

# **JOINING THE DOTS: CONNECTING CHANGE, POST-PRIMARY DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION, INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND AN INTER-DISCIPLINARY CROSS-CURRICULAR CONTEXT**

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**Abstract:** This Perspectives article develops a rationale for the integration of a development education (DE) approach into initial teacher education (ITE) within a cross-curricular framework. The perspective is grounded in the practical considerations of the local and global circumstances of living in today's world. A discussion is presented of significant current ecological, technological and socio-cultural changes and the resulting challenges they pose if schools and communities are to respond responsibly and imaginatively. In particular, we focus on ways in which ITE providers can strengthen the moral and social justice dimensions of the pupils' learning experience through DE.

While schools have various traditions of building aspects of global citizenship into their programmes, recent curricular developments at Junior Cycle in post-primary schools in Ireland offer fresh opportunities to engage with inter-disciplinary topics such as sustainable development, climate change, social justice and participative democracy. For meaningful change to take place, student-teachers and teachers need a thorough grounding in the many issues linked with concepts associated with global citizenship and the methodologies that are effective in facilitating such learning.

**Key words:** Development Education (DE); Initial Teacher Education (ITE); Ireland; Junior Cycle Reform; Teachers' Professional Identity; Teaching Council.

## **Introduction**

Throughout history societies have acknowledged the central position that education holds, and have, at the very least, recognised education as a key activity and part in their societal development (Mulhearn, 1959). Closely linked to the development of society and modernity, education is regarded as key to addressing ecological, technological, social, cultural, economic and personal change (Share et al., 2012). Many sociologists view education as a key driver of change and as a vehicle to develop society and communities (Clancy, 1995). Education is also seen as a pathway to develop individuals through economic growth and social progress, and to facilitate learning more about the world in which we live and interact, so that we can better control our futures (Postman, 2011). Education, a human right, is also valued because it is indispensable in achieving other human rights (Baker et al., 2004). In the light of the considerable social, cultural, economic and technological changes we have experienced in Ireland (Crotty and Schmidt, 2014), attention is frequently turned to how education can contribute towards making sense and coping with these changes (Andreotti, 2009), and the creation of an adaptable, modern, multi-cultural and inter-connected society (McKay et al., 2011).

Within the context of education generally, development education (DE) can act as an overarching umbrella under which many of the above issues can be comfortably unified. DE can offer learners an intellectually coherent and practically useful way of engaging with the local and global circumstances of living in today's world and of confronting the challenges that societies are experiencing. A key contention of this article is that DE needs to be afforded a central place in school programmes and, by extension, in teacher education, particularly initial teacher education (ITE).

## **Local and global concerns**

Like many other established institutions in society, schools are straining under the weight of expectations to adapt and respond to life in the twenty-first century. While many accept the broad principle that young people and their teachers need to develop new skills if they are to flourish, consensus as

to what these skills are, how they might be cultivated or, crucially, what traditional aspects of schooling might be jettisoned, is elusive (e.g. Claxton, 2008; Postman, 2011; Robinson, 2017; Schleicher, 2018). The stakes are high as decisions made about schooling now will impact on young people's futures; how much promise, how much peril?

The challenges that we are now facing, due to local and global changes, require an educational response if we are to look forward to a sustainable future. These challenges, that are having an extensive impact in Ireland and on Irish education, can be grouped into four broad areas of concern: ecological, technological, socio-cultural and political.

### Ecological concerns

A particularly urgent and important problem confronting us today is represented by the ecological changes caused by human actions and inactions (Goudie, 2018; Share et al., 2012). Despite the urgency in finding solutions to rapidly changing global challenges, responses so far have been slow. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2015) reported that progress in different regions regarding world health has been uneven and highlighted the need to incorporate changing social and environmental determinants.

Numerous attempts at cooperation across international borders to find solutions that address environmental problems have been dogged by disagreements, conflicts of interest and difficulties in keeping environmental concerns a live issue in public consciousness (Anderson, 2009). The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015) adopted by world leaders with 2030 targets reflect a fresh international appreciation that ecological challenges are among the most serious ones facing the human family. Identified ecological concerns include: climate change; stratospheric ozone depletion; changes in ecosystems due to loss of biodiversity and plant and animal species; changes in hydrological systems and depletion of freshwater; land degradation and the decline of soil quality; problems of waste and recycling; urbanisation; the movement of people and mass migration; and stresses on food-producing systems (UN, 2015).

