
Exploring the Elephant in the Room:

Attention to Economic Neo-liberalism in Development Education and International Development on the island of Ireland

A research report by Harm-Jan Fricke
commissioned by **Financial Justice Ireland**
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Development Education? Global Citizenship Education?

In Ireland the terms – and meaning – of these approaches to education are often used interchangeably: see, for example, Irish Aid's [Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025](#) and the Irish Development Education Association's (IDEA) [website](#).

In this report Development Education is used to include the range of educations that give attention to a global perspective in exploration of local-global issues: using active involvement in the process of learning and in responding to that learning, involving enquiries into, reflections on, discussions about and responses to local and global development issues.

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Summary

1. This report follows up on a research report produced in 2022.¹ That report focused on the attention given to the globally dominant neo-liberal economic system by the International Development (ID) and Development Education (DE) sectors in the island of Ireland. Amongst its conclusions was that the sectors, despite their significant activities relating to poverty and inequality, tended to focus largely on single issues. Overall, the research saw little *explicit* consideration of global economic processes or explicit exploration of the globally dominant economic system of neo-liberalism. The 2022 research, however, also found that there was, amongst the sectors' practitioners, an awareness of the need to give attention to the dominant economic model and an interest in addressing the root causes of poverty.
2. The 2022 report outlined a range of factors that help explain the limited attention explicitly given to neo-liberalism in the DE and ID sectors. The research for the current report sought to explore those reasons further. In addition, the research aimed to find examples of work that does give explicit attention to systemic (economic) root causes of poverty and inequality, and to identify opportunities that exist to extend the attention given to this through formal and non-formal education.
3. The report is based on information obtained from focus group discussions, email exchanges, interviews, a survey, and two workshops with ID and DE sector practitioners. It was complemented by references to publications, websites and other documentation.
4. Research findings are largely based on the experiences and opinions of a limited sample of approximately 35 to 40 unique, self-selected respondents. This means that the findings are not representative of the practice, experiences and opinions of DE and ID practitioners in Ireland; they are, however, likely to be indicative. Given that the respondents were invited or self-selected and hence interested in and practically familiar with the issues of the research, it is reasonable to assume that more widespread practice in the DE sector gives less attention to investigations of systemic economic root causes of poverty and inequality, which confirms the main findings of the 2022 research.
5. Practitioners who informed the research use a variety of methods to explore root causes of issues of poverty and inequality through formal and/or non-formal education. Examples of how such root cause analyses are or have been used relate to courses and workshops of school-based and teacher education, adult and community education, trade union education and non-formal public education.
6. Use of explicit systems thinking skills and approaches is far less common than the use of root cause analytical methods. The systematic exploration of relationships between different causes and consequences and the feedback loops that may reinforce particular consequences of a system are only occasionally used and only by few practitioners.

¹ Fricke 2022: *International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?*, Centre for Global Education & Financial Justice Ireland: <https://www.centreforgloaleducation.com/sites/default/files/CGE%20FJI%20Report%20August%202022%20%28Final%29.pdf>

7. In exploring root causes or systemic causes of poverty or inequality, some practitioners give explicit attention to neo-liberalism as the globally - and nationally or locally - dominant economic paradigm, particularly in a non-formal education setting. Explicit attention to explorations of neo-liberalism as a system and how it affects poverty or inequality is, however, not a mainstream or fundamental part of most practices.
8. The findings regarding why the DE sector gives little attention in its work to a systemic exploration of the economic root causes of poverty and inequality correspond to the findings of the 2022 research. The 2022 research identified various reasons for this, some institutional, some practical, and some related to individual or organisational values. The current research found similar reasons with informants highlighting in particular:
 - a. The lack of skills needed by practitioners to apply a systemic root causes approach,
 - b. The lack of familiarity with economic concepts amongst those who ID and DE practitioners work with,
 - c. The complexity of exploring root cause/economic systems – and hence its absence in explorations and discussions of root causes.
9. The current research provided additional details of the challenges DE practitioners face if they wish to introduce attention to systemic root causes and the neo-liberal economic system in their work. Such challenges can be categorised as relating to:
 - a. Understanding, amongst practitioners and their publics, of 'economics' and its terminologies,
 - b. Skills, understanding and confidence of DE and ID practitioners in introducing and exploring the systemic nature of global economics/neo-liberalism,
 - c. ID and DE networks in Ireland giving no, or at best limited, relevant professional development support to their members: support that enables these members to explicitly address the systemic, ideological nature of neo-liberalism and its consequences for poverty and inequality,
 - d. Broader institutional issues, amongst others relating to the reduction in government funding for adult and community education, and the predominance of (mainly commercially produced) education resources that do not give attention to economic systems when discussing 'development',
 - e. Practical issues such as the time available for extensive exploration of causes and consequences of an issue with a particular audience or group of learners.

10. Considering the opportunities to introduce systemic economic explorations into the work of DE practitioners and into their work with others the findings suggest the following:
 - a. The need for capacity building of DE and ID practitioners (into the use of root cause analyses, systems thinking, and into understanding of the global economic system),
 - b. Creating an awareness and understanding amongst practitioners that in their work, the economic perspective is as important as the environmental, social or political perspective,
 - c. That in work relating to one or more of the SDGs (as many ID and particularly DE sector initiatives do), the SDGs should be seen as a whole, i.e. based on systems thinking – and that the SDGs themselves can be seen as an example of, or an adjustment to, neo-liberal principles,
 - d. That opportunities to introduce an economic perspective exist in partnerships such as with organisations and institutions involved in:
 - i. Solidarity movements,
 - ii. Environmental groups,
 - iii. Trade unions,
 - iv. Youth work,
 - v. Community education,
 - vi. Teacher training,
 - vii. Post-primary education including transition year.
 - e. A number of informants referred to socio-economic models that offer alternatives to neo-liberalism, which they highlighted (though not in great detail) in their work, including Degrowth, Doughnut Economics, and the Wellbeing Economy. Tapping into this interest in exploring sustainable and equitable alternatives, and building on the implicit critique of the dominant economic model that it represents, offers a real opportunity for capacity-building initiatives within the sector.
11. The report is concluded by a number of recommendations aimed at ID and DE practitioners and their organisations and networks. These recommendations are primarily concerned with:
 - a. The professional development of practitioners including their understanding of the global economic system and the use of education methods that explore root causes and systems analyses,
 - b. Further research into the existing education practice within the ID and DE sectors regarding approaches to the global economic system and the systemic root causes of poverty and inequality,
 - c. Support, including peer learning and action-research, needed by practitioners who want to improve their educational approaches in these areas.

1. Introduction: background, purpose and methodology

ASSUMPTIONS: ABOUT SYSTEMS, CAUSES OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY, AND THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AGENCIES

- that it is more effective to systematically investigate (and thereby understand, prevent or solve) underlying issues or reasons rather than just focussing on ad hoc symptoms,
- that exploration and responses to issues of poverty and inequality requires attention to the underlying systemic global economic processes of neo-liberalism,
- that, if their work is to have a lasting impact, international development and development education agencies and initiatives need to give explicit attention to (the neo-liberal) root causes of poverty and inequality, and involve the public in the investigation of, and response to, those causes.

Background

Research commissioned in 2022 by the Centre for Global Education and Financial Justice Ireland found considerable interest in economics among international development (ID) and development education (DE) practitioners across the island of Ireland, along with clear recognition of its importance.² However, there was also a recognition (amongst respondents from both Ireland and elsewhere) that, despite attention to issues of poverty and inequality, the sectors give little consideration to *explicit* explorations of global economic processes and the globally dominant economic system of neo-liberalism. Instead, in publications produced by the sectors *and* in the practice of ID and DE sector practitioners, the focus seemed to be largely on single, ad hoc, issues of poverty and inequality that drew little, if any, attention to the broader economic root cause and systemic context of those issues.

² <https://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/CGE%20FJI%20Report%20August%202022%20%28Final%29.pdf>

The research identified various reasons why this might be the case, some of these relating to:

- Organisational assumptions that governmental and other funding would not be available or might be lost to organisations if neo-liberalism and/or root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice were highlighted;
- A lack of confidence amongst practitioners and organisations in addressing the issues appropriately, including in terms of approaches to raising, discussing and exploring the issues, and in terms of conceptual understandings;
- The complexity of 'economics' and its concepts and terminologies which makes it difficult to convey through public education and communication work.³

The current report

This report follows up on the issues raised by the earlier research with DE and ID sector practitioners by exploring:

- Further reasons why in DE and ID in the island of Ireland limited attention is given to explorations of systemic economic (neo-liberal) root causes of poverty and inequality;
- Examples of initiatives that do attempt to place single issues of poverty and inequality and their causes in a systemic global economics context;
- Challenges and opportunities for DE and ID practitioners and other educators to engage learners/the public in explorations of global economic systems;
- Approaches and techniques that might be useful in exploring the global economic system and its relationship with issues of poverty and inequality.

