



WorldWise Teachers' Conference

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Keynote Address

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Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to thank Mary, Sam, Fionnuala and all the WorldWise team for inviting me this morning as the key note speaker. I met Mary last week as I was anxious to know the theme of the conference and quickly Mary said to me that it is **sharing experience**. I said to myself what a brilliant idea, because there are lots of people boasting of development ideas, but they do not necessarily have the skills to interpret that into development education.

I work with the Africa Centre as a project officer for Development Education and also a National Council member of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA). IDEA is an organisation keen on advocating for the use of southern perspectives in their development education activities into Irish DE. Hopefully it will serve as an umbrella body of development education practitioners on the whole island of Ireland (South and North).

For the Africa Centre, Development Education is about exploring development issues through participatory learning approaches with the aim of changing attitudes and promoting positive changes in society locally and globally. Most importantly for us it is about creating awareness of positive images and messages on Africa and Africans in Ireland.



(Irish Aid Strategic Plan 2007-20011): Development education aims to deepen understanding of global poverty and encourage people towards action for a more just and equal world. As such, it can build support for efforts by government and civil society to promote a development agenda and it can prompt action at a community and individual level.

For the last few years the landscape of DE in this country has changed significantly in a good way. Examples of these are the increase of funding in the sector by Irish Aid and that led to lots of activities been undertaken by organisations like ourselves and others. However you as teachers, you should pay particular attention to DE in the global dimension in the classroom.

That is, looking at your linking and immersion with schools in developing countries (the global South) as a partnership for equitable benefit. If not there should not be any linking. Linking with schools in the south is not a bad thing, but the way it happens should be on a level playing field.

These should include looking at what benefits there are for children you will be sending, in terms of;

- their own education/preparation
- will students you are sending go to see and talk about unprivileged communities?
- will they have the concept that their going will change the world? In other words to see what they can do for the poor people of the developing world or
- are they going to see the world and have a nice time?

Or will it be;

- for their own education on global issues and relate that learning to Ireland



- for their own education that there are communities that are poor in developing countries, as any where else, but these communities in the developing countries are rich in social capital and culture which might be lacking in developed countries like Ireland? Is this a key learning point for those involved in exchange?

There are always tensions between generating responses financially (fundraising) and educating donors on best practice. This is a worrying thing for us at the Africa Centre, particularly the way fundraising materials are used in Ireland for raising money for development activities in developing countries. Even for some leaders in development education today in Ireland, their tunes of language are very ethnocentric (i.e. using terms like “third world countries”, “developing them”, “democratizing” the countries in the south). This can lead to fundamental values such as dignity, respect, modesty and a level of understanding about the positive side of these countries being lost in their agendas. This also raises a debate about whether we development educators should carry out our DE activities incorporating a rights-based approach (as well as in our teaching methodologies), or should we consult the new communities in Ireland and incorporate some of their methodologies of DE into our activities? I think that is the way forward for Irish DE. If not it will still be about power relations and inequalities of the poor and the rich and we do not want that to happen in the New Ireland.

In his speech at the Development Annual Conference, Michael Edwards of the Ford Foundation refers to the thinking of development organisations and politicians, referencing to what they should be doing for Africa:

Promote green revolution, production of vaccines for HIV and malaria, the benefits of the market through microlending and social entrepreneurship, and the possibilities for implanting democracy in other people’s countries. When you listen to all this, it sounds as if you had been transported back to the 1960s and 1970s.



It is not even long that most of these people were taught the literature of the importance of politics, culture and institutions in development practice. But for them Science and technology are king. They say: if we can push enough money through the international system to back these innovations and create new markets to take them to scale, success will be assured. They are forgetting that development has to come from the people who need it most, not from those who are only selling the idea.

This approach has led to a widespread perception that problems are the domain of the South and solutions the domain of the North. It has prioritized certain types of knowledge and excluded valuable learning across a range of development stories, North and South (Michael Edwards, 2007).

As an organisation, the Africa Centre is concerned with the negative use of images and messages of Africa and Africans in Ireland and this resulted in our poster campaign known as “Africa Also Smiles” (The dignity and resilience of the African people must not be disregarded despite the scars of war, poverty and disease).

Not only that, but we are also carrying out;

- Moonlight talks (Story telling)
- Courses in development education, Exploring Africa
- Annual lecture
- Debates
- Other methods

The role Africa Centre and other ethnic minority groups in development education in Ireland is to bring another dimension to the approaches being used:

- add value and bring a wider perspective



- bring alternative notions of identity and history (eg. the role of missionaries and colonialism, the slave trade) and social justice (eg. how aid to Africa and Asian countries is decided today)
- strengthen development education through insights from people who were born in or who have connections with the South
- offer different methodologies, approaches and good practice
- offer a series of workshops on development education and awareness raising

To conclude, I tried to put development education in a perspective that is beyond the North and South thinking, but on the rights-based approach for social justice around creating understanding on global issues, issues that affect both those in the developing and developed countries.

I wish you all the best of luck for the rest of your conference; hopefully it will be a great learning forum for you all and thank you for listening.

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