

REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTIONS

CATHERINE SIMMONS

Policy and Practice is a new development education journal that aims to support the work of development education practitioners and increase active engagement with development issues in Ireland and overseas. The journal features a variety of in-depth contributions on aspects of development education practice such as methodologies, monitoring and evaluation, the production of resources, enhancing organizational capacity, strategic interventions in education and sectoral practice. Each issue contains a variety of regular sections including theme-specific focus articles, shorter perspectives articles, discussion and debate features, resource reviews and correspondence.

The Journal aims to address topics central to development education policy-making and practice and to inform the work of practitioners in the formal and non-formal education sector by facilitating reflection and discourse on development education practice in Ireland. It aims to enhance communication and strengthen capacity in the development education sector and to celebrate and promote good practice. Policy and Practice encourages feedback on issues raised and contributions to future editions.

In this first issue, it is appropriate to take the opportunity to reflect on past and current development education practice in Ireland and to examine ways to enhance future practice. With this as the focus, our contributors were encouraged to consider their articles from this perspective.

The concept of reflection in practice is becoming more widespread within the education sector. However, the interpretation of the term ‘reflection’ can vary. For example, in a recent study of Irish teachers, many identified that reflective practice is an important aspect of teaching, but their individual understanding of ‘reflective practice’ differed considerably. For some it meant reflecting on the examination results at the end of the year. For others it meant

reflection on the day during the drive home. The majority did not identify a need to take notes, to record progress, to discuss with colleagues and to learn from mistakes (Kiely 2003).

To some, the term ‘reflection’ may suggest a certain passivity, in the sense that one definition of ‘to reflect’ is to think quietly and calmly. This is certainly one aspect of reflective practice. It is the recognition of the importance of inward examination and the ability and willingness to be introspective. It promotes a state of receptiveness to outside influences and ideas. At the same time, reflection must also be seen in the context of practice. That is a context of reflective *action*. Here, reflection is active; it makes manifest or apparent our challenges, assumptions and our strengths and weaknesses. In order to be most effective, reflective practice has to move beyond just ‘doing’ and ‘thinking’ in the immediate present time. It is important to see reflective practice as a *process* that allows us the opportunities and flexibility to examine past and present practice, and to consider the implications for future practice as we move from reflection to projection.

In the context of education for social change we see that this concept of reflective action was largely developed in the work of John Dewey, author of *Democracy and Education* (1916). For Dewey, the concept of ‘reflection’ was clearly linked to a person’s willingness to take responsibility for their world. As such, effective engagement in education for social change is dependent on participation in reflection. Dewey wrote:

“the opposites, once more, to thoughtful [reflective] action are routine and capricious behaviour. The former accepts what has been customary as a full measure of possibility and omits to take into account the connections of the particular things done. The latter makes the momentary act a measure of value and ignores the connections of our personal action with the energies of the environment. It says, virtually, ‘things are to be just as I happen to like them at this instant’ as routine says in effect ‘let things continue just as I have found them in the past’. Both refuse to acknowledge

responsibility for the future consequences which flow from present action. Reflection is the acceptance of such responsibility” (Dewey 1916).

In today’s increasingly multinational, multicultural and multifaith Ireland, the need for a global perspective and understanding cannot be underestimated. In this context Annette Honan explores how the need for the education sector to embrace this global dimension is vital. She clearly demonstrates that there is a firm place for development education within the primary and post-primary curriculum. We can also see, however, that there is no reason why this responsibility and engagement in reflective practice should remain solely within the formal education sector. Indeed, Policy and Practice demonstrates examples of why and where there is scope to extend the reaches of reflective practice into a wider range of sectors involved in development education.

Stephen McCloskey reflects in his article on development education in Northern Ireland and assesses its potential for future growth. The importance of issues such as funding and capacity become evident and the need for support at local level and the strengthening of links between development education and civil society are key recommendations. This desire to mobilise civil society to engage with development issues is central to the objective of the Development Education Exchange in Europe Programme. As development theories and approaches change, active reflection becomes indispensable for effective practice. Angelo Caserta examines this point in relation to the expanding European Union where different member states have varied perspectives and approaches to development education and challenges practitioners to consistently engage in such a process.

Reflection within the development education sector and a process of identifying needs and wants have resulted in the creation of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA). As Sally Corcoran explains, IDEA is now developing and moving through a detailed process of consultation and strategic planning. IDEA’s main aim of effectively engaging

in development education operates by improving communication and the flow of information between agents and by recognizing the importance of critical awareness and accountability.

The expansion of development education across a variety of sectors and levels enables wider participation and input as well as strengthening existing practice. As Catherine Roche reports, strong support at policy level is essential. At this level, Development Cooperation Ireland is now assessing the progress of their development education strategic plan as part of a wider strategic planning process focussing on future overseas development policy.

How can we engage in reflective practice? We see that in the wider context and as mentioned above, reflective practice can take different forms for different people in different situations. In general however, we can identify certain characteristics to reflective practice. These include collecting data, researching, thinking, talking to colleagues, sharing our good practice, revisiting and reanalyzing our 'bad' practice and being open and flexible to the possibility of changes in our ideas and methodologies. The first step is to be willing and active in entering this process of questioning and challenging our assumptions. Doing this allows us to appreciate the responsibilities we have in engaging in this.

One definition of 'to reflect' is to give back or show something as an image. In this way, **Policy and Practice** aims not only to participate in a process of taking responsibility through action, but also to act as the development education 'mirror' in which our work and attitudes are reflected.

References

Dewey, J (1916) *Democracy and Education*, available at: <http://www.worldwideschool.org/library/books/soc1/education/DemocracyandEducation/chap11.html> (accessed 27 June 2005).

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