

COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

REVIEW OF EDUCATION PROGRAMME

FORMAL SCHOOL SECTOR

SECOND LEVEL

( 1989 - 1996 )

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## INTRODUCTION

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One of the four functions of the Combat Poverty Agency is to promote a greater public awareness of the extent and causes of poverty and the measures needed to overcome it. Until 1989 the Agency mainly fulfilled this function through seminars, reports and liaising with the media. However it was then decided that a more long term approach was also needed. One possible approach was to develop an educational programme directed at second level students. In fact, as highlighted in briefing document on the education pack for schools, the Agency's 1987-1989 Strategic Plan specifically mentions the preparation of educational materials for the school curriculum, which focus on poverty. This document goes on to argue that there was a dearth of information on the extent and causes of poverty in the then school curriculum. The Agency proposed to initiate an educational programme which would include the development of a "schools educational pack" in conjunction with educational and other relevant institutions. In addition to providing information and initiating discussion on poverty, the educational programme would also attempt to challenge stereotypes.

This briefing document laid the ground work for the subsequent development of the education programme which has continued from its initiation in 1989 to the present - June 1996. However development of the programme has been marked particularly by a broadening of the vision which informs its work. This is highlighted in particular in the Agency's submission in response to the Education Green Paper.

"The Agency believes that the education system should provide a vision of society which is committed to the values of social equity and justice: this ethos should permeate all levels of education and all subject areas and should enable participants in the education system to learn to respect and value themselves and others (P7/8).

Therefore one of the main objectives of the education programme has been to contribute to the development amongst young people of social solidarity. This is particularly important at second level where the emphasis is often towards individualism and competitiveness.

Furthermore the Agency's Strategic Plan 1993-1995 stated its commitment to "develop and extend its educational work with schools" within its strategic objective - Strengthening Anti-Poverty Action. This was to contribute to the development of a consensus "to ensure fundamental change in society" (P14/15).

### Educational Approach

A participative educational approach is espoused by the Agency.

It is not simply concerned with passing on information to participants but wishes to engage learners in an active way. This approach emphasises the following:-

- development of skills e.g. critical thinking, communication, presentation;

## PHASE ONE: 1989 - 1992

As a first step in its formal education sector programme the Combat Poverty Agency initiated a process to produce an active learning teaching resource .

This phase includes two elements;

- (i) the production of Fair Shares? 1989 - 1991
- (ii) the promotion and dissemination of Fair Shares 1991 - 1992.

This section outlines the production and promotion of Fair Shares ? It highlights the main achievements of this and issues arising from this process.

### RESOURCE PACK

As a first step in this process it was decided to produce an educational resource pack. Initially, it was thought that the process of initiating, producing, piloting and final production would take one year. However this work, which by its nature is complex and slow, took approximately 2 years to complete, with the Fair Shares ? Pack being launched in September 1991.

### THE PROCESS

In order to ensure relevance and high quality, the Agency brought together a representative working group to be involved in the production of the pack. This group included teachers, community activists, youth and adult educators. Members of the group were not simply there in a consultative capacity, but were asked to originate material. The Agency appointed Ita Sheehy, on a half time basis, to co-ordinate the work of the project. Considerable time had to be given at the beginning of the project to agreeing the philosophy, objectives, target group etc. for the educational resource.

### THE METHODOLOGY AND CONTENT

The pack was to be a learner-centred, active-learning resource. In other words it was not intended as a fact book but rather as an educational resource which would bring learners through a process. This process would start with learners own perceptions of poverty. It would explore definitions, the multiple effects of poverty including cycles of poverty, exploring causes and possible solutions. Thus it is based on a model of education which is not simply about acquiring facts or information but which emphasises the need to look at attitudes, challenge stereotypes and develop attitudes such as empathy and tolerance. It also seeks to develop skills in the learner including communication skills, problem solving and critical thinking. It includes the exploration of concepts such as justice, human rights and empowerment. The knowledge

## 1991 - 1992: PROMOTING FAIR SHARES

The next stage was to disseminate the pack and ensure maximum usage. This work was carried out by Maureen Bassett from September 1991 - June 1992. The aim of this phase was to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of the availability of the Fair Shares ? pack and to offer workshops in the use of the material. At this point, all areas were targeted to ensure maximum exposure.

