Resource reviews

PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN YOUTH WORK TRAINING

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Whether it is called global youth work or development education, 2008-2009 was a productive year for research on its relationship with youth work and youth work education and training with at least three research projects undertaken. De Montfort University in Leicester examined global youth work in higher education institutions (HEIs), my own university, the National University of Ireland Maynooth, explored the attitudes of young people and youth workers to global justice issues and finally, the Centre for Global Education in Belfast commissioned research on development education in Community Youth Work courses at the University of Ulster (UU), Jordanstown. The latter research report titled 'Promoting Development Education in Youth Work Training' is the subject of this review.

The research was guided by an advisory group and adopted a qualitative approach to explore how 'development education is and can be further addressed within the youth and community work courses at the University of Ulster' (2009:9). The research participants included lecturers, students, members of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work (NSETS) and the Youth Work Training Board in Northern Ireland (YWTB).

The research sought to build on the success of a 'Global Youth Work' programme (accredited by the Northern Ireland Open College Network - NIOCN) delivered to youth workers on an in-service basis and, specifically, to identify new opportunities for collaboration in strengthening the global dimension in professional youth work programmes. The fieldwork was carried out in late 2008 by Aine Wallace and Stella Murray of Dare to Stretch consultancy on behalf of the Centre for Global Education in Belfast and the University of Ulster (UU). It was funded by a grant from the Department for

International Development (DfID) Development Awareness Mini-Grant Scheme.

The research takes the United Nations' definition as its starting point, highlighting development education's mission to 'enable people to participate in the development of their community, their nation and the world as a whole' through their engagment in actions that promote social justice and equality. The report also notes the differing terminologies used in youth work contexts to describe the process of enhancing understanding of international development issues and enabling individuals to develop the skills, values and attitudes to that end. These include global youth work, development education in youth work, global justice in youth work, education for sustainable development and global citizenship, all of which were used interchangeably during the research.

The research outcomes are grouped under five headings: relevance, most appropriate training courses for global youth work, internationalisation of global youth work, resources, motivation and wider support. These headings are expanded in the main body of the report to include a more detailed discussion of opportunities and challenges associated with incorporating global youth work in the professional programmes at UU. The findings and analysis are organised by group, firstly, lecturers followed by NSETS members, the Youth Work Training Board and finally students at both the Jordanstown and Magee (Derry) campuses. A number of tables provide useful summaries of the findings.

The findings are presented in great detail and it is impossible to do them justice here so I will highlight a few that resulted in specific recommendations and attracted my attention while inviting you to read the full report to satisfy your own interests. Firstly, the report highlights the role of highly committed staff members in promoting the inclusion of a global youth work dimension in the absence of explicit agreed curriculum content on global issues/education. It was interesting therefore to note that there was general agreement among participants that there is both the potential and an imperative to consciously incorporate a global justice perspective into professional youth work programmes by maximising existing opportunities rather than creating a separate module (2009:30). The possibility of offering students the opportunity to specialise at post-graduate level was also suggested (33). This makes sense in a context where one of the biggest challenges cited by the research was that of time to add on additional curriculum content into an already congested

timetable. In addition, the diverse range of terminology was seen as confusing and was identified as a further challenge in focusing on global justice aspects of youth work, a point borne out by the De Montfort research (Sallah, 2009:2). For instance, the 'internationalisation' of global youth work may promote a tendency to focus on faraway places and contribute to an 'othering' at the expense of a commitment to diversity, social justice and interdependence locally and globally (2009:31). Equally, opportunities for students to undertake fieldwork practice placements in other countries were seen as valuable in contributing to their awareness of global justice issues.

Secondly, the research noted that the current focus of youth work on promoting young people's personal development is perhaps made at the expense of their wider social or political development. This is reflected in a lack of demand for the inclusion of a global dimension in professional programmes from the wider sector and may be related to perceptions that youth work students themselves are less political than in the past. At the same time, twenty-five out of thirty-two students described themselves as 'very motivated' or 'motivated' in relation to incorporating a global justice dimension into the programmes at UU.

On a related issue, concerns were raised about the availability of youth work-specific resources for global education practitioners. The perception in the youth sector is that most existing resources are developed for formal rather than informal education and may not be suitable without time consuming adaptation for youth work audiences which can be a deterrent in a busy work context. While it was acknowledged that some specific youth work resources are available, participants queried their ability to source and utilise them appropriately. This finding is consistent with research carried out in NUI Maynooth in 2008. One proposal made to address this situation is the development of a toolkit for lecturers to enable them to incorporate global justice concerns across a wide range of modules. Such a toolkit could usefully be developed for youth workers to the same ends.

The report itself is attractively presented in seven sections and laid out in a horizontal A4 format over forty pages making for an informative and substantial read, certainly providing more detail than can be reviewed in this short article. The comprehensive five page executive summary could usefully be made available as a downloadable pdf document to maximise access and distribution. This would support the author's stated aim of sharing the learning from the research with a range of statutory and voluntary youth work and

development focused organisations and those higher education institutions providing professional education and training for youth workers.

While the research findings relate specifically to the University of Ulster programmes they clearly resonate with other recent findings in the youth sector (Devlin and Tierney, 2009; Sallah, 2009). For those committed to global youth work, it would be gratifying to think that this recent research activity signifies a significant step in embedding a global justice dimension into the training and education of youth work professionals. Such an added dimension could promote youth work's contribution to the social and political education of young people as well as their personal development.

Centre for Global Education (2009) *Promoting Development Education in Youth Work Training*, University of Ulster, Jordanstown, Centre for Global Education, Belfast: http://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/documents/105.

References

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Sallah, M. (2009) *The State of Global Youth Work in HEIs (Summary Report)*, De Montfort University, Leicester: http://www.dmu.ac.uk/Images/Global%20Youth%20Work%20Report%2001c_tcm6-44144.pdf.

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