By conveying the findings from this follow-up research it is hoped that the report will contribute to debates and further work on approaches that counteract what one research informant described as "Economics [being] 'the elephant in the room' when discussing global issues".

Methodology

Initiated and funded by Financial Justice Ireland (FJI), in collaboration with the Centre for Global Education (CGE), the research primarily took place from January to April 2025. Enquiry into the issues mainly drew on fairly readily available sources of information. This obviously has restricted the depth of enquiry, for instance relating to the number of interviews with informants, into documents that illustrate the issues, and into the methods that may be useful in DE and ID practitioners addressing the issue. Research findings, although indicative, are therefore far from comprehensive: more detailed research involving assessment of and support for further development of existing practices would therefore be helpful (see section 6).

Although the focus of the research was intended to be on practices that highlight economics and the neo-liberal economic system, virtually all of the issues and examples given by informants related to a multiplicity of consequences, causes and relationships that affect poverty or inequality. Where economics is discussed it is typically related to other social, political, environmental conditions. Attention to the underlying systemic nature and ideologies of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services is, however, typically absent.

³ Section 3 below provides more information about related findings from the 2022 research.

Focus group

Initial discussions with a small group of practitioners, invited by FJI and CGE, informed the methodology of the research (October 2024). The eight participants in the focus group and two e-mail correspondents brought their diverse (international development and development education) backgrounds and experiences in formal and non-formal education to bear on the organisation of the assignment.

In reflecting on the previous research participants expressed “caution regarding the interpretation [of] findings [since they] potentially overlook the depth of experiential, process-oriented pedagogy that characterises high-quality DE/GCE.”⁴ Participants suggested that it would not only be useful to investigate ‘why’ practitioners give little attention to economic contexts and systemic root cause analyses, but also to gather examples of activities that explicitly aim to place enquiry into single issues of poverty and inequality in an (economic) systemic setting, in order “to amplify or expand on effective practices that may already be taking place, giving [...] a clearer picture of where any gaps exist.”⁵

Interviews

The suggestion to gather information about relevant practical work within the DE and ID sectors was followed up through contacts with practitioners (suggested by focus group participants and by FJI and CGE) who had or were attempting to incorporate a ‘root cause’, economic systems approach in their work. Ten potential interviewees were identified, each known to have experience of placing issues of poverty and/or inequality in a broader systemic context. To ensure a spread of respondents across various forms of formal and non-formal education six of these were contacted. This led to four interviews involving responses from those involved in school-based, teacher training, community education, and ID sector public education.

The interviews, using a semi-structured approach, focused on obtaining “examples of education or communication work that places an issue of poverty/inequality/injustice/sustainable development in a broader context, aiming to explore ‘root causes’/global systemic causes of the issue.”⁶ It also asked for respondents’ experiences and opinions of “challenges and opportunities to introduce such systems/root cause exploration through education work in Ireland”. Although the number of interviewees was limited, their responses have provided a useful insight into the approaches they have used, or are attempting to use, and the challenges that are faced and the opportunities that exist to implement a systemic, root cause analysis.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire aimed to find out about DE and ID practitioners’ perspectives on and experiences of the issues of the research. Attention to the questionnaire was drawn through a notification in IDEA’s newsletter (circulated to the network’s membership) and to Dóchas DE Working Group members. This limited form of advertising led to a limited response: only sixteen questionnaires were completed. Such a response rate is obviously not representative of the experience of DE and ID practitioners. However, limited though the response was, the content of answers, particularly to open-ended questions, provided useful information for the research. (See the Appendix for details of the questionnaire and its responses.)

4 E-mail from a focus group participant to the author, summarising the Focus Group discussion, 30.10.2024.

5 Ibid.

6 E-mail from the author to interview respondents.

Workshops

Following the interviews and taking account of responses to the questionnaire gathered at that point, two workshops were held in March 2025. The first involved twelve practitioners working in or in support of formal sector education (including schools-based and teacher training). The second involved fifteen practitioners working in or in support of nonformal education, including in adult education, trade union education, youth work, and third-level student action.

Each of the workshops was concerned with obtaining participants' perspectives, experiences and suggestions to do with:

- Why is it important to give attention to the global economic system?
- What stops the DE and ID sectors from giving attention to the global economic (neo-liberal) relationship with poverty and inequality?
- Which methods and tools have participants used or can be used to explore the relationship between the global economic system and poverty and inequality?
- What could the DE and ID sectors do to improve their attention to systemic economic root causes of poverty and inequality in their education work?

Literature and Documentation review

Literature and documentation review formed a relatively small part of the research, at least compared with the previous research in 2022. It was mainly concerned with following up on documentation and publications suggested by research contributors and identifying root cause analyses and systems thinking approaches that informants had used (see the References section).

The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) was contacted to ask for permission to gain confidential access to reports on how members of the 'Code of Good Practice for Development Education' initiative had dealt with addressing the issue of exploring root causes and given attention to global systems (key aspects of the Code).⁷ How Code members do this is reported on annually by them. On behalf of the researcher, IDEA staff approached a small number of Code members to obtain their agreement on making their relevant reports available, on a confidential basis. Although two organisations expressed a willingness to provide access to their relevant reports, this, unfortunately, did not lead to information being made available. However, some information was available from IDEA: *Code of Good Practice for Development Education in Ireland 2022 Research Report*.⁸

7 For the content of the Code see: <https://irp.cdn-website.com/9e15ba29/files/uploaded/Code%20Principles%20and%20Indicators%20landscape%20A4%20single%20page%201008.pdf> and https://irp.cdn-website.com/9e15ba29/files/uploaded/7.%2015717%20IDEA%20-%20Background%20Note_V9.pdf

8 https://irp.cdn-website.com/9e15ba29/files/uploaded/16020_IDEA_Research_Report_2022_V6-a6341260.pdf

This report

In the report sources of information are identified as follows:

FG: Focus Group meeting and related emails;

IV: Interviews;

QR: Questionnaire;

WS: Workshops.

Publications, websites and other documentation, if not mentioned in the text, are listed in the Reference section.

The boxes in the document aim to give an interpretation of particular terms or approaches. Some include references to sources where further information can be obtained.

Glossary

Economy

- *"An economy is a system of interrelated production and consumption activities that ultimately determine the allocation of resources within a group.*
- *[An economy involves] all of the activities related to the production, consumption, and trade of goods and services in [a geographical] entity."*⁹

Global Economy

- *"the system of industry and trade around the world that has developed as the result of globalisation (= the way in which economies have been developing to operate together as one system)"*¹⁰
- *"a global economy deals with all the economic activities that are conducted within or between multiple nations."*¹¹

Economics

- *"the way in which trade, industry, or money is organized, or the study of this"*¹²

Global Economics

- *"the study of the way in which economies in all parts of the world operate together"*¹³

9 <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/economy.asp#:~:text=An%20economy%20encompasses%20all%20of%20the%20activities%20related,its%20own%20resources%2C%20culture%2C%20laws%2C%20history%2C%20and%20geography.>

10 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/global-economy>

11 <https://www.wallstreetmojo.com/global-economy/>

12 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/economics>

13 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/global-economics>

Characteristics of the globally dominant neo-liberal economic system

(For a summary overview of the origin, growth and effects of neo-liberalism see the 2022 report, pp 14-19 ([International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?](#)). For descriptions of neo-liberalism, policies and their consequences also see: Chang 2014, Eagleton-Pierce 2016, Dobre 2019, Harvey 2019, Tribe 2021, Monbiot & Hutchinson 2025.)

Economic neo-liberalism, also described as 'free-market' economics, is a form of capitalism that gives precedence to:

- Individual (personal and private business) initiative in organising economic activity, with limited state (government) involvement in its application,
- Limited state activities, primarily focused on ensuring a largely unfettered access by companies to markets within and between countries, a low tax regime and 'balanced' state income-expenditure,
- A profit model as the basis for economic activities, including through the privatisation of and/or public-private partnerships in public services (such as in the provision of water and electricity, health and social care, and public transport),
- A limited role (if any) for civil society in the organisation of economic affairs and in decisions about the distribution of gains from economic activity.