### SCHOOLS SECTOR

- inserts were put into teacher unions magazines;
- education officers of the unions were contacted;
- stands were set up at the teacher union conferences and principals conferences;
- stand was taken at exhibition for Home Economics teachers;
- Curriculum Development Unit (CDVEC) Dublin was contacted and workshops were held there;
- Curriculum Development Unit - Shannon was also contacted.

### TEACHER CENTRES

All twenty four centres were contacted and advised of the availability of the resource and workshops offered. Workshops were held in Waterford, Limerick, Dublin (three centres) Navan.

### TRANSITION YEAR

The material in the pack was particularly suited to Transition Year with its emphasis on personal and social development. Therefore all schools offering Transition Year were contacted (approx 120). A meeting was held with Dublin co-ordinators of Transition Year, in St. Patrick's, Drumcondra.

### UNIVERSITIES

All Education Departments were contacted and a workshop was held in Trinity College Dublin with H. Dip students.

### HOME ECONOMICS

This subject area proved a very fruitful one as teachers were anxious for resources to teach the social scientific aspect of the course. A number of workshops were held in conjunction with regional branches i.e. Cork, Sligo, Galway and a session was also held in St. Catherine's, Sion Hill Teaching College for Home Economic Teachers.

groups were contacted. A day long workshop was run in the Combat Poverty Agency during February 1992. This attracted a wide range of participants from the informal level, including youth workers, community workers and Gardai training staff. Whilst it was recognised that there may be further potential for development within these sectors, it was decided to focus, for the coming period, on the formal sector, as it was felt that most needed to be done there.

### ACHIEVEMENTS OF PHASE ONE

- \* Fair Shares? was very well received and praised for its clarity, user friendliness and valuable inclusion of the photographs. The original print run sold out very quickly necessitating a second run. It remains a key resource.
- \* It attracted teachers from a range of subject areas but particularly Religious Education and Home Economics.
- \* Interest was also expressed by those involved in Transition Year.
- \* It's potential was also noted by those involved in developing the new Civic, Social, Political subject.
- \* A beginning was made in establishing links with other education bodies and groups eg. NCCA, Dept of Education, CDU's, Teachers Centres etc.,
- \* Inservice sessions throughout the country were well received.
- \* Limited but useful engagement with youth sector
- \* Generally a sense of having done everything possible to promote Fair Shares?

### OUTSTANDING ISSUES

- \* The difficulties for an Agency, such as CPA in trying to engage fully with the formal education sector - in part arising from resistance, from mainstream educational interests due to fear of "agendas" and lack of understanding of level of commitment and expertise.
- \* Need to overcome teachers resistance to introducing poverty issues into the classroom.
- \* Lack of teachers awareness/understanding of issues.
- \* Strategies for dealing with sensitive and controversial issues.
- \* Teachers' need for training in participative methodology.

## PHASE TWO 1992 - 1994

### INTRODUCTION

Based on the experience of the promotion phase of Fair Shares? it was decided to focus future work on the second level of the formal school sector. The main impetus here was to ensure that the exploration of poverty issues became more fully embedded in the mainstream curriculum. Furthermore that this exploration should take place within a broader educational context. The Combat Poverty Agency in its response to the Education Green Paper stated:

"...the education system should provide a vision of society which is committed to the values of social equity and justice. This ethos should permeate all levels of education and all subject areas and should enable participants in the education system to learn to respect and value themselves and others."

The response also emphasised the importance of education for active citizenship, which includes a global perspective and which is informed by a commitment to social justice.

The education work was to be based on developing links and partnerships with other education organisations and interests.

### KEY AREAS OF WORK

#### (i) Civic Social Political Education (CSPE)

The development of a new subject was underway under the auspices of the NCCA and CDU. The objectives of this subject coincided very much with the objectives of the CPA education programme

These were outlined by the NCCA as follows:

#### "4. What is Civic, Social and Political Education ?

- 4.1. Civic, social and political education prepares students for active, participatory citizenship in local, national and international life. It should help students to use their minds well in a constantly changing and complex society. It should produce students who can explore, examine and analyse, who are skilled and practised in moral and critical appraisal, and capable of making decisions and judgements through a clarified and reflective citizenship, based on human rights and social responsibilities. Such students will be prepared for life in a world where traditional structures and values are being challenged and where students are being confronted with conflicting interests, impermanent structures and constant questioning.

