Learning approach of the Climate Action short course

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# 1. Introduction

Responding adequately to climate change and reaching this goal of empowerment requires educators and school communities to draw deeply on established knowledge and skills as well as significant new learning. The task for schools and teachers is daunting but exciting. Achieving this will require a sustained collective effort of both the imagination and the intellect.

Initial research on pedagogical approaches best suited to a Climate Action Short Course for Junior Cycle was conducted by the Short Course Development team as the basis for discussion and consultation with an Expert Advisory Group made up of ten experts from the education field.

Through discussion and consultation with these experts as well as teacher and youth advisory groups, a learning approach for the short course has been developed, in section 2 below.

The pedagogical approaches researched are detailed in section 3. The rationale arrived at through this process, for the prioritisation of transformative approaches (community education, popular education, youth organising and GCE) is outlined in section 4, followed by the rationale for the inclusion of outdoor learning approaches in climate change education.

# 2. The learning approach of this short course

The pedagogical approaches informing this short course brings together influences from different fields of education, and is based on

### **Holistic learner-centred education;**

including starting from students intertwined feelings and thinking, students’ life experiences, students participating in decision-making, and co-creating learning and action,

### **Democratic citizenship**;

involving critical reflection, democratic participation and informed action

### **Approaches which build students sense of belonging and connection to place, nature and community;**

including enjoyable outdoor experiences, group experiences and learning in my local community.

This approach is participatory, active, engaging, empowering, and so it can be very enjoyable and full of meaning, purpose and positive affirmation for students. It connects personal wellbeing to the wellbeing of people and the environment. It is focused on social change, and on the personal and group empowerment that enables people to be part of the democratic and creative processes of social change on many scales.

The key characteristics of the learning approach for this short course will be provided in a supporting document for teachers called ‘Learning for Climate Action’, which contains background information and links to materials to support teachers in planning teaching and learning in this short course.

One critical aspect of designing the course is to recognise that the process of empowerment is self-driven - it relies on the student becoming engaged by doing what they enjoy, starting from their lives and interests. Becoming empowered and involved in social change is also a social activity, in which enjoying connecting and bonding to others are core ingredients. These dimensions of enjoyment and of social connection supports wellbeing and are central in creating anempowering environment where students can deal with their feelings about climate change, develop new skills and new ways of being and thinking, and rise to the challenge of taking part in social change.

In planning for this approach educators may design, and co-design with young people, learning experiences that:

* Start from the learners experience and involve co-created learning experiences
* Encourage social change
* Develop a critical consciousness (I think this needs explaining or simpler wording)
* Link the personal and the political
* Link the local/personal to the global/collective
* Incorporate cycles of planning and action and reflection
* Involve outdoor learning
* Empower young people
* Incorporate creative and active learning
* Interconnectedness / systems thinking
* Support children’s rights/participation
* Develop skills to make informed and considered decisions

Educators can draw on a range of established pedagogies to support this approach. These pedagogies are described in more detail in the next section of this document. They include community education, youth organizing, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education; nature-based and place-based education; and transformative learning using arts and creativity.

# 3. Pedagogies informing the learning approach

The short course development process and learning approach is informed by a combination of a number of pedagogies. These pedagogies were researched and considered in the pre-development phase in 2020 and discussed with the educational expert advisory group. These include;

1. Community education
2. Youth organising
3. Education for Sustainable Development
4. Global Citizenship Education
5. Nature-based education
6. Place-based education
7. Youth arts/ Creativity learning and transformation
8. Environmental education
9. STEAM

Community education is proposed to be an overarching approach that should inform all aspects of the course design. Community education shares principles and characteristics with transformative and social change oriented youth work, such as youth organising, and action/social change oriented youth arts.

## 

## Community education

“Community Education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and of the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale. It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation within the community.” (AONTAS, 2000) (‘The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation’)

The meaning of community education in Ireland is shaped by decades of growth and development of the grassroots community education movement (Connolly, 2003). Community education is associated with a spectrum of learner-centred, dialogical educational approaches including critical consciousness raising, social action models of education and participatory, transformative education. It refers to education that places creating social change at its core.

Community education approaches are based on the idea of education as the practice of freedom and the development of social solidarity and learners’ empowerment and liberation through educational practices. These approaches which are informed by the work of Friere (1972), by anti-colonial social movements, by radical worker education (see Crowther, 1999) and feminist consciousness raising among many other influences (Connolly, 2003).

Some key concepts in community education, as explained by Connolly (2010) are;

* ‘Consciousness raising; An increase of concerned awareness especially of some social or political issue.
* Empowerment; To promote self actualization or influence
* Praxis; In the context of community education, praxis connotes the synergy of activism and reflection, in order to bring about a more just and equal society.
* ‘Really useful knowledge’; This concept was developed in the nineteenth century to critique dominant forms of knowledge, and to contribute to changing all forms of domination while simultaneously promoting democracy and social amelioration. ‘Really useful knowledge’ underpins the reflection in praxis.
* ‘Really useful methods’; These include ways of working with learners to enhance democracy, participation and equality. These methods underpin the activism in praxis.’

(Connolly, 2010, p.3)

Community education approaches have a very significant overlap with youth work approaches in an Irish context and beyond. Some of the features of both community education and of youth work that are relevant to the approach for a junior cycle short course are;

* education as a participatory process, located within the community and of the community,
* ownership of the process remains with the participants, educators facilitate dialogue, rather being there to impart knowledge.
* learners participate freely and are learners are seen as agents of change, not as passive recipients of information
* the subjective experience of the participants is considered vital and transformative. Learners start from their own life experiences, and develop awareness of social context and an analysis of power structures in their societies and awareness of realities of lives of other people in locally and globally
* Egalitarianism enables the learners to raise their consciousness about their own lives as well as the lives of others, engaged in the analysis of inequality.
* the central importance of Freire’s (1972) praxis – cycles, action and reflection - connects the learning with activism, in a continuous cycle.
* learners are inspired to take action for social change based on experiential knowledge and emerging critical consciousness. The content of ‘really useful knowledge’, (Thompson, 1996) contributes to the potential for societal transformation.

