

STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS TO GLOBAL SOUTH ACTOR INVOLVEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN IRELAND

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Introduction

This article highlights underlying structural contradictions implicit in the participation of Ireland's minority ethnic communities in development education (DE) in Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK). It begins by attempting to identify a conceptual framework of DE practice in Ireland within the context of two dominant approaches. It then argues that the methodologies and conceptual framework that underpin mainstream funding of DE provide little space for global South actor participation. This limits the role and relevance of global South actors in pedagogical discourse on and the delivery of DE. The article concludes that the absence of a discernable theoretical framework to inform DE practice makes the identification of capacity building needs difficult and therefore encumbers the prospects of funding capacity building projects against other competing priorities. For the purpose of this article, a theoretical framework is defined as a body of knowledge that serves to interpret a given phenomenon or set of principles on which the logic of an activity is based, while a conceptual framework is a set of articulated ideas upon which a desired activity or course of action is constructed.

This article draws upon my experience as a participant in the 2008 Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) conference in Dublin, titled 'Opportunities and Challenges: Minority Ethnic Communities and Development Education in Ireland'. Researching the conference paper provided an opportunity to undertake an in-depth analysis of some of the key issues that emerged from the conference plenary sessions.

External constraints

In mapping the barriers to global South participation in DE, four key factors were identified as 'external influences' that hinder fuller participation: the highly structured approach to DE; the dominance of DE by large non-governmental organisations (NGOs); poor regional presence of leading DE organisations; and the overarching influence of state multicultural agendas

(Gyoh, 2008). I have divided these factors into three categories, with the last two factors under one heading: the absence of a strategic framework for global South engagement in DE. This reorganisation is informed by two assumptions: first, that government intercultural education agendas have negatively influenced global South actor activity due to an absence of a clear conceptual framework on DE practice. Second, that poor regional presence of mainstream actors is a result of the funding constraints emanating from implications of the first two listed factors.

Development education delivery in Ireland is similar to its delivery in the UK, where NGOs have pioneered work in this area (Smith, 2004). While Oxfam, CAFOD and the Department for International Development (DfID) play leading roles in influencing DE in the UK, Concern, Trócaire and Irish Aid occupy similar positions in Ireland. I include government agencies with NGOs as organisations that define DE delivery because of the influence they exert through funding guidelines and close ties with the major NGOs. Ireland and the UK have also seen the emergence of ‘second tier’ DE-focused organisations, such as the One World Centres, that have a mandate to promote public awareness, debates, dialogue and linkages at community level (Andreotti, 2006; <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie>). In Ireland particularly, the hegemony of big NGOs in the DE sector persists as a result of the embedded nature of their relationship with the state international development funding apparatus. These NGOs, with strong government support, dominate the sector in defining the nature of learning resources available to schools and organisations as well as the direction of government policy. However, the NGO charity/aid approach to DE has not come without its own drawbacks, as it walks the line between the perspective dilemma of sympathy for charity donations and empathy for global reflection and action.

Gap in theoretical premise

An underlying factor restricting global South participation in development education in Ireland and the UK is the absence of a theoretical framework outlining DE’s approach to development. This fundamental gap promotes and sustains an inconsistent regime of DE practice, where actors mix and match conceptual frameworks that are inconsistent with DE’s defining ethos of motivating action and challenging values that sustain existing global economic relations. Concepts and issues of poverty, diversity, interdependence, injustice, debt, unequal trade, etc., have contested and conflicting interpretations under different development theories and it is important to adopt a consistent framework. Beside the tensions this gap

generates in the arena of pedagogy, the absence of a theoretical framework has created caveats in the practice of DE compounding the North/South power polarity in promoting dialogue and enquiry (McCollum, 1996; Starkey, 1994; as cited in Andreotti, 2006). It leads to the question of what framework or values of 'development' are we promoting? Is it the neo-liberal, basic needs, dependency, post-development, reflexive paradigm or a hybrid model yet to be defined? Are there disparities in the perception of advocacy in DE practice in the global North and the South? A theoretical framework is important for consistency in message, dialogue, and pedagogy with implications for downstream actor capacity building.

Learning-centred approach (education) vs. campaign and advocacy

Development education practice appears to have diverged into two broad approaches. The first is the learning-centred approach which promotes knowledge, dialogue and enquiry towards global citizenship values and action (UNICEF, 1992:47). This approach describes DE as an 'educational process aimed at increasing awareness...and better understanding of global interdependence...' (DICE, 2008:20-22). The second approach, as defined by the United Nations (UN), emphasises advocacy towards understanding the underlying causes of underdevelopment and working towards a new global economic order (Hicks & Towley, 1988). While the educational approach looks to new sets of values and attitudes to motivate action at individual and group level, it is pursued through structured pedagogical processes. The campaign and advocacy approach on the other hand, emphasises challenging the existing global order at individual and institutional level through civil society solidarity.

The two strands are arguably more complementary than mutually exclusive as they both aim at challenging the root causes of underdevelopment (Starkey, 1994). The tension between these approaches resides more in methodology, yet they share a potential to interface in a reciprocal way within one theoretical framework. The educational process paradigm has started a search for an action component of DE, a gap easily filled by the campaigning and advocacy approach. However, a combination of factors emanating from the prevailing funding environment and a lack of clarity around the conceptual framework for DE practice has led to tension in the mutual application of the two methodologies (Foubert, 1986:122).

