

Perspectives

“DOING GENDER” DIFFERENTLY: A COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE WITH TRÓCAIRE’S DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

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Abstract: This article explores a cross-organisational initiative of creating a Healthy Relationships Youth Manual, which has helped alter the internal dynamic of development education (DE) in Trócaire. The manual is a culmination of multiple elements: it is rooted in DE and youth work principles, guided by adult learning methodologies and is underpinned by a strong gendered lens which aims to challenge unequal gendered power relations. It is developed using the expertise of country-based colleagues in Sierra Leone, and staff with considerable youth work and gender expertise in Ireland.

Key words: Gender; Women’s Empowerment; Youth Work; Development Education (DE); Global and Critical Education.

Introduction

This article explores a cross-organisational initiative of creating a healthy relationships youth manual: ‘Getting to know me: Supporting young people to grow in confidence’ (Trócaire, 2019). The development of this manual has provided an opportunity to re-think the relationship between Trócaire’s development education (DE) and overseas programmes by expanding on our partnership model approach through deepening the linkages of our overseas country programmes with our DE unit. Through the creation of ‘Getting to know me’ for use in Sierra Leone, we highlight the importance of drawing on extensive local knowledge of the Sierra Leone context, building on Trócaire’s experience of developing innovative DE material within Ireland; and making use of Trócaire’s deep knowledge of youth work principles as well as significant gender expertise. In the process of sharing this example, the authors reflect on the positive lessons

from this initiative as well as taking stock of strengthening opportunities for this partnership and the implications of this for other North-South partnerships.

Trócaire's approach to partnership and development education

Working in partnership means that Trócaire supports local organisations in the global South to implement projects in collaboration with their local communities. These organisations bring an in-depth understanding of their local context, language and culture, while Trócaire contributes its experience, funding and staff. By working in partnership, Trócaire does not implement 'one-size fits-all' projects but listens to what people need and gives them support, ownership and control over how the problems they face are solved. This approach brings lasting change and empowers communities to overcome poverty through their own efforts and abilities.

Our DE mission is informed by Trócaire's dual mandate. Overseas, to deliver support through local partner organisations to enable at-risk families and communities to free themselves from the oppression of poverty. At home, to increase awareness and understanding of global justice issues to motivate and mobilise the Irish public to demand and work for a more just world. Trócaire recognises the crucial role DE plays in bringing this mandate to life. Trócaire views DE as a pedagogy that addresses the structural causes of poverty, injustice and inequality in our world. Trócaire's DE lens is often focused on the global South with an aim to equip learners in the global North with the knowledge and competencies to make informed decisions and take meaningful action aligned to their values. Core aims of DE include promoting an understanding of global development issues and fostering the emergence of informed and active global citizens (Irish Aid, 2006).

However, much of DE's global citizenship agenda relates to the global North. DE in the global North is historically rooted in non-government organisation (NGO) education activities for both formal and informal education audiences, aimed at rallying public support for development in the global South (McCloskey, 2014). Over time, DE has adopted a critical lens in overseas aid programmes, with the introduction of themes of power, social justice and equality into its narrative (Bourn, 2014). With the work of educationalists such as Paulo Freire (1972), a strong critical pedagogy within DE has evolved which includes:

an emphasis on developing partnerships between educators and learners in the global North and South; the promotion of social justice, empathy and solidarity; and a commitment to participatory and transformative learning processes, with an emphasis on dialogue and experience. To date, this shift, which takes the interdependent nature of global relationships into account, has not been significantly developed within Trócaire's DE unit in a practical sense.

In general, Trócaire's DE team documents the lived experiences of people affected by global injustice in the global South and represents their stories authentically in (primarily) formal education resources for schools in the global North. This new collaborative initiative of creating DE resources to be used in the global South provides an opportunity to reflect on the position and function of DE within Trócaire's broader programme. It broadens the scope of Trócaire's partnership model and provides the opportunity for adopting a renewed strategic approach to work with those delivering programmes at a grassroots level.

