

# CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** In 2019, the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) launched a Code of Good Practice for Development Education. The idea of creating a Code of Good Practice was born out of a desire to strengthen good practice in development education (DE) through a self-assessment process which would help educators to articulate their good practice and identify any gaps which needed focus. The Code of Good Practice for Development Education (hereafter ‘the Code’) is the first of its kind in Ireland and an important development in the practice of DE on European and global stages. It was developed collectively by IDEA members over the course of three years and builds on good practice in the DE sector in Ireland over many more years. IDEA members engaged in drafting the content and piloting the Code, developing supporting documents and an implementation framework, leading to its official launch at the end of 2019. DE needs to be responsive to a turbulent and changing global environment. Reflecting on our practice and challenging our approach are central to quality DE.

**Key words:** Development Education (DE); Code; Good Practice; Community of Practice; Peer Learning; Self-Assessment; Quality Education; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 4.7.

## **Introduction**

IDEA, the Irish Development Education Association, is the national network for development education (DE) in Ireland and a leading voice for the sector. IDEA was established in 2004 and represents over 70 members involved in the practice, promotion and advancement of DE in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Together as a network, IDEA works to strengthen DE in Ireland and to raise awareness of the crucial role it has to play in achieving an equal, just and sustainable future. IDEA members refer to their work under a variety of educational approaches, including DE, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Environmental Education (EE) and Global Citizenship

Education (GCE) which all contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly target 4.7 which aims to:

“By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (United Nations, 2015: 19).

This article considers the rationale for creating this Code in Ireland and the process involved in developing it. It discusses how the Code will work in practice and how it will benefit IDEA members. It also explores some possible challenges in rolling-out the Code in 2020 and beyond.

## **Rationale for creating a Code of Good Practice for Development Education**

The idea of developing a Code of Good Practice for Development Education initially arose from an IDEA working group on Good Practice in 2009. IDEA working groups are member-led groups that come together to explore an area of relevance to their DE practice. The working group set about developing Good Practice Guidelines over a number of years within IDEA and with partner organisations for various sectors of education including: formal education (IDEA, 2013); adult and community education (IDEA, 2014); volunteering (Comhlámh, n.d.) and developing resources (Dóchas, IDEA and DevelopmentEducation.ie, 2014). The Code is the culmination of work carried out by IDEA members and partners over at least ten years and, arguably, over the several decades during which DE has been practiced in Ireland.

IDEA as a network of educators is fully committed to strengthening good practice and supporting our members to do so. The Code of Good Practice for Development Education facilitates good educational practice as it promotes knowledge and understanding of the root causes of poverty, injustice

and inequality; critical thinking; reflection on our own position in our globalised and interdependent world; and an impetus to act on injustice (IDEA, 2019a). IDEA regards the Code as a key tool for the promotion of quality DE as a right for all learners in Ireland. It supports practitioners by enabling us to create quality educational experiences; use creative, participatory methods; produce quality resources and materials; and evaluate whether what we are doing is making a difference. It encourages us to be open to give and receive feedback, to learn from others and contribute to a community of practice. The cumulative results of quality DE are more important than ever in our increasingly globalised and unequal world. It builds skills for action, encourages learners to imagine solutions for a better world, and brings our ethos and values into our operations through the organisational principles of the Code (Ibid).

The Code was written by IDEA members and represents a collective agreement to both strengthen and articulate quality DE across all of our work. The Code is an expression of what IDEA members have in common; a commitment to protect the integrity of development education through our own good practice.

### **Development of the Code**

In November 2016, IDEA members were invited to a workshop to explore how to strengthen and reinvigorate the various Good Practice Guidelines created, to ensure they are living documents which influence practice in the sector. There was a broad discussion among a variety of IDEA members present at that workshop and a clear consensus to create a common Code of Good Practice for Development Education emerged. That meeting also agreed that any Code should be developed for and driven by the DE sector itself. As part of the workshop and the subsequent report by Éilís Ryan, a consultant facilitating that stage of the process, other voluntary Codes within the non-governmental organisation (NGO) and DE sectors were also presented (CGE, 2015; Comhlámh, 2013; Dóchas, 2006; 2008; National Youth Council of Ireland, 2007; People in Aid, 2003; WorldWise Global Schools, n.d.), in particular the Comhlámh (n.d.) Code for Volunteer-Sending Agencies (VSAs).

Desk-based research was also carried out for any other similar codes for DE internationally in case there were other Codes we could adapt, however nothing similar was found.

