Education.
- The responsibility for ensuring that young people are exposed to social justice issues falls largely upon the shoulders of 'willing and able' teachers who have a personal and passionate commitment to social and global justice.
- The discourse of international development within state-sanctioned curriculum materials is not completely uniform, coherent, or consistent.
- Modernization theories of development provide the dominant theoretical framework for development in Irish post-primary schools.
- Development activism in schools is generally underpinned by a development-as-charity or 'Three Fs' approach—comprising fundraising, fasting and having fun in aid of specific development causes.
- Only a very small number of in-career teachers have undertaken in-service training in Development Education.
- Teachers expressed a need for greater opportunities where they could come together to learn more and exchange information and knowledge about their own experiences of 'doing' Development Education in schools.

Background and Context

Development Education strives to support people in understanding and acting to transform the social, cultural and economic structures which affect their lives (NCCA & Irish Aid, 2005). The effectiveness of this process is largely contingent on the following factors: availability of effective educative materials and resources upon which teachers and other development educators can draw on; the meanings ascribed by teachers to this educational process, and the personal, curricular and institutional factors which facilitate and/or constrain teachers and schools from incorporating development and social justice issues into teaching practice.

Adopting a qualitative approach, this research allows for a rich description of what Development Education looks like in an Irish context and how it is understood in post-primary schools. The study – the first of its kind to have been published in an Irish context – offers combined insights into the status and practice of Development Education in schools as well as an analysis of how development issues are represented in the formal curriculum.

Research Aims and Objectives

- To enhance our understanding of the resources that educators use in delivering Development Education.
- To identify points of comparison, tension and contradiction in how development is framed within and across educational resources.
- To identify personal, curricular and institutional (school-based) factors which facilitate and/or prevent teachers and schools from meaningfully engaging with development issues.
- To propose alternative development narratives as a basis for establishing and enhancing interconnectedness and solidarity with citizens in the Global South.

Methodology

Three principal sources were used to collect data:

- Curricular resources and textbooks used for Development Education purposes from seven subject areas: Geography; Religious Education (RE); Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE); Business Studies; Economics; Home Economics, and English.
- Development Education lesson plans created and implemented by student teachers enrolled in a Post-graduate Diploma in Education programme in the Republic of Ireland (PGDE).
- In-depth interviews with 26 practicing teachers and school administrators.

KEY FINDING 1

Development Education occupies a marginal status within the formal curriculum

Both pre-service and in-service teachers identified a host of constraining factors which actively work against the mainstreaming of Development Education, including:

- The perception that current opportunities for critical engagement with Development Education within the curriculum are inadequate.

...in my view [development] has been a hugely neglected area, sort of being tagged on there. And in terms of exam questions, for example, very, very little has come up in recent years (Male Teacher, 15 years' experience).

- An ongoing failure at junior cycle level to afford CSPE parity of esteem with other

CSPE is a Cinderella subject. Nobody takes it that seriously! (Male Teacher, 30 years' experience).

academic subjects.

- Limited scope at senior cycle level for engagement with social and justice issues.

I would feel a little bit frustrated that there's not more [Development Education] at senior cycle and they're not recognising the young people who have a sense of justice and have a huge sense of equality in a sense, yet they're not being give a voice for through mainstream education. (Male Teacher, 26 years' experience).

Even within those subject areas that might be seen to lend themselves readily to a consideration of justice and global themes, participants tended to see Development Education as an underdeveloped or under-exploited dimension of the curriculum and as ultimately up to individual teachers whether they chose to integrate development themes or not.

KEY FINDING 2

The exam-driven focus of the post-primary system is a major obstacle to the meaningful inclusion of Development Education.

It's all geared towards points for the Leaving Cert. to get into college. Where do you allow room for Development Education in that kind of structure? (Male Teacher, 30 years' experience).

The vast majority of in-career teachers felt that the competitive national examination system worked directly against in-depth and critical explorations of global justice issues. In this exam-driven context, participants expressed a felt need to produce 'safe' and acceptable answers which glossed over complex realities.