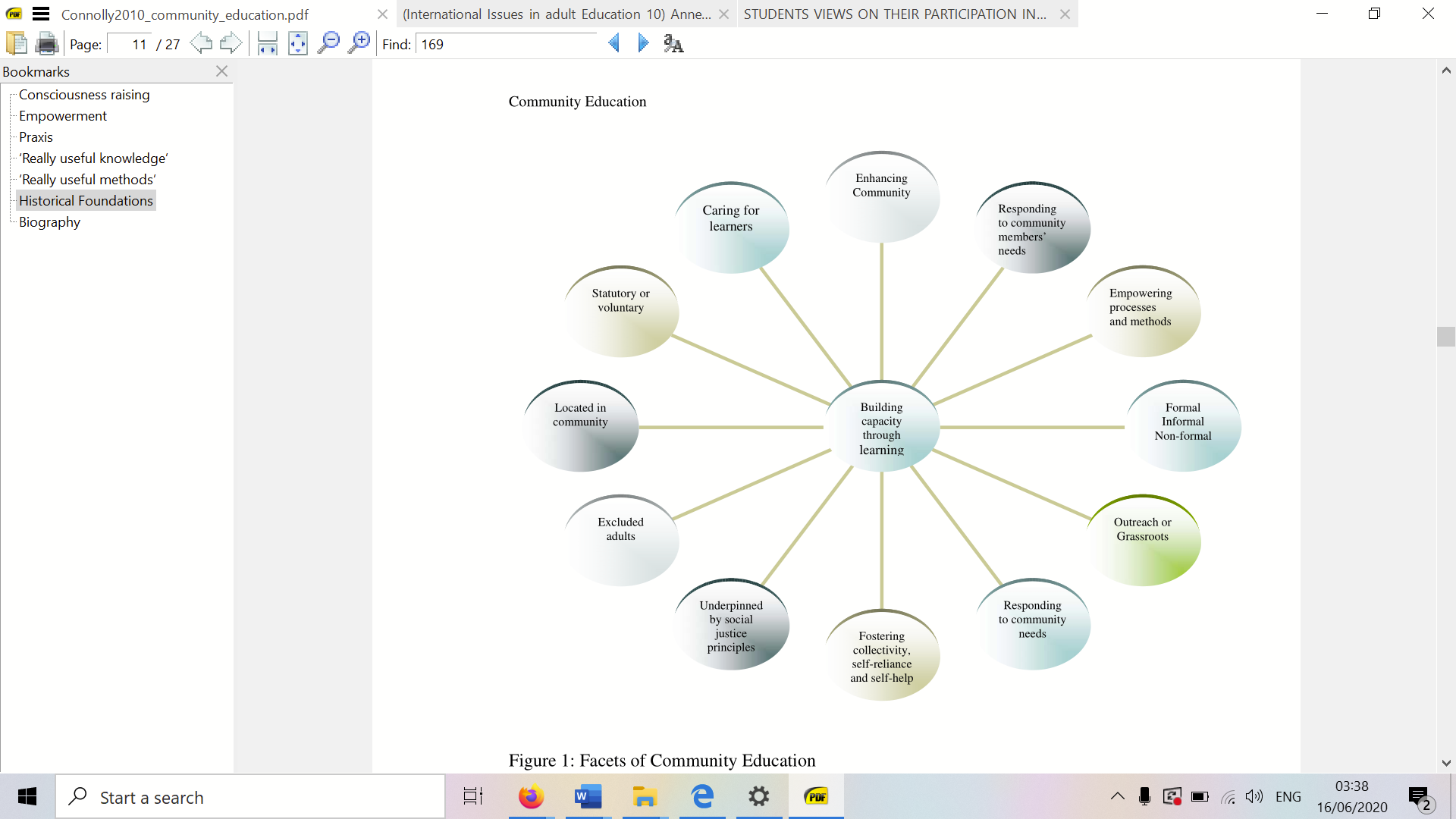


Image source: Facets of Community Education (Connolly, 2010) http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/3570/1/BC\_community\_education.pdf

Where the short course will run in a specific setting, it will exist to serve the educational needs of a small community of young people aged 12-15 who come together to learn in a particular geographic, social and economic context, and who will be part of other interconnected communities where they live.

Applying ideas from community education approaches to this short course would mean placing the lives and contexts of learners participating in the course at the centre of decision making about how learning happens.

Community education approaches share features with community development and also with ‘popular education’ (e.g. Crowther, 1999). Popular education has been described as education with a curriculum that ‘comes out of the concrete experience and material interests of people in communities of resistance and struggle. It is focused primarily on a group as distinct from individual learning and development. It assumes a direct connection between education and social change' (International Popular Education Network, 2004; in Trapese Collective, 2020).

The Trapese Collective identify the following characteristics of popular education

* A commitment to transformation and freedom
* Learning our own histories i.e. an emphasis on people’s history or ‘history from below’
* Starting from daily realities of how issues affect people in their daily lives
* Learning together as equals and showing solidarity - breaking down hierarchy between teachers/ students and educators and participants
* Getting out of the classroom - Learning can take place everywhere and anywhere
* Inspiring social change - enabling participants to feel connected to wider issues and to take action on the issues that concern them.

(Trapese Collective, 2007)

Popular education principles are used in many variations of structured community and youth development work (e.g. Beck and Purcell, 2010) as a way of supporting people to empower themselves.