- both are involved in creating awareness in relation to poverty and justice issues - one local, the other global;
- both organisations view poverty as a structural issue and understand development as a process which should be human centred;

## THE WORK OF THE IMAGES PROJECT

### Developing Teaching Units

It was decided to focus on Junior Cycle level as the aims of the New Junior Cycle Curriculum and the aims of justice/development education are highly compatible. These include an emphasis on participative learning and a development of critical thinking and attitudes such as tolerance and empathy.

Ten subject areas were chosen, the syllabi were examined and a small area was identified which was amenable to the purpose of the project. Ten teaching units were developed each comprising four class plans. It was decided to base the units on the use of visual material i.e. photographs, posters, graphics, cartoons etc., Once again this was in line with an emphasis within the Junior Cycle curriculum on visual literacy. Thus existing education resources were "trawled" to identify appropriate material.

### Contacting Schools

It was decided to pilot the project in County Laois mainly to offer an innovative programme outside Dublin. Links had also been developed with the Teachers Centre in Portlaoise. All schools (second level) in the area were contacted and five agreed to be involved. Each school was visited to explain the idea and four decided to participate with just one teacher from the fifth, who attended subsequent meetings in a nearby participating school. When the units were completed workshops were held in each school to acquaint teachers with the issues and materials.

A feedback questionnaire was prepared and sent to all participating teachers and follow-up workshops were organised. The feedback was very positive. The following gains were identified for the students and teachers involved.

### Student Gains

Amongst the gains which teachers felt that students obtained from the process were:-

- (a) Increased awareness of poverty related issues.
- (b) Greater understanding of broader nature of poverty i.e. not simply material.
- (c) Some grasp of the structural nature of poverty.

for Religious Education - Senior Cycle, with the Marino Religious Education Institute. This module was to have a local focus and would not revolve around the use of visual material. The work on these initiatives continued into the next period of the Education Programme.

### Review of Senior Cycle Subjects

A process had begun within the NCCA to review all senior cycle subjects to ensure their appropriateness and relevance. In line with the Combat Poverty Agency's educational approach it was considered important to ensure that a consideration of poverty and related topics would be included in the new syllabi, particularly within Home Economics, Economics, Geography and Religious Education.

A submission was made to the Home Economics course committee through its education officer, a meeting was arranged with the latter and subsequently we were given the opportunity to comment on the draft syllabus. Contact was also made with the Association of Educational Book Publishers, to alert them to the resources and expertise of the Combat Poverty Agency in relevant areas. The draft syllabus contained an elective, within social studies, on poverty, suggestions were made in our response for the inclusion of a poverty perspective into other areas of the syllabus.

### Transition Year

The expansion and development of Transition Year offered an ideal opportunity for the promotion of CPA's education concerns. Every effort was made to ensure that key people involved in Transition Year were aware of the availability of teaching resources and support. A meeting with the Inspector with responsibility for Transition Year was part of this strategy. Another initiative was a proposal to work jointly with ASTI to produce and publish a resource for Transition Year which would supplement Fair Shares ?

Support was also given to a project initiated by the Shanty Educational Centre, Brittas, which brought together students and teachers from four Dublin based schools. This project involved the students in researching aspects of poverty and in coming together on a number of occasions to share their learning. The project ended with a presentation by students of their findings. This was attended by Joan Burton, Minister for State, Department of Social Welfare. The student presentations demonstrated a good grasp of the aspect of poverty which they researched and their comments indicated that they had found involvement in the project a very stimulating learning experience. An outline of the approach was included in subsequent publication, as a possible model for other Transition Year teachers.

### Other Areas of Work

The foregoing areas were the core of the work of the education programme for the period 1992 - 1994. Listed below are other areas which also contributed to the overall development of the work during this period.

- Beginning to be recognised as an education "partner" in citizenship education.
- Building a profile with a broader group of teachers.
- See also outcomes from Images Project

### **OUTSTANDING ISSUES**

- Importance of and difficulties surrounding teacher training (see end of Phase One).
- Difficulties regarding being fully recognised as partner particularly by NCCA, Department of Education.
- The need to be very clear on what basis collaboration is taking place i.e. more formalised.
- Ongoing issues regarding teacher resistance, sensitivities etc.,
- Non integration of the education programme into the mainstream of Combat Poverty's Work.