I think students and teachers are naturally going to want to get their 'A,' so they're going to want something clear cut with a very clear beginning middle and end which is resolved and easy to write up and will look good on paper, you know, to get their 'A.' (Female Teacher, 8 years' experience)

A number of teachers expressed the need to be subversive and/or creative in order to ensure development issues feature in the formal school curriculum. Others felt that 'going off on a tangent' to explore development issues was doing students a 'disservice' within the context of an examination-based system.

I know you're not supposed to be teaching to test, but unfortunately you kind of do the kids a bit of disservice I think, a little bit, if you start going on a total tangent away from what's really important. Because at the end of the day they want to do as best they can. ... So unless [development] sort of came in somewhere that was appropriate I wouldn't be varying too much away. It's a pity I know, but it's just, that's just the way it is. (Female Teacher, 6 years' experience).

Teachers enthusiastic about 'bringing development in' were particularly appreciative of those educational spaces available to them that were outside of the exam-based curriculum including Transition Year programmes and Religious Education.

Transition Year and RE and different things you know, the end result is not the most important thing. You know, maybe in those classes there's more opportunity to grasp and grapple with some of the difficult tricky things where you know there will be no resolution and you walk away going: "Okay. I don't have the answers but that's okay because that's the way the world is, we don't have answers and all we can do is think about it and, you know, come up with whatever we can" (Female Teacher, 8 years' experience).

KEY FINDING 3

Responsibility for raising the status of Development Education in schools and for exposing students to global justice issues falls largely on the shoulders of individual teachers.

Teachers with a particularly strong commitment to Development Education were perceived as being influential in both raising the overall profile of Development Education within schools and carving out spaces for development themes within the curriculum.

Participants spoke about the need to be creative and strategic in terms of 'bringing Development in' to their classrooms. Very experienced educators with a strong personal interest in Development Education were successful in going beyond the confines of the existing curriculum to make important connections to development issues, even where there was little formal recognition of development within the syllabus.

If you only teach exactly what's on the syllabus within Science you'll come across very little references probably to Development Education. You probably need to be a bit creative in getting it in there (Male Teacher, 38 years' experience).

At a whole-school level, individual teachers were often key drivers in trying to raise the overall profile and status of Development Education.

I think that [Development Education] would be very much something that individual teachers would take on, and 'cause, as I say, it's not built into the Constitution of the school... I mean obviously, like, every school would, you know, stuff comes through the letter box and it's taken up and taken on board, but there's no policy on it (Male Teacher, 15 years' experience).

KEY FINDING 4

The discourse of development within state-sanctioned textbooks is not completely uniform, consistent or coherent.

A critical discourse analysis of junior and senior cycle textbooks across a range of subjects revealed that exceptions, inconsistencies and

contradictions existed between and within texts. At their best, textbooks sought to explore underlying dimensions of global poverty and to engage students in a critical understanding of global development issues. Geography textbooks were found to explicitly critique the modernization and development-as-charity approaches to development and actively encourage students to reflect critically on dominant ways of thinking about development.

The notion that 'West is best' exists in many regions of the South. However, our models of development have severe shortcomings, as we have seen. The idea that one model of development fits all countries is questionable. An amalgamation of various viewpoints is required. (Ashe & McCarthy, 2008, p.130, emphasis in original).

However, more commonly, textbooks were found to implicitly evoke the 'West is best' narrative, frequently presenting the prevalence of global poverty as identifiable problems generated by practices within individual poorer countries that are contrary to the more enlightened practices of the developed world.

*The North is said to be **developed** and **rich**, whereas the South is said to be **developing** and **poor**. In the North, the government tends to play a central role in the welfare of its citizens. In the South, the government may not be actively concerned with the country's development. It is sometimes said that they are more interested in holding onto power than in the citizens and their needs (Guilmartin & Hynes, 2008, p. 198, emphasis in original).*

Strongly contributing to the 'mixed messages' contained in textbooks was the problematic use of images to 'illustrate' development and countries in the Global South. In many textbooks, '**development pornography**' – that is, graphic and distressing images of majority world inhabitants – were used to illustrate a range of development themes. Visual images also tended to pander to stereotypical and homogenised

perspectives of developing countries as primitive places of deprivation.