## 

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## Youth organising

The principles of community education are reflected in and overlap with transformative youth work approaches. One example of a transformative approach to youth work that is particularly relevant to young people involved in youth-led climate action is ‘youth organising’.

“Youth organizing is a youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities. Youth organizing relies on the power and leadership of youth acting on issues affecting young people and their communities. Young people themselves define issues, and youth organizing groups support them as they design, implement, and evaluate their own change efforts. Employing activities such as community research, issue development, reflection, political analysis, and direct action, youth organizing increases civic participation and builds the individual and collective leadership capacity of young people.” (The Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2000)

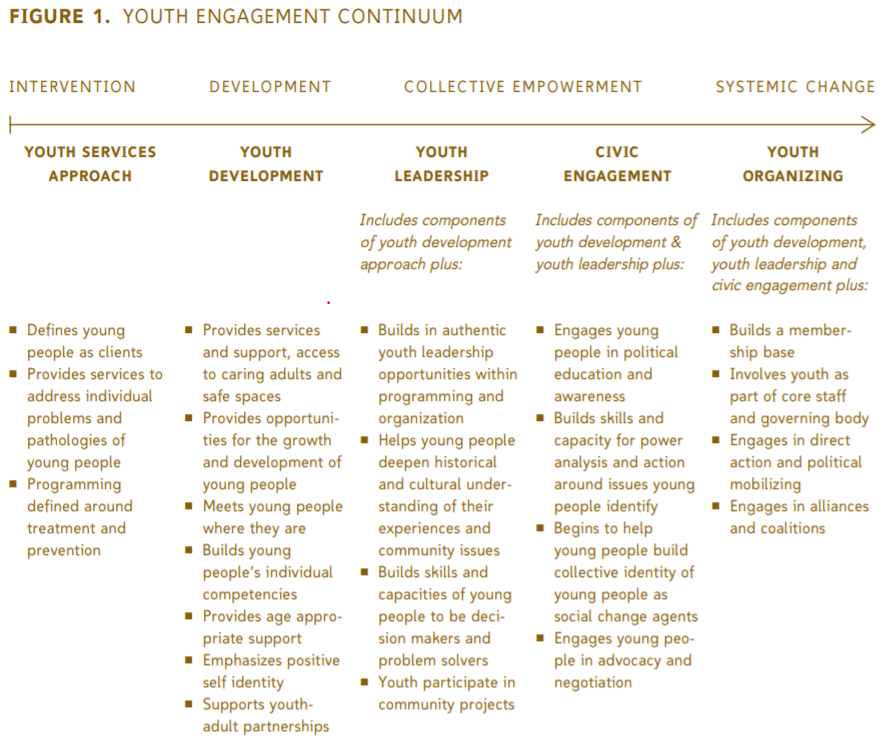
The Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) describes how youth organising involves ‘helping young people see how their individual experiences, both positive and negative, are shared by others, young people participate in group efforts that lead to building collective power’.

According to FCYO, youth organizing skills include the following:

* Analysis of community governance structures including dissection of decision-makers;
* Analysis of mainstream socialization—corporate commercialism, media imaging,and pop culture;
* Practice of issue analysis, power analysis, and communication skills;
* Importance of building relationships and alliances with peers and adult allies;
* Recognition of limits of engagement without organization and/or mobilization.’

(The Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2000)

Youth organising is one form of youth engagement along a continuum of approaches, which can be described as running from intervention, through development and collective empowerment to systemic change (See Figure 1 in The Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2000)

Image Source: <https://fcyo.org/uploads/resources/8141_Papers_no1_v4.qxd.pdf>

## 

## Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development is an approach closely related to GCE. The Global Goals (SDGs) adopted by the global community include ESD. Target 4.7 of SDG 4 on education addresses ESD and related approaches including Global Citizenship Education.

The vision of ESD according to UNESCO is education which ‘empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society.’ (UNESCO, 2020)

UNESCO describes ESD as education involving the following components;

● Learning content which integrates critical issues, such as climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable consumption and production, into the curriculum.

● Pedagogy and learning environments which are interactive, learner-centred, enabling exploratory, action-oriented and transformative learning. ESD involves rethinking learning environments, physical as well as virtual and online, to inspire learners to act for sustainability.

● Education for Societal transformation. ESD is about empowering learners of any age, in any education setting, to transform themselves and the society they live in. ESD supports a transition to greener economies and societies, equipping learners with skills for ‘green jobs’ and motivating people to adopt sustainable lifestyles. ESD empowers people to be ‘global citizens’ who engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and to resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to creating a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world.

● Learning outcomes which stimulate and promote core competencies, such as critical and systemic thinking, collaborative decision-making, and taking responsibility for present and future generations.

Source: https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd

## Global Citizenship Education

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) can be described ‘an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. By challenging stereotypes and encouraging independent thinking, GCE helps [people] to critically explore the root causes of global justice issues and how they interlink with our everyday lives. GCE inspires global solidarity by supporting people to fully realise their rights, responsibilities and potential as global citizens in order to take meaningful action for a just and sustainable world.’ (WorldWise Global Schools, 2018).

Central to any interpretation of GCE, is an emphasis on critical thinking and self-directed action. Learners are supported to think critically about the root causes of global injustices and unsustainable development and to respond by taking action to address these root causes.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) was previously known in Ireland as development education. The Irish Aid (Department of Foreign Affairs) Development Education Strategy 2017-2023 adopts the definition of the components and characteristics of GCE/Development Education as articulated by the Irish Development Education Association (2015), shown below.