Getting to know me: supporting young people to grow in confidence

The development of a youth-centred Healthy Relationships manual was created through collaboration with Trócaire's Sierra Leonean Gender Technical Advisor, Trócaire's Youth Officer within the Irish DE unit, and Trócaire's Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Advisor and Women's Empowerment Advisor who are based within the International Programme's team in Ireland. This cross-organisational collaboration provided an opportunity to incorporate DE approaches and principles while at the same time ensuring the work was culturally and contextually appropriate and underpinned by a strong gendered lens. This section outlines the principles and theories which underpin the manual as well as the process of its development and roll out.

Principles underpinning youth work, DE and work to support gender equality

The DE unit within Trócaire is guided by youth work and DE principles. Trócaire's vision for a youth work-based resource is rooted in the definition of youth work identified in the Youth Work Act:

“a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is complementary to

their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations” (Youth Work Act, 2001).

Critical DE shares many of the same principles as good youth work. These include: starting with and valuing young people’s own views; learning through participation; and promoting equality, responsibility and mutual respect.

Based on these principles, key elements to this approach include: a recognition of the role of power and ideology in determining the form and content of non-formal education; a critical awareness of how knowledge is constructed and interpreted; an understanding of dominant and subordinate cultures; and an examination of the root causes of issues as well as the broader social context (Giroux, 2005; Andreotti, 2008). The critical approach of DE that draws on the work of theorists such as Paulo Freire (1972), bell hooks (1994) and Henry Giroux (2005) among others, has, according to Skinner, Blum and Bourn (2013: 95) ‘a significant role to play in the development of effective learning’.

One of the responsibilities of the Women’s Empowerment and SGBV Advisors, who are based within Trócaire’s International Programmes team, is to support country-based teams and partner organisations with strategies and approaches to support gendered social norms change. A social norm is an attribute / rule of a group or community that is perceived to be appropriate for its members (Mackie, 2018). Social norms are expectations that family, community and society set down for boys and girls, men and women. They can be closely linked to culture, religion and traditional beliefs. Social norms impact on all people in society from birth through childhood, adulthood and old age. Parents, teachers, friends, media, education institutions and the community all take part in the construction and maintenance of social norms. Social norms lead us to adopt attitudes and expectations about girls, boys, women and men. They guide gender roles and determine who has power and who is valued in our societies. Social norms are learned from the people and institutions around us, vary in different societies and change over time. Gendered social norms specify acceptable behavioural boundaries for women and men. These generally correspond to the division of labour and power relations within specific settings. For example, a gendered norm could be ‘a woman’s place is in the home’. Norms

such as this can severely limit women's opportunities, impact women's confidence in their abilities, impact both women's and men's mental health and prevent men from taking on care-giving roles.

In recent years, Trócaire's Programme Advisors have been analysing and reflecting on the effectiveness of our work to address gendered social norms and have consolidated a significant body of learning on the impact of social norms change methodologies (Trócaire, 2018a). As a result, Trócaire has developed a set of guiding principles to support our work on social norms change with adults (Trócaire 2018b). This work is based on background research on a number of social norms change theories, a scoping of literature on current best practice on gendered social norms change and learning from our country programmes. Despite the fact that these guiding principles are for work with adults, they are also very much in line with critical DE and youth work principles. Trócaire's gendered social norms change principles include: being women-centred; using a strong gender analysis; using methodologies that facilitate reflection and promote and inspire activism; investing heavily in partner field office staff and community facilitators; understanding when it is appropriate to use single-sex or mixed sex groups; ensuring accountable practice; using the socio-ecological model; working with community stakeholders and agents of change; applying a phased approach; and preparing for and anticipating resistance.

Writing, piloting and delivery of the manual

'Getting to know me' (Trócaire, 2019) is a training guide for community facilitators to improve and explore concepts and issues relating to healthy relationships with 9-14 year olds in Sierra Leone. In doing so, it aims to provide access to quality education in a safe learning environment in a non-formal educational space. The training manual grew from a deep understanding of the above-mentioned principles.