KEY FINDING 5

Modernization theories of development are the most popular and pervasive perspective on development in Irish post-primary schools.

Children brought up in poverty are more likely to repeat the cycle [of poverty]. The attitudes and the behaviour of poor people keep them in the poverty cycle for longer and often into the next generation (Jones, 2007, p. 351).

With the exception of Geography texts, the analysis suggested a failure to conceive of development along any other lines besides **development-as-modernization**.

Modernizationist perspectives favour internal explanations for global inequality and poverty while glossing over the legacies of colonialism and the persistence of exploitative relationships between the North and South. Teachers' perceptions of the coverage and treatment of development issues in textbooks corroborated the analysis of textbooks which suggests a tendency to over-simplify the complexity of development problems and to present sanitized and de-politicized understandings of global injustices.

We'll talk about the people and their poverty but we won't talk about why they're poor and decisions we make. You see, we're talking about the facts in [textbooks], but we're not talking about the why. And I think that's what needs to change, and that's my frustration with textbooks (Male Teacher, 26 years' experience).

KEY FINDING 6

Development activism in schools is generally underpinned by a 'development-as-charity' framework.

A development-as-charity framework positions Western official aid and charitable donations as

key responses if not *the* solution to the development 'problem'. This perspective was explicitly and implicitly endorsed by the majority of textbooks analysed and by the majority of teachers who participated in this study. Consequently, a 'Three F's' approach to development activism pervaded in-school and extra-curricular initiatives in aid of specific development causes whereby students engaged in *fasting, fundraising and fun* activities to raise money for majority world people in need.

The **development-as-charity** framework was also evident in school linking schemes — partnerships between schools in the Global North and the Global South — which were taking place in over half of the participants' schools at the time of the research. Participant's accounts of these schemes indicated the majority of schools adopted a **'helping' model of school-linking** which involved significant fundraising and other volunteer work. However, a number of schools saw the 'helping model' as problematic in terms of the implicit and explicit messages attached:

The strongest objection was the imagery of it, the imagery, the idea that a group of Irish teenagers would arrive for a short period of time and either would build something and then would go away. And [the school patrons] just saw that as all wrong in terms of development and in terms of education and in terms of intercultural links. They said that the message we'd send to the locals was they can't build and the message you'd send to the Irish kids was that the locals can't build and we have to go and do it for them (Male Teacher, 15 years' experience).

Schools which avoided fundraising and other forms of 'helping' opted for a **'mutual learning' model** instead. Martin (2007) defines mutual learning as a process underpinned by core elements of discussion, reflection and negotiation, enabling participants to recognise the social, cultural and historical frames that have influenced their world view. Characteristics of the 'mutual Learning' model of school linking include an emphasis on the need for reciprocity;

respect; relationship building; expectations of mutual learning; an awareness of the potentially harmful effects of poorly-planned school linking schemes, and a comprehensive pre-linking preparation process for students.

I think we made it very clear at the outset, when we met the senior management in that school and the local bishop who gave us permission to do this, that this was not a fundraising exercise, it was about mutual learning and, you know, getting an understanding of each other and respect for each other. And I think that's very important (Female Teacher, 20 years' experience).

KEY FINDING 7

Only a small minority of in-career teachers had undertaken in-service training in Development Education.

I wouldn't be that confident, and I'm definitely not an expert, and I think a lot of people who teach it do have a background in Geography and stuff, and I definitely don't. (Female Teacher, 6 years' experience)

The majority of in-service teachers had not participated in any in-service training in Development Education, while pre-service teachers received only limited exposure to development themes. Consequently, participants reported feeling ill-equipped and lacking in confidence, particularly when dealing with interrelated themes of racism, discrimination and multiculturalism. These anxieties were heightened when ethnic minority students were present with some teachers expressing fears of upsetting or further stigmatizing ethnic minority students.

KEY FINDING 8

Teachers need opportunities to come together, learn more, and exchange information and knowledge about their own experiences of 'doing' Development Education in schools.