In May 2017, IDEA members were invited to join a group tasked with drafting content for a Code. At that stage, there were 13 IDEA members active in the task group over a period of five months with others feeding in remotely. Interestingly, in the early stages, the idea of having more than one Code was raised, in order to complement the already published Good Practice Guidelines at sub-sectoral level (formal education, youth work, adult and community education etc.). IDEA also engaged a consultant, Morina O’Neill, to facilitate the work of the group and support the development of content alongside IDEA staff. A desk review of all available background material was carried out including a further search for other Codes for DE in other parts of the world. Nothing similar to what we wished to create was found.

As a result of the review of background materials, a basis for the Code content was created using the ‘Vision for Development Education’ (IDEA, 2015) and the Good Practice Guidelines (IDEA, 2013; 2014). The ‘Vision’ document (IDEA, 2015) set out the key values and characteristics of DE and aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the approach of DE rather than a single definition. At the first task group meeting in June 2017, the members critically reviewed the framework put forward for the Code content and began to flesh out the areas to be included in terms of good practice. This included topics related to educational practice (knowledge, understanding, critical thinking, sourcing of information, action taking, monitoring and evaluation) as well as organisational practice (organisational policies and strategies, human resources, governance and advocacy). These areas went on to become the ‘Core Principles’ of the Code (IDEA, 2019a). It was also clear, at this stage, that any Code had to be relevant to individual practitioners as well as organisational members of IDEA.

Subsequent meetings of the drafting group focused on indicators linked to each of the Principles and also thinking about the evidence which

could be used to illustrate good practice in each area of the Code. The group also initiated discussions on how the Code could be implemented by IDEA members, and how they might be supported to do so. As the work progressed, the group agreed that a common Code for all IDEA members was most useful, given that many members worked across and between different sectors of education; in schools, in higher education, in community-based projects and with youth groups. By the end of 2017, the draft Code content was agreed, and IDEA members were invited to volunteer to participate in the pilot (IDEA, 2018). At this point, eight organisations came forward to pilot the Code, of which six completed the pilot phase, including the IDEA office staff team. At that stage, the Code had 15 principles. Each pilot organisation completed the self-assessment process for a number of principles which ensured that all principles were covered by dividing them purposefully.

The Code pilot was hugely valuable (Ibid) and was complemented by an extensive review with the pilot organisations by an external consultant, Adrienne Boyle, who interviewed them about their experience of the Code during the pilot. This review focused on what organisations did and their experience of working on the Code. They were also asked about the challenges, and what they would do differently, what advice they would have for other practitioners undertaking the Code and other reflections on how it affected their practice of DE. These are set out under benefits and challenges below.

The final stage in developing the current Code came in 2019, when feedback from the pilot informed the Code content. Fifteen principles were reduced to twelve, nine of which focus on educational practice and three on organisational practice relating to DE (IDEA, 2019a). In addition, IDEA brought together an advisory group to develop structures to roll-out the Code to the DE sector. The advisory group's work included setting out the steps of the Code journey, what self-assessment and Code compliance could look like, and what learning, support and networking opportunities could be offered. The final version of the Code is a result of all of this work, alongside a series of supporting documents, including an information leaflet on the Code which

folds out into a poster to display in the workplace (IDEA, 2019a); a User Guide (IDEA, 2019c) outlining steps on the Code journey and what support you can avail of from IDEA and the membership; a Self-Assessment Workbook (IDEA, 2019b) which is a toolkit to be completed for each principle along with an action plan template; and a Code Commitment form which Code members should sign to join the Code. The Code Commitment Form must be signed by the chief executive officer (CEO) of organisational members (individual members sign their own Code commitment form) and must be renewed annually.

### **Roll-out and benefits of the Code of Good Practice**

This section focuses on the intended and potential benefits of using a Code of Good Practice for Development Education, informed by the results of the pilot process as well as input from the IDEA staff tasked with overseeing Code development. DE is an educational process which enables people to understand the world around them and to act to transform it (IDEA, 2015). It works to tackle the root causes of injustice and inequality, globally and locally, to create a more just and sustainable future for everyone. Quality DE is more important than ever, in Ireland and globally. As DE practitioners, we must be responsive to a turbulent and changing global environment. This requires us to continuously challenge our own thinking, re-examine our focus, and to critically evaluate whether what we are doing makes a difference. Reflecting on our own practice and challenging our approach are central to quality DE.