- (iii) *Against the Odds* a teaching resource for Senior Cycle Religious Education teachers was compiled, piloted and re-drafted in conjunction with MREI. This draws on material from *Fair Shares ?* but also includes new material particularly relevant to Religious Education. In particular it raises questions regarding different philosophical underpinnings of society eg. individual v community and how these might contribute to a society free from poverty and injustice. Whilst this resource was not published it is available from the MREI Resource Centre which serves a network of teachers. It is also envisaged that in its existing or an adapted form it will suit the teaching of the new R.E. syllabus, which is presently being drafted. The co-author of *Against the Odds* Co-Ordinator of the MREI Resource Centre, is also a member of the course committee for the development of the new syllabus.
- (iv) *Food Issues*, one of the follow-ons from the Images Project, was published in April 1996. This is a teaching resource for Home Economics teachers - at Junior Cycle level. It raises questions about access to food both in a local and a global context. It attempts to broaden the discussion from purely practical /technical issues regarding nutrition and diet, to the social, cultural and political context. In an Irish context it sets out to challenge the idea that under-nutrition is reducible to "bad management" and explores issues around income adequacy. In a global context it broadens the discussion from climate and population arguments to broader issues such as trade, debt, war etc. In both situations it argues that poverty is an underlying factor to under-nutrition and hunger.

This resource was compiled in conjunction with experienced Home Economics teachers. It was piloted in Dublin and Galway and then re-drafted. Mainly the material was drawn from other sources and adapted to the purposes of the publication. An important aspect here was drawing on material from two of CPA's research reports and presenting the information in an educationally relevant manner.

The resource has been endorsed by the Association of Teachers of Home Economics who wrote a foreword for it. It was launched at their Spring Meeting in Galway. A strategy to promote and disseminate the publication is currently under way.

### New Programmes

There has been ongoing liaison and monitoring of the development of new programmes.

(i) Leaving Certificate Applied Programme

This programme is currently being developed and piloted by NCCA. The Agency was invited to attend a number of consultation meetings. The programme is intended for less academically inclined students and puts an important emphasis on personal development and social education.

(iii) Religious Education:

For the first time Religious Education is to become an examination subject at both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle level. New syllabus are being drafted by NCCA and contact has been made with course committee members. It is likely we will be given the opportunity to comment on these in the near future.

(iv) Geography:

Contact just beginning here in relation to development of new syllabus.

Transition Year

- \* During this period Transition Year continued to be an important focus for the education programme.
- \* Liaison work involved a number of meetings with the Transition Year Support Team. This group is attached to the Department of Education whose brief is to support the development and expansion of Transition Year.
- \* The publication and mailing of Fair Shares ? / Poverty in Focus was undertaken.
- \* A joint initiative was developed with Focus Ireland. This involved devising a Transition Year module entitled "Take a Better Look". The module takes as its starting point the concept of social exclusion, suggests ways of exploring this and approaches to student research. It then takes a look at public awareness campaigns relating to social issues and introduces both practical and ethical issues relating to such campaigns. It also encourages students to design a poster campaign on a relevant topic. This module was offered at a two day inservice course in Dublin. This course was organised in conjunction with the Transition Year Support Team and proved to be very popular. It attracted twice as many applications as could be accommodated.
- \* TEAM Theatre Group - TEAM is a theatre in education group and each year it devises a play which it brings to transition year students in schools. The play is augmented with a workshop and resource material for the teacher to explore the topic further. As part of its interest in exploring more creative methods of introducing relevant issues to students, CPA made contact with TEAM. Focus Ireland had also made contact with TEAM and the outcome has been that TEAM has taken the topic of homelessness as the theme for its 1996/1997 production. CPA and Focus Ireland are acting in an advisory capacity to TEAM in their development of the theme. This includes clarifying the issue itself, contacts, back-up resource material, commenting on a draft version of the play. CPA also made some funding available out from its information and public awareness grants scheme.

The play will be presented in schools during January to March 1997.

