

NCCA guidelines for intercultural education: Issues, opportunities and transferability

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Most of us are already familiar with the distinction made between the activity taking place in the school/university system, referred to as ‘formal sector’, and that happening at the community level, or in the ‘non-formal’ sector. Development education (DE), with its aim of engaging people as global citizens at all levels has a crucial role to play in both sectors and also amongst the general public.

However, we often hear about specific DE activity happening in one of these sectors with little or no involvement (or awareness) from the other. Does this mean that the kind of DE happening within one is different from the other? Is it assumed that there is little transferability between the kinds of material designed? Are we then limiting the scope and potential of what DE can achieve by making distinctions too rigid?

With this in mind the Dóchas (the umbrella organisation of Irish non-governmental organisations involved in development) Development Education Group (DEG) in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) held a seminar aimed at exploring the relevance of the newly published *Guidelines for Intercultural Education* to the more general DE work happening at the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)/community level. The event was open to organisations and individual practitioners interested in promoting intercultural education so as to maximise the opportunities for representatives from both sectors to explore the potential offered by the guidelines.

Beyond introducing the guidelines document and putting into practice some of its suggested activities, the seminar aimed “to provide a forum to look at ways of adapting the guidelines for use in the wider formal and non-formal sectors”. It was envisioned that by the end of the conference, participants would have:

- explored the relevance of the guidelines to the formal and non-formal education sectors
- increased awareness of how to use the guidelines for intercultural education
- enhanced knowledge of relevant supports

Working in small groups, participants were asked to identify challenges and opportunities they thought might be present when working with the guidelines as well as transferable elements to their work in the non-formal sector. Some of their findings are listed below.

Challenges

Training and support

The NCCA's remit was to produce the guidelines and not to devise training for the target group. Though the NCCA has sent a copy of the guidelines to all primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland, it is up to the teachers and their school administration to implement them. It is feared that a lack of follow-up strategy could result in the loss of what is recognised as a very valuable piece of work. The target audience are teachers and steps should be taken by the relevant authorities to ensure that every teacher and school principal is trained and supported in using the guidelines.

Perceived addition to teachers' workload

Related to the point above, participants questioned whether teachers will see the guidelines as a new addition to their workload or not. Again, this follows from a potential lack of supporting mechanisms inside/outside of their schools. It is hoped that schools choosing to implement the guidelines will factor in teachers' concerns around this area.

Feasibility of the holistic approach

One of the main benefits of the guidelines is that they provide practical information about how to mainstream anti-racist/intercultural education principles into the life of the school. A lack of coherent planning for the guidelines' implementation may result in the 'ghettoisation' of these into areas such as Social Personal Health Education and Religious Education, which will limit the guidelines' potential.

Opportunities

Individualised school plans and autonomy

The guidelines provide clear suggestions (and checklists) as to how schools can incorporate the core values of intercultural education in their ethos, structure, policies, classroom planning and more. This is seen as an opportunity for each school to reflect and positively influence not only its own values but also those of its community.

Language and attitudes

By promoting a positive attitude towards linguistic diversity and recognising the intellectual capacity of second language learners the guidelines provide good opportunities for teachers to deal with discriminatory behaviour (and bullying). Similarly, teachers are recommended to proactively choose multilingual resources, where possible, which will only enrich the notion of diversity in the classroom.

Reinforcement of the values of development education

Intercultural education promotes an atmosphere of openness and dialogue through specific participatory learning methodologies, and sensitivity to and respect for world cultures. It is recognised that a direct correlation exists between the values promoted by the guidelines with those of DE (sense of social justice-human rights and responsibility) and therefore opportunities to mainstream them in practice should be considered.

Transferability to the non-formal sector

Organisational planning

Although the guidelines are meant for primary schools, some participants recognised the potential they have to inform organisations' planning. Organisations seeking to adapt intercultural values into their structures can refer to the very practical advice offered in the guidelines applying it to recruitment policies, as well as informing the delivery of DE workshops. Of course, the guidelines can only serve as pointers as to what areas might need reviewing and it is up to individual organisations to take these further through research and adaptation.

Development education workshop activities

A number of learning activities (exemplars) are featured in the guidelines with explicit reference to the curriculum area, strand and strand units they target. Some of these exemplars can be carefully adapted to suit the needs of DE workshops (e.g. those that have an anti-racist element) taking into account age group, learning needs and the development issue under discussion. Some elements of the suggested sessions could be used as an introduction to a given topic, as ice-breakers or extension activities to name just a few.

Resource production

Organisations involved in producing resources for DE or campaigns could benefit from practical advice offered by the guidelines when designing their

printed materials. Useful information can be found in the guidelines on language awareness, selection of images and an alertness of what is absent as well as what is present.

The groups' findings mentioned above were based on a limited exposure to the guidelines before the actual workshop took place. It is therefore highly probable that more opportunities for transferability of the intercultural guidelines from the formal to the non-formal sector exist. It is up to organisations and individuals to take the task further and benefit from this timely piece of work.

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A copy of the Intercultural Guidelines can be obtained through the NCCA's website at www.ncca.ie