Attention to such principles is primarily intended to ensure individual freedom to undertake economic activities which, it is assumed by its adherents, will lead to economic growth in a region, country and the world.¹⁴

Since the late 1980s neo-liberalism has become the main driver of global economic activity. Although the extent to which the characteristics mentioned have been applied has varied from country to country, both in the Global North and in the Global South¹⁵, they have ushered in a rapid globalisation of economic processes and an integration of national economies in global value chains.

The drive to foster economic growth has been a key characteristic of and seemingly an "obsession [for] almost all political leaders in the neoliberal period" with "the scrutiny afforded to economic growth [... a ...] fixation for many government agencies, businesses and media commentators" (Eagleton-Pierce p 97).



14 Economic growth is typically measured as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For a description of what it entails see, for example [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Beginners:GDP_-_What_is_gross_domestic_product_\(GDP\)?](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Beginners:GDP_-_What_is_gross_domestic_product_(GDP)?)

15 See for example Dobre 2019 and Tribe 2021

Neo-liberal economic policies have contributed to (some) economic growth, initially leading to a sharp reduction in the number of people living in 'extreme poverty' - particularly, but not only, in China,¹⁶ but it has also had significant negative consequences for environmental sustainability.¹⁷

In the absence of policies that redistribute the financial gains from economic activities, economic growth has led to increasing inequalities in both incomes and in wealth.¹⁸ Such inequalities often hamper or nullify attempts to combat poverty and are accompanied by negative effects on other aspects of life, including on the environment (with the enclosure and commodification of what are termed 'natural

resources', exacerbating climate change and the ecological crises), on decision-making (through the growing influence of plutocracies), on gender (maintaining inequalities in e.g. health provision, labour market access, decision making) and on social welfare (through its lack of investment in social protection).¹⁹ Neo-liberalism not only deepens inequalities, but is also implicated in growing tolerance for those inequalities, and the erosion of social solidarity.^{20 21}

The recent introduction by the Trump administration of measures that focus on economic protectionism, e.g. through tariffs and other forms of import controls, undermine a key aspect of neo-liberalism, namely the 'unfettered access by companies of markets between countries'. It is too soon to say what the effect of this will be on the economies, economic organisation and livelihoods of people and countries across the globe. However, without a significant change of economic ideology, policy and practice, other characteristics of neo-liberalism and its relationships with wealth/poverty and equality/inequality are likely to continue to play a dominant part of global economics and in the lives of people.

For the International Development and Development Education sectors and their concerns with understanding, let alone addressing, poverty and inequality, explicit attention to the globally dominant economic system and the causes and effects of neo-liberalism is a 'must' if that concern is to have a lasting structural effect on collective understanding and action.

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- 16 The definition and measurement of 'poverty is a much disputed topic. The World Bank defines 'extreme poverty' as an income equivalent to less than \$2.15 per person per day. The intention of SDG 1 No Poverty is to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030: "providing access to basic services, food security, and improved living standards. It also aims to create economic opportunities, reduce inequality, and ensure social protection and access to public services" (<https://whatcanyoudo.earth/tellus-blog/sdg-1-no-poverty-meaning-explained/>). The number of people living in extreme poverty in 1990 was estimated at 2 billion (<https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/march-2024-global-poverty-update-from-the-world-bank--first-esti>). In 2024 the World Bank estimated that some 700 million people were living in extreme poverty, i.e. 8.5% of the world's population with the World Bank forecasting that this percentage will be reduced to 7.2% – this despite poverty rates in low-income countries having increased since the Covid-19 pandemic. Using another 'absolute poverty' indicator – also used by the World Bank - (of \$6.85/day) shows that some 44% of the world's population lives in poverty, a percentage that has barely changed since the 1990s when neo-liberalism became the mainstream global economic practice. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-prosperity-and-planet>
- 17 See for example Eagleton-Pierce pp. 61-65, and Monbiot and Hutchinson pp 125-126.
- 18 On inequality in Ireland see for example <https://www.sdgwatcheurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/7.1.a-factsheets-IE.pdf> (2019); and <https://www.tasc.ie/blog/2023/06/12/neoliberalism-and-neo-classical-economics-in-ireland>
- 19 For sources and examples, see section 6 (pp 26 – 33) in International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?. Also see World Inequality Database: <https://wid.world/news-article/10-facts-on-global-inequality-in-2024/> On wealth inequalities also see: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/takers-not-makers-621668/>
- 20 See for instance: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2352154620300905#:~:text=Neoliberalism%20is%20positively%20related%20to,predict%20acceptance%20of%20unequal%20power>
- 21 On the effect of economic inequalities on other aspects of society see, for example <https://equalitytrust.org.uk/evidence-base/the-spirit-level-at-15/>

2.

DE and global economics: importance and challenges

- *Why is attention to root causes and (economic) systems seen to be important?*
- *What are the challenges that practitioners face in giving attention to (global) economics and economic systems?*
- *Why is there a lack of explicit attention to global economics and economic systems?*

Importance

The 2022 research found that DE practitioners had considerable interest in, and recognised the importance of, global economics in the context of Development Education.²² Informants of the current research offered various (additional) reasons why economics is important in exploring, discussing and responding to issues (and not only those relating to poverty and inequality):

- “To better understand single issues [by relating them to] a bigger, connected story” (WS)
- Provide “more focus on [different] paradigms and worldviews [that] move from attention to individuality to a collective” (WS);
- “Making connections [between different] issues” ... “instead of seeing everything as separate” (WS);
- “Root cause analysis [of economic and other issues] makes you reconsider how to act” (WS);
- “[Economic] systems thinking helps you to address ‘why?’ [for example when] the poor are blamed for their own situation” (WS);
- Overcoming “power structures that [currently] prevent attention to root causes of economic issues” (WS);

22 See the 2022 report: section 4 (p 20) and survey results (pp 50 onwards)

- "... many root causes are to do with economic systems ..." (QR);
- "... [supporting] learners to make connections between different elements of global development which is an important part of systemic thinking" (QR);
- "Helping people understand how it [i.e. economics] directly impacts on the lives of them and other individuals ..." (QR);
- "... we want economic justice and this [i.e. global economic processes] will impact --- e.g. climate change, gender equality, child labour etc ..." (QR).

Challenges

Opinions about the challenges faced by practitioners in giving attention to systemic root cause analyses of poverty and inequality (and other issues of concern to DE and ID) have been grouped in a number of categories.

Conceptual challenges:

- Not being clear what is meant by terms such as 'root cause', 'global economics', 'systems approach'. "[T]here is an absence of a practical approach" and a need for "more clarity [of] the theory behind [such terms]" (WS, QR);
- "understanding economic concepts", "complexity [of economics] is overpowering", "[within DE economic] terminologies were used after the [2008] financial crisis – we have lost that" (WS);
- "... young people know things are bad but beyond climate cannot point to examples" (QR);
- "In some DE spaces [there is] an assumption that there is a consensus understanding of what the root causes are and that therefore we don't need to talk about what we already agree on" (WS); "Our own assumptions that those we work with are familiar with [what is meant by] root causes ..." (IV).

Challenges to do with practitioner skills, understanding and confidence:

- "The level of knowledge (about economics) amongst DE practitioners is inadequate." (IV)
- "... amongst teachers (and amongst organisations) there appears to be a lack of confidence in using a root cause approach" (IV);
- To do with global economics: "Aftermath of the [2008] economic crash in Ireland led to structural adjustment and austerity and a resistance to the making of local-global links -and for fewer concerns about what was happening [outside Ireland]" (WS);
- "As many of the root causes are to do with economic systems, non-business and economics teachers feel they don't have the expertise or confidence to explore them with students" (QR).

Challenges relating to support from international development and DE networks:

- “The silence of the national development networks in Ireland (Dóchas and IDEA) on neo-liberalism and its impact locally and globally” (QR). Some interviewees and FG related emails also commented on the potential role of IDEA (but also of the ID sector organisations) in development of an understanding of the global economic system;
- Related to that and following the focus group meeting, one respondent wrote that “INGOs have become part of the Economic Paradigm themselves and have become somewhat entrenched in our capitalist world [...] the status quo suits the sector and therefore the majority are reluctant to entertain exploring systems and structures. [In addition] If the sector is [operating in] the same way as the neo-liberal capitalist system that it should be challenging, this presents a challenge in itself.”(FG). Although not voiced in this manner, participants in one of the workshops made similar comments (WG).

Institutional challenges:

- The decline in (governmental) funding for community initiatives and community institutions “... makes it generally a major problem to engage members of the public in community education initiatives.” (IV, similar FG);
- “Schools prefer going with the ‘fun’ safer charity approach as this is what society expects of them too so it [i.e. a root cause analytical approach] is challenging for them” (QR);
- “... social media [encouragement] of fear and anxiety as a business model” (WG);
- “Book publishers and writers [...] of most material taught in schools are probably the biggest offender of a narrow, often problematic perspective with the absence of root causes and systems thinking [...] they appear] happy to present the same view of the Global South as [in] 1984!” (IV).

