

DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT: A DVD-BASED LEARNING RESOURCE FOR KEY STAGE 3 AND 4

Review by Ruth Doggett

'Disability and Development' is a resource aimed at supporting teachers address the Learning for Life and Work component of the Northern Ireland curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 or Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) at Junior Certificate level in the Republic of Ireland. Developed by a consortia of disability and development organisations across the island of Ireland and structured around specially commissioned short films, it provides teachers with a valuable resource to encourage students' exploration of the lives of young people living with disabilities around the world and the interconnection between poverty and disability.

The resource is laid out as seven session plans, with an overview provided of the resource learning activities on pages 4-7. While the resource is particularly aimed at the subjects mentioned above, the activities provide ample opportunity for the issues to be addressed as a cross curricular project. Each session is estimated to take one hour to deliver which means that each one may need to be planned across more than one class period, depending on timetabling. The provision of suggested extension activities within each plan, however, facilitates this and the resource is well structured to allow an in-depth project on disability and development to be carried out.

A particular strength of this resource is the seven films provided on a DVD which were commissioned to illustrate the concepts discussed in each session. It can be difficult to find films which align closely with topics being discussed in a classroom. However, this resource has been well thought out and the films provided are honest portrayals of the lives of young people living with disabilities across the world. They illustrate the diversity of experiences of young people living with disabilities, sensitively exploring the causes of their disabilities, the impact on their lives and their hopes for the future. For example, through these films, young people are introduced to: the challenges faced by wheelchair users in rural Nepal; a young boy injured by debris falling during the earthquake of 2010 in Haiti; disability caused by generational genetic mutations as a result of exposure to Dioxin contained in Agent Orange spread during the Vietnam war; disability caused by poverty and malnutrition; and disability caused by a congenital or inherited condition.

Session one provides a solid foundation lesson, clarifying the different types of disability and introducing students to the legislative frameworks in place to protect the rights of people with disabilities and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities into society. Session two explores how disabilities can be caused by life situations, illustrated by two very different experiences of young women in Nepal and offering students the opportunity to consider how disability may or may not affect quality of life. Session three centres on the experience of a young boy living with a physical disability caused by malnutrition in Ethiopia. In this session, students are encouraged to explore the connection between poverty and disability in this film through group activities and class discussion. Session four builds on these by exploring the attitudes and feelings that people with disabilities experience in society, bringing the experience home by focussing on a young girl living with a visual disability in Northern Ireland and encouraging some of the students to experience the session with a simulated disability.

Sessions five and six move the learning from building empathy and critical reflection to understanding and analysis of legislative frameworks and global commitments to support the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society, namely the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (session five) and the Millennium Development Goals (session six). These sessions, again supported by appropriate films, consider how certain rights may need particular enforcement in certain situations and that this focus on addressing disability issues is vital for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Having previous experience of exploring these frameworks with second level students, I am aware of how difficult it can be to bring the issues down to the level of students' understanding. This resource does so admirably. The exploration of each article is carried out as an interactive activity and the accompanying films once again speak to the empathy of young people and their own life experiences, making the frameworks meaningful and applicable.

Working my way through the resource, my own understanding and commitment to addressing the issues raised by the films was awakened, so it is fitting that the final session (session seven) takes this new understanding and encourages students to consider their power to make a difference. It starts by exploring the different levels of response by the student themselves, the class as a whole, society and government. Finally, it encourages the students to make a commitment to action by drawing up a class action plan and providing contact details of the organisations responsible for developing the resource who are also available to provide school visits and class room based activities.

‘Disability and Development’ is a strong development education resource. It makes tangible links between the lives of those living with disabilities in the global North and South and compels the students to action by exploring their sphere of influence and the existing democratic opportunities for influencing change. Throughout the resource, interactive participatory activities are employed to explore the issues, from the use of group work and collages to drama based activities such as human sculptures and simulated experiences. Alongside all of this are the remarkable films and another CD with all the printouts required to deliver the module including fact sheets on each country covered, case studies of the young people we meet through the films, and simplified versions of the MDGs and UNCRPD. Evaluation is also recommended to the teacher, with an evaluation target sheet provided on the CD, allowing the student and teacher to evaluate each session and make changes as they progress through the module. It is a considered resource and welcome addition to development education resources for second level students. I would be happy to recommend it to colleagues and teachers and am confident that it will facilitate teachers’ delivery of a quality module on Disability and Development with their students.

Disability and Development: A DVD-based learning resource for Key Stage 3 and 4 (2012) Fermanagh: Development Media Workshop. For more information on the resource visit <http://disabilityanddevelopment.ie/>.

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