### Technological concerns

Modern technologies, such as televisions, mobile phones, computers and the Internet have become so embedded in people's lives that they seem indispensable for modern living. Technology has allowed us to make significant advances in how we handle and organise data and information, and this has resulted in improved access to information and better knowledge systems (Fuchs, 2014). Increasingly, technology is being used to replace manual tasks and even face-to-face social interaction. These changes are impacting human behaviour at various levels. For instance, one in four relationships, in Ireland, reportedly start online (*Irish Times*, 2016), and 30 percent of Irish consumers expect their phones to be their main shopping tool in the future (PWC, 2017). While undoubtedly bringing about improvements in health, safety, long-distance communication and work conditions, some of the negative effects of technology are causing particular concern to educators.

Concerns frequently focus on young people's social media use. In Ireland, an estimated 99 percent of 15-24 year-olds have a phone and, of these, 92 percent access social media everyday (Lee, 2017). Teachers and those working with young people report the influence of social media on person-to-person interaction and the effects on developing social skills and human relations (Best et al., 2014). Medical research has connected social media usage with dispositional anxiety and increased incidences of anxiety disorders (Vanucci et al., 2017). Addiction to video games is a disorder now recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Murphy, 2017). When social media is the prime leisure activity, there are higher incidences of low or decreased self-esteem during or after online activity. Research is showing that young people are increasingly experiencing feelings of disconnection from friends and family (Block, 2018), and of not interacting with them in person as they would have done before the proliferation of social media (Vanucci et al., 2017). Pupils are increasingly losing their ability to concentrate on tasks over a period of time, and are experiencing increased, or unusual, social anxiety when interacting with people offline. Documentary evidence shows how online usage has resulted

in irregular or disordered sleeping patterns, resulting in increased fatigue and/or stress after using social media (Best et al., 2014).

An Australian government study estimated that just under half of all Australian children aged between 9-16 years have viewed pornography, with potentially negative impacts on their attitudes to sex, sexuality and relationships (Quadara et al., 2017). Such reports heighten educators' and parents' concerns about regulating children's access to pornographic, and/or violent material, particularly when their access takes place in unsupervised environments.

Online bullying is a further concern. O'Higgins, Norman and McGuire (2016), found that over 50 percent of adolescents in Ireland have been bullied online, and a similar percentage have engaged in cyber-bullying. A study from the United Kingdom (UK) revealed that over 25 percent of adolescents are bullied repeatedly, on a daily basis, through their phones (ReachOut, 2016).

### Socio-Cultural concerns

Socio-cultural concerns are not always reported in the popular media to the same extent as technological or ecological concerns, but are no less significant. Recent data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2016) indicated a growing multi-culturalism, changes in patterns of family life and a decline in religious affiliation. For example, 17.3 percent of Irish residents were born outside the country. Between 2011 and 2016 those with dual nationalities (e.g. Polish-Irish) almost doubled. The CSO census also revealed that, in a population of 4,761,865, over 600,000 speak a foreign language at home. The CSO 2016 census also revealed that the average number of children per family in 2016 was 1.38. Increases were recorded in the number of people in the following categories: single, separated, divorced, re-married and in same-sex civil partnerships. Among families with children, the numbers of married couples, co-habiting couples and one parent families all increased, with co-habiting couples showing an increase of 25.4 percent.

In Ireland, 78 percent of the population declared themselves as Roman Catholic, a drop from 84 percent five years earlier and from 92 percent in 1991. 10 percent in the 2016 census declared ‘no religion’, a jump from 6 percent in 2011. Following the May 2018 abortion referendum, some commentators expressed concerns that ‘the role of religion in education is set to be the next battleground in moves to separate Church and State’ (McQuinn, 2018).

Amid these well-documented changes, the growth in young people’s financial dependency on their parents, coupled with significant affordable accommodation shortages and an increasingly flexible, less secure workforce, point to young people facing new and additional challenges to those encountered by their parents (Quinn et al., 2017). Concern has also been expressed at the growth in the numbers of children being classified as ‘at risk’, reported as being as high as one in seven of all children (Barnardo’s, 2018). Figures from the CSO (2016) revealed that one in four families with children are one-parent families and 40.2 percent of lone parent households are at risk of poverty, and 11 percent (N=132,146) of children are living in poverty (CSO 2016), with 4 percent (N=40,906) of children being homeless, in direct provision, or referred to family support services (TUSLA, 2018). Kiely (2016), a researcher with the Society of St Vincent de Paul, argues that such trends require better analysis and more radical government responses.

These various socio-cultural changes, coupled with a widespread growth in post-materialism, and the movement of people from an aspirational position of material advancement and deference towards authority, towards one where values of non-materiality, self-expression and self-fulfilment are held (Inglehart and Appel, 1989) all impact directly, and indirectly, on the daily life of school pupils and how they engage in ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995).