Practical challenges:

- The lack of time available to do a deep-dive into issues (particularly, but not only, when working with formal sector curricula):
 - “We have limited time with groups of teachers and often prioritise highlighting links between the curriculum and GCE [...] that can readily fit in to existing classroom practice” (QR), “time and people’s starting points are the two major barriers” (QR and similar opinions from IV and WS),
 - “Placing single issues within a broader, systemic, context and making that visible and understandable will require time. Even the time that may notionally be available [e.g. to DE practitioners] for personal reading/ learning is typically taken up with more pressing single issues” (WS, similar from FG);
- Availability of “time and people’s (economic literacy) starting points are the two main barriers” (FG), “we are building on a low [knowledge and skills] base with a low timeframe” (IV);
- “... the subject matter [is felt to be] too complicated to take forward” e.g. with communities and also “Those we really want to be involved are the poor – who lack time” (WS);
- “... keeping the complexity of root causes and global systems simple (but not simplistic)” is a challenge” (IV);
- “A lack of [education] resources [that explore economic root causes and systemic issues]” (WG).

Obstacles to giving explicit attention to global economics and economic systems

Findings from the research in 2022 identified various obstacles and causes for an absence of attention to the dominant neo-liberal system of global economics²³, including:

- That the contextualisation of single issues (e.g. by relating issues 'elsewhere' to similar issues at home) was seen as potentially too contentious, hence possibly affecting support, funding and fundraising for the relevant organisations;
- That ID and DE sector organisations have become too tied-up with the interests of (governmental) funders and that "(potentially) biting the hand that feeds is felt [to be] too dangerous";
- That there may be a lack of political will within organisations to act on stated intentions to address 'root causes';
- That the emphasis within neo-liberalism on individual action that pursues a defined and single objective undermines a more fundamental systemic approach to resolving problems;
- That the current approach in (development) education to e.g. the Sustainable Development Goals is focused on promoting awareness of issues that are "a mile wide but only an inch deep";
- That communicating complex issues, for instance to do with global economic systems, in a 'plain language' manner is challenging and that practitioners may lack the skills or the confidence to address this.

Interview, questionnaire respondents and workshop participants tended to agree with these reasons. They identified the following as particularly significant obstacles:

- The (lack of) familiarity of the audience with economic concepts, (IV, WS, QR);
- The skills needed by practitioners to apply a systemic root causes approach (QR, IV);
- The complexity of exploring root cause/economic systems (QR, WS, IV): "... the economics angle is often seen as 'too complicated' and is therefore left off the agenda when discussing environment, society or politics" (IV);
- The content of the formal sector/school curriculum (IV; questionnaire respondents saw this as less of a problem).

Most interviewees, however, were also of the opinion:

- That funders were usually not averse to funding ID or DE sector explorations of the globally dominant, neo-liberal system and its contribution to root causes of poverty and inequality.

Despite these challenges and obstacles, some practitioners and organisations do address neo-liberalism as part of their exploration of the root causes of poverty and inequality (IV, WS, QR). Among respondents who claim that their core work does not *explicitly* explore neo-liberalism, some nonetheless described efforts to highlight *alternative* socio-economic models. These include Doughnut Economics, Degrowth, and the Wellbeing Economy (QR), which were apparently introduced as part of a wider discussion about addressing the inequalities and environmental costs linked to the dominant economic system.

²³ See: International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm? Summary and p 42. Work by BOND on 'Decolonising economic development' (2024) identified similar and related observations to do with the international development sector in the UK.

3.

Exploring economics and systemic root causes: examples of practice

- *Which examples of attention to root causes, or systemic economic causes of poverty and inequality do informants provide?*

Examples

Interviewees provided various examples of how they had addressed or were attempting to give attention to root causes and systemic economic causes. Questionnaire respondents and workshop participants also mentioned approaches they had used or were using in their work. A selection of five examples given by interviewees are outlined below.

The Irish Debt Crisis; what happened? A community Education Handbook

This workshop template and resource was developed by Debt and Development Coalition (FJI) and the Spectacle of Defiance and Hope for use in community education contexts. Following the 2008 financial crisis leading to the collapse (and state takeover) of the Anglo Irish Bank, involvement of the IMF in re-organisation of Irish state finances, and the introduction of austerity measures, a course of seminar-workshops was implemented involving community educators and trade unionists.

The course involved a series of sessions bringing together economists, educators and community development workers as co-facilitators. The aim of the course was to develop an understanding of what was happening with the Irish economy in the run up to, and the aftermath of, the 2008 crash, the causes of the financial crisis, the effects of austerity on socio-economic life, and possible actions to address the negative fall-out of the crisis. The course was presented within a context of the global economics of neo-liberalism.

The course drew on participants' own experiences and understanding, introduced and developed understanding of key terms using participatory/active learning methodologies, using the 'Why? Why? Why?' approach, role-play activities, and other methodologies to develop an understanding of structural inequality that is an effect of (and underpins) neo-liberalism. An outcome of the course was a handbook published in 2015 (DDCI et al 2015).

Latin American Development Issues: A ten-week evening course

Beginning in the early 2000s a ten-week evening course for adults was delivered in Dublin and Cork, led by diverse facilitators and with inputs from a range of speakers. The programme is focused on the political economy of Latin America and in particular on the consequences of the 1980s and 90s 'shock doctrine' policies of neo-liberalism on social and labour movements and on indigenous people.

The course drew attention to the systemic nature of socio-economic developments in the continent and the, at the time, diverse social movements whose anti-free market demonstrations led to changes in governments in various Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela).

Portlaoise College: Exploring inequality

This programme of classroom activities was produced for use in secondary schools, focusing on global inequalities and their various historic, political and economic causes and effects, as well as how these factors interact to reinforce inequality. Students explored the dynamics of racism and extractivism, and considered the implications of choosing between growth-led and sustainable development models. They also examined alternative economic approaches, such as Doughnut Economics and the Wellbeing Economy. A PowerPoint presentation, produced for use in secondary education, on wealth and social inequalities and their causes is available to view on the WWGS website. (ref.: WWGS a.).

Global Village: Global Citizenship Education In Primary Schools

Global Village is a multi-agency GCE programme focussing on the primary school sector. It provides teaching resources, teacher training, and in-school support, as well as carrying out research. The programme emphasizes building a fairer and more sustainable world by fostering a deeper understanding of global issues among students. Development of awareness of global themes and how pupils' lives are interconnected with others forms a major focus of the programme. Attention to explorations of root causes is a more recent innovation, which is done "far more intuitively rather than explicit" (IV).

An example of this initial work on addressing root causes can be seen in a professional development course involving some 45-50 teachers from various primary schools, supported by a range of facilitators. This involved exercises exploring historic and current systemic causes of, and relationships between, different issues, using the 'Why? Why? Why?', and 'Problem tree' approaches to investigate issues such as global poverty, climate change and the occurrence of malaria. Participants are supported to relate development issues to GCE related knowledge, skills, values and actions, and to the content of the Rights of the Child Convention, and to the SDGs.

Developing teacher's and student's awareness of the interconnected nature of different issues is seen as a first step towards developing understanding of the underlying causes of specific issues. The use of stories about the experience of people is seen as particularly helpful as an age-appropriate entry point to building greater awareness, empathy, and ultimately a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. (ref.: GVS).

