

Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) short course draft specification consultation

Joint-submission from Concern Worldwide and 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World

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1. Aim and Rationale

1.1 On the aim and rational: While the ambition of the draft specification presents a range of critical citizenship education goals, it is important to set out some questions that explore the context that the CSPE short course will be working in for many years from now. Is there actual engagement with real world problems in Ireland and abroad from the syllabus? Was CSPE adequate for preparing young people to examine and tackle the financial crisis as young adult citizens over the last five years? Was it deep enough to counter voter apathy and perceptions of government, corporate and financial corruption? If not, why?

1.2 Including the realism agenda: The economic order in Ireland in recent years and the role of markets, from justice perspectives, has been severely lacking in CSPE. How can civic, social and political education be a meaningful learning experience if it ignores businesses, markets and how the government services these interests as the unquestioning greatest public good in Ireland today? Preparing students to become active citizens in an Irish democracy is considerably questionable as to whether students are being properly equipped by CSPE, in our expectations of the subject, to prepare them for the real world challenges in learning ‘political literacy.’

1.3 Conducting one class a week for CSPE, based on feedback from principals and teachers and colleagues that we have worked with and unequivocally stated in the 2003 CSPE Report on Survey of Principals and Teachers, has been a tokenistic approach towards citizenship education and weak for any deep educational work on citizenship issues. The increase in class time as a result of the conversion of CSPE to short course status, from 70 to 100 hours, is to be welcomed.

1.4 We agree with Des Hogan from the Human Rights Commission in an article on December 4th 2013 in the Irish Independent when he said “CSPE is a vital space for teachers and students to explore contemporary issues in Irish society within a human rights framework” and he went on to credit Ireland’s ranking of 7th in the 2009 Civic and Citizenship Report of 14 year olds to CSPE as compulsory in the Irish education system. The downgrading of CSPE from a compulsory subject to an optional strand is deplorable and risks the government being seen as retreating from its commitment to education that strengthens respect for human rights.

1.5 The Statements of Learning selected in the draft specification link to the rationale and aims of CSPE efficiently. Should it be possible to include other SoL to deliver CSPE (either more than the prescribed SoL or a mix of 2 plus 1 other SoL) we would recommend SOL 5, 6, 18 and 24.

2. Content and Structure

2.1 Partnership work: The new draft syllabus thrives on partnerships work - whether with NGOs or with other subject teachers. DE has always been at its strongest when used in an interdisciplinary manner and supports this kind of effort really well. Many teachers we work with view the changes to the Junior Cycle curriculum as more work when they are stretched to capacity already whereas the new CSPE allows more collaboration, more whole school approaches (where teachers usually had worked alone) and so the environment in which CSPE can flourish for students and teachers will be in a much more supportive space. This is both commendable and exciting.

2.2 On continuing citizenship education: Having a citizenship education carry on from primary level in this experiential manner and mixed teaching methods in the new CSPE draft specification is welcome. However, if citizenship education does not continue on after the Junior Cycle then it is a wasted effort and a clear statement that reveals the extent of how de-politicised political education for young people in Ireland has become. As the Senior Cycle citizenship education subject Politics and Society has been dropped (until 2020) by the DES, following more than 10 years of development and consultations by the NCCA, there is a serious risk to the citizens of tomorrow being churned out by the education system preparing them to read, write and work in business as the only priorities for the country. The context of various political, financial and social crises in Ireland makes this point even more alarming.

By reneging on citizenship education at Senior Cycle level CSPE runs the risk of not being continued in a formal sense and in fact depoliticises young people when they are at their most critical. The role of TY, extracurricular activities and DE action projects becomes all the more important within this context.

2.3 Definitions, language and the basics: the draft specification does not make clear whether there space is provided for to exploration of the context and circumstance that give rise to meaning around concepts such as 'where did human rights come from and why are they important?'. Understanding the ideas/concepts of 'human rights', 'human dignity', 'sustainability' and 'development' are essential prerequisites for engaging with the issues that follow and should be included more clearly in the draft specification. The implications associated with this are evidenced on p.9 of the Chief Examiner's Report to the CSPE exam in 2005 and on p.12, 15 and particularly p.18 of the Chief Examiner's Report in 2009.

2.4 While the SOL associated with linking to an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making is not included with the draft specification (SOL 5) the core concepts of citizenship in CSPE are generated by personal values and beliefs to understand the world. This emphasis on making learning relevant at an individual level of understanding for students to build empathy for an issue (such as tackling global hunger) or explore how they feel about global inequality or difficult global issues is missing from the course strands and we would recommend revising some of these approaches as appropriate.

2.5 Sustainability is covered in Strand 2 but sustainable development (and all of its implications) is not. Particularly within the global policy context of moving from the MDGs toward the Sustainable Development Goals it is important to give students and teachers the critical space to engage with this agenda, of which the Irish government, Irish NGOs, Irish citizens and global businesses are all stakeholders.

2.6 Mechanical citizenship vs active citizenship: Knowing what the meaning of 'voting' and 'Dail' is not the same as being skilled to critique and challenge bad practice from any of these institutions. Too much of *Strand 3 Exploring Democracy* is only explanatory in focus without any analytical skills accompanying the knowledge. Knowing what 'Power' is, is not the same as being able to examine

'Power' and make judgements about it. The draft specification for CSPE would benefit in re-balancing critical engagement drills with informational knowledge-based learning in Strand 3. Building an informed and empowered public with a commitment to engage in civic life is not simply a matter of providing 'facts and information'. Looking at the history of a social campaign, for example, within the context of Irish democracy and its achievements would be a valuable exercise.