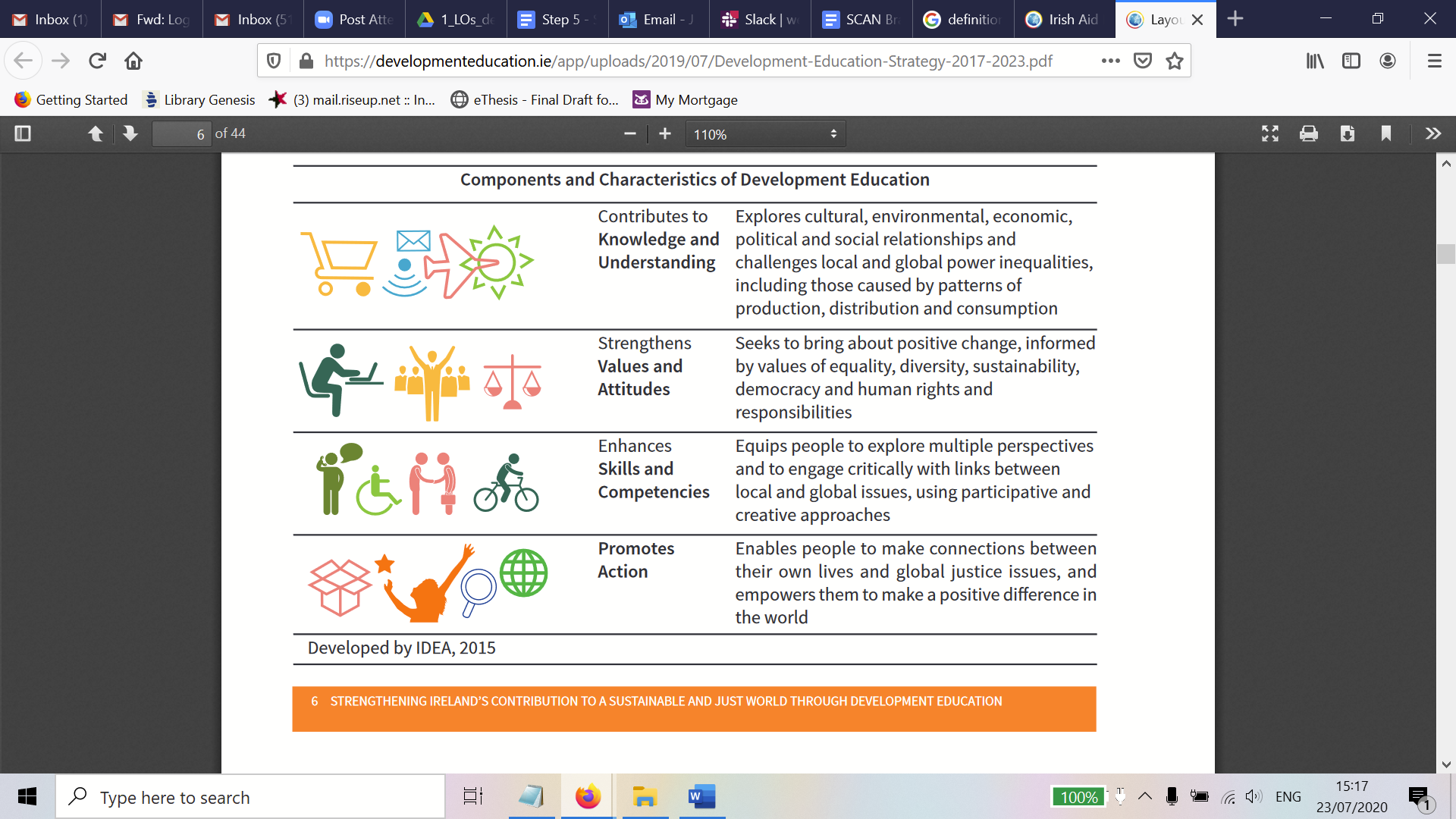


Image Source: <https://developmenteducation.ie/app/uploads/2019/07/Development-Education-Strategy-2017-2023.pdf> (Page 6)

The key organisation funded by Irish Aid to support GCE in secondary schools at a national level, WorldWise Global Schools, has elaborated on the knowledge, skills and attitudes and values which GCE fosters.

Worldwise Global Schools (2018) propose that in terms of knowledge, a GCE approach involves learners;

* making connections between the local and global.
* exploring the root causes of the theme(s) learners have chosen and examining it from a global justice perspective
* asking questions when exploring global issues, injustice and inequality
* exploring multiple perspectives
* Reflecting on learning and action

In terms of skills, Worldwise Global Schools proposes skills developed through a GCE approach include;

* **Communication Skills** (such asListening and discussion, Oral presentation, Debating and defending a position, Writing for a purpose, Ability to express one’s own interests, beliefs and viewpoints through an appropriate medium, Ability to perceive and understand the interests, beliefs and viewpoints of others and the Ability to exercise empathy and solidarity)
* **Intellectual Skills**(Such asResearching and evaluating information and ideas, Interpreting the media and identification of bias and prejudice, Recognition of stereotypes and discrimination, Organising information, using concepts and ideas, Applying reasoning skills to problems and issues, Communicative competence across a range of media and uses of language, Ability to perceive the consequences of taking or not taking specific actions in a particular context and the ability to manage complexity and uncertainty.)
* **Social Skills** (such asTaking responsibility, Making decisions, Establishing democratic working relationships, Sustaining dialogue with people in power and within and across cultures, Capacity for the development of satisfying and interactive human relations in different cultural and power contexts.)
* **Action Skills**(such asthe ability to participate in group decision-making and effectively engage in democratic action to try to influence and/or change social situations, Cooperation and conflict resolution, action and event planning that mobilise people towards meaningful action or changed behaviour and lobbying skills.)