Organising For Power (O4P)

This 6-week online training was part of a global programme that in early 2025 engaged groups in over 70 countries and in 9 languages to teach organising skills to build movements for collective rights and solidarity campaigns in the workplace and community contexts. Placed within the context of the existence of global inequalities in wealth and the structures that maintain it, the course used a variety of activities to develop organisational, leadership and activist skills to create change in a trade union, justice campaigns, or community settings. The training was attended by an Irish contingent which included participants from a range of youth organisations, community development projects, and global justice solidarity campaigns.²⁴

Approaches used to explore the Systemic Nature of the Issues and their Causes

The approaches that were commonly used by those who did give attention to root causes and its relationship with the global economic system included a variety of purposes and methods:

- As an introduction to highlight one or more issues:
 - Starting with a story or a case study to illustrate an issue, using that as a means to investigate its causes: “The use of stories about the experiences of people [in being faced with and/or responding to a problem] is seen as particularly helpful as a first step”, and “... case studies can help people see the direct impact of systems – it makes addressing ‘big issues’ more approachable”;
 - Simulation games or role play to introduce an issue²⁵;
- As a means of identifying possible root causes of an issue:
 - ‘Why? Why? Why?’²⁶;
 - Fishbone Analysis²⁷;
 - Problem Tree Analysis²⁸;
- Exploring relationships between different phenomena and their causes:
 - Ranking games: a list of causes of inequality or poverty could form the basis to explore and discuss their relative importance and their interrelationships²⁹;
 - Development Compass Rose: to identify social, economic, environmental and political phenomena and/or causes and their interactions³⁰;

24 <https://www.rosalux.de/en/o4p>

25 Respondents mentioned a number of examples included at https://developmenteducation.ie/resources/format/?_sft_resource-format=game and the 5:50:500 idea: <https://developmenteducation.ie/five-fifty-five-hundred/five-fifty-five-hundred-deciphered/>

26 For a variety of ‘Why? Why? Why?’ templates see for example: <https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=5+Whys+Worksheet+Template&form=IARSLK&first=1&cw=1481&ch=828>

27 E.g. see <https://leanoutsidethebox.com/ishikawa-fishbone-diagrams/> and <https://www.bogiolo.com/blank-fishbone-diagram-template/>

28 See for example: <https://mspguide.org/2022/03/18/problem-tree/> and <https://odi.org/en/publications/planning-tools-problem-tree-analysis/>

29 The slide presentation available at WWGS a. (see References) includes a ranking game on such causes.

30 <https://www.tidegloballelearning.net/development-compass-rose>

- Exploring systems thinking:
 - The Iceberg Model: to relate a single event or phenomenon to other events or trends, to systems structures and processes, and to mental/ideological models³¹.

The emphasis in the examples given by respondents is primarily on approaches that explore the (root) causes of an issue. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the challenges of available time, conceptual understanding and access to practical skills (see Section 2), systems thinking approaches³² were mentioned very infrequently, if at all, with the Iceberg Model being the sole example provided.³³

Attention to alternative models of economics

Although no explicit attention was given to this in the research, when discussing their use of root cause analyses, a number of informants referred to social-economic models, alternative to neo-liberalism, which they highlighted in their work (but did not necessarily address in detail), including:

- Degrowth economics: see for example <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800923003646>
- Wellbeing economy: see for instance <https://weall.org/what-is-wellbeing-economy>
- Doughnut economics: see for example <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>

31 See for example: <https://donellameadows.org/systems-thinking-resources/>

32 i.e. seeing the relationships and patterns within the whole rather than the individual parts as the cause of a phenomenon or problem.

33 For details of systems thinking skills and approaches see for example Richmond n.d., Meadows 2008, Arnold & Wade 2017, and Hoffmann et al 2022. For its application in stimulating or creating change see a.o. Kahane 2012 and 2025, Stroh 2015.



4.

Opportunities?

- *What are the opportunities for DE practitioners and other educators to engage learners/the public in systemic (economic) explorations of the root causes of poverty and inequality?*

Opportunities in the external environment:

Multiple economic crises (costs of living, debt, income and wealth inequalities) provide ample opportunities for DE and ID practitioners to explore root causes, systems thinking and analyses of the neo-liberal economic system and its effects on poverty. The use of power to enforce particular ambitions also provides scope for (economic) analyses of root causes and the application of systems thinking, e.g. in relation to Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Irish and European economics, and American government policies (“MAGA: makes very clear a vision of superpower world shaping” (QR)).

Questionnaire respondents who answered the relevant question (see Appendix question 6, scale points 1 to 3) were of the opinion that very good or only slightly less good opportunities to introduce a root cause/global economic system approach existed in the following sectors – with open ended answers to questions, and responses during interviews and workshops providing additional information:

- Environmental Groups, for instance: “Some opportunities for a more systemic analysis and understanding may exist in e.g. the environmental-climate change movement and/or the Palestine support movement: developing a sense of the interconnectedness of issues.” (IV);
- Solidarity Movements;
- Trade Unions, for instance: “[In Trade Unions] discussions about the minimum wage [...] pension investment” (WG); Relevant debates are ongoing in e.g. trade unions and some political parties: DE practitioners could offer to facilitate or input into meetings and workshops with those organisations (QR);
- Secondary Education, for example: “Transition year in the senior cycle offers opportunities to explore a deep dive through courses on politics and society, and business” (IV) – however, one respondent remarked in this context that “DE tends to focus on TY [transition

year] too much which excludes students who opt out of TY for economic reasons - they can't afford it, these students tend to go directly into work from post-primary";

- Teacher Training Pre-service and In-service Training: according to multiple IV, QR and WS respondents teacher trainers and teacher training colleges are "very progressive in bringing in the root causes and systems thinking" with "Teacher courses giving an opportunity for teachers to try new approaches"; "In teacher training courses [e.g. in relation to the Leaving Certificate in Business Studies: see OIDE) 'design what a business looks like when it is environmentally sustainable' and looking at that as a means for developing a 'well-being economy'" (IV);
- Youth Work;
- Community Education, in particular in relation to the Cost of Living crisis.

Opinions about opportunities in primary education, higher education (excl. teacher training) and in communications with a 'general' public were more divided.

Some respondents mentioned too that the use of (social) media, podcasts, TV and radio offers (sometimes significant) opportunities to explore systemic, root causes of poverty and inequality, linking local issues to a global context (QR, IV).

Opportunities in the ID and DE sectors and in the DE approach used by practitioners:

- "When we focus on symptoms, people tend to focus on charity as a solution (... fundraise/donate). If they look at root causes they are more likely to consider bigger picture solutions" (WS);
- There are (potential) opportunities "In the capacity building of development educators and international development personnel through Dóchas and IDEA ..." (QR, WS);
- As part of introducing DE/GCE methodologies to formal and nonformal educators there is an opportunity to give *explicit* attention to the local-national-global *economic* systemic links and how these can be explored through DE/GCE approaches, and not to focus only on for example the environmental, political or social dimensions of DE/GCE (WS, IV). "... we don't have to be the experts, we just have to be open to exploring the issues in collaboration ..." (WS);
- "GCE [offers] a framework approach to bring connections/relationships between different issues and their shared causes to light" (IV);
- "The SDGs are based on Systems Thinking Principles. Further use of these is an important narrative to create a dominant narrative and understand the interconnectedness of society, world, issues etc." (WS);
- "Reaching out to other communities and groups"; "the expertise of DE practitioners provides an opportunity": in facilitating groups of people in enquiry into, discussions about, reflection on, and responses to issues and exploring local-global economic, systemic, relationships (WS, IV);
- Developing contacts and exploring joint work with organisations who have a similar (economic) theme interest as DE: providing DE's approach as a methodology for them to further explore their (and DE's) issue – potentially developing that into a partnership (WS).³⁴

34 Also see Wittig-Ferguson & Fricke 2021, pp 35-54



5. Conclusions

- ***What are the main findings from the research?***

The 2022 research report concluded, amongst other things, that both sectors “give little attention to a systemic exploration of root causes of poverty, inequality, injustice” and that amongst development education initiated resources and projects, there is “little indication that economic system thinking is high on the agenda.” ([International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?](#), p. 42) That report identified a number of reasons why this might be the case. The current report is based on further research:

- into those reasons, into examples of initiatives that do give attention to the systemic (economic) context and causes of poverty and inequality,
- into challenges and opportunities that DE practitioners face when attempting to address systemic economic root causes of poverty and inequality, and
- into approaches and methods that DE practitioners have found useful when they attempt to explore (economic) root causes and systemic reasons in their education work.

Research findings gathered in 2025 are largely based on the experiences and opinions of a limited sample of approximately 35 to 40 unique, self-selected respondents.³⁵ This means that the findings cannot be taken to be representative of the practice, experiences and opinions of DE and ID practitioners in Ireland. However, given that the respondents were self-selected and hence interested in and practically familiar with the issues of the research, it is reasonable to assume that more widespread practice in the DE sector gives less attention to investigations of systemic economic root causes of poverty and inequality, which would confirm the main findings of the 2022 research.

