

CONSENSUS IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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One of the challenges of development education is this: how to bring together European Union (EU) member states, the European Parliament, the European Commission, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and all the other actors that are taking on the important role of encouraging and educating people to understand the world around us?

This particular challenge has motivated key representatives in these organisations to work towards agreement on the ‘European Consensus on Development: The contribution of development education & awareness raising’. This document was launched by Louis Michel, EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, on 9 November 2007 at the European Development Days (EDD). Commissioner Michel announced that:

“...this Consensus on development education is as important as the European Consensus on Development. Young people are unaware of poor people suffering. Raising awareness amongst young people is a day-to-day effort. Development education is a long term process to prepare young people for the debates of tomorrow” (Michel, 2007).

This statement refers to the first strategy framework on European development education and awareness raising (DE/AR) at local, regional, national and European levels. It supports the implementation of the European Consensus on Development (2005), which recognises the importance of DE/AR among EU citizens in addressing global development concerns and commitments, such as the Millennium Development Goals. It also complements and strengthens, while not replacing, existing national and European initiatives in DE/AR.

The strategy framework has been drawn up by representatives from the member states’ Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Development, the European Institutions, local authorities and municipalities, NGOs, youth organisations, the Global Education Network Europe (GENE), the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Aimed at EU Member State governments, the European Commission, the European Parliament and media and civil society actors, it includes a number of significant policy recommendations to improve the practice and impact of development

education, in particular emphasising political and financial support. These include:

- To create more dialogue between European, state, media and civil society actors who are and who should be engaged in promoting DE/AR;
- To strengthen mutual support in learning to improve existing practice and develop new ventures;
- To encourage cross-European programmes and activities, ensuring inclusion of new actors in DE/AR and development cooperation;
- To encourage greater cross-learning between national and EU levels; between people from the global North and South; and between governmental and civil society actors in and outside of the European Union;
- To highlight the relevance of global development to European, national, local and public concerns.

Many existing development education activities and strategies tend to run parallel to one another. It is therefore important to build bridges between the member states, different actors and different themes to strengthen our common capacities to deliver a higher quality of development education. One of the concrete outcomes of implementing the above recommendations across the EU would be more national development education strategies like those in Ireland and Finland.

The preparatory group of the DE consensus will facilitate the implementation of the document's recommendations, on both a national and European level. Other important stakeholders in the strategy process, especially the national Ministries of Education, will have the responsibility to ensure that development education moves beyond its traditional home of development cooperation and becomes accessible to the greatest possible number of European citizens through formal education.

Research is one key tool which has been significantly underutilised in promoting and assessing the practice of development education. Of course, there have been baseline studies and evaluations carried out in preparation for large projects, but less common is the systematic use of research methods or techniques as a key part of project implementation. With NGOs in particular, the challenge has been to identify resources to fund research as part of their activities, which is absolutely necessary for these organisations and their target groups to have a better understanding of the current state and impact of development education. The DE consensus process identified research as one of the most important areas to focus on in the future.

During the Slovene EU presidency, SLOGA, the Slovene national platform for non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) and CONCORD (The European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development) members, together with the DE consensus group and the Slovene Ministry for Foreign Affairs, organised the European Conference on *Intercultural Dialogue in Development Education* (9-10 June 2008 in Ljubljana). A recurring topic discussed in the conference working groups by participants representing many different stakeholders was research, including various approaches, methodologies and communication requirements, some of which are outlined below.

Research must be grounded in a full understanding of the context (e.g. gender, culture) of the issues examined, which can be explored through participation and collaboration. Moreover, more open, flexible and collaborative approaches to research must be promoted, including those which challenge the usual ways of thinking and working. Specific research methodologies for development education and intercultural dialogue (DE/ID) should be developed. These methodologies should include: creating thinking space in the field of DE/ID; carrying out research to inform action outcomes; and researching the impact and evaluation of DE in a variety of contexts, including lifelong learning processes and the integration of intercultural dialogue in the curriculum, media and other forms of technology.

More and better collaboration between NGOs, academics and other stakeholders is needed in order to share and learn from each other, and develop best practice in research. The process of collaboration should recognise the strengths and limitations of all stakeholders, with the aim of capacity building in the global North and South. A database and research network should be developed as a way of sharing research (findings and methods) between stakeholders. Also, new budget lines should be set up to support joint research projects between NGOs, academics and other applicable groups.

As a part of the DE consensus process, EU member states were encouraged to find ways to cooperate with different actors. An example of this form of collaboration is a report produced by the Finnish Ministry of Education describing how to compile articles from different researchers about development education. The report demonstrates one way to learn about the wider field of development education and, hopefully, can provide development education practitioners with a new understanding about the various forms that DE can take. The report can be accessed in its entirety online at:

<http://www.minedu.fi/export/sites/default/OPM/Julkaisut/2007/liitteet/opm31.pdf?lang=fi>.

Rilli Lappalainen is the Co-Chair of the ‘European Consensus on Development: the contribution of Development Education & Awareness Raising’ process, a member of the board of CONCORD (the European NGO confederation for relief and development), and the former chair of the CONCORD Development Education Forum.