

UBUNTU NETWORK

A submission from the Ubuntu Network to Irish Aid on the implementation of recommendation 3 from the GENE report

Recommendation 3 – “Support for purposeful further research concerning DE should be considered, including for example, networking of researchers, mapping existing research, comparative analysis and explorative studies.”

18th December 2015



Research and Development Education

The Ubuntu Networks welcomes the inclusion of research as a recommendation in the 2015 GENE report, *Global Education in Ireland*, and urges that research be included as a core element in the upcoming Irish Aid Development Education Strategy.

This document provides an insight into how research on Development Education might be conducted in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It has been compiled by the Ubuntu Network in association with its members located in the teacher education departments of HEIs in Ireland.

1. Rationale For Investing In Development Education Research

1.1 Research will provide an evidence base to inform good practice.

“People often mistake common practice for best practice, and seem to prefer the comfort of the crowd to thinking for themselves using hard evidence” (Petty, 2009, p. 1)

Each year Irish Aid funds Development Education in formal and non-formal educational settings. Approaches are varied, contexts differ and the immediate impact of the interventions is often difficult to define and measure. In an environment where transparency and accountability are essential, Development Education practice based on rigorously established and objective evidence is essential to ensuring good practice.

Evidence-based teaching is that which is informed by significant and reliable evidence derived from well-conducted research studies (Petty, 2009). Evidence may be extracted from educational research for example the meta-analyses of teaching and learning strategies carried out by Hattie (Hattie, 2009) and Marzano (Marzano, 1998). Equally it may be taken from high quality Development Education research reports such as *‘Learning to read the world?’* (Bryan et al, 2011). Valuable evidence may also be gathered by the teacher themselves through critical reflection and inquiry into their classroom practice and student experiences (Petty, 2009, p. 58).

In the context of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), this is borne out through teacher educators conducting research and using their research-based knowledge to inform their teaching. Student teachers therefore are prepared through a research-based approach led by researchers (Sahlberg, 2012, p. 21). Equally in Continual Professional Development (CPD) of teachers, William stresses that research can play a significant role in indicating for teachers the directions which are most likely to be impactful in terms of their practice (William 2014, p.32 in Teaching Council, 2015).

Development Education interventions that are informed by evidence of good practice are more likely to result in the desired learning outcomes. And whilst evidence based Development Education interventions are key, it is equally important that those engaged in this practice also contribute to the evidence base by reporting and disseminating their research.

The benefits of evidence-based approaches are not confined purely to teaching but are equally relevant to other aspects of education including policy making and curriculum design and implementation. Decisions in these areas should be informed by evidence derived from quality research.

1.2 Research is central to the teaching profession

“Let us find ways to link up research projects across the country and expand the dialogue...creative professional development deserves to be acknowledged and applauded.”

(Owen, 2014, p. 62 in Teaching Council, 2015, p.1)

Teachers are becoming better equipped to conduct research that informs their practice. The Teaching Council promotes reflective practice, research and inquiry-based learning as central to teachers’ professional development from ITE and through to in-service learning (Conway et al, 2009; Teaching Council, 2011a; Teaching Council, 2011b; Teaching Council 2015;). This sentiment was strongly reinforced in the most recent review of teacher education in Ireland which noted that student outcomes tend to be higher where teacher education is research driven (Sahlberg, 2012, p.13). Since 2014, post graduate ITE programmes have placed greater emphasis on preparing pre-service teachers to use educational research to inform their teaching while also conducting their own research and inquiry to support their learning (Sahlberg, 2012, p. 25). The draft framework on Teachers’ Learning, Cosán, also makes reference to the potential of research for CPD, referencing action research and the publishing of articles as examples of valued activities (Teaching Council, 2015).

Of course research is highly valued in HEIs. Teacher educators undertake research as a core part of their work alongside teaching duties. Teacher educators supervise the research of Professional Masters in Education (PME) student teachers and PhD candidates. Opportunities for including Development Education as a research topic are especially apparent with the increasing number of PME students nationwide and the increased provision of Development Education in these programmes through the Ubuntu Network and DICE.