³⁵ Responses to the questionnaire were done anonymously; it is likely that some of these respondents were also involved in other approaches of the research (meeting, interview, workshop, email)

On the basis of the findings from the research the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Practitioners who informed the research use a variety of methods to explore root causes of the issues, such as poverty or inequality. Examples of how such root cause analyses are or have been used relate to courses and workshops of school-based and teacher education, adult and community education, trade union education and non-formal public education.
2. Use of explicit systems thinking skills and approaches is far less common than the use of root cause analytical methods, i.e. the systematic exploration of relationships between different causes and consequences and the feedback loops that may reinforce particular consequences of a system is only occasionally used and only, it seems, by few practitioners.
3. In exploring root causes or systemic causes of poverty or inequality, some practitioners give explicit attention to neo-liberalism as the globally (and nationally/locally) dominant economic paradigm – particularly in a non-formal education setting.
4. The findings regarding why the DE and ID sectors give little attention in their work to a systemic exploration of the economic root causes of poverty and inequality largely correspond to the findings of the 2022 research. The 2022 research identified various reasons for this, some institutional, some practical, and some related to individual or organisational values. The current research found similar reasons with respondents highlighting in particular:
 - a. The skills needed by practitioners to apply a systemic root causes approach,
 - b. The lack of, or limited familiarity with economic concepts amongst groups that those DE and ID practitioners work with,
 - c. The complexity of exploring root cause/economic systems – and hence its absence in explorations and discussions of root causes.
5. The current research provided additional details of the challenges DE practitioners face if they wish to introduce attention to systemic root causes and the neo-liberal economic system in their work. Such challenges can be categorised as relating to:
 - a. Understanding, amongst practitioners and their publics, of 'economics' and its terminologies,
 - b. Skills, understanding and confidence of DE and ID practitioners in introducing and exploring the systemic nature of global economics/neo-liberalism,
 - c. ID and DE networks giving no, or at best limited, professional development support to their members: support that enables these members to explicitly address the systemic, ideological nature of neo-liberalism and its consequences for poverty and inequality,
 - d. Broader institutional issues, amongst others relating to the reduction in government funding for adult and community education, and the predominance of (mainly commercially produced) education resources that do not give attention to economic systems when discussing 'development',
 - e. Practical issues such as the time available for extensive exploration of causes and consequences of an issue.

6. Considering the opportunities to introduce systemic economic explorations into the work of DE and ID practitioners, and into their work with others, the findings suggest the following potential steps forward:
 - a. Capacity building of practitioners (into the use of root cause analyses, systems thinking and into understanding of the global economic system),
 - b. Creating an awareness and understanding amongst DE practitioners that in their work of exploring issues through DE/GCE the economic perspective is as important as the environmental, social or political perspective,
 - c. That in work relating to the SDGs, the SDGs should be seen as a whole, i.e. based on a systems approach that can usefully illustrate neo-liberal assumptions and policies,
 - d. That opportunities to introduce an economic perspective exist in exploring partnerships with organisations and institutions involved in:
 - i. Solidarity movements,
 - ii. Environmental groups,
 - iii. Trade unions,
 - iv. Youth work,
 - v. Community education,
 - vi. Teacher training,
 - vii. Post-primary, Transition year, Leaving certificate education

6. Recommendations

- *What could usefully be done to follow-up and address the findings?*



1. Professional development of DE and ID practitioners

Not every ID and DE practitioner needs to be an economist.

However, the findings of this and the previous research, indicate that there is a need for professional development of DE and ID practitioners in facilitating the development of explicit economic considerations in their work – with the DE and ID networks (respectively IDEA and Dóchas) in a good position to enable this. Such professional development could usefully include attention to:

- familiarisation with critiques of the dominant economic ideology, policies, and their impact,
- development of enquiry skills of using methods of root cause and systems analyses and applying them to local, national and global issues of poverty and inequality,
- development of a mindset that gives explicit attention to the economic factors that affect or are affected by whichever social, environmental or political issue that is being investigated. Work on this could make a worthwhile contribution to ID and DE practice that explicitly addresses “ongoing concerns around neo-liberalism and how GCE is always implicated in the inequalities it aims to address” (Pashby et al 2021).



2. Qualitative Research into Current Practice on Root Causes and Systems

Organisations in Ireland who are signed up to the Code of Good Practice for Development Education all have the intention (and commitment) to give explicit attention to exploring the root causes and underlying systems of the global and development issues they are concerned with.

To improve the attention given to such explorations it would be useful for Code members (through IDEA) to commission an assignment that provides and disseminates a qualitative analysis of Code Member experiences and of the quality of their work in this regard, highlighting (anonymised if need be) good practice examples and recommendations to improve existing practice across the DE sector.



3. Action-Research and Peer Learning to Support and Improve Practice

Despite the multiple challenges facing ID and DE practitioners, there is clear interest in, and recognition of, the need to engage more deeply with the globally dominant economic system: its processes, causes, and consequences.

To build on this interest and begin addressing some of the challenges, one or more action research initiatives could be highly beneficial. These would support practitioners to strengthen their existing enquiry-based and reflective practices, deepening understanding of global economic structures and processes and their relevance at national and local levels.

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Appendix: the questionnaire

The questionnaire was organised as a Google Doc and information about it was circulated to IDEA newsletter recipients as items in the 6th and 20th February 2025 newsletters. The questionnaire was also circulated to Dóchas DE Working Group members during that month. Access to the questionnaire remained open until early April 2025.

Sixteen (anonymous) responses were received: a quantitative analysis of answers to questions is therefore not seen as appropriate. Qualitative information drawn from the questionnaire has been referred to in the main text of the report, but additionally some general observations can be made about the responses.

- The low response rate means that the results are not representative of the DE practitioners in Ireland
 - There seems to be an over representation of those engaged with higher education.
 - Slightly more than half of respondents use a root cause approach as 'a matter of course' in their work with a further fifth doing so 'frequently'.
 - About one-third use a global economic systems approach as 'a matter of course' with a further third doing so 'frequently'.
 - About two-thirds of the organisations in which respondents work, 'frequently' or 'as a matter of course' apply a root cause approach in their work, with less than half doing so in the case of a global economic systems approach
 - Answers to questions generally relate well to, confirm or expand on the results of the 2022 survey (see Appendix to the 2022 report: [International Development and Development Education: Challenging the Dominant Economic Paradigm?](#))
-

When opening the questionnaire the following introduction appeared:

Root causes, global economics and DE/GCE

This questionnaire tries to understand the challenges DE/GCE practitioners face in exploring global economic 'root causes' of poverty, inequality and injustice in their work with students/communities/other audiences. It also tries to find out about the methodologies and tools that DE/GCE practitioners find helpful or may find helpful in furthering a contextualised or global economic systems approach to 'single' issues.

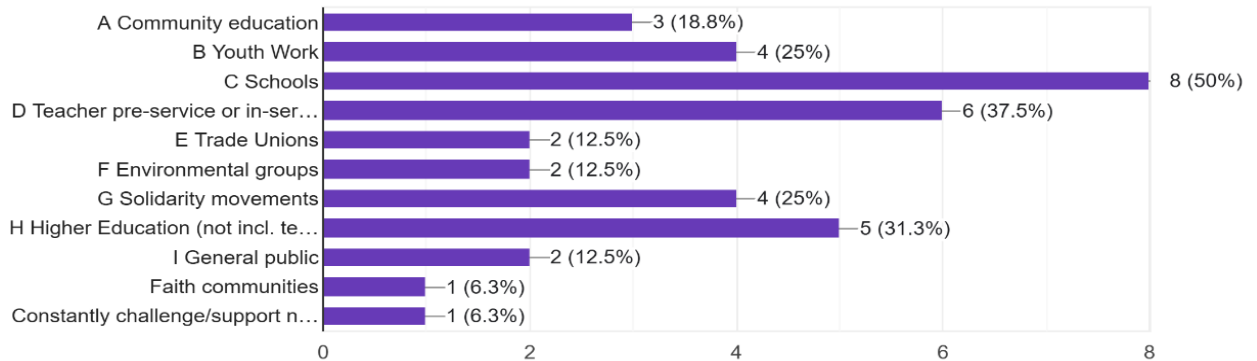
The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete (responses to open-ended questions may take longer). Individual answers will be treated confidentially.

The survey is carried out on behalf of Financial Justice Ireland and the Centre for Global Education. In case of problems with completing the questionnaire or in case of queries about the survey and its purpose please contact Harm-Jan Fricke: hjfricke@btinternet.com

Thank you for your participation.

