

# Opportunities for development education within formal education in the Republic of Ireland

Development education has been a feature of education in the Republic of Ireland for over thirty years. **Annette Honan** explores the development education opportunities within the formal education sector in the contemporary Irish context.

## Setting the context

*“...development education is an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. It seeks to engage people in analysis, reflection and action for local and global citizenship and participation. It is about supporting people in understanding and in acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives and the lives of others at personal, community, national and international levels” (Development Cooperation Ireland 2003:12)*

Development education has been a feature of education in the Republic of Ireland for over thirty years. From its origins as a marginal ‘tag-on’ to the curriculum, mainly promoted by returned development workers and non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs), development education today has ‘come in from the cold’ with both its content and methodologies evident across the curriculum at both primary and post-primary levels.

In recent years, a consciousness of the global context in which education takes place has been much in evidence in the debate on educational reform. The outward-looking character of contemporary Irish education is evident in official policy documents and educational discourse. This is due to a variety of factors, such as, the multiplicity of cultural ties and political relationships which Ireland enjoys, the work of Irish non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and more recently, the growth in ethnic and cultural diversity brought about by increased movement from an enlarged European Union, as well as an increase in asylum seekers and those issued with work permits from around the world.

Commenting on the context in which Irish education takes place the Government's White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995:ch 17), noted:

*“Recent geopolitical developments, including major changes in Eastern Europe, concern about an apparent resurgence of racism, violence and xenophobia in many countries, and the focus on conflict resolution in the island of Ireland, serve to underline the importance of education in areas such as human rights, tolerance, mutual understanding, cultural identity, peace and the promotion of co-operation in the world among people of different traditions and beliefs. The threat to the global environment has focused attention on the importance of environmental education.”*

In this context, the need for education to cultivate an awareness of global issues is affirmed.

*“An important component of the international dimension of education is making young people aware of the nature and causes of underdevelopment in the world and about what needs to be done to bring about change in relation to the imbalance in wealth between rich and poor countries. ...An aim informing policy formulation, educational practice and curriculum development at the different levels will be to create an **awareness of global issues, including the environment and third-world issues**. The objective will be to stimulate a commitment, by individuals and society as a whole to necessary actions that respond to specific crises and equally importantly to search for and promote long-term solutions to the underlying problems.”*

At the outset it must be emphasised that the kinds of dispositions, understanding, values and attitudes central to development education are, in the first instance laid through the encounter of the learner with the individual teacher, through the relationship experienced, through the teaching approaches and finally, through the actual curriculum (in the narrow sense) itself. That said, this article will explore opportunities for linking development education within the curriculum while aware that development education is more than the sum of a series of random opportunities.

## Opportunities in Primary Education

The Republic of Ireland's Primary Curriculum was launched in September, 1999 and amongst the aims of the Primary Curriculum are to:

- enable the learner to come to an understanding of the world through the acquisition of knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes and the ability to think critically
- enable children to develop a respect for cultural difference, an appreciation of civic responsibility and an understanding of the social dimensions of life past and present
- enable children to develop skills and understanding in order to study their world and its inhabitants and appreciate the interrelationships between them
- enable children to develop personally and socially and to relate to others with understanding and respect

The above aims emphasise the importance and relevance of a development education perspective in implementing the Curriculum. The specific opportunities for incorporating a global dimension in the Curriculum were explored in detail in *The World in the Classroom – Development Education in the Primary Curriculum* (Ruane et al, 1999). This guide illustrates how a development education perspective can be incorporated into each of the seven curricular areas – Language, Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, Arts Education, Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education and Religious Education. It also suggests appropriate methodologies and teaching resources to support the integration of development education within the Curriculum.

The Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) has been charged with the responsibility for delivering in-service training to all primary teachers in the State. Every teacher in every school receives one day's in-service on each subject area. The PCSP team are under great pressure to present the core concepts of the curriculum in the time available. While some in-service has included a development education perspective, it must be acknowledged that a host of other 'educations' are all vying for attention (human rights education, intercultural education, special needs education). However, History and Geography will be the subjects for in-service training starting September 2005, and these subjects present very strong and interesting opportunities for development education.

The publication of *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Teachers*, (NCCA/Department of Education and Science, 2005) is a significant support to primary teachers who wish to bring both an

intercultural perspective and a global justice perspective to their teaching. Many of the core values around which intercultural education is based (such as similarity and difference, human rights and responsibilities, discrimination and equality) are compatible with the values that underpin development education. A number of the exemplar lesson plans presented in the Guidelines are supportive of development education. So too, the suggestions relating to planning the physical and social environment of the classroom are equally relevant in promoting development education as in promoting intercultural education. For example, in relation to choosing classroom displays, it is suggested that ‘images should be chosen to reflect accurately people’s current daily lives. This will help overcome stereotypes’ (NCCA 2005:41).

