

REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTIONS

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It gives me great pleasure to write the preface for the first issue of “Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review”.

Educators need space and time to reflect on policy and practice, especially in as complex a field as development. Education cannot be static; those working in the area require constant updating both in terms of content and methodologies. All too often educators feel the need ‘to deliver’, ‘to be out there’, ‘to do the work’ and do not allow themselves the breathing space to take a step back and reflect on how they can and should approach their work. I am confident that this journal will make a significant contribution to creating the space necessary for such thought and help stimulate a lively debate on professional development education.

The Development Cooperation Ireland programme is widely regarded as a first class one. Ireland’s programme of official assistance to developing countries enjoys a worldwide reputation for effective, high quality aid, which makes a real difference to the lives of the poorest of the world. The Taoiseach has recently announced that Ireland will reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNP on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) by 2012. This means that the coming years will see huge increases in the Government’s spending on ODA – for example, by 2007, the total budget will be €773 million. A key challenge for us will be to maintain the current quality of the programme, as it continues to expand. It is a challenge we will meet. As a Government we have a responsibility to let the public know how their money is being spent. With the planned increases, this responsibility is greater than ever and one which we are taking very seriously.

Development education has a wider purpose. It works to educate people about the challenges of development. Through development education

people are taught that these challenges are not remote but that they are shared challenges. The efforts to meet them must also be shared and we can all contribute, at the local and the global level. In creating a sense that we can all play our part development education plays a vital role.

Over the course of the last few months, I have arranged for a series of public meetings about the Government's programme to take place in various locations around the country. From these meetings it is clear that the public want to engage on development issues. Engaging the public is essential if we are to maintain public support for the aid programme. Of course, an engaged and informed public can also question what we in Government are doing and challenge us to do better – that can only be welcomed.

Development education plays a critical role in this regard. Development Cooperation Ireland recognises the value and unique contribution that development education practitioners and organisations have made, and are continuing to make, to enable people in Ireland to engage with development policies and issues. This work, across the formal and informal sectors, is invaluable. In an increasingly globalised world it is essential to educate people in Ireland about local and global development, open their eyes to the realities of injustice and to enable them to understand the causes and effects of that injustice and to engage them in action.

Development education in Ireland faces a number of new challenges, both in terms of policy and practice. How can we build sustainable, human and equitable links with the people in developing countries? How can people from the South be integrated in development education work here in Ireland? How can we strengthen the global dimension at Third Level and in Adult Education? What skills do young people need to become competent and confident global citizens? How is the impact of development education being measured and documented? How can we engage parts of the public that have not benefited from development education before? The pages of this journal will, I know, provide a forum for debate on these and other issues. Development Cooperation Ireland will also be considering these questions. Later this year,

we will begin a consultation process for the development of a new strategy plan for development education. I am looking forward to an active engagement from the development education sector in devising the new policy.

I would like to congratulate the Centre for Global Education on the production of this impressive new journal. I am looking forward to many thought provoking and challenging articles in the future.