1. About the sectors you have worked in or since September 2024. Which sectors have you worked in or with during the past half-year? (Select all that apply to you)

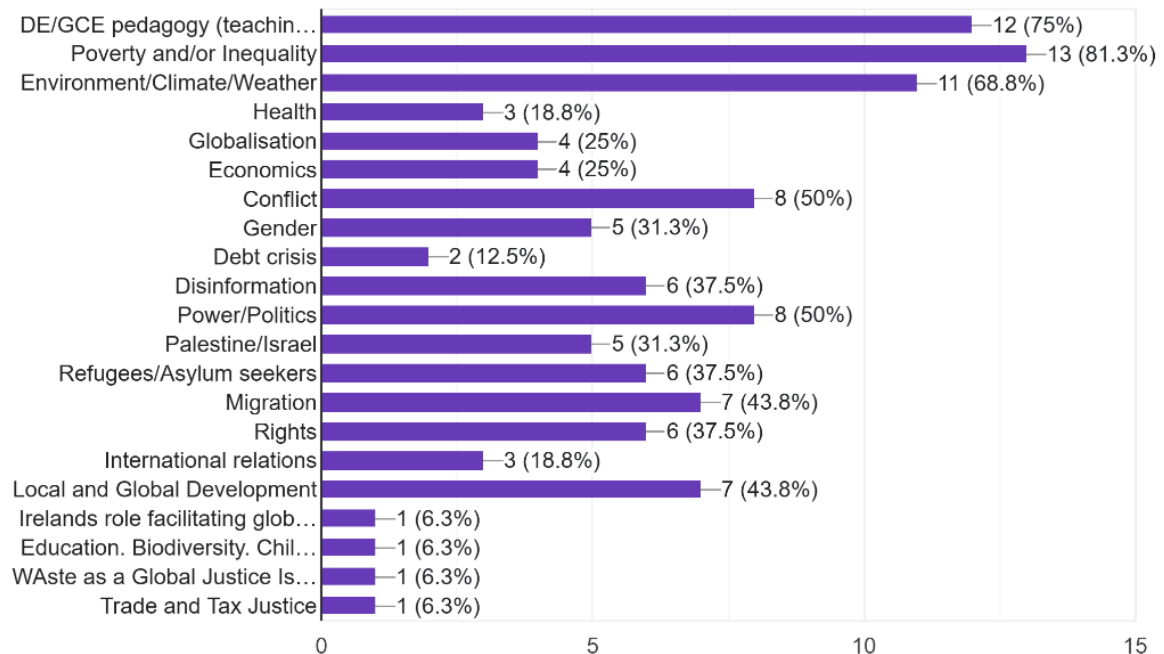
16 responses



D = Teacher pre-service or in-service training; H = Higher education (not incl. teacher training); 'Constantly challenge/support ...' refers to letter writing to the Irish Times

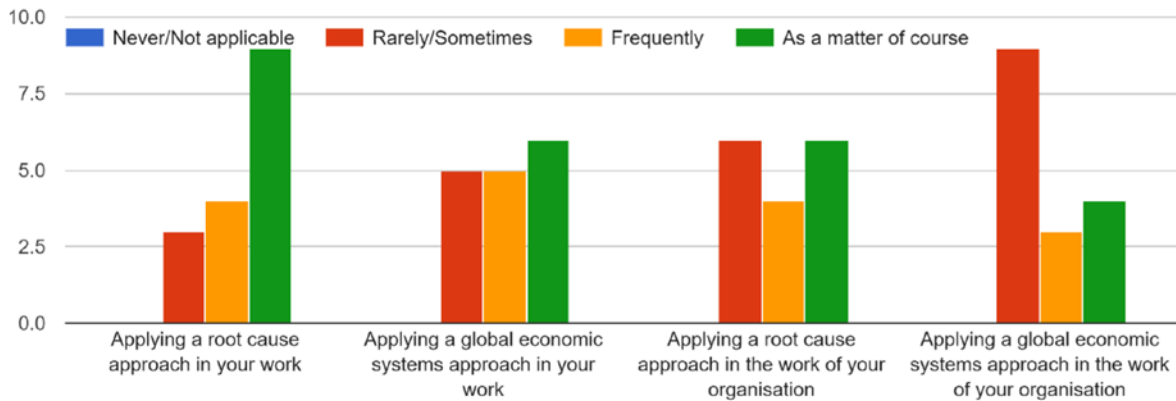
2. About the focus of your work. Since September 2024, which topic or topics did your work explicitly focus on? (Much of the work we do, even when it is focused on one or a few topics, covers a range of issues; this question asks about the main topic or topics your work was concerned with.) (Please select all that apply to your work since September 2024)

16 responses

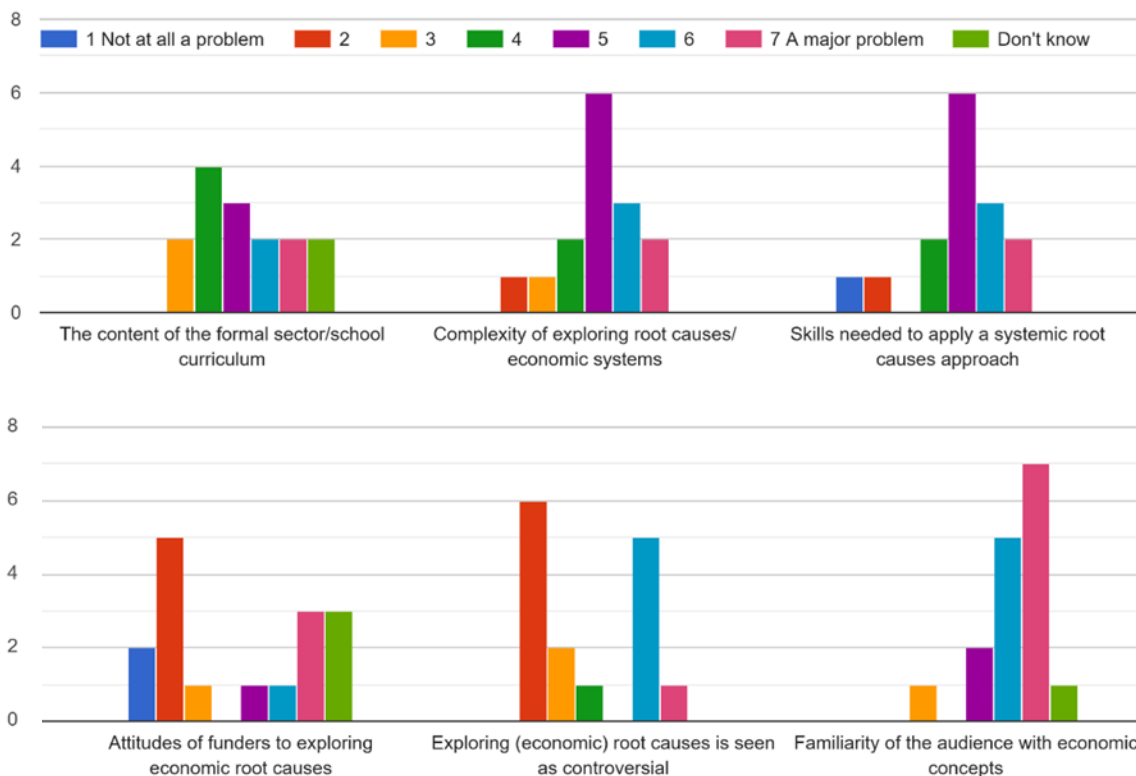


Explanation of the categories in question 2: 'Irelands role facilitating global greed'; 'Education, Biodiversity, Child labour'; 'Waste as a Global Justice issue'

3. About using a root cause or global economic perspective. To what extent do you or your organisation apply a systemic economic approach to exploring the root causes of poverty, inequality or injustice?



4. Barriers and Challenges you face. The following lists some of the challenges you may face when introducing a global economic approach in your work. In your experience how big a problem is each of the following? (Use a 7 point scale in which 1 = not at all a problem, and 7 = a major problem)



5. Other barriers and challenges. In your opinion, which other challenges do you (and/or your organisation) face when you want to introduce a root cause/global economic systems approach in your work?

10 responses

Our own assumptions that those we work with are familiar with root causes already and/or assumptions that we don't have time to get in to depth on root causes. We have limited time with groups of teachers and often prioritise highlighting links between the curriculum and GCE and resources and methodologies that can readily fit in to existing classroom practice.

The silence of the national development networks in Ireland (Dochas and IDEA) on neoliberalism and its impact locally and globally. Dochas and IDEA are entirely circumscribed by their refusal to act with agency and independence on behalf of their members. They act like they are appendages of Irish Aid and perhaps perceive of themselves that way. This prevents any kind of meaningful action on neoliberalism and a host of other pressing global issues that they are silent on.

The amount of time that we get to work with people is often short. We might be working with the public whose baseline knowledge is low so we are building on a low base with a low time frame. In our longer programmes (e.g. the debates) we choose topics which allow young people to explore and dig into the root causes of issues in a self directed way and provide support in terms of initial research links. Time and peoples starting point are the two major barriers. Also, if we go in too heavy at the start it can make this area of education seem exclusive to having prior knowledge so we tread carefully in this regard as we want to engage everyone.