In addition to involving knowledge and skills, Worldwise Global Schools emphasises that global citizenship education can help to foster the following values;

* Empathy not sympathy
* Solidarity not charity
* Respect for self
* Respect for others and human rights for all
* A sense of social responsibility and belonging
* A commitment to learning
* Belief that you can make a difference

“Fostering values and attitudes of solidarity and empathy is a key part of global citizenship education and connects in well with the [Junior Cycle Wellbeing Framework.](http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum/Wellbeing) GCE should be approached with an open mind and the process of unknowing/unlearning and venturing into the unknown is as important as knowing. Imagining a fairer better world requires wisdom as well as knowledge. It’s important to use [methodologies](https://www.worldwiseschools.ie/methodologies) that bring out the values and attitudes of students on global issues.” (WorldWise Global Schools, 2018)

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## Place-based Education

Place-based Education (PBE) can be understood as environmental education focusing on the local, expanded beyond the natural environment to include the cultural, social, and economic conditions of place. PBE approaches seek to benefit from the strong affinity people have for their communities to accomplish ecological and cultural literacy. Through the integration of civic engagement opportunities in place-based curricula, learning is connected to action: students and citizens engage together in the civic life of their communities. This is a values- driven approach, designed to advance educational goals together with locally identified social, economic and environmental objectives. It contributes to the broad adoption of stewardship perspectives, skills and action and the restoration, rebuilding, and reconnecting of human communities and natural systems (Clarke, 2008). PBE emphasises the importance of love of place and power of the contexts in which learning happens; ‘the context of place provides a framework of authentic experience for deeper reflection, sense of belonging and body/sensory stimulation that acts as a catalyst for deep engagement required for transformation’ (Singleton, 2015).

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## Nature-based education

Nature-based education brings together elements of Outdoor Learning, Forest Schools, Biophilia (E. O Wilson), Ecopsychology (Roszak, Gomes), Deep Ecology (Arnae Naess, Joanna Macy), Head Hands Heart model (Patrick Geddes, David Orr) and Permaculture (David Holmgren, Bill Mollison).

Nature-based education is about providing students with meaningful and inspiring direct experiences in their natural environment. This can be through, for example, primary experience - feeling, seeing, tasting, hearing or smelling the landscape around them and through creating opportunities for physical and emotional connection that goes beyond empirical knowledge. This approach is supported by research which shows we need to do more than teach about the environment through a cognitive or analytical lens, but to also provide opportunities for students to appreciate nature with their hands and feel the love of a place in their hearts (Orr, 1993; Sterling, 2001). Research suggests that nature-based education supports students in making pro-environmental decisions (Cheng and Monroe, 2010; Chawla, 2007; Orr, 1993).

## 

## Youth arts / Creativity learning and transformation

This is an approach based on the belief that ‘creative engagement can support transformative learning experiences that connect the head, hand and heart and nurture competences of global citizens that are important for the sustainable future of our world, competences such as empathy, resilience, critical thinking, problem solving, ability to take action and compassion’ (Creativity and Change, 2020). This approach is sometimes also thought of as combining creative methodologies with Global Citizenship Education, and often uses the head, hand, heart model for transformative learning that is also associated with nature-connection and place-based education (e.g. Singleton, 2015). Participatory/community arts-based approaches are also often used in an integrated way with popular education and with participatory action research (e.g. Barndt, 2011)

Taylor and Murphy (2013) describe creativity in this context as being simply ‘the ability to think things up and make them happen’, and while emphasising that creativity is not something that should not be overly associated with art-making, that arts-based approaches to learning promote joy, confidence, health and empathy and thereby facilitate young people to empower themselves.

(The use of art-based approaches does not imply any requirement that social movements using them are egalitarian, or are aiming for a more just and sustainable world; arts-based approaches and popular education practices have been effectively used and appropriated by extreme right-wing racist groups for example (Hall et al., 2012, p.x))

Image: The Creative Community Model. Source: Taylor, P., Murphy, C. (2013) *Catch the Fire: An Art-Full Guide to Unleashing the Creative Power of Youth, Adults and Communities. p.30*

## 

## Environmental Education

While environmental education can be argued to predate any formal expression of this concept, following a the rise of environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s, states and intergovernmental conferences began to articulate a particular concept of ‘environmental education’ (EE) and propose that environmental education be extended from the informal and non-formal spheres into formal education. According to the Tbilisi Declaration (1977) the goals of environmental education are:

* ‘to foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
* to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values,
* attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
* to create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.’ (UNESCO, 1980)

Some aspects of this concept of EE have relevance for climate action related education today. In order to meaningfully engage with the challenge of climate change learners will need not only scientific literacy, including ability to read and interpret data, evaluate the reliability of sources, but also wide-ranging environmental knowledge and skills. For example, learners need specific knowledge about scientifically determined ‘planetary boundaries’ (environmental limits) in order to be able to assess the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of interventions by states, corporations and communities such as carbon trading systems, carbon drawdown and energy descent projects. Learners need to acquire data analysis skills in order to analyse the impact of potential carbon reduction interventions on social issues and inequalities. EE knowledge and skills are needed to participate in current and future public debates about climate change.

At a local community level, students need to be able to measure and recognise threats to biodiversity, to be able to relate this to climate change, and to distinguish between effective and superficial remedies to climate change and biodiversity loss. The integration of an Environmental Education approach supports students in acquiring sufficient environmental, ecological and technological literacy to participate in major societal decisions which will affect their lives and communities. The development of EE skills and knowledge among junior cycle learners is primarily undertaken in Junior Cycle Science, Maths and Geography.

Some aspects of this definition of EE reflect assumptions /political ideologies associated with modernisation theory and mainstream development theory, for example the idea that the patterns of human behaviour needed to protect the environment are ‘new’.

