

# ONE WORLD WEEK AS A MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

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## Introduction

This article looks at One World Week (OWW) as a model of good practice in development education in the non-formal youth work sector. One World Week is a week-long event that is delivered annually both at a national level in Ireland and across Europe, the latter being facilitated by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe. This article explores One World Week from its origins, outlines its aims, and explains how the different components of this initiative are beneficial to both youth work and development education practice. In addition, it explores some of the challenges arising from One World Week.

One World Week is a week of youth-led awareness raising, education and action, during which young people learn about local and global justice issues and take action to bring about change. One World Week is co-ordinated by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), the representative body for national voluntary youth work organisations in Ireland. It takes place throughout the country during the third week in November, to coincide with Universal Children's Day which falls on 20th November. The aim of One World Week is to encourage youth organisations to explore global justice issues, in order to increase awareness and promote youth-led action. A main priority of the week is to address these issues from a local and a global perspective, serving as a reminder of the interconnectedness of the world in which we live.

## Origins of One World Week

The origins of One World Week date back to the early 1980s, when development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) throughout the United Kingdom (UK) became concerned that development education was failing to find its way onto the agenda of major youth organisations. An article responding to this situation appeared in *Youth and Society* in September 1983 and proposed a renewed focus on the upcoming International Youth Year in 1985. This was an opportunity to promote One World Week, an initiative that had already been established in the youth work sector.

Around the same time, the International Youth Year served as a catalyst for similar developments that were taking place in Ireland. 'One World, Our World Week' became One World Week in 1990 and has gone on to become a feature of the development education calendar in Ireland for the last 18 years.

The One World Week process involves: selection of an appropriate theme; the development of age-specific education materials to raise awareness and promote action; delivery of training to youth workers; planning for a common action; and planning for the week itself, which features local and regional events, and a visit by youth workers from the global South to share their experiences. All of this activity culminates in a national event where young people have the opportunity to showcase their work.

## **Planning One World Week**

The planning process for One World Week begins in February each year, when NYCI identifies a number of potential themes in consultation with its advisory structures, development NGOs and Global Education Week coordinators around Europe. An important aspect of the theme selection process is that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) serve as an overarching framework. The MDGs (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>) are international targets toward poverty eradication in the developing world and increasing awareness of the goals is seen as critical, particularly in the context of a recent survey that suggested 82 per cent of European Union (EU) citizens are unaware of them (Europeans and Development Aid poll, 2007:22). The MDGs provide a useful framework for development education in youth work in the absence of a formal curriculum. Previous themes have included global health, peace and conflict, globalisation and trade and young people participating for global change. Effective development education and awareness raising are essential catalysts in mobilising support to reach these targets.

The process of consultation in choosing the theme has ensured that levels of ownership are high among youth organisations and that the selected theme is relevant to the young people with whom they work. The process of choosing a theme is paralleled at the European level, coordinated by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe. The European process attempts to synthesise a broad range of national views and constituencies and, as with the Irish process, the themes are informed by the MDGs. The European theme is usually selected in March and is discussed during the Irish selection process.

## One World Week resource

When the theme has been agreed an education resource is published and targeted at youth workers, youth leaders and other educators, with a view to making the resource as accessible to as many groups as possible. Careful consideration is given to the level at which the material is pitched, reflecting the non-formal settings in which youth work learning takes place. The resource's strength, however, is that it is usually adaptable to a variety of settings.

One World Week resources are created with key features that allow for accessibility and adaptability. For example, activities are based on both principles of good youth work practice and principles of good practice in development education. The *Going Global* resource for example which was produced by NYCI in 2005, highlights that 'quality development education 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' (NYCI, 2005:8).

Activities are largely participatory and experiential with the aim of developing young people's skills, attitudes and values. Many of the activities are based on methodologies that suit the non-formal context such as art, sport, drama, games, quizzes and role play, and are ultimately intended to support a greater understanding of inequality and justice issues.

Another feature of the resources is the use of personal perspectives through case studies. This is an important feature as it provides perspectives from the global South and ensures that the information provided is not purely based on our own perspectives and assumptions. As NYCI does not have its own operations in the global South, it works in partnership with development agencies who do and can contribute their experiences to the OWW resource and activities. For these agencies, their participation in OWW helps increase awareness in Ireland of the regions in which they operate and the people with whom they work.