- clarification of 'why teach these issues?'
- identification of where they fit in the curriculum
- guidance on planning a module
- guidance on project work on related topics
- guidance on research methodology
- provision of resources where possible.

In the period under discussion, particularly during the last school year ie 1995/96. A considerable level of inservice was provided. Many of these have been mentioned as they were linked to other areas of work. The following is a brief overview of the main areas of involvement

PROJECT/SUBJECT AREA	PARTNER(S)	THEME	LOCATION
CSPE	NCCA	a. Going National b. Gender	National & Regional Regional
Transition Year	ASTI	Teaching Social Issues (3 day course)	Dublin
Transition Year	Focus Ire.	a. Take a Better Look (2 day course) b. Take a Better Look "Taster" evening sessions	Dublin Tullamore, Carrick on Shannon
Transition Year	DETY & TYTS	a. Development Education Concept Approach (1 day course) b. "Taster" session	Dublin Sligo
Home Economics	ATHE	Food Issues (Pilots)	Dublin Galway
Religious Education	MREI	Against the Odds (Pilot)	Dublin

- \* Involvement in CSPE - Poverty as an issue worthy of inclusion and analysis mentioned specifically in syllabus document.
- \* Involvement in LCAP - inclusion of human rights dimension to study of contemporary issues.
- \* Refocusing amongst DETY members on local dimension - inclusion of this in framework being offered at inservice and in Creative Resource Guide.
- \* High level of inservice
- \* Opportunity to comment on Economics draft syllabus - inclusion of section on employment, unemployment and inequality
- \* Link up with TEAM - play on theme of homelessness
- \* Link up with Focus Ireland - particularly development of Take a Better Look Module and inservice

### ISSUES OUTSTANDING

There have been a number of issues throughout the programme which still need discussion and action.

Primary among these is the need to integrate the formal sector education programme into the mainstream work of the Agency. This process has not been assisted by the fact that the development and implementation of the programme was provided by consultant rather than a member of staff. The fact that the work has been associated with one person has probably had consequences both internally within CPA and externally with other organisations. When a decision was taken to "develop and extend its educational work with schools on issues of poverty and fairness "Strategic Plan 1993 - 1995 different decisions regarding staffing of this could have assisted the integration of the work. Even within staffing constraints an approach similar to that of the Community Arts programme might have been more appropriate. The development / support worker(s) here are on fixed term contact(s) but for this period are considered members of programme staff.

A second issue is the need to discuss and reflect on the long-term nature of formal sector work and the importance of distinguishing between limited projects with a beginning, middle and end and ongoing work. It is suggested that the formal sector work is of the latter kind. Despite having made considerable inroads into having poverty related issues written into the syllabus, this in a sense, is just the beginning.

Given the broad nature of individual syllabi, there is no guarantee that these sections will be taught. It is vital to ensure that teachers will actually teach this part of the syllabus through the provision of support, initial training, inservice, resources etc.,

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations outlined in this section are based on:

1. My own understanding and experience of the education programme and the wider educational context in which it operates
2. The suggestions of the consultative group.
3. Informal discussions with a number of key people.
4. Research documents by Olga McDonagh .

Account has been taken of the Review of the Agency by Goodbody Economic Consultants and in particular its discussion of the Agency's public education role.

The CPA is currently drawing up a new strategic plan and therefore it is vital to clarify at this stage what its commitment and thinking is regarding continued formal sector work.

The CPA have put resources into this area over the past five years and as outlined earlier in this report have achieved a considerable amount. There is a danger that it will be thought that the work has been done. Everyone consulted argued that there is a need for a continuing role for the Combat Poverty Agency, in the formal sector, particularly until the new subjects, programmes and reviewed syllabi are more firmly established. There is no other agency/organisation with a specific focus on Irish poverty issues and an expertise in the formal sector who would fill the gap. The mechanism by which the Agency chooses to do this could be either directly by having an education advisor/officer based in Combat Poverty or indirectly e.g. by funding another educational body to employ someone to carry out the brief eg. CDVEC, CDU. The advantage of this would be to locate the work within a mainstream educational establishment with a long history of curriculum development in social education. A disadvantage might be that it would further marginalise the formal sector education programme from the work of Agency. However, it might be possible to find mechanisms to overcome this eg. this person's attendance at programme meetings, section meetings etc. It may be possible to get co-financing for such an approach from European sources.