## STEAM

The call to dissolve unnecessary boundaries between the cultures of science and the arts are not new, however the past 10 years have seen an articulation of the importance of combining science and the arts in the form of STEAM education in the post-primary sector. STEAM is proposed by some to be an approach for empowering active, creative and scientifically literate global citizens, with science educators teaming up with their colleagues in the arts to design innovative interdisciplinary curricula (Taylor, 2018).

Taylor (2018, 2019) proposes that STEAM education

* enriches and expands the scope of STEM education
* involves teachers in developing a humanistic vision of 21st century education and their role as professionals.
* provides a creative design space for teachers in different learning areas to collaborate in developing integrated curricula.
* engages students in transformative learning, which is based on five interconnected ways of knowing: cultural self-knowing, relational knowing, critical knowing, visionary and ethical knowing, knowing in action.

The interdisciplinary nature and problem solving focus inherent in climate action means that STEAM education approaches may be relevant to some learning outcomes in this junior cycle short course.

The use of STEAM is sometimes embraced not to meet learner needs, but rather in response to a perceived need for more STEM graduates. Used in this way, STEAM could be arguably inconsistent with community education, youth organising and many of the other approaches listed. However STEAM can also be approached in a learner centred way. If learner interest and needs are kept as the starting point, then the benefits of exploring science and arts as one, and the activities being developed by artists and science educators global may also be of great benefit in delivering this course.

#### 

# 4. Rationale for the prioritisation of transformative approaches

The rationale for prioritsing principles of transformative community education, popular education, youth organising and global citizenship education, is that these approaches support;

* fulfillment of the spirit of the Junior Cycle Framework (DES, 2015).
* fulfillment of young people’s human rights,
* democratisation of learning,
* skill development for collective action,
* experiences of a range of models for decision-making and social organising
* Creation of learning environments conducive to imagining the unprecedented and radical social change needed to address climate change and climate injustice.

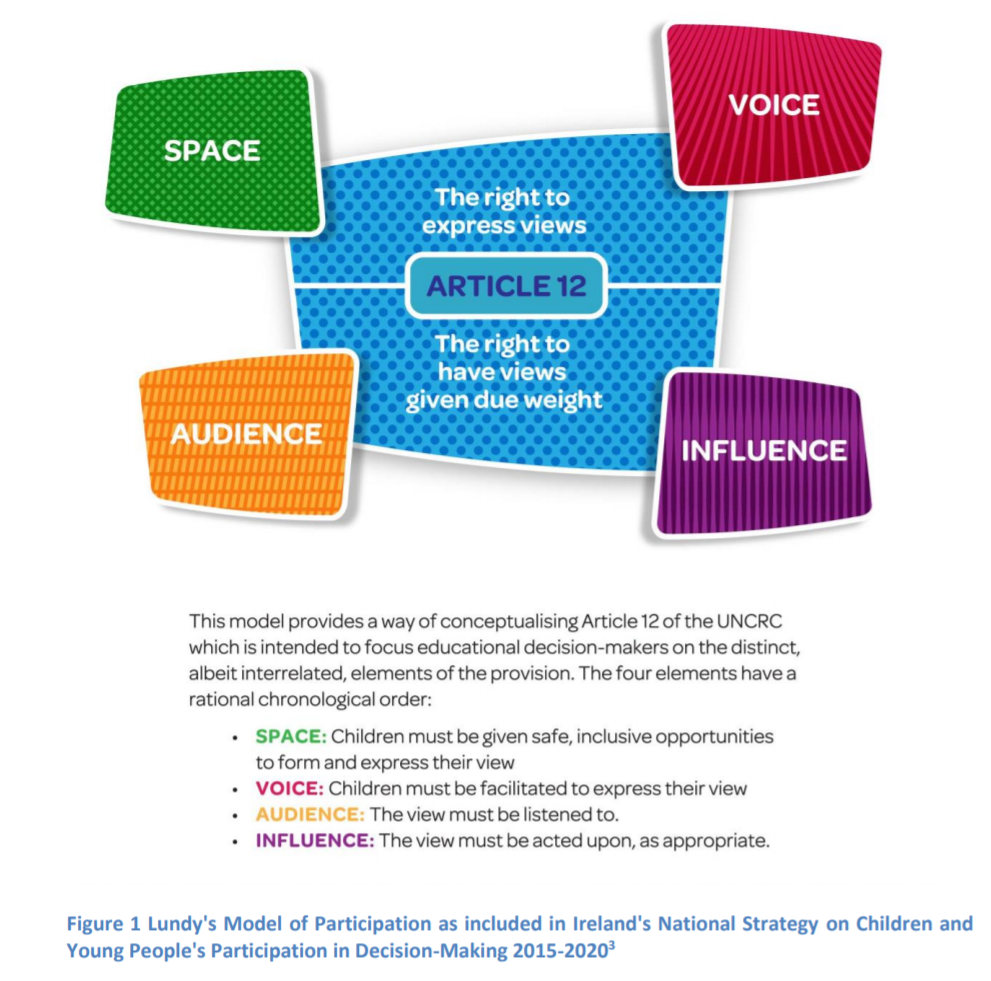
### Principles of the Junior Cycle Framework (2015)

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) outlines the curriculum and assessment arrangements that will ‘provide students with learning opportunities that achieve a balance between learning subject knowledge and developing a wide range of skills and thinking abilities.’ (DES, 2015, p.7). Focusing on action skills and youth organising will allow this short course to deliver on the framework goal of promoting ‘a focus on active and collaborative learning’. In particular the framework aims to enable learners ‘to use and analyse information in new and creative ways, to investigate issues, to explore, to think for themselves, to be creative in solving problems and to apply their learning to new challenges and situations’. The dimension of analysis and independent thinking will be achieved through use of pedagogies that are based on critical thinking such as community education and GCE. The element of collective action through youth organisation and the element of nature-based education /outdoor learning will both serve to create student experiences that ‘contribute directly to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing.’ (DES, 2015, p.11). The choice of pedagogies, in particular community education and youth organising, will serve to achieve Junior Cycle Framework principle of Participation and Engagement, in which the ‘experience of curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning encourages participation, generates engagement and enthusiasm, and connects with life outside the school’ (DES, 2015, p.11). The short course will allow space for meaningful engagement through youth-led action, connecting students with their communities and wider society through their actions.

