

Reviews

Connecting Communities: A practical guide to using development education in community settings

Lourdes Youth and Community Services

Reviewed by Anne Garvey

Two challenges for many development educators in adult community education in Ireland today are: firstly, how do we make development education attractive? Secondly, how do we present the problems of people living in ‘faraway places’ to people who themselves may be experiencing poverty and a sense of exclusion from mainstream society and the economic boom that is happening all around us?

For example, how do you present the water crises in the ‘global south’ to a group of travelling women from Ballyfermot who do not have an adequate water supply in their own homes? How do you present “Third World debt” to Irish people who are struggling everyday to make ends meet? (The 2006 UN Human Development Report places Ireland 17th out of the 18 OECD states for its rate of poverty and inequality).

The simple answer is: start with local issues. This is exactly what *Connecting Communities* a publication by Lourdes Youth and Community Services does. It introduces the learner to the inequalities existing in Ireland today and then creatively broadens out the learner’s understanding to cover the lives of people living in communities in the ‘majority world’ through a series of well thought out workshops. The topics covered in the manual include: income, education and health inequality, housing, debt, drugs, migration and racism, all of which are extremely relevant to people experiencing social exclusion in Ireland today.

The manual also provides clear, simple to read handouts with up-to-date information. I have found the workshops and exercises very useful in promoting classroom debate and stimulating learner reflection. Using these techniques adult learners develop a stronger sense of connection and solidarity with people living in communities in the ‘majority world’ and a deeper understanding of the reasons why people migrate in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

Connecting Communities excels as a tool for development education in Ireland. All too often I have found development education publications overlook local poverty and the edge is lost for us to use development education as a vital tool for empowerment and transformation.

I would encourage development educators to use this manual not only in a community education context but also in post primary settings so that our young people get a true picture of the nature of global inequality.

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