Another possibility would be to facilitate a multi-agency approach, bringing together other groups and organisations with similar educational interests. It would be important to identify those organisations which are committed to broad educational aims as opposed to simply pushing their own "agenda's".

It is important that clear decisions are made regarding the level of commitment to formal sector work over the time of the strategic plan. Following from this an action plan should be drawn up outlining key objectives, priority areas and tasks. Mechanisms for ongoing evaluation should be considered.

## PROPOSALS FOR ACTION PLAN

The following are proposals for possible components of a future action plan - these are focused on key areas of work - many developing on from work already done.

1. CSPE

Identify best ways of supporting the teaching of poverty related issues within CSPE which begins to be nationally implemented in 1996/1997.

2. LCAP

Identify ways of supporting the teaching of Contemporary Issues within LCAP. This could include producing a relevant teachers resource book and inservice - in partnership with NCDE, with whom we co-wrote the modules on Contemporary Issues. We have been requested to rewrite the second module in light of teacher feedback. This programme is entering the 2nd year of the pilot phase, modules which work successfully at pilot phase will be retained on national implementation in 1997/1998.

3. Senior Cycle Review

Keep in touch with syllabus reviews particularly Senior Cycle Home Economics, Economics, Religious Education and Geography. All of these are at different stages and therefore need different actions. The actions range from requesting draft syllabi for comment to ensuring text books cater for new syllabus in relation to our concerns. If text books fail to do so, subject specific teaching resources will be required. In all cases support/training for teachers in these areas will be required.

4. Development Education

This has potential for further development and it is important that the local focus is further highlighted. At present no other organisation with a specific local concern is actively involved in DETY. It is also important to formalise and consolidate links with NCDE. Historically development education has focused mainly on "Third World" issues and on local issues, only in as much as Ireland linked with "Third World" through aid and trade. The actors which make up the development education sphere are mainly Third World development agencies eg. Trocaire, Concern etc. Also NCDE is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, historically with the aim of informing the Irish public on the Irish Aid programme. This brief has broadened considerably but to ensure that development education in practice as well as in theory includes an analysis of local and national / social, political and economic situations, an Agency such as CPA needs to actively work to ensure this happens.

10. Developing a Network of Teachers

The basis for this already exists but detailed work would need to happen to develop a network of teachers who are committed and experienced in the teaching of poverty related issues. They in turn could be called upon to be presenters at inservice, initial teacher training, to advise regarding directions and content of the work, be involved in development of resource material etc. An initial step in this regard would be to develop a database which would include all the teachers we have had contact with over the last seven years.

11. Innovative Project - Human Rights

1998 Marks the 50th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, this could become the focus for some innovative/creative formal sector work. Amnesty International are interested in collaborating on initiatives to mark this year. This proposal is not necessarily in addition to proceeding proposals but could be part of other areas of work e.g. innovative action oriented project for Transition Year or part of Contemporary Issues LCAP support work.

12. Community Links

Develop and pilot model(s) of joining our Community Development links and expertise with relevant schools programmes eg. LCVP, LCAP, CSPE, Transition Year. All of these programmes are advocating that students link with their communities as part of action based learning. This should be done in conjunction with education officers/ co-ordinators of these programmes. Possible sources of ideas here - Community Education Development Centre Coventry and IBEC model.

13. Transition Year

- (i) There is a need here to develop innovative approaches to involve students in action oriented projects. It is worth considering developing a number of pilot projects but it is important that these can be replicated. The Shanty model is worth considering as one possible approach. Others might include elements such as a poster competition, (Take A Better Look module could be the basis of this), producing a radio programme to be broadcast on local radio programme, use our links with community radio here.
- (ii) A short-term proposal would be to repeat the very successful two day inservice on Take a Better Look at three locations, Dublin, Galway and Cork in conjunction with Transition Year Support Team and Focus Ireland.
- (iii) Look at Focus Ireland's model for media studies which took a contemporary film i.e. *Fisherking* and in conjunction with TYST (Gerry Jeffers) devised a teaching resource in relation to it. This could be linked to teacher training in the use of film as stimulus to exploration of poverty related issues.