

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND CAMPAIGNING LINKAGES

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Introduction

A central value of development education (DE) entails linking participatory learning with action for global justice. This is often an energising and dynamic process within development education work. Nevertheless, there are differing approaches within the global justice community regarding how and when the action elements of development education should be introduced, and at what point education and campaigning approaches should intertwine. This article will reflect on the relationship between development education and campaigns and some of the strategic considerations that inform how they work together. She suggests some of the structural factors that may underpin the differences between development education and campaigns and makes some recommendations as to how the sectors can be mutually supportive.

One of the clearest descriptions of the difference between development education and campaigns comes from Irish Aid's *Development Education Strategy* which suggests that development education should 'encourage people towards action for a more just and equal world' (Irish Aid, 2007a:6). On the link between development education and campaigning, Irish Aid's funding guidelines state that:

“[D]evelopment education projects can incorporate an element of campaigning and advocacy for change. In order to qualify for funding [...] campaigning and advocacy activities must be genuinely educational and informed by sound pedagogical practice. In practice this means providing a target group with a range of information and perspectives, as opposed to a single viewpoint. It also implies enabling target groups to reach their own conclusions, rather than providing a single solution” (Irish Aid, 2007b:7).

This clearly highlights the approach desired by Irish Aid in their funding of development education work and campaigning activities that are considered educational. It also reveals the grey areas that exist in defining what this approach actually means in practice. For example, how exactly can development education practitioners facilitate the encouragement of people toward action, while ensuring that a range of options are explored, and ensuring that campaigning approaches are included as an element of the process? On the one hand, the Irish Aid guidelines encourage good practice by emphasising rigorous and open approaches to development education. On the other hand, its guidelines also beg the question whether the suggested approach is realistic in achieving its aim of ‘encouraging people toward action for a more just and equal world’. Considering the wide range of views and approaches to these debates, it is important to explore the views of the non-governmental sector on the ‘right balance’ between education and action.

The core concerns among non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The Centre for Global Education’s 2008 annual development education conference included a workshop on the link between development education and campaigning which highlighted many concerns requiring further exploration (Centre for Global Education, 2008:16). One particular issue raised in the workshop discussion was the need to protect and strengthen open learning spaces, with no pre-determined outcomes to participation. This reflected the NGO community’s desire to guard against instructive approaches to identifying political solutions and routes to political action. Concerns were also raised that development education at an operational level can sometimes privilege the personal responses of the individual, thereby potentially missing opportunities for, or placing barriers to, collective action for global justice. A more in-depth exploration of how development education and campaigning work is structured in Ireland can assist us in understanding the foundations of these concerns.

Development education

The development education sector in Ireland has significantly increased its capacity and focus on good practice approaches. This is partly evidenced through the formation of collective learning networks that seek to increase the quality of development education work and its reach, such as the Development Education Exchange in Europe Project (DEEEP), the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA), the Development and Intercultural Education project and the Ubuntu network. Development education practitioners also extensively engage in the mainstreaming of global justice issues in formal education, which requires a strong knowledge of the formal education system and curricula, target groups and appropriate methodologies. Practitioners' considerable work in the formal education sector is evidenced by the increased range of resources now available to schools. There is also a heavy emphasis on course accreditation with an increasing number of opportunities available to take development education courses designed for the formal sector.

Informal development education has also been strengthened through a wide array of creative methodologies and community facilitators' resources (some resources are outlined on IDEA's website: http://www.ideaonline.ie/useful_links/index.html). This is an indication of the success development education practice can have when it is well resourced and has a 'space of its own' to flourish. However, it is more difficult to discern how these courses, linkages with formal curricula, and new methodologies are strengthening action for global justice.

Campaigning

While many organisations can no doubt provide evidence of successful and unsuccessful action agendas that have been introduced to development education processes it appears that much of this experience and the lessons learnt have so far been undocumented within the Irish context. Among the unanswered questions are, for example, what processes have worked in terms of linking development education and campaigning? Have any political policy changes been achieved as a result of these methods? Have these actions been linked to longer-term learning? Where the link between education and action has not worked, what were the reasons for this?

The difficulty in documenting learning experiences potentially lies in part in the operational compartmentalisation of development education and campaigning approaches, and the numerous approaches being applied in both arenas of work. For example, there is a wide range of campaigning groups promoting equally varied political perspectives in Ireland. The structure of campaigning groups is similarly diverse with some having been ‘professionalised’ by the hiring of paid employees while -many others remain dependent on voluntary contributions. This diversity relates in part to key differences in interpretation of how campaigning work should be carried out. Some groups maintain a very small staff or work on a voluntary basis because they do not receive government funding, either on the basis that their objectives fall outside government funding guidelines or because they choose not to seek government funding out of a belief that it compromises their work. These voluntary-based groups often engage in what meets the description as development education practice, but through forms of practice very different from the Irish Aid guidelines on development education. Public meetings, reading groups, and political discussion groups are key tools for these organisations, resulting in voluntary participants from the general public developing into highly informed, empowered and politically active citizens engaging with issues of concern.

