

Memo

To: Participants, [JMB Education Conference 2017](#), Croke Park Conference Centre
From: Clifton Rooney and Tony Daly
Date: September 14th, 2017
Re: Thinking about Education for Sustainable Development and Action Projects: resources and ideas for school leaders

'We are entering a new era in Earth's history: the Anthropocene. An era in which humans rather than natural forces are the primary drivers of planetary change. But we can also redefine our relationship with our planet, from a wasteful, unsustainable and predatory one, to one where people and nature can coexist in harmony.'

'We need to transition to an approach that decouples human and economic development from environmental degradation - perhaps the deepest cultural and behavioural shifts ever experienced by any civilization.'

Marco Lambertini, WWF International, [Living Planet Report 2016](#)

Quotes such as that above (and the evidence and realities behind them) offer profound challenges to the nature and role of education throughout the world. For example:

- What are the implications for teaching and learning in a planet under increasing stress from a variety of angles?
- What is fair, appropriate and reasonable to ask of schools, teachers and students in such a scenario?
- How can schools 'balance' the needs and rights of students (and teachers) and those of society at large and the planet?
- What does *Faith in our Schools: Creideamh – Culture – Curriculum* mean in such a world?

Deciding to educationally engage with an issue, such as climate change, is both crucial and immediate as leaders of schools that have a direct impact on their own environment. School projects offer staff, students and management the opportunity to look at issues in their community by encouraging debate, discussion, and reflecting on them through presentations, exhibitions and finding our voices.

Schools are wonderful sites for exploration, investigation, hard thinking, scrutinising and reflecting.

Designing a program of study or group engagement, large or small, based upon any subject matter is open and available to the infusion of universal values and perspectives (justice, equality and fairness, for example). Looking at our own contexts we can ask, how we can use today to make our world a little better?

The 'Energy Bandits' Project and 'Waste Mountain' shown today, stem directly from the Green School's initiative completed outside of regular class time with groups of interested TY students. Class and school project work around topics such as 'the environment' can, however, begin from many entry points and fulfill many curricular needs. Projects such as these can be carried out in normal class time. Art projects do not need an art class to succeed; any interested group of students and teachers will do.

In challenging just how young considerations around sustainability and environment can begin, the [Exploring the Ocean Project](#) was carried out with a senior infants' class and linked directly to the themes of the ocean and consumption, which related to their theme of 'Ocean' for the month of June 2017. A record of the artwork and project [are now online](#).

Where do we begin?

There are many starting points:

- School leaders and teachers alike should explore their own interests that they can connect to the issues from – there may be a particular experience
- Familiarise yourself with the issue, then explore 1 or 2 key talking points that the school or class can engage on the issue with
- Look at a big issue, such as one that arises from one of the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and begin a program of investigation exploring this issue
- Look at a local issue and explore its connections to global issues.
- Explore whether other teachers, management or staff can connect with the issue, as part of the curriculum or general interest

How do we make it interesting/relevant to students?

Try to connect the issue with current news. This will highlight the legitimacy of their work as it has currency with events taking place today.

It is also worth asking whether it can be connected with other work going on in the school or town. It is important that students explore and participate within the world and communities they are active in rather than in distant topics from books alone.

Encouraging teachers to actively connect global issues within their own subjects, and nurturing universal values of interdependence, empowerment, compassion, justice and human rights supports an approach to both learn about our world and, importantly, to be actively involved in shaping it.

How do we involve others?

In school if you can help to nurture connections between the work already being done, find the points of intersection and therefore help to create more collaboration.

Outside of school, try to connect with reliable organisations which want to help you express your voice rather than only being a vehicle for theirs. If you can connect with media outlets or good websites, you can turn your project into a piece of advocacy work reaching wider communities, even internationally.

How much should you have planned and how much flexibility should you leave room for?

A good outline plan helps to fuel initial work and give direction. The group themselves need the opportunity to be empowered to then take control.

If the teacher is interested in a particular subject area such as cartoon design, website work, photography, murals, sculpture etc, this is where there is an opportunity for professional development. How the project manifests within this broad framework is part of a continual dialogue between the teaching staff, students and school management.

How much does an educator need to know about an issue before beginning?

Not as much as you'd think! A cursory outline of the main issues, based on solid reliable sources, is usually enough and then let the students flesh it out and encourage them to explore it together.

That said, be involved in research and learning, depending on your own interest, in the topic explored. Sometimes, one or two websites are a good start. Pick up a book or two on the topic for general background reading. Importantly, keep it to exploring a single topic and don't get bogged down in a mountain of facts, which can be overwhelming.

Ideas on empowering students

Never take on a project which will leave students disempowered as this will consolidate those already too familiar adolescent feelings. There are many ways to empower young people as part of their work on social issues which will be familiar within the work of the school community already, such as:

- Raising awareness is a form of empowerment through action.
- By speaking at home during dinner about these issues they are acting on the issues through discussion and debate

- By sharing on their social media accounts their thoughts and words on these issues is a form of action with friends and peers.
- By speaking in public about the action they have taken, the research they have done and writing articles as pivotal components of their work, students are given a chance to reflect on and crystallise their thinking.
- Ensure you have a place to publish their writing: a newsletter, a leaflet, a print-out stuck around the school, space on the school website or app or an entry in the year book – not a ‘wow look at us piece!’ but a solid advocacy piece.