At pre-service level, a very interesting initiative has been started and funded by the Development Education Unit of Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI). The Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) project works to integrate development and intercultural education within initial primary teacher education across five colleges of education in the Republic of Ireland. In three of the colleges the development and intercultural module is compulsory for all students while it is an elective module in the remaining two. The project works in two main ways – developing and delivering courses to raise awareness of development and intercultural issues amongst students, and increasing awareness and capacity of college staff to incorporate development and intercultural education into their work. Since its initiation in 2001, the response to the project has been very positive from both students and staff. It will take more time and research to establish the long-term impact of the project on graduates’ classroom practice and to see how it influences the whole culture and curriculum of the colleges of education participating in the project.

## **Opportunities in Post-Primary Education**

### **Junior Cycle**

In 1989 the Junior Certificate programme was introduced based on the principles of breadth and balance, relevance, quality, coherence, continuity and progression. One of the key aims of the Junior Certificate programme is to:

*“prepare the young person for the responsibilities of citizenship in the national context and in the context of the wider European and global communities.”*

*A Programme for Reform (1993, p.26)*

A number of common features can be discerned across the Junior Certificate programme, all of which are compatible with the philosophy of development education:

- an emphasis on process rather than product
- emphasis on active-based methodologies
- focus on attitudes, concepts and skills to be imparted
- encouragement of non-linear approaches to teaching of syllabus content
- suggested potential for cross-curricular themes

A full review of the opportunities for the incorporation of development education across Junior Certificate subjects is available in *A Global Curriculum? Development Education and the Junior Certificate* (Hammond, 1991). While the opportunities are plentiful for integrating a global dimension in the Junior Certificate subjects teachers have sometimes expressed the view that they have difficulty in pursuing these links. There is a perception amongst teachers and schools that the Junior Certificate curriculum is ‘overloaded’. Plans are in train to rebalance Junior Certificate syllabuses in order to reduce both overlap and overload. The aim of this rebalancing is to allow teachers greater opportunities to engage with topics in more depth and also to enable extension work in areas of interest to both the teacher and his/her students. Work on the first ten rebalanced subjects will be completed in early 2006. This could allow more space for development education themes to be explored.

A further initiative that has relevance for development education is the NCCA’s work with teachers in providing professional support in the use of Assessment for Learning (see [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)). The essential purpose of Assessment for Learning is to provide feedback to the learner on the progress of his/her learning so that he/she can learn more effectively. Goals are agreed together and the teacher moves from ‘giving a mark’ to giving feedback which helps the student identify the next step she/he should take to improve. This implies a changed teacher-student relationship that is more dialogical and democratic – a relationship that is more in keeping with the philosophy and approaches of development education.

### **Senior Cycle**

A study of the opportunities for development education at senior cycle in the Republic will soon be published by the NCCA and DCI. This study shows strong links and opportunities for exploring development education across the whole range of senior cycle subjects and programmes. The Transition Year possibly presents the richest opportunity for incorporating development education at senior cycle. Amongst the core aims of the

Transition Year is the fostering of social awareness. Social awareness must be local and global. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine a school doing justice to the aims of the Transition Year without incorporating development education in the programme. Because the Transition Year programme is designed to allow great flexibility of content, approaches and timetabling there are numerous ways that development education can be included in the programme. Some of the options are; a whole school approach, a cross-curricular approach, integration of development education into existing subjects or provision of a stand-alone module in development education. The flexibility afforded by the Transition Year presents opportunities for development education to be linked to special days (such as International Human Rights Day) and special weeks (such as One World Week and Fair Trade Fortnight). By setting aside special dedicated days schools can enable creative work across cross-curricular themes that involve the whole school community.

Both the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational (LCVP) programmes offer rich opportunities for development education. The use of active teaching and learning methodologies is encouraged in LCA and LCVP. Project work based on research and investigation of a topic of interest to the student is also important. Skills of discussion, problem solving, independent learning and team-work are emphasised. Cross-curricular work is encouraged and this provides opportunities for exploring development issues using cross-curricular approaches.

The majority of students who progress to senior cycle education follow the Leaving Certificate (established) programme. This has often been criticised as overly academic and exam driven. This might be seen as a barrier to extra-curricular and cross-curricular work in development education. However, an audit of Leaving Certificate subjects shows that there are ample opportunities for incorporating a global perspective without straying from the curriculum. Many Leaving Certificate subjects present rich opportunities for exploring development education issues. Most subjects approach learning from both a local and global perspective and provide opportunities for students to explore issues of justice and human rights that impact on their daily lives and on the wider world. All Leaving Certificate programmes emphasise the importance of self-directed learning and highlight the importance of critical thinking, reflection and problem solving. Values of respect for diversity, human rights, justice, solidarity and care for the earth are both explicitly and implicitly evident across a wide range of Leaving Certificate subjects.