See: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle-2015.pdf>

### Children’s Rights and participation

Children and young people are rights-holders. Schools, learning environments and curricula all have the potential to support (or to undermine) the fulfilment of children’s human rights as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) signed by Ireland in 1992. A model developed in 2007 by academic Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast, provides a framework for conceptualising a child's right to participation, as set out in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The model draws attention to the distinct, interrelated, elements required for child participation, proposing four elements that have a rational chronological order: **space, voice, audience, influence**. The Lundy Model of Participation has been previously endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in their recent National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015 –2020).

Article 12 of the UNCRC which affirms the rights of children to be provided with the opportunity to be heard by states in administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body. 

The new framework for junior cycle has a focus on student voice (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) that it presumably intended to help move towards a post-primary education system that fulfills young people’s participation rights.

A community education approach would support this shift towards supporting the fulfillment of children’s rights, as this approach would entail young people within a school and classroom setting being involved in decision making about what and how they learn.

Using principles of community education and/or transformative youth organising as meaningfully as possible across the three years of a junior cycle short course would support schools to give young people a safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views - about their schools, communities and society. Building up the capacity of a group of young people to take action for social change would make it more likely for students' voices to be heard, listened to and acted on.

Taking a community education /popular education approach which seeks to build more equal teacher-student relationships could also be a starting point for improving levels of student participation in school life. A study by McCormack et al (2019) highlighted ‘the passive role students tend to play in classroom and school life and the minimum power they exert within schools’ and found that the teacher–student relationship was an important difference between schools that made a difference to participation , suggesting that these relationships are critical to young people’s participation in their schools.

Image Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/lundy_model_of_participation.pdf>

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### Co-design /democratisation of learning

The Junior Cycle framework aims to meet the ‘needs of junior cycle students, both now and in the future’. Meeting this aim would require significant opportunities for consultation to identify needs and to co-design learning experiences to meet those needs. While selecting how to present work or being given more choice in how to be assessed is a step towards a democratised classroom, teachers and students need space to become genuine partners and collaborators. A principle of co-design means that this short course can be responsive to the student’s interests and needs and can be shaped by students’ wishes to respond to real world events that will vary each time the course is delivered. Learning can be phenomenon based, with the phenomena being the issues of greatest interest to students taking the course at that time. The learning can also be designed by students to engage directly with a live issue in the local community of the students.

### Skill development for collective action

Learning to take action collectively with others (rather than taking action only as an individual) is one essential component of a journey towards empowerment as an active global citizen. Learning to take action collectively involves development of a range of complex skills such as how to facilitate and take part in group decision making, analyse root causes, strategise, choose tactics, plan and evaluate actions together. The provision of CSPE in schools goes part of the way in introducing these collective action skills, as CSPE actions ‘may involve students working with others’ (NCCA, 2016, p.17). However, the lack of time available for CSPE action processes means that they are likely to be planned and managed by teachers rather than student-led, with a consequence that students are unlikely to gain a wide range of action skills that they can apply to other local and global issues. Allowing more time for student-led action increases their capacity to collaborate with peers to carry out action, without the support of their teachers, as will be required in the world beyond school.

### Experience of a range of decision-making and organising models

In addition to experiencing systems of majority voting (for example in a mock referendum in CSPE) schools can also provide opportunities for students to learn how to make decisions by consensus. Instead of voting, the process of consensus challenges all participants to keep discussing and to find a solution that everyone in a group can live with and can be an important way of working for non-hierarchical groups. As well as offering experiences working with others within hierarchical leadership structures (such as a class led by a teacher or a sports team with a captain) schools can also provide opportunities for young people to experience organising themselves according to mutually agreed principles of equality and structures for non-hierarchical organisation. Self-organising in a group of peers without any leaders being appointed, can be a new experience for students that can build their capacity to participate effectively in groups of all kinds. Students can learn how to form group agreements, how to facilitate meetings, how to rotate key roles in a group to share power and skills and how to take initiative and support others in the group, without dominating others or controlling decision-making. The experience of different modes of decision-making, such as consensus decision making and working with others in explicitly non-hierarchical ways, provides valuable experience and skills that students can use in school, in further education, community groups, businesses and social enterprises, families, friendship groups, workplaces, voluntary organisations and in social movements that drive political change on climate action.

### Imagining radical social change

During Junior Cycle students learn gradually about a world that is unsustainable and unjust. They will encounter evidence that the earth’s environment is undergoing extreme and in some cases irreversible change and will try to comprehend how and why existing social and economic structures have produced this situation. The world which they will discover is a world quite clearly in need of fundamental changes. Meanwhile it is likely that many students will also encounter a pervasive perspective among adults that fundamental changes to how society is organised are impossible. In order to feel empowered and to create a just and sustainable world, students need learning environments that allow for imagination - seeing different possibilities for social change. Community and popular education practices leave room for exploration of possibilities for radical social change, for imagining deep transformations in social and economic or cultural practices.