### Political changes

Recent political changes in Ireland, across Europe and in the United States (US), have seen a subtle, and not so subtle, move away from mainstream,

centre-ground, politics and a move towards political extremism and polarisation. There has been a noticeable change in how people in these countries are choosing to express themselves politically, with a rise of far-right political parties and views in France, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Austria, the UK and the US. Somewhat against international trends, no extreme right-wing party has emerged in Ireland though there has been a rise in independent representatives in Dáil Éireann, of diverse views. Unlike much of the rest of Europe, Ireland has tended to offer voters a less mixed ideological choice than elsewhere with the two biggest parties in Ireland difficult to separate ideologically. This is particularly noticeable, and can be seen very visibly, in people's expression for new ways to make political change. Political problems and concerns that have resulted include a broad range of contentious issues, including: refugee quotas and border controls; trade restrictions; global shift of power; Brexit; regional conflicts; mass migration; inequality etc.

### **The case for a Development Education curriculum**

The Ubuntu Network (<http://www.ubuntu.ie>), among others, sees DE as increasingly relevant and important to post-primary schools as one framework for responding to many of the ecological, technological, socio-cultural and political challenges outlined above, particularly as they impact on justice in the world. The Ubuntu Network views DE as an active and participatory educational process that supports the learner to assess and respond to change, and to:

- Build critical consciousness and an awareness of inequality, injustice and unsustainable practices both locally and globally;
- Develop the skills necessary to explore development education issues – skills such as critical thinking, critical media literacy, information processing and communication;
- Foster a sense of responsibility and agency to be active citizens that confront local and global problems and work towards positive change.

A focus on ‘equality’ is key to DE. Fostering a sense of equality in classrooms leads to a sense of empathy with others and encourages pupils to combat negative stereotypes (Bourn, 2003). As pupils, teachers and schools learn to confront issues of inequality, initially in individual classrooms, they can also turn their attention to the whole school, and, importantly, focus on the wider local and national community. Attention can be focussed on linking the local community with the global and linking the schools’ curriculum with the wider world. Encouraging pupils to utilise a problem-solving framework to develop critical thinking skills and encourage behavioural change, and a belief that individuals can cause change, can potentially have far reaching consequences.

### **Educational System Response in Ireland**

Schools and teachers, at a local level, have always been receptive to the challenges their pupils face. For some young people, schools are increasingly the primary source of moral and value guidance, where teachers frequently provide the only check of their well-being, emotional and physical state. For example, Scanlon and McKenna (2018) show how, without official policy or provision, schools respond imaginatively and pastorally to young people who find themselves homeless. Schools that are sensitive to young people’s challenges often find themselves close to the heart of the community they serve and can make a valuable contribution to community cohesion (QCA, 2010).

It is not as if the Irish government’s responses to these emerging challenges have been lacking, following valuable work by the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). *The Programme for Action in Education 1984-1987* proposed to address the changing nature and purpose of schooling. The document’s preamble emphasised the notion of ‘access’ for all and outlined the need to update the curriculum to make it ‘relevant to the modern world’, to ‘developments in technology’ and ‘changing employment opportunities’. Adjusting the schooling system to meet changing needs has been a central theme in policy aspirations since. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (1991) on

Ireland's education system triggered a range of papers, consultations and legislation. For example, the Green Paper *Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland, 1992), the National Education Convention (Coolahan, ed., 1994), the White Paper *Charting Our Education Future* (Government of Ireland, 1996), the Education Act (1998), the National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000), the National Children's Strategy (2000a), the Education and Welfare Act (2000b), the Teaching Council Act (2000c), the EPSEN Act (2004) proposals for curriculum reform at Junior cycle (NCCA, 2012; DES 2015) and a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014-2020 (DES, 2014).

However, to translate the rhetoric of policy documents into action, these ideas need to be embedded in the school curriculum. A major challenge arises from traditional subject divisions and teachers' identities as subject specialists. The growing ecological, technological socio-cultural and political challenges demand inter-disciplinary, cross-curricular, responses. DE is a clear example of inter-disciplinarity. The Ubuntu Network is familiar with the challenges associated with trying to embed a cross-curricular approach to DE. The network's vision is:

“Through Development Education, the Ubuntu Network contributes to building a world based on respect for human dignity and rights and is informed by values of justice, equality, inclusion, sustainability and social responsibility” (Ubuntu, 2016).

We can see two main ways in schools, and in initial teacher education, where a cross-curricular theme, such as DE is addressed. Firstly, there is the possibility of a short course or module in Junior Cycle; secondly, as a module in Transition Year. One of the significant curriculum shifts in Junior Cycle reform is the concept of Wellbeing, another cross-curricular theme, integrating Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE), along with the development of key skills. The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Strategy is a further example of a cross-curricular challenge. This

inter-disciplinarity is not simply a transient educational fashion, but an emerging opportunity to address the knowledge explosion and the local and global challenges and concerns mentioned above. As the guidelines for Transition Year state: ‘An interdisciplinary approach would help to create that unified perspective which is lacking in the traditional compartmentalised teaching of individual subjects’ (DES, 1994).