#### *Strengthening good practice*

The Code provides a framework and a rationale to take time to focus and critically reflect on what we are doing as educators. It encourages practitioners to take time to value and acknowledge the work we are already doing well. The self-assessment tool (IDEA, 2019b) is also useful in identifying gaps and where we have more to do. For one organisation involved in the pilot, they found writing down what they were doing important in relation to the Code. ‘For us, after doing it for so long, we do it on autopilot. But the Code has

enabled us to codify what we do and given us the rigour of writing it down'. Another pilot group noted:

“The Code helped us reflect on work we were already doing. It supported us with a lens through which to look at our training provision and now we have a one-pager based on the principles for our pre-departure training. The training has become more about critical engagement”.

### *The Code as a framework*

The Code provides a framework for different types of educational practice, both for those who are relatively new to DE and those who have more experience:

“I felt the Code should be an instrument that would not only guide a seasoned practitioner in our practice but would also help those new to the sector to grasp all the elements they should be considering in developing a DE programme”.

As the self-assessment process is carried out by the individual educator or organisation, it enables us to build on where we are at. There is a risk of being overwhelmed by the Code, with 12 principles and 34 indicators. But the pilot members were very clear that the Code is ‘a journey’, and that each Code member that signs up will be on that journey with other ‘critical friends’. The Code journey begins with our own good practice in DE. Also for organisations who don’t deliver DE regularly, the Code can be utilised to enhance other areas of work: ‘It definitely renewed our awareness that while we aren’t [always] delivering DE directly it is important that the principles of DE are reflected in how we work and what we deliver’.

### *Community of peer learning*

During the Code development, there was a real desire to create a community of practitioners who could come together to learn from each other's practice, being open and honest about areas which were challenging, and celebrating the work that was being done well. For the pilot group, meeting up with peers was very supportive, facilitating learning across organisations:

“It gave us a space for creative reflection, to think more about the qualitative rather than the quantitative side and to deepen our understanding. It was important to feel part of something collective, to get a sense of how others approached it”.

### *Trying different approaches*

The Code is also a useful tool to give a deeper rationale to strengthen our own skills in doing DE as well as time to think about how we can tweak things. There were lots of examples of new approaches from the pilot group, which they felt the Code facilitated, or ‘gave permission to do’:

“In the past we might have been afraid to invite peers into our space, because we weren't confident. But the code has really encouraged us to do this, e.g. our networking with Stop Climate Chaos. We achieved a lot more through this collaboration”.

“[The Code helped] to deepen our linkages with groups working on social/global justice issues for responding to requests for collaboration with other stakeholders that may otherwise have been outside our agreed work programme for the year”.

“As well as using trusted, evidence-based publications we need to ensure we are hearing and promoting ‘thought leaders’ from the global South. Podcasts are brilliant for this”.

“Taking a couple of guilt free hours when at work (rare as that may be) on a weekly basis to research, read and review is rewarding and vital”.

### *Taking stock of our approach*

The Code aims to provide a clear tool for self-assessment without becoming a ‘tick the box’ exercise. It seeks to encourage meaningful reflection on the work we do. It can challenge well-established practices by formalising reflection. This means that practices have moved beyond the comfort zone of ‘that’s the way we do things’. Other learning from the Code pilot include realising ‘We hadn’t been that great at collecting information on “engagement, use and associated learning [of our resources]”’; as the organisation in question had been focusing primarily on distribution of resources, so the indicator enabled them to move their practice forward. The Code also encourages us all to think outside our ‘bubble’ and look at information from different sources and perspectives: ‘Move outside your “echo chamber”’.

## **Challenges of implementing the Code of Good Practice for Development Education**

The learning from the pilot also highlighted a number of challenges for practitioners in using the Code, and in IDEA, our role is also to anticipate areas where our members will need support in rolling-out the Code.

### *Time and resources*

In a sector where many DE practitioners work alone, or in small teams, and in small organisations, finding adequate time to focus on the Code can be a challenge. Code members need to build it into annual work plans in order to allocate sufficient time and resources to it. This is one of the reasons that the CEO/Director of Code member organisations must sign the Code commitment form. Senior management needs to be involved in planning and allocating resources to DE and to the Code self-assessment process. One of the IDEA members involved in the pilot of the Code said that it asks organisations to:

“Make sure the organisation as a whole has buy-in from a senior level. You have to make sure the Code plays out in a day-to-day way in the organisation. Make sure specific time is allocated by senior management to the person implementing the Code. There has to be a perception that the Code is relevant to the organisation as a whole”.

