

INTERDEPENDENCE DAY! TEACHING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS THROUGH DRAMA FOR ALL AGES

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Mullineaux, Pete (2020) *Interdependence Day! Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals through Drama for All Ages*, Dublin: AFRl.

Over the past decade there has been increasing recognition of the need for a ‘Education is a global issue; it is also a deeply personal one’. Ken Robinson’s (Robinson and Aronica, 2016: 119) quote is an appropriate way to enter into a review of Pete Mullineaux’s book *Interdependence Day! Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals through Drama for All Ages*. The author, an experienced drama practitioner and poet, advocates for an interdisciplinary, cross-curricular approach to *teaching* development education. The book is an illustration of his praxis, providing a *way-of-working*, a means of exploring the seventeen United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) using creative approaches and stimuli. Connected global focus on the achievement of the SDGs would bring about lasting change, breaking down the global mechanisms of oppression, inequality and inequity that are historically embedded. Mullineaux’s creative approach, offers multi-stimulatory approaches to engage students in Quality Education (SDG 4) by encouraging critical reflection at a grassroots level.

Interdependence Day! focusses on play and *process drama* as a vehicle for targeted learning to explore the SDGs. The author intends this publication as a resource for both primary and post-primary teachers. He hopes that the publication will aid the ‘fusing of development education with developmental learning and a fostering of emotional intelligence in helping the child become aware of both themselves and the world they live in’ (Mullineaux, 2020: 9). While acknowledging the abundance of resources available for the discussion and examination of global justice issues, this publication offers an alternative mode of investigation. Drama is proposed as a vehicle or threshold *into* the often-dense subject matter, a means of exploration that can be supported and enhanced by existing non-drama

activities. Mullineaux's book aims to reach beyond merely presenting the problems, encouraging students to explore alternative endings through out-of-the-box creative thinking. This approach, as Mullineaux suggests, 'promotes the imagination and human potential moving beyond binary notions of education and placing value on the fictional, sensory and affective' (Davis, 2016: 4).

In the opening chapter, Mullineaux reflects on the importance of, and need for, development education and critical exploration of the SDGs. He advocates for the potential of the arts in framing students' investigations of the SDGs, making links and connections between the fictional and the real. The author provides a frame to scaffold the teacher in tackling a drama-as-pedagogy methodology. Mullineaux claims that the teacher does not need any drama background. He acknowledges that within teacher practices 'there are often mixed feelings around doing drama in the classroom' (Ibid.:10). He aims to remove some of the mystique around doing drama, thus breaking the myth that 'it is beyond the reach of a regular teacher and only fit for someone who is a drama specialist' (Ibid.:11). The author breaks down learning in the classroom into four key components: imagination, cooperation, articulation and reflection. Imagination is the main driver, the nucleus or rhizome, from which the other components sprout.

The book comprises eight projects. Each project begins with a drama foundation; a creative seed or nucleus. *Freeze-frame* is a spinal device or method, that serves to link the projects and the SDGs, making the teacher and students 'experts in handling, and then apply to exploring each theme or issue' (Ibid.: 9). Mullineaux offers practical classroom layout advice and an approximated timing of eighty minutes for the process [of] drama. He begins in Project One - *Freeze-trees/ Seeds of Hope* - with an exploration of Life on Land (SDG 15) and Climate Action (SDG 13) addressing the importance of bio-diversity. The author illustrates how the project links with SDGS 10, 12 and 16. A very useful observation, particularly for an educator who may be new to the teaching of development education and global citizenship. He explains that the methods can be extended with the material becoming more complex or in-depth depending on the age-group and abilities of the class.

The freeze-frame and teacher-in-role process drama methods, illustrated in the first project, support each project thereafter with the author offering advice and tips to help the teacher find their ‘drama feet’ (Ibid.:14). Landy and Montgomery describe process drama as ‘a methodology that empowers students to take ownership in the meaning they make of any given topic. As the drama is developed, it takes on a reflective component that impacts the unfolding action...’ (2012: 19). Essentially it is the teacher and student working in-role in an imaginary scenario. ‘Reflection-in-action drives process drama practice’ (O’Mara, 1999: 4). The method is not product-based, a show or play is not the end goal, but rather, the learning occurs through the process. The author’s methods are reminiscent of Heathcote’s Mantel of the Expert (MoE) and Rolling Role (Heathcote and Herbert, 1985), in that, an interactive, constructivist methodology is proposed. The book, therefore, avoids the didactic role of the teacher as knowledge-holder and the student as the passive recipient of knowledge, to favour a co-constructed active methodology. Thus, placing his work within what Landy and Montgomery (2012:1) describe as ‘Educational Theatre praxis’.