However, as Jeffers noted: ‘There is minimal evidence in any of the research of such approaches’ (2011: 66). Evidence from Transition Year evaluations suggests strong teacher resistance to inter-disciplinary work (ibid.). Such resistance is not that surprising if the teachers’ initial teacher education experience restricts itself to traditional subject categories. Of course, teachers need to be qualified subject specialists, but in the emerging and fast changing world they need to be much more open and flexible to the possibilities offered by cross-curricular work. Bryan and Bracken in their survey of teachers’ views noted that:

“...the vast majority of participants felt that development issues occupied a very marginal position within the formal curriculum, with many identifying mere superficial treatment of development issues within their own subject areas” (2011: 256).

They add that:

“...while theoretically there are indeed numerous ‘opportunities’ to incorporate development themes and issues across a wide range of subject areas, there are a host of constraining factors, which actively work against the likelihood of these opportunities being realised in practice” (ibid).

The case for explicit modelling of modules and cross-curricular work in ITE in DE is an urgent one. The Ubuntu Network’s mission statement states:

“The Ubuntu Network will support teacher educators to embed into their work a living understanding of and commitment to education for global citizenship, sustainable development and social justice. As a result, graduate post-primary teachers entering the workforce can integrate into their teaching, and into the schools where they work, perspectives that encourage active engagement to build a more just and sustainable world” (Ubuntu, 2016).

The Ubuntu Network strategy (Ubuntu, 2016) proposes a five component framework for integrating DE into ITE:

- Introduction to DE: theoretical underpinning; relevant issues, SDG's etc.;
- Subject specific DE: linking DE with subjects and pedagogies;
- DE and core components of ITE: e.g. Philosophy of Education, Teaching for Diversity: Education Policy etc.;
- DE and school placement;
- Research and reflection: DE in professional portfolio.

Various reports indicate (<http://www.ubuntu.ie/publications/papers-reports.html>) that ITE providers have been imaginative and creative in how they embed DE into their ITE programmes. Sometimes ‘normal’ activities are suspended and a dedicated few days are devoted to DE issues and methodologies. In addition, developing staff capacity opens the possibilities for DE perspectives to infuse various components of the ITE programme, for example teaching methodologies, sociology of education, philosophy of education etc. (Gleeson et al., 2007). These approaches both reflect and model what often happens in schools as evidence in resources from WorldWise Global schools (n.d.). Regrettably the Teaching Council Code of Professional Practice (Teaching Council, 2016) doesn't reference teaching for global citizenship as a core feature of teachers' work; that is a separate discussion that deserves further consideration. This article has sought to make connections, to join the dots between DE in school, ITE and a cross-

curricular context. A further extension of the discussion would concern the role of the Teaching Council and in particular their Code of Practice

Notwithstanding initiatives supported by the Ubuntu Network and other organisations and programmes, teachers' reluctance to move outside the confines of their subject specialism suggests tradition, conditioning and development in ITE runs deep and needs to be challenged more. Bourn (2012) describes how many student-teachers and teachers feel ill-equipped to incorporate a DE learning perspective into their subject teaching because of a lack of both confidence and skills to address the complexity of development and global themes. The teachers' professional development in DE is perhaps more complex than other elements of professional capacity building. It requires both reflection and critical thinking of their understanding of current DE issues, coupled with an engagement in a process of learning that recognises different approaches and different ways of understanding and looking at the world (Bourn, 2014).

In a curricular context, a focus on citizenship, including global citizenship was a persistent theme in many curriculum initiatives from the mid-1990s (Jeffers and O'Connor, 2008). Educational change can be a slow process, partly due to Ireland's post-primary curriculum being dominated by the high-stakes Leaving Certificate examination (Gleeson, 1998). Curriculum reform while including content change, has also had a strong focus on improving the process of teaching and shifting the assessment system (Looney and Klenowskib, 2008). The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) strategy (DES, 2014) also provides a framework to support the contribution that the education sector can make towards a more sustainable future at individual, community, local, national and international levels.

## **Conclusion**

What emerges, then, is an important viewpoint: teaching for human solidarity, for global citizenship, sustainable development and social justice can offer an integrated response to emerging and urgent local and global

ecological, technological, socio-cultural and political challenges. This article has argued that addressing these challenges in appropriate ways is a core responsibility of all teachers. This necessitates a pedagogic approach that utilises an inter-disciplinary methodology that encourages critical thinking and active engagement with local and global issues. DE should not be marginal to school practice or an optional extra; it needs to be an essential and cross-curricular part of the curriculum and life of any school. For this to happen, a DE perspective needs to be embedded within teacher education programmes, both initial and ongoing.

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