A core set of aims is also evident which corresponds with the aims of development education. Amongst the common aims which can be identified are:

- to foster an appreciation of the diversity of life
- to promote mutual understanding and respect for the diversity of peoples and cultures that share this planet
- to understand how humans can responsibly use the natural resources of the earth for the production of food and non-food materials
- to critically evaluate the impact of scientific, technological and economic progress
- to engage critically with information and be able to recognise perspective, bias or prejudice

### **Review of Senior Cycle**

The NCCA's review of senior cycle post-primary education commenced with the publication of *Developing Senior Cycle Education: Consultative Paper on Issues and Options* in October 2002. It has been progressed since then through an extensive consultation process and a series of publications culminating in detailed advice to the Minister for Education and Science in April 2005. Many of the proposals for change outlined in these documents have the potential to open up new opportunities for development education at senior cycle. Amongst the changes recommended are:

- reducing the content of subject syllabuses in order to create more space for a greater student role in structured, well managed, independent learning and research
- over a two or three-year programme of study senior cycle students would have access to a range of curriculum components - subjects, short courses and Transition Units
- in order to balance the range of subjects available to learners, a number of additional subjects would be introduced on an optional basis (for example, Social and Political Education). In addition, short courses are proposed which would be developed on a phased basis
- assessment would be more frequent and spread out across the courses of study
- changes to school culture would be promoted to allow students to take more responsibility for their learning and to enable access to learning environments beyond the school
- a new form of certification will record more of the student's achievements and give greater insight into the range of skills students have encountered in their programme of study

The particular combination of transition units, short courses and subjects taken by a senior cycle student would be called a *programme of study*. Programmes of study would be characterised by choice and flexibility. From a development education perspective it is interesting to note that the NCCA's advice (2005b:14) to the Minister states,

*“The purpose of senior cycle education is not solely related to meeting needs and ambitions associated with further study and work. Curriculum components that cater for the personal and social development of students, that contribute to their personal well-being and prepare them for life as citizens should be included.”*

This view was also strongly expressed by those who responded to the NCCA online Senior Cycle Consultative Survey. When asked to identify the most important challenges facing students in the future respondents identified challenges such as communicating with others and appreciating different cultures as more important than finding gainful work.

With this in mind, and in order to offer greater balance in the range of subjects available to students, the subject list will be reviewed to establish what new subjects should be added to the list as either subjects or short courses. Social and Political Education is amongst the new subjects likely to be introduced. It is envisaged that a wide menu of Transition Units will be developed by schools and recognised by the NCCA. A range of development themes could be included in new Transition Units.

In summary, then, the future points towards:

- a move away from the division of learning into a range of encounters with separate subject areas and greater emphasis on basic and key skills. These include skills that are at the heart of development education, such as communication, critical thinking and working with others
- new models of inter-disciplinary teaching and learning. This too will facilitate an inter-disciplinary approach to development education issues which has always been promoted by development education practitioners
- a broadening of the basis of assessment to a more diverse assessment process. For example, more emphasis on research and project work/action projects will support the unity of education and action for change. This unity is central to the philosophy and methodology of development education.

- a changing role of teachers from imparters of knowledge to facilitators of learning using a broad repertoire of methods associated with active and self-directed learning methodologies. It is envisaged that the teacher of the future will engage much less in ‘banking information’ and instead facilitate critical enquiry and active engagement in the learning process.

## Conclusions

The role of the individual teacher is probably *the* most significant factor in determining whether students will experience the kinds of issues and teaching approaches central to development education. Teachers who are sensitive to issues of justice and human rights, are aware of and open to exploring the wider world and have a sense of responsibility and commitment to creating a better world, will find opportunities to link development education within the subjects they teach. This is especially so in the case of ‘open-ended’ syllabuses such as Art, Music, English, Irish and Modern Languages. The teacher can exercise considerable choice in the selection of texts and themes to be explored in class. Where syllabuses are framed more tightly (such as Geography, History, R.E. and the Sciences) there are usually options or elective units which offer possibilities in relation to development education. Some subjects also present opportunities to explore a development education theme as part of the assessment process. Here again the teacher is key in encouraging and supporting students in researching topics with a development education link. This points to the need for professional development that builds capacity and confidence amongst teachers so that they can see the opportunities to engage in development education and have the necessary skills and knowledge to take such an approach.

In the course of the NCCA’s consultation on senior cycle education, many people (including students themselves) pointed to the need for a school culture conducive to fostering more independent thinking and learning. There was also considerable discussion of the need for students to become more participative in their learning through the development of critical thinking skills, communication skills and the ability to work with others. The importance of a more democratic school culture has been highlighted in the proposals, and the NCCA envisages working on models of greater inclusion of the student voice. This will be welcomed by development education practitioners who have consistently highlighted the importance of school culture and argued that issues of justice and human rights cannot simply be taught as discrete slots on the timetable. The values

that underpin development education are more ‘caught’ than ‘taught’. They are caught through the whole school environment, including the values, messages and culture of the school. Therefore it is difficult to teach *about* human rights in a school culture where a student’s experience of equality, respect and participation in democratic processes is poor.

Finally, the increasing number of international students in Irish classrooms is bringing new challenges and opportunities to all areas of Irish education. Where previously teachers might not have considered making links between local and global issues the very presence of students from a variety of cultures and continents makes these links more immediate and relevant today. This growing cultural diversity of students is a great asset to teachers wishing to bring a global dimension into their teaching.

## References

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