### Sharing social movement knowledge

Learning in social movements happens far beyond the limits of structured programmes of community or youth development. People taking action in movements for social justice and social change are engaged in learning - acquiring knowledge and skills from other activists and other movements in order to take action more effectively, and learning through reflecting on the experiences of social action that follow. People are both learning in social movements and learning from experiences of participating in social movements (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991).

If social movements generate a shared social wealth, a store of knowledge; a commons that can be passed onto future generations, then one question is whether and how effectively this knowledge is being shared with young people? Taking a transformative youth organising approach, could help in ensuring that new generations of activists for a just, sustainable and equitable society can benefit from the skills and reflections being generated in related social movements in Ireland and beyond.

### Challenges and opportunities in implementing principles of community education in a Junior Cycle short course

The 2015 Framework for Junior Cycle could be reasonably argued to already be influenced by the strong tradition and established status of community education in Ireland. Short courses, particularly if it is requested by young people, provide opportunities to go look more closely at the principles of community education and to try to bring learning experiences closer to the spirit and intention of the Junior Cycle framework, i.e. to provide education that is learner-centred. However, there are challenges to be faced in attempting to implement community education principles in anything more than a superficial way.

Connolly (2003) warns of the glass fence effect and that community education ‘needs to be protected from inappropriate application and implementation’. The attempted use of community education principles is clearly potentially inappropriate in traditional school and classroom environments given that relationships are hierarchical. However, in the right local conditions – perhaps core principles of community education can be meaningfully implemented. Some of these local conditions might be;

* post-primary teacher training as facilitators of transformative youth work/youth organising, teacher training in political and social activism, and engagement of teachers in learning that supports their own critical consciousness
* Teacher education and engagement with dilemmas about the role of adults in youth organising, youth-led activism e.g. ‘Teaching without teaching’ (Kirschner, 2015) (For example Kirschner contrasts constructivist concepts of youth voice where adults should adopt a neutral detached stance, with the role of adults in providing young people with access to activist practice, resources and tools generated by social movements, the role of adults in facilitating youth access to social networks of power and influence, and the potential for adults to support young people in their critical assessment of the available narratives that frame their political actions and ideas.)
* schools embracing emancipatory education proposed by Freire (1972), building praxis and conscientization into learning experiences across junior cycle education
* establishment of relationships between group members and between the group and the facilitator(s) of the short course, based on equality and trust, using approaches which give students meaningful choices in an attempt to minimise the coercive dimension of learning in post-primary schools
* the short course being optional for students to enter into (perhaps timetabled against two other equally attractive short courses)
* local course design being based on group decision making by students
* schools accepting and embracing the potential of students to create transformative social change through a variety of approaches such as youth-led community organising (e.g. Delgado and Staples, 2007)
* schools and teachers valuing knowledge generated by people organising in egalitarian social movements and consciousness-raising group work, e.g. Jane Thompson’s ‘really useful knowledge’ (Thompson, 1996)
* schools reorienting focus beyond critical thinking alone to consciousness, and combining personal development with developing critical consciousness of power structures in society
* school culture which takes young people’s human rights seriously, building school norms and structures which comprehensively support the fulfilment of children’s rights
* school cultures which effectively moderates the extent to which students are forced to comply with arbitrary rules not essential to the maintenance of a safe learning community – for example through the use of restorative practice.
* Effective systems for meaningful student participation in decision making of the school as a whole (for example students being able to participate fully in the decision about whether to run the short course, or whether to change how it is run in the school, after a pilot phase.)

Some of these challenges are big - and can probably never be fully overcome in the setting of state-funded post-primary school, without a significant reduction in educator to learner ratios.

On the other hand, it could be argued that learners in the post-primary system already do, at times, experience dimensions of the nature of community education or popular education. Some students may have experiences that embody learner-centred design and praxis that grows from the group; whether it is in after-school drama club, in the learner-centred resource classes, or in student-run societies and campaigns during lunchtimes. Some actions in CSPE or organised by Student Councils do manage to be genuinely youth-driven and sometimes catalyse social change in wider society despite all the constraints and time limitations that exist in post-primary schools. Not all teacher-student relationships are characterised by hierarchy and coercion – despite the hierarchical and coercive nature of the mandatory education system that the relationships must exist within. Both students and teachers in many schools do have experience of learner centred participant led activity in schools – even if often these activities are in the margins or squeezed into non-curricular time.

The approaches of community education and youth organising as well as GCE are standard practice in the non-formal youth education sectors. The Climate Action Short Course could be used to pilot a shift towards more learned centred curriculum and approaches within second level, with a view to researching the possible benefits of expanding this approach within formal education.

# 5. Rationale for the prioritisation of outdoor learning approaches

The framework for Junior Cycle aims to support the wellbeing of learners. However, across the specifications of existing junior cycle subjects and short courses, the potential wellbeing benefits of outdoor learning have not been emphasised. Eisner (1985) discusses the impact the ‘null curriculum’, that which we do not teach, has on our perceptions of what we value in education. If we do not spend time teaching the formal curriculum outdoors this suggests that we do not see it as an important learning tool (Beames et al, 2012). According to this line of thinking, confining students to learn indoors has serious implications for students’ skills for understanding their natural environment as well as for their appreciation of ecology, biodiversity and natural resources. Locating all learning indoors may also send an implicit message to students that what is found outdoors in the natural environment is not of value and not a worthwhile focus for learning. Numeracy, literacy and digital skills for interacting with the virtual world are highly prioritised by the Framework for Junior Cycle Key Skills. By contrast ecological literacy and skills for interacting with the natural world are not explicitly included. Unfortunately national policy on ESD has not provided direction in this regard, and the National Strategy for ESD (2014) also fails to emphasise the value of outdoor learning. This short course could help to address this gap by providing a way for students to benefit from outdoor learning.

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