Although written with the Irish education system in mind, *Interdependence Day!* has universal appeal. It is intended as a resource for *any and all teachers* and *any and all classes*, from primary to post-primary and beyond. Mullineaux acknowledges that the book can be used directly as part of the primary level drama content strand: ‘Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding’ (Ibid.: 10). The author acknowledges that his approach works well with primary school, first year and transition year students. He encourages collaborative planning and interdisciplinary practice as a means of engaging other year groups at post-primary level who are time-poor due to constraints attributed to terminal examinations. The book provides a route map for the effective teaching of SDGs through the weaving of subjects and disciplines, linking the exploration of the (often overlapping) SDGs fluidly across the curriculum, contributing to a whole-school approach to global citizenship education (GCE) and further underpinning Mullineaux’s philosophy and understanding of interconnection and *interdependence*.

If Mullineaux's vision of interconnected learning and interdisciplinary collaboration is to be realised in post-primary schools, it would have been prudent to align his methodology with the quality framework document, *Looking At Our Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2016) which encompasses the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) inspectorates statements of practice for (Highly Effective) quality teaching and learning at both primary and post primary: 'Teachers plan collaboratively for learning activities that enable pupils to make meaningful and progressively more challenging connections between learning in different subjects' (Department of Education and Skills, 2016: 20). This approach would aid schools in the practicalities of embedding his whole-school approach to development education, allowing schools to link the resource to their School Development Planning (SDP) and School Self Evaluation (SSE) which are informed and supported by the *Looking at Our Schools* framework document. The Teaching Council of Ireland's (2016) *Cosán: National Framework for Teachers' Learning* would further support the embedding of such a resource, as collaborating teachers could actively engage with reflective processes, such as, Triadic Reflection, that underpin the reflective framework to review and discuss the successes and difficulties arising from interdisciplinary practice.

From a timetabling perspective at post-primary level, difficulties may arise in implementing these projects in the eighty-minute sessions that the author suggests, but creative timetabling and cross-curricular planning could overcome these time pressures and break down the individualisation of subject areas. The SDGs do not occur in isolation, they are not seventeen separate aspirations that can be achieved one by one as one might tick a to-do list. They are, rather, an ecology of interconnected issues and so looking at one will inevitably lead to looking at all. This *interdependence* should be reflected in how we plan our pedagogical approaches to teaching development education and global citizenship, offering a way in, particularly at post-primary level, where constraints exist regarding timetabling and subjects are generally segregated. The school must become a microcosm of the world, an opportunity to demonstrate this interdependence through interdisciplinary practices.

This book is packed with information, strategies and fully formed lessons, so much so, that it may be a little daunting for the novice teacher, but not so if used, as I believe that the author intends, as a guide to the possibilities of drama and the arts for cross-curricular planning. Linking the ideas generated by the author with the standards and learning outcomes of individual subjects, create a cohesive inter-dependent, whole-school development education programme tailored to the students and their school context. This is what quality education should look like for twenty-first century learning.

The SDGs can be challenging subject matter for students to connect to as the local is often easier to probe but it can be tricky to connect the local to the global and truly understand the interwoven and embedded mechanisms of oppression that exist in our world. As educators, we must be mindful of the well-being of our students in tackling the material. We must acknowledge that to truly understand the gravitas, mechanisms of oppression, disparity, and inequity that exists in our world and the need for social justice, could be cause for cognitive and emotional overload. Mullineaux's way-of-working, using mixed methods from drama, story, allegory, fairy tale, myth and poetry, un-scripted improvised scenes and scripted plays, act as a threshold into the exploration of the SDGs. Working from creative stimulus permits students to explore topics within the safety of the fiction, providing cognitive distancing and safe-guarding their mental health, an aspect which is all the more important in our 'new normal', post-pandemic world, where students have experienced trauma and a very real challenge to their safety. The author adds notes throughout the text, sign-posting the developmental and socio-emotional learning for the teacher, layering moments *of* and *for* reflection. At the end of each section or project he offers further reflection exercises that link and connect across the curriculum, encompassing individual subjects.

Mullineaux's prose is at once personal but informative and knowledgeable. He creates an understanding with the reader, illustrating his ideas and connecting his personal journey. He demonstrates his mastery of the processes he endorses during the story-telling aspects of the projects. Simple and scripted, they provide a tangible resource into process drama for the apprentice teacher in facilitating development education, or, drama, or both.

Mullineaux exercises his expertise, sharing a wealth of knowledge and activities while keeping his work attainable for the new practitioner/facilitator at whom this book is aimed. This is a huge strength of the book.

My criticism of this resource is purely aesthetic. The book is A5, a scale which does not serve it. The small scale means that the layout is impacted and compacted making it less user-friendly than the author may have intended for the time-poor teacher. A workbook layout would rectify this, quite literally, giving space to the author's lessons and ideas. This book has heart and a wealth of expertise drips from its pages. Mullineaux has lived and taught what he proposes, giving weight and validity to his ideas and guided lessons. In essence he is disseminating a lifetime of thinking and working. This book is a record of his methods and in writing it, Mullineaux passes his baton, encouraging a new generation to develop their creative praxis.

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