

TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

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Anne Marie Kavanagh, Fionnuala Waldron and Benjamin Mallon (eds.) (2021) *Teaching for Social Justice and Sustainable Development Across the Primary Curriculum*, Abingdon: Routledge.

This is an impressive, if somewhat ambitious, volume in bringing together a range of academics and educationalists from across Ireland, many of whom having a connection to Dublin City University, to address social justice and sustainable development themes across the primary curriculum. The book is divided into four main sections: critical enquiry; creative and relational approaches; challenging dominant frameworks; and social justice education in real contexts.

Twelve of the fifteen chapters focus on specific school subjects or themes such as race and ethical education. As well as introductory and concluding chapters by the editors there is also a chapter on a ‘whole school approach’ written by Anne Marie Kavanagh. Her chapter on a whole school approach is also different from most of the other chapters in that it has more of an empirical research focus, being based on her doctorate on intercultural education in Irish primary schools.

The importance of the volume and the increased status of development education and related areas in Ireland can be seen in the very supportive Foreword to the volume from the Irish President, Michael D. Higgins. The subject and theme-based chapters cover areas such as history, geography, science, visual arts, drama, music, language teaching and mathematics. There are also chapters on climate change, global citizenship and race and ethnicity through ethical education.

The volume is particularly strong in that whilst the various authors of the chapters have slightly different perspectives, there is a coherence to it around the themes of social justice, sustainable development and social change. Among the many challenging questions posed in the volume are the relationships of themes such as social justice to the wider purpose of education. Children throughout the chapters are seen, alongside teachers, as agents of change. Criticality is also a common term used throughout the book, for example, there is reference to critical engagement in both the word and the world. Several chapters also demonstrate the importance of multiple perspectives.

Where perhaps the volume is less explicit is on pedagogy. Whilst there is reference to differing approaches and summary of key debates relevant to specific disciplines, I think more could have been made of appropriate teaching methodologies and approaches. These are implicit rather than explicit. This for example can be seen in that whilst most of the chapters include at their end exemplars of lesson plans, there is little discussion of the relation of these examples to the earlier themes in the chapters. Also, I felt more could have been made of the interdisciplinarity of much of primary school teaching and many of the themes addressed cut across subject areas.

What I particularly enjoyed about the volume is the central place it gave to social justice education and education for sustainable development. I agree with the framing of social justice in the volume around pillars of equity, activism and social literacy. Social justice education has become increasingly influential in North America and it can provide an important conceptual basis for many of the themes addressed around development education and global citizenship education.

Finally, a minor criticism is that the specific Irish context within most of these chapters are situated could have been developed more; what are the factors that influence specific pedagogical approaches. Whilst I recognise and hope that readers from all regions of the world will read this very important

volume, the antecedents of some of the ideas and practices could have been explored more.

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