2.7 Action Section: No weighting has been suggested as to what standard 'action projects' can be measured. This means everything from a talk by an NGO to lobbying a local supermarket is given equal weight in principle. Just as there are quality demands that we should be making of development education in class rooms there should also be a minimum we expect teachers to deliver in terms of outcome-based learning from action projects. The criteria for reporting on 6 actions needs to be stronger; it might be possible to combine multiple actions, for example, such as a talk plus follow up written exercise plus an action by the students. The quality of admissible actions that directly link to the core CSPE concepts needs further refinement in the draft specification. This is a crucial issue for the vibrancy and energy of CSPE and one that has been reiterated in the Chief Examiner's reports on multiple counts in both 2005 and again in 2009.

2.8 This point is consolidated by recent research into an audit of Irish development education resources (2013) over a 12 year period conducted by www.developmenteducation.ie where many resources produced for CSPE included action projects supports which "remain weak in development, environmental or human rights terms".

2.9 The outcomes of action projects are not entirely clear from the draft specification. Based on the previous point, this could be stated more clearly.

2.10 A note of caution around campaigning: it is vital that whole school support and relevant internal systems are encouraged for CSPE teachers around the issue of student campaign actions. Principals should not close a class off from pursuing a company, for example, based on a disgruntled letter. For genuine campaigning to take place requires whole school and administrative support; if a principal intervenes and stops a class from completing their action project, for example, it is important to look at the implications around a range of actors involved and not just the complainant.

3. Assessment and Certification

3.1 Literacy and Numeracy: The draft specification is in need of clearer literacy and numeracy guidance/suggested standards throughout. For example, the reflective journal should include a clear literacy component such as written reflections on different perspectives and a numbers component (i.e. survey results; statistical instrument critique/observation etc.). The inclusion of the Human Development Index is an innovative feature of CSPE and more numeracy and measurement tools used in practice by organisations and individuals should be promoted in the specification. Examples can include calculating the class' water footprint, carbon footprint and waste footprint (comparing to global/regional averages etc).

3.2 Strengthening assessment: The draft specification would benefit from encouraging the gathering of deeper reflections from students, such as through utilising higher order questions – "I know how"; "I need to do A,B,C to advance X,Y,Z". Attitudinal change of the class at the beginning and end of strands should also be recorded.

3.3 Active learning and action projects: A guidance system for teachers to support the sustainability of students in their action project management should be advanced more clearly in the draft specification, which would be essential for genuine participative and active learning outcomes.

3.4 Action project assessment subjectivity: while students may fulfil action project ‘tick box’ criteria for their assessment, guidance is required for teachers that may have a conflict of interest, disagreement with or ideological divergence from students. There are potentially strong elements of control and teacher-bias in relation to the agenda that action projects deliver. This may have a knock-on impact on assessment outcomes.

References:

Chief Examiner’s Report (2009) Junior Certificate Examination: Civic, Social and Political Education. State Examinations Commission. Link:

http://examinations.ie/archive/examiners_reports/JC_CSPE_2009.pdf

Chief Examiner’s Report (2005) Junior Certificate Examination: Civic, Social and Political Education. State Examinations Commission. Link:

http://examinations.ie/archive/examiners_reports/cer_2005/JC_CSPE.pdf

Dave Redmond & Paul Butler (2003) Civic, Social and Political Education: Report on Survey of Principals and Teachers. NCCA and Nexus Research Cooperative. Link:

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Publications/Reports/Civic_Social_and_Political_Education_Report_on_Survey_of_Principals_and_Teachers.pdf

Des Hogan (4th December 2013) The downgrading of CSPE could harm vital human rights education. The Irish Independent. Link: <http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/education/the-downgrading-of-cspe-could-harm-vital-human-rights-education-29807284.html>

Tony Daly, Ciara Regan and Colm Regan (2013) An Audit of Irish Development Education Resources. DevelopmentEducation.ie link: www.developmenteducation.ie/audit

Addendum to CSPE short course submission by Concern and 80:20

2.5 The reference to sustainable development (rather than simply ‘sustainability’) should also be understood in the context of the Department of Education and Science’s draft Education for Sustainable Development strategy set for publication in early 2014 and the educational opportunities to link with this. More information on the Department’s ESD strategy can be found here <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Education-for-Sustainable-Development/>

2.7 The quality of admissible actions mentioned in this point should also be understood in the context of Audrey Bryan and Meliosa Bracken’s recent critically important research *Learning to Read the World: teaching and learning about Global Citizenship and International Development in Post-Primary Schools* (2011) and references to ‘obedient activism’ raised by not engaging with the core CSPE and DE ideas and concepts rigorously enough in the classroom environment on p.68 & 272.

Links to the resource can be found here:

http://www.tcd.ie/tidi/assets/doc/Development%20Research%20Week%202011/Presentations/Wednesday%209th%20November/Audrey%20BryanLearning%20to%20Read%20the%20World_FinalReport.pdf