Groups that have ‘professionalised’ appear to categorise their work into ‘disciplines’ or skill sets. These disciplines generally include development education, popular campaigning, and policy analysis and lobbying. In many ways, this is an encouraging trend as it demonstrates a recognition of, and investment in, the skills required to make a real difference for global justice. For the better resourced organisations, this can mean increased levels of staff with specific skills to work within each discipline. This increased capacity can result in greater dynamism. However, as highlighted in a survey among European campaigning organisations, it can also present communication challenges in ensuring application of common understandings of the issues and effective methodologies in the work (Ní Chasaide, 2007).

‘Professionalised’ organisations with small numbers of staff might attempt to create different projects to complement the dominant approaches to campaigns. Other organisations with a limited capacity will direct their faculty to one of the three disciplines, thus developing into a development education organisation, a campaigning organisation, or a think tank. Both of these approaches linked to smaller organisations have their respective deficits: the former being the danger of overloading small organisations’ capacities and the latter potentially weakening the groups’ integration to the wider operations of the global justice movement.

Some implications of funding

These various organisational approaches and their respective structures have been influenced by the funding possibilities and constraints in the areas of development education and campaigning. Most of the funding available for global justice work in Ireland is in the development education sector which is primarily supported by one dominant donor, Irish Aid. This presents challenges, especially to smaller organisations, in identifying alternative funding for the more ‘political’ aspects of their work such as campaigning, policy analysis and lobbying work. The potential implications of this are important to explore: are Irish global justice organisations prioritising work that will be more acceptable to funding organisations because of the dearth in funding for campaigning and advocacy? What impact is the lack of funding for campaigning having on development education work? The lack of resources available in Ireland for campaigning work is shrinking the possibilities for campaigning action. This directly impacts on the campaigning community, but also places pressure on the development education community to deliver a constituency for global justice action. The emphasis on development education standards, particularly in formal education, can close off possibilities for experimentation and the formation of ‘unlikely partnerships’, such as collaboration between groups that employ different political approaches.

Conclusion: Opportunities to bridge the gap

Having highlighted some pressing questions regarding the link between development education and campaigning, I am going to conclude with recommendations for action to prompt further debate on this issue.

First, it is important that practitioners begin to create opportunities to share lessons, specifically on the experience of linking development education and campaigns, and document the learning derived from these processes. This should be done with a view to exploring good practice and its impact on political policies and processes by linking education and action. A longer-term goal arising from the relationship between education and action should be the enhanced and enduring involvement of participants. Irish Aid have highlighted ‘linking education to advocacy’ as a research area for funding in their current funding guidelines (Irish Aid, 2007b:7), and this should be actively taken up within the global justice community. Research should not be restricted to lessons emanating from Irish Aid funded organisations, but should explore approaches utilised by other groups as well.

Second, it is important that we bridge the collaborative gap between ‘professionalised’ and voluntary-based development education and campaigning groups, and among groups specialising in different approaches. There should be greater attention paid to sharing lessons, challenges and good practice between a diverse range of groups. This may encourage more experimentation and formation of productive alliances and methodologies.

Third, we need to adopt a new approach to funding. Irish Aid, as key funder and policy actor in development education work in Ireland, needs to adopt a more open approach to supporting the link between development education and campaigning. While continuing to emphasise good quality approaches, a greater openness to experimentation in campaigning work should be adopted in order to give real support to the aim of ‘moving people toward action for a more just world’. This need not involve a compromise in standards. In practice it may mean extending a greater level of trust and independence toward funded organisations which have credible links with

groups in the global South and a commitment to good practice approaches in development education. This should be undertaken by Irish Aid based on a commitment to supporting the flourishing of democratic spaces for global justice in Ireland in the long term. From the NGO side, diversification of funding bases and investment in voluntary activist structures are crucial if sustainability of political action in the longer term is to be achieved.

Fourth, we need to focus on the long term relationship between development education and campaigning. The debate on the linkages between these sectors tends to focus on very ‘operational’ level concerns. These are important to address, and spaces should be identified to discuss and tackle these concerns. However, dynamic spaces should also be created for envisioning common political goals and collaborative approaches to achieving them. This does not imply a need to agree on political analysis or solutions at the outset of a learning process, but rather a need to deepen our intellectual and creative engagement with each other. This is taking into account the observation often made by Southern activists in the global justice movement: in the global North, we run campaigns, while in the South, they build movements.

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