When developing One World Week resources, NYCI also considers the challenges of addressing both local and global issues simultaneously. The Development Education Association (DEA) suggests on the basis of research that:

“(I)n order to gain the skills and confidence to take action to create a better future, young people need not only an understanding of their local circumstances but of how the global community functions and of how inequalities are perpetuated, locally and globally...Youth workers

need guidance on how to develop local-global links and perspectives in their work with young people” (Development Education Association, 2004).

Once the resource is developed, training is provided to youth workers, community workers and others that work with young people in local centres around Ireland. The training aims to increase participants’ awareness of the theme, explore how activities can be adapted for particular groups or settings, and highlight actions that groups can take at a local level for youth-led public awareness raising.

### **Training toward action**

Following training, participants bring the resource materials back to their groups and engage with young people on the issues. The participation level of groups in One World Week varies considerably but the overall effect is to increase awareness of development issues and enhance capacity in the sector. Some training participants will run an activity or two with their groups, while others will encourage the young people to take action at a local, national or international level. In choosing a central action, consideration is given to the nature of young people’s involvement and the fact that NYCI is not a campaigning organisation and does not have the capacity to lead a range of global justice actions in the medium to long term. For that reason, NYCI prioritises actions that form part of an ongoing wider project and involves young people around the world. In recent years, actions have focused on the right to education, climate change, tackling stigma and discrimination about HIV/AIDS, separation walls and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In 2004, the theme for One World Week was young people and stress, with a specific focus on education, sexual health and the world of work. NYCI linked in with the Irish Coalition of the Global Campaign for Education (ICGCE) to promote a common action called ‘Send a Friend to School’. It involved creating life-sized body maps and decorating them with images and messages highlighting the importance of education locally and globally. The resulting ‘Friends’ were showcased locally and at a national event with the Irish Minister of State responsible for Overseas Development Aid (ODA). They finally joined thousands of ‘Friends’ from over 150 countries at a meeting of the United Nations in Washington. The arts-based methodology caught the imagination of groups in Ireland and emphasised the value of young people taking action in solidarity. NYCI subsequently joined the ICGCE (see <http://www.campaignforeducation.com>), which has

allowed us to continue to work on this issue on a long-term basis.

## **Southern links**

In recent times, NYCI has responded to the need for a Southern voice in development education by bringing youth workers from Zambia to Ireland during OWW to visit groups around the country. The link with Zambia has been developed in partnership with 80:20: Educating and Acting for a Better World, an Irish NGO which operates in both Ireland and Zambia. This has allowed us much greater contact with local organisations on an ongoing basis and supports the sustainability of the work. In many cases, youth groups organise their One World Week activities around the visit. This has proved to be a very successful initiative based on the positive response of youth organisations; however, there are significant costs involved which could limit the long term sustainability of this aspect of the week. NYCI has sought to address this challenge by framing the visit in the context of a bigger exchange programme between Ireland and Zambia, with a particular focus on youth organisations in both countries developing their own links.

One World Week can either support a stand-alone event or alternatively be a catalyst for a programme of events stretching over the full week. The challenge, however, is to avoid the one-off approach becoming tokenistic and allowing the issues raised during OWW to become fully integrated in the work being done on an on-going basis with young people. Following on from the week, NYCI encourages organisations to build a global justice dimension into their ongoing youth work. This requires that youth organisations better understand development education and the role it can play in supporting their work. Perhaps a shift in thinking is needed, moving away from a simplistic view of development education as just a vehicle to educate ourselves about the developing world. OWW seeks to nurture an alternative view of development education that holds at its core an emphasis on the personal and social development of the young person. This shift is already reflected at a European level where some countries have a year-round focus on the theme without organising a specific week of events. However, they still value the banner of Global Education Week and the sense of solidarity with other events across Europe.

## **Conclusion**

One World Week can serve as a useful model of good practice for both youth work and development education practitioners. OWW events and activities promote ownership of the global justice theme by youth organisations

and young people. The learning is multiplied and continued through the accessible and adaptable education materials that are produced and through the provision of training for local youth workers and global educators. Moreover, NYCI works closely with other organisations both locally and internationally to create partnerships, share ideas and methodologies, and to support sustainable links between youth groups in Ireland and in the global South, thereby committing to action in solidarity with people throughout the world. For more information on the One World Week and the National Youth Council of Ireland, please visit: <http://www.youth.ie>.

## References

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