For those working in organisations, it will be vital to include other team members as well. Advice from those who completed the pilot was to set aside more time for the team as a whole to meet more regularly to discuss the Code. This could mean including it as a standing item in team meetings or dedicating specific meetings to it.

### *The Code needs regular attention*

There was a sense during the pilot that practitioners could get overwhelmed by the Code. It is really important that the process is useful and meaningful. As such, educators must take it at their own pace. The self-assessment is designed to include an action plan, and Code members can decide to just focus on a few areas for development. It needs to be seen as a step-by-step journey, and a process. A suggestion was to incorporate other work that you are going to be doing on a regular basis which is relevant to you and your DE practice and apply the Code action plan to this area. As one of the pilot organisations suggested: ‘This is why focusing on the review of the resource packs was so useful for us – we were doing it anyway, but the Code stimulated us to look at it in more depth, and hence develop better practice’.

### *Interpreting the Code*

The development of the Code took place over three years and the content of the Code was shaped by DE practitioners working in many different sectors, across different organisations, as well as freelance workers. All the ideas from the initial drafting process had to be distilled down into a more succinct version. In some cases, the phrasing of the Code was hotly contested and terminology that was used had to fit a wide variety of DE settings and

audiences. The language used is very much from a DE perspective and may be challenging for those operating in other sectors to grasp completely. Even among DE practitioners, there may be differing interpretations of the meaning of some indicators and principles: 'The Principle created a lot of discussion around specific themes. This could be interpreted very differently by different organisations.

### *Utilising the Code and associated learning for the DE sector*

Almost half of IDEA's organisational members have signed up to implement the Code in their practice in 2020. This first year of the Code is very much a learning process for all involved, both the practitioners using the self-assessment process, and for IDEA staff to gauge the work involved and the resources needed. IDEA also has an important role in articulating how the Code process can benefit the DE sector as a whole – in highlighting areas of strength and good practice and identifying shared challenges in DE practice overall. IDEA will also receive a significant amount of evidence of good practice via the self-assessments and it is important for us to consider and plan for how we will make the learning from the self-assessments accessible to all Code members, as well as other stakeholders. We believe the Code will produce important data which could enable us to identify trends in DE, emerging issues as well as 'blind spots', and we have a role to play in communicating these findings from the Code's roll-out. As with the Code members, time and resources will need to be made available to maximise the impact of the Code at sectoral level. The Code network will come together twice a year and these meetings will be an important opportunity to surface this learning and plan to address gaps as well as communicate the successes.

### *Supporting individual practitioners as well as organisations*

Code membership is open to both organisations and individuals delivering DE. Individual practitioners only need to work on the first nine principles of the Code addressing educational practice (the other three focus on organisational practice). How the individuals use the Code may differ from how

organisations use it. Individuals may decide to focus on one particular DE setting they work in, or with one project. They may not have the benefit of collaborating with colleagues in the self-assessment stage and may need further support from IDEA in completing their self-assessment. There has been a lower uptake in 2020 from individual members and this is something we will seek to address in future years.

### *What's involved in becoming a Code member*

All Code materials are freely available on the IDEA website (IDEA, 2019c) for anyone to access and use. Code Membership is open to all members of IDEA, both organisations and individuals, however, it is not a condition of membership. IDEA has undertaken to provide dedicated support to Code members through the journey of implementation. Joining the Code involves a self-assessment process which members carry out and share with IDEA. There are three Compliance Commitments for Code members: sign a Code Commitment form; carry out the self-assessment process including developing an action plan to be shared with IDEA; and attend at least one Code network meeting annually. Feedback on this process is provided to Code members by IDEA as well as access to network meetings, training and events.

Becoming a Code member offers many benefits, including networking, peer learning, support opportunities, the space to share your experiences as DE practitioner, and an opportunity to celebrate and showcase good practice in DE.

### **Conclusions**

The pilot process was hugely valuable and surfaced important learning. Among other things, the participants found that the Code supported their reflective practice, helped them to more effectively promote DE within their organisations and improve their own personal DE practice overall, as well as bringing them back to the values and ethos underpinning DE. We hope these positive effects of the Code are felt more widely as more Code members sign up to implement it in their daily work. It is a very exciting time for the DE

sector in Ireland, with a huge commitment among practitioners to utilise the Code to strengthen their good practice, and we will have ample evidence from this process to continue to learn from.

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