1.3 Research in Development Education will strengthen the sector

“It is recommended that the DEAC committee will use its role as an advisory body to the Minister to ensure that ... gaps and weaknesses in research identified in chapters 3 and 4 are addressed by the continued funding of high-quality research, by prioritising the allocation of grants for studies focusing on under-researched areas in development education and by ensuring that research on development education is more effectively disseminated, and that the implications of research more directly inform development education practice.” (Fiedler et al, 2011)

From its inception in the 1970s Development Education in Ireland has evolved into a significant educational movement. Today is seen as relevant right across formal education from Early Years Education to Higher Education. It is recognised as a means to explore complex development issues, to develop high order thinking skills and to bring about attitudinal change towards responsibility, solidarity and commitment to action.

However Development Education in Ireland lacks a depth of research evidence to inform the sector and provide a basis for understanding Development Education in relation to education and society today. There are many unexplored questions and unconsidered perspectives (e.g. how does Development Education relate to contemporary social, cultural and economic crises? How does

Development Education align with the Education for Sustainable Development or citizenship agendas? How does Development Education relate to international efforts e.g. Sustainable Development Goals or climate agreements?). A DEAC (Development Education Association Committee) commissioned meta-analysis of Development Education research conducted in 2011 showed a small number of in-depth, rich research studies that allow for deep understanding of the complexities of the development education process. However it also showed a significant number that were poorly designed, marred by underdeveloped or unclear data analysis and displaying a limited or superficial understanding of the field. (Fiedler et al, 2011, p.9)

It is important to support research that examines a wide range of development education-related themes that will enhance the theorisation of the field, as well as the development of enhanced methods and resources (see section 2 below).

2. Priority Research Areas for Development Education

2.1 The Concept of Development Education

- Research to advance a theory of Development Education in the Irish context.
 - Exploring its ontological underpinnings - ontology being the starting point of all research, after which epistemological and methodological positions follow. While ontology refers to assumptions on the nature or essence of the social phenomena (is social reality external to individuals or is it the product of individual consciousness), epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the origin, nature, methods and limits of knowledge. (Cohen et al, 2007).
 - Exploring philosophies of education relevant to Development Education (aligning Development Education with the work of Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Maxine Green, Peter McLaren, Vanessa Andreotti etc.),
 - Exploring Development Education from sociological perspectives (e.g. equality, gender).
 - Examining the links between Development Education and other relevant constructs e.g. metacognition, moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, values education, critical consciousness and civic responsibility.
- Research that explores Development Education in modern contexts
 - Problematizing the construct of development education in light of the international literature base on education for social justice, equality and sustainability e.g. Education for Sustainable Development, Global Education, Citizenship Education.
 - As it relates to ongoing local and global crises e.g. water provision, migration, climate change, radicalisation
 - As it relates to international negotiations and agreements, e.g. COP21, Overseas Development Aid, Sustainable Development Goal obligations.

→ As it relates to curriculum change in the formal education sector (particularly Junior Cycle reform, Senior Cycle reform and the introduction of Politics and Society as a Senior Cycle subject area.

2.2 Towards a Model of Integrating Development Education (in formal education settings)

- What Development Education is being conducted in formal education.
- How the nature and culture of subjects and disciplines informs approaches to integration of Development Education.
- Substantiated exemplars of good practice that are reliable and validated (e.g. specific subject, whole school approaches, ITE content).
- Development Education's contribution to building key skills e.g. critical thinking, critical media literacy, information processing, communication, systems thinking.
- Measuring the learning from integrated Development Education – process indicators and product indicators.

2.3 Development Education in Post Primary Education.

- Deployment of the new Junior Cycle CSPE short course and Senior Cycle Politics and Society subject.
- The nature of Development Education provision in primary and post primary schools.
- Curriculum reform and Development Education.

2.4 Development Education and Teacher Education *(the re-configuration of ITE within the Irish context creates enormous opportunities for collaborative research in this area)*

- Development Education as it relates to the mandatory elements of Initial Teacher Education (Teaching Council, 2011) e.g. inclusive education, teacher as professional/reflective practitioner/researcher, developing a professional portfolio, ICT in teaching and learning, adolescent learning (post primary).
- Development Education as it relates to School Placement.
- Development Education and the research/inquiry component of teacher education.
- Development Education as it relates to subject areas and subject pedagogies.
- The place of Development Education in the Cosán Framework and Droichead pilot and roll out, research might consider what Dev Ed CPD and induction might look like over time in an evolving landscape.

2.5 Development Education in Further/Higher Education

- Development Education and other academic/research areas e.g. digital humanities, media literacy, Green Technology.
- HEA (Higher Education Authority) and HEI strategies and operation – where does Development Education lie?