How to choose a physical output for the work

While the teacher may have a vision for a project, if students have unexpected skills to bring to the table, embrace them!

Radio skills, video skills, web skills, origami skills etc. Whatever the output, ensure there will be a place for it; never let it die in the art room! If it is a social justice piece then it is not serving its purpose unless it is out there in the school community. This then creates momentum for future thinking and points of departure for school students and staff.

What can management do to support?

Leadership: If you want to do more of this type of work in your schools we would suggest sincerely showing that it is important to you is a fundamental first step. Show a genuine interest in learning more about it – yourself – and to be involved in nurturing it along actively. These are the foundations for building a culture of socially engaged people in school communities, from students, to teachers and to senior management.

Resources: Remove obstacles where you can. Don’t wince at big costs. Encourage mistakes as ‘learning experiences’ for students and staff alike. Look to your own resources and contacts to promote the work – students and teachers are with you at this conference because our principals did just this.

Staff: Don’t overload your educators with work, promote and celebrate quality and clear direction rather than endless lists of jobs and activities. Stop talking about actions in your school and begin talking about values. Most of all, if you want to nurture the values intrinsic in a Catholic School, embody those values in your own work.

Share your work: Platforms such as developmenteducation.ie are run by people open to assisting in the writing your case studies around social justice and art. The team are also open to developing links and supporting new project developments which might be useful for a principal looking to explore methods, in, for example, beginning research on these types of projects using the Pope’s encyclical.

Whole class projects: Highlight work as whole-class projects, where possible, rather than a small group extracurricular project. This will both diversify the ways that projects can enter school settings and will broaden them into the wider school community as more link in and are involved.

As leaders, you will not do this work, but without you it will not be done.

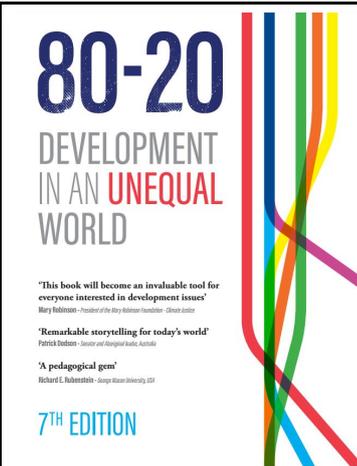
Where to Research on Global Issues and Topics

developmenteducation.ie

Is a place to access global citizenship education resources, blogs, educational action projects, whole school guides and approaches, and reports on the unequal and unjust nature of the world today.

It offers resources to stimulate debate and discussion about the issues and challenges we face and which encourage us to make decisions about the type of world we need and want to create.

It is a place for primary and post primary teachers, youth workers, students, adult and community workers and those with an interest in development, sustainability and human rights.



'80:20 is attractive, engaging, challenging and never simplistic or patronising and could allow schools to put global issues at the heart of the curriculum' - Professor Brian Boyd, University of Strathclyde, Scotland

80-20 Development in an Unequal World, 7th edition, edited by Tony Daly, Ciara Regan and Colm Regan. Published by 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World and the New Internationalist.

Queries, more info and discounts at www.8020.ie

A selection of online links

- theguardian.com/global-development The Guardian newspaper's Global development, environment and Inequality Project (theguardian.com/inequality) sections are packed with news, opinions and the latest developments on world issues (among many other sections!)
- greenschoolsireland.org Green Schools Ireland programme information, resources and more
- hdr.undp.org Human Development Reports produced annually on a specific global development theme by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Great for group work and background reading
- seai.ie Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland topic guides and information resources
- worldwiseschools.ie Irish Aid's *WorldWise Global Schools* is Ireland's national Development Education (DE) programme for post-primary schools, which includes teacher supports and a schools' grants scheme

LINKS TO THE WORK YOU SAW TODAY

Blog and photos: An advocacy piece written by three students about the mountain of waste project: [Planet Earth: Our home, our dumping ground](#) and photos on [Presentation College Bray website](#)

Stop-motion video: [Your Litter Catches up with You](#), made by Pres Bray students around the development of the mountain of waste project

Blog: advocacy piece about the [Energy Bandits Project](#) by TY student Jack Lawlor

Stories of Change: a case study documenting the [Energy Bandits Project](#),

News report: [Laptops, light bulbs, love and learning](#) - a reflection upon the links between the PBST Charter, Pope Francis' encyclical and a green schools project

This 'memo' has been prepared by to stimulate discussion and debate at the JMB Conference in September 2017 and is based on reflections and collaborations from a series of art projects with students in a primary and post-primary school's context and Pres College Bray, 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World and developmenteducation.ie