Gaps in the educational approach

The exclusionary nature of the educational process approach may be the most persistent structural barrier to global South participation in DE. It emphasises knowledge production through the application of structured educational materials and processes aimed at providing individuals with information and skills to engender global citizenship in the global North with a view to motivating civil society action for change (Smith, 2006). In practice, this approach relies on a high level of expertise linked to the formal education structure, leaving marginal space for input from global South actors. Quite frequently, the processes of dialogue and enquiry occur mainly at conferences and academic seminars with poor representation from the global South. This model of DE practice follows a pattern where the mainstream funders and NGOs adopt an operational definition which combines elements of citizenship education with a brand of advocacy built on 'pedagogical practices' (Irish Aid funding guideline, 2008:7). The concept of advocacy as a 'pedagogical practice' pushes for the inclusion of DE in the national education curriculum, contrasting with Southern participants' objective of mobilising institutional change through the use of campaigns.

The structured educational approach offers very little career and capacity building prospects for global South actors, and confines their involvement to rudimentary aspects of cultural awareness. Under such circumstances, even where opportunities such as mini-grants are available, global South actors may be unsure how they can fit into the agenda. The limited uptake by black and minority ethnic (BME) groups to a DfID mini-grant scheme, as reported in a publication by the One World Centre of Northern Ireland (presently the Centre for Global Education), may be an indication of this structural gap (One World Centre for Northern Ireland, 2004). The educational approach appears content with sustaining an identifiable pool of satellite global South organisations that serve the purpose of an information repository to feed the specific needs of mainstream organisations. The predominance of this approach in Ireland projects DE practice as academic, abstract and elitist, with little space for true dialogue and the enhanced participation of Southern stakeholders.

Imperatives of funding environment

Development education funding guidelines are shaped by institutions that are themselves powerful actors in the field. These institutions include large NGOs and state international aid development programmes. This dual actor/funder role solidifies a partisan resource allocation environment

where less powerful actors struggle to align themselves with the interest and work patterns of the larger, more recognisable institutions. With few exceptions, global South actors are effectively marginalised from this funding arrangement and unable to experience organisational growth.

Although capacity building for global South actors has been acknowledged as increasingly important in planning and funding DE initiatives, training projects aimed at Southern actors have not attracted adequate funding attention in the Republic of Ireland. As a leading global South organisation in Ireland comments, 'training initiatives fail to attract funding...there seems to be a confusion on the context of what capacity building funders really mean'. The funding establishment is usually slow to respond to the less routine and emerging challenges to DE and sometimes it is even resistant to new initiatives perceived as conflicting with pedagogical practices. Individuals and community groups from the black and minority sector are expected to link with mainstream development education centres in the regions but there does not appear to be a specific funding scheme for capacity building at this level. This has led to Southern actors delivering intercultural awareness activities in an ad hoc, informal and undefined manner that is difficult to evaluate in a structured educational context.

For the nationally-based global South organisations such as Akidwa and the Africa Centre, project initiatives are driven by funders' guidelines rather than needs identified in practice. For example, work that remotely hints at enhancing advocacy around clearly established global issues such as debt or trade inequality are immediately off-limits in the prevailing funding environment. This shows that advocacy and campaigning activity is not perceived as part of awareness raising objectives when it is not deployed via the structured prism of pedagogical practices. Therefore, there is an urgent need to re-define advocacy and campaigning work in a context that fits and relates to the ethos of development education. With the introduction of pedagogical methodologies such as critical literacy and independent thinking, concepts now centrifugal to DE practice, there is an urgent need to recognise the veiled but growing tension between big NGOs, downstream actors, and the DE epistemic community.

Conclusion

This article argues that the marginal involvement and the apparent difficulty in enhancing global South participation in DE can be attributed to the highly structured and elitist educational approach that focuses on engendering '[global] Northern global citizenship'. This process demands a level of professional expertise and experience in the host (global North)

educational system which presents difficulties for global South actors. The difficulty in negotiating space for Southern actors is compounded by the absence of an underlining theoretical framework that defines the development paradigm by which DE initiatives are conceptualised, and in which other concepts such as advocacy are understood. The situation is further compounded by the lack of a strategic plan to enhance the capacity of minority ethnic actors to engage in meaningful dialogue and the process of knowledge production.

The prevailing funding environment forms another structural barrier hindering greater participation of global South actors in DE. The guidelines of lead funding institutions reflect 'mainstream' perspectives and agendas that drive the direction of funding priorities, limiting by extension the scope of Southern input in DE. Global South community groups have tended to focus on intercultural education because they find it less structured and with more prospects for career opportunities.

Finally, this article makes a case for a redefinition of advocacy and campaign in DE practice, as there appears to be a disparity in global North/South approaches to the concept and its application in motivating action. Funders have frequently shown reluctance in funding certain campaign projects intricately linked to Southern perspectives. Advocacy and campaigning are intrinsic to community development and civil society procedures, which is the organisational framework in which DE should reside.

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