The purpose of the manual is to ultimately help young people develop and explore the types of behaviours, attitudes *and skills* that align to the promotion of healthy relationships. It is based on 14 modules which include exploration of self, family, friendships, relationships, as well as discussing cultural norms, beliefs, attitudes and gender roles. Some of the activities within these modules have been adapted from '*I am Somebody*': *National Life Skills*

Curriculum Sierra Leone (2016) as well as tried and tested activities that local partner organisations were already using. All of the modules involve participatory approaches and reflective methodologies, and in some of the sessions, guidance is provided to separate the group into girls and boys to allow for deeper reflection on specific issues. Detailed guidance is provided at the beginning of the manual to ensure that parental/guardian consent is provided and that parents/guardians and the wider community have a good understanding of the content of the modules. This will help to ensure that there is both endorsement of the manual as well as support for the core messaging within the manual.

Trócaire's Sierra Leonean Gender Technical Advisor developed an initial first draft of the manual to ensure the core content was culturally appropriate. It was then handed over to Trócaire's Youth officer who revised it with a strong youth-centred lens and worked very closely with the Trócaire's Sierra Leonean Gender Technical Advisor, and Trócaire's SGBV and Women's Empowerment Advisors. These Advisors provided detailed comments on initial drafts and discussed how many of the activities would work in the specific areas of programming in Sierra Leone. Following the finalisation of the working manual, Trócaire's programme advisors in Sierra Leone introduced the manual to Trócaire's partner organisations through a facilitated four-day workshop. Partner organisations have since provided feedback on this working draft, which is currently being amended by Trócaire's Youth Officer. The next steps in this process will be to provide further facilitation skills training to the partner organisations who will be rolling out the manual and to test it in a couple of communities within Sierra Leone. Following this testing and possible further amendment, four of Trócaire's partner organisations in Sierra Leone will start using it in their project areas.

The cross-departmental work on 'Getting to know me' has provided an opportunity to understand both the synergies and the divergences between youth work, critical DE and gendered social norms change work with adults. It has resulted in a manual that is age appropriate, grounded in DE and youth work and underpinned by a strong gendered lens which is now at the stage of being tested in practice. The training modules will help build the knowledge and skills of both facilitators and participants involved in order to successfully create change. The manual is not a standalone intervention, but a skill-building tool that draws

upon adolescent psychology and its influence on health-related behaviour (Pringle et al., 2018).

Moving forward

Education is regarded as key to addressing ecological, technological, social, cultural, economic and personal change (Share et al., 2012). Many sociologists view education as a key driver of change and as a vehicle to develop society and communities (Clancy, 1995). The educational process must be experienced in the context of citizenship; that is, it must be planned and implemented according to values and principles posed by society. This approach is focused on learning strategies that are open and participatory, incorporating the recognition of power. As a consequence, it requires teachers capable of stimulating collaborative and critical learning processes (hooks, 1994).

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the youth manual is the often-harsh realities encountered in implementation. As highlighted above, following the development of the 'Getting to know me' manual (Trócaire, 2019) and piloting phase, community workers within four of Trócaire's partner organisations in Sierra Leone need to be trained on how to use it. Rather than require one standard set of materials and curricula, or government standards, which are unlikely to be relevant across different contexts, we can instead support community educators to develop the confidence they need to address difficult issues and choose the most relevant materials for their context and the particular youth group they are working with. This requires significant time, ongoing investment and needs to be rooted in strong youth work principles. We also need to ensure that parents, schools, and relevant government and other funding bodies respect community educators and support them in the difficult task of preparing young people.

We need to ensure the youth manual is rolled out in a comprehensive and meaningful way with the required investment and resources. Its effectiveness will depend on complementary strategies that are also underpinned by a combination of the deep contextual knowledge and relationships our partner organisations have with the communities they work with, the guiding principles for Trócaire's social norms change work, and our youth work experience within the DE team.

Conclusion

The development of 'Getting to know me' has provided an opportunity to deepen linkages across departments within Trócaire and alter the position and function of DE within Trócaire's broader programmes. It broadens the scope of Trócaire's partnership model and provides the opportunity for adopting a renewed strategic approach to work with those delivering programmes and at grassroots level. The process has shown us the synergies across our youth work, DE and women's empowerment programming and demonstrated that many of the underlying principles which inform these elements of our work are complementary. It has resulted in a manual that is age appropriate, grounded in DE and youth work and underpinned by a strong gendered lens. As a cross-departmental team we look forward to continuing on this journey together and working out the finer details of both implementation and evaluation.

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