Teachers frequently mentioned the need for opportunities where they could come together for support and information and to share their experiences of 'doing' Development Education.

I would like some more support, I'd like to feel that I could talk to other teachers sometimes about what they're doing (Male Teacher, 35 years' experience).

Similarly, participants who were involved in school-linking schemes expressed a need for an **overarching support system** that could help distil good practice out of existing practices, promote networking opportunities for school personnel and investigate the longer-term effects of school partnerships. They were largely appreciative of the training, supports and funding received from the state support agency, Worldwise. However, those benefits were somewhat overshadowed by participants' perceptions of the application process and reporting mechanism required by the agency as **overly bureaucratic and time-consuming**.

There are a lot of different models on the go in the schools and I would love to see best practices coming out of those. You know, some schools are going off to build and some schools are going off to work in clinics and some schools are going off to do the stuff we're doing ... I think [WorldWise] are the only ones who can act as some form of a co-ordinating forum for best practice (Male Teacher, 15 years' experience).

Schools with **'low visibility'** Development Education appeared to share the following characteristics:

- Students were generally from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and schools themselves were not as resource-rich as other schools in the sample.
- Students' ability to perform well academically lacked the 'taken-for-granted' status evident in other schools.
- Schools perceived the diversion of time and resources away from the 'basics' as a luxury they could not afford.
- Schools tended to lack staff members who were willing or able to drive support for Development Education initiatives. However, in some cases, individual teachers' attempts to initiate development-themed activities in 'low visibility' schools went unsupported or were actively resisted by the school.

On the other hand, the following characteristics appeared to facilitate a **'high visibility'** Development Education profile:

- A private, fee-paying structure and/or a large student body from relatively privileged backgrounds.
- Strong links with religious missionary orders and/or staff members with a strong passion for Development Education.
- An awareness of the status-enhancing and publicity-generating effects of pupil involvement with social justice initiatives.
- An assumption that students would perform well academically and progress to third level education. Consequently, Development Education was considered important to give students a 'complete' or 'well-rounded' education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Irish Aid

- *Ensure that all Development Education initiatives receiving financial support are premised on critical engagement with development themes and issues.*
- *Support the development of an interactive and easily 'updateable' curricular resource for teachers with a corresponding resource for students.*
- *Facilitate, in collaboration with other bodies, regular, structured networking and capacity-building opportunities for teachers.*

School-Linking and Immersion Delivery

- *encourage and support 'mutual learning' models of school linking schemes.*
- *withdraw support from school partnership programmes which adopt the 'helping model' and are premised on donor-recipient relationships and fundraising initiatives.*
- *implement a less time-consuming and less complex application process and reporting mechanism for schools engaged in school linking initiatives.*

Department of Education and Skills / National Centre for Curriculum & Assessment

- *Afford parity of esteem to CSPE*
- *Provide 'follow-through' opportunities for development education at senior cycle level*
- *End the conscription of teachers who lack training into teaching CSPE and ensure more frequent provision of regular in-service training for Citizenship Education teachers*
- *Radically revise the CSPE action project and make fundraising projects inadmissible.*

to discuss development-themed initiatives.

- Liaise with commercial textbook publishers regarding the development content of textbooks, particularly around the need to remove 'development pornography' from textbooks.
- Provide high-quality in-service training in intercultural education for all teachers
- Remove all calls to 'obedient activism' from educational materials in favour of initiatives designed to engage students in a critical evaluation of different kinds of development interventions.

Teacher Education Programmes

- Provide pre-service and in-career teachers with opportunities for sustained and critical engagement with Development Education.
- Support pre-service and in-career teachers in developing critical literacy skills which they can, in turn, cultivate in their own students.
- Employ highly-skilled lecturers with a dedicated Development or Citizenship brief in universities and Colleges of Education.

Schools

- Promote critical literacy in classrooms
- Do not endorse Development Education initiatives that are coupled with fundraising exercises.
- Provide whole-school support for Development Education to avoid over-burdening individual teachers with the responsibility for exposing students to development themes and global justice issues.
- Raise the profile and status of Development Education within schools by allocating specific time at staff meetings

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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