3. How To Conduct Research on Development Education

3.1 Researchers should conduct research

Research on Development Education should be conducted by academics and researchers in HEIs in association with NGOs, state agencies (e.g. NCCA, PDST, Teaching Council) and partner organisations (e.g. WWGS, Ubuntu Network, DICE). This will ensure that skilled and experienced professionals in the areas of research and Development Education conduct the work. It will also enhance Development Education as an academic field, create a network of researchers involved in Development Education, build a culture of research in Development Education and serving to build capacity of faculty associated with participant Institutions.

Where teachers and/or teacher educators are engaging in research associated with their professional practice, specific training on *Research Methods for Development Education* should be made available. This may be done in association with existing research modules available in HEIs.

A Research Committee should be established to support Irish Aid in activities such as identifying research priorities, allocating funds to HEIs or researchers, supporting dissemination of research outputs and fostering an active Development Education research community.

Teacher educators in HEIs should advocate for the inclusion of Development Education in Research Strategies pertaining to their Departments and HEIs.

3.2 Quality Assurance

Research must be of high quality and integrity. It should be non-biased, valid and reliable. Research methodologies should be appropriate, and ethical approval should be sought by the lead institution. Inter-institutional and intra-institutional research teams should be welcomed. Partnerships and collaboration with NGOs, government agencies and other organisations should feature. Studies that transcend boundaries (primary, post primary, further education, higher education, youth and community) should be conducted e.g. how learners in different learning contexts actually engage with complex development issues or establishing a theoretical underpinning for Development Education the Irish context.

3.3. Dissemination of Research Outputs

Research should be disseminated to a variety of audiences (including Development Education practitioners, researchers, teachers, academics from other disciplines) and through a variety of means (e.g. reports, papers, Dialogue Days, conferences, CPD events)

An annual Development Education Research conference should be hosted in by a participant HEI.

Opportunities for dialogue on research and practice should be provided e.g. through facilitating Dialogue Days (see Ubuntu's Dialogue Day model - <http://www.ubuntu.ie/our-work/events.html>)

3.4 Funding Modalities

In terms of funding modalities, the following provide some feasible options.

3.4.1 Targeted Research Projects facilitated through existing HEI-based organisations with proven research capacity (e.g. Ubuntu Network, DICE) - Research priorities and projects are identified. Appropriate researchers are identified for the completion of the research based on their existing research capacity and scope. This scheme provides funding to individual researchers or research teams where the Principal Investigator (PI) is located within a Higher Education Institution. Projects may involve collaboration with NGOs, government bodies and other stakeholders. Duration of projects may vary.

3.4.2 Open Call for Research in Development Education - Research priorities have been identified, however scope is provided to researchers to identify appropriate and worthy projects. An open call is issued. Individual researchers or research teams may submit research proposals related to priority areas. Seed funding of €3,000 - €7,500 for one year projects may be awarded initially and extended beyond one year where necessary.

3.4.3 Establish a Post Graduate Scholarship scheme - where research is significant and if longitudinal research is required,

- Offers scholarships for suitably qualified individuals to pursue a Research Masters or a PhD (either traditional or structured) relating to the Development Education topic at a recognised HEI within Ireland,
- And/or
- In partnership and collaboration with the Irish Research Council provide a small number of targeted scholarships for the completion of a Research Masters or a PhD in particular areas of study. IRC Terms and Conditions for the 2016 funding call are available at: <http://www.research.ie/sites/default/files/eeeeee.pdf>.

The total value of the IRC Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship, and all Strategic Funding Partner Scholarships, can be up to a maximum of €24,000 in any approved year.

3.4.4 Establish a Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme - Fund researchers to work as part of established research teams who have already achieved recognition for their Development Education work. Fellowships can be held for either one or two years. An IRC Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship can be up to a maximum of €45,895 in any approved year (Irish Research Council, 2015).

3.4.5 A Partnership Scheme whereby HEIs, in partnership with private enterprises or public bodies, award co-funded postgraduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships to the most promising researchers in Ireland.

3.4.6 Knowledge Exchange Grant - Facilitated through existing HEI-based organisations a national selection process whereby eligible institutions may nominate staff, researchers at PhD and/or Postdoctoral stage for knowledge exchange with other Institutions nationally/internationally.

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