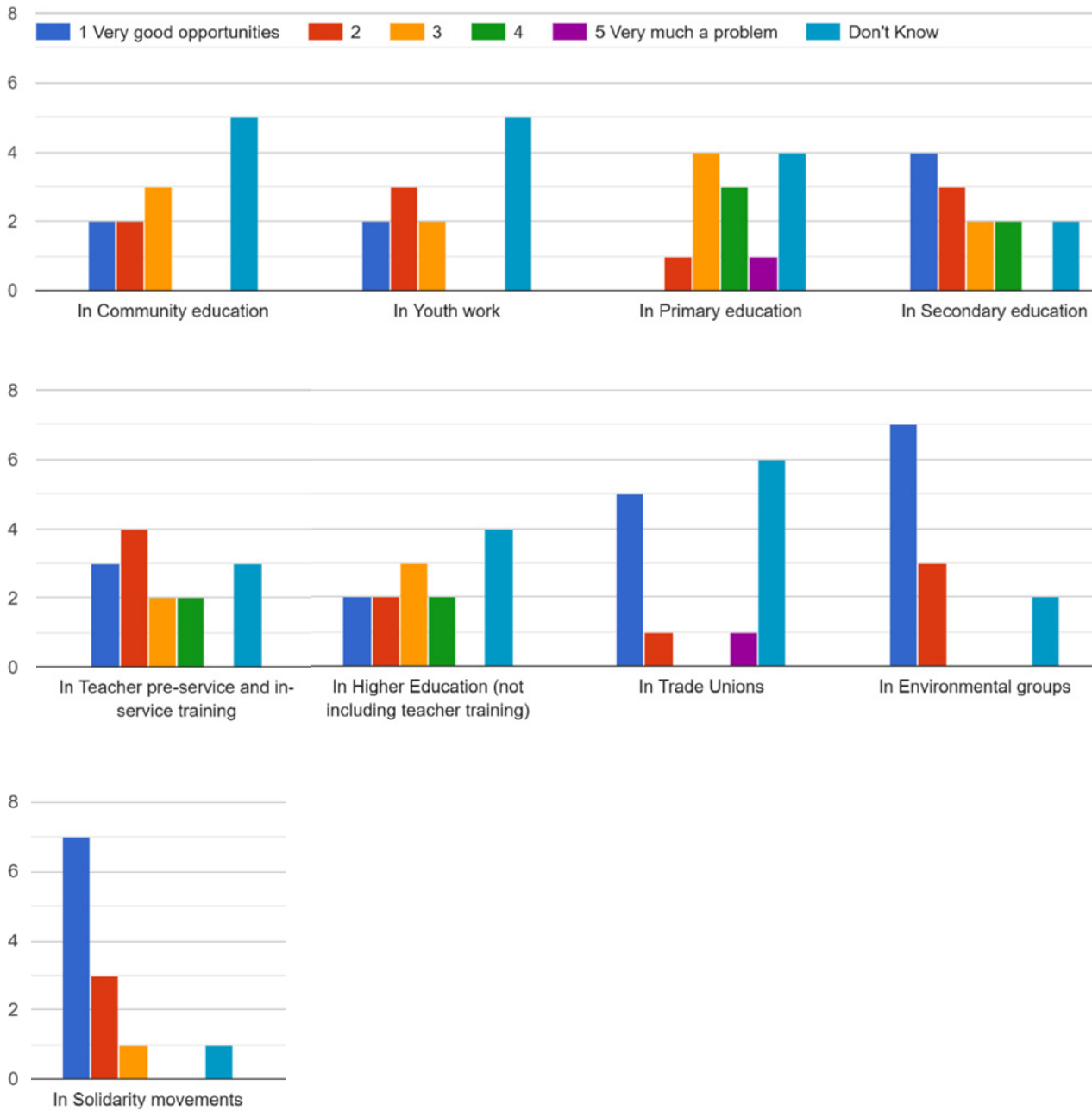
We work in the Global South with communities and disability movements. The predominance of a welfare model has historically excluded disabled people from being part of a development discourse - is a big problem we come across.

Trying to address root causes when students do not understand the true issues they are causing in the first place - there is a much larger level of unawareness to the world around them - young people know things are bad but beyond climate can not point to examples

As many of the root causes are to do with economic systems non business and economics teachers feel they don't have the expertise or confidence to explore them with their students. Also because it's not in the mainstream it takes a lot of convincing people of these root causes. Schools prefer going with the 'fun' safer charity based approach as this is what society expects of them too so it is challenging for them!

6. Opportunities. How would you rate the current opportunities to introduce a root cause/global economic systems approach in each of the following?

Use a 5 point scale in which 1 = Very good opportunities and 5 = very much a problem.



7. Other opportunities. Apart from the potential in particular sectors such as listed in the previous question, are there other opportunities that enable the use of a root cause/global economic systems approach?

4 responses

current global context - MAGA: makes very clear a vision of superpower world shaping.... much less hidden...

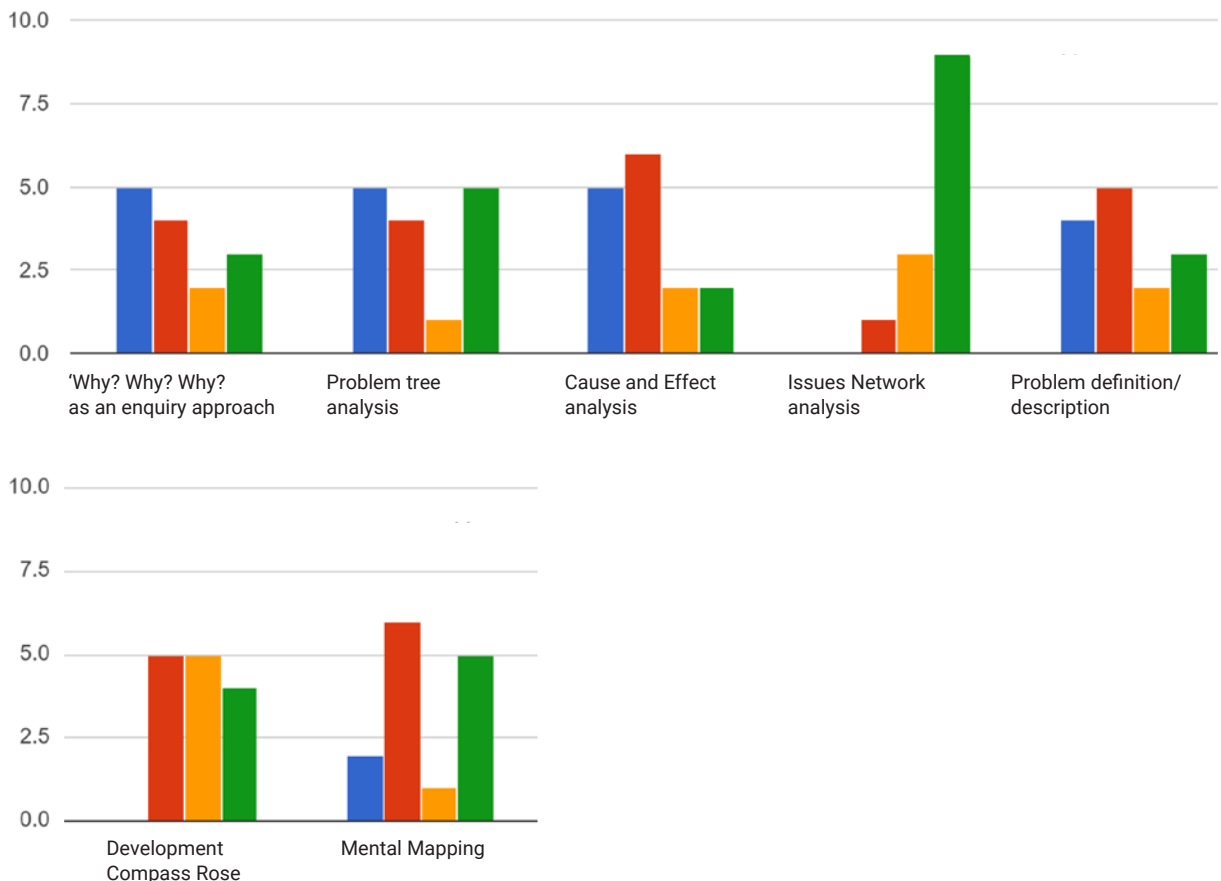
Constant letter writing challenging/supporting articles, emails to economists and reviewers raising the issues

In media, social media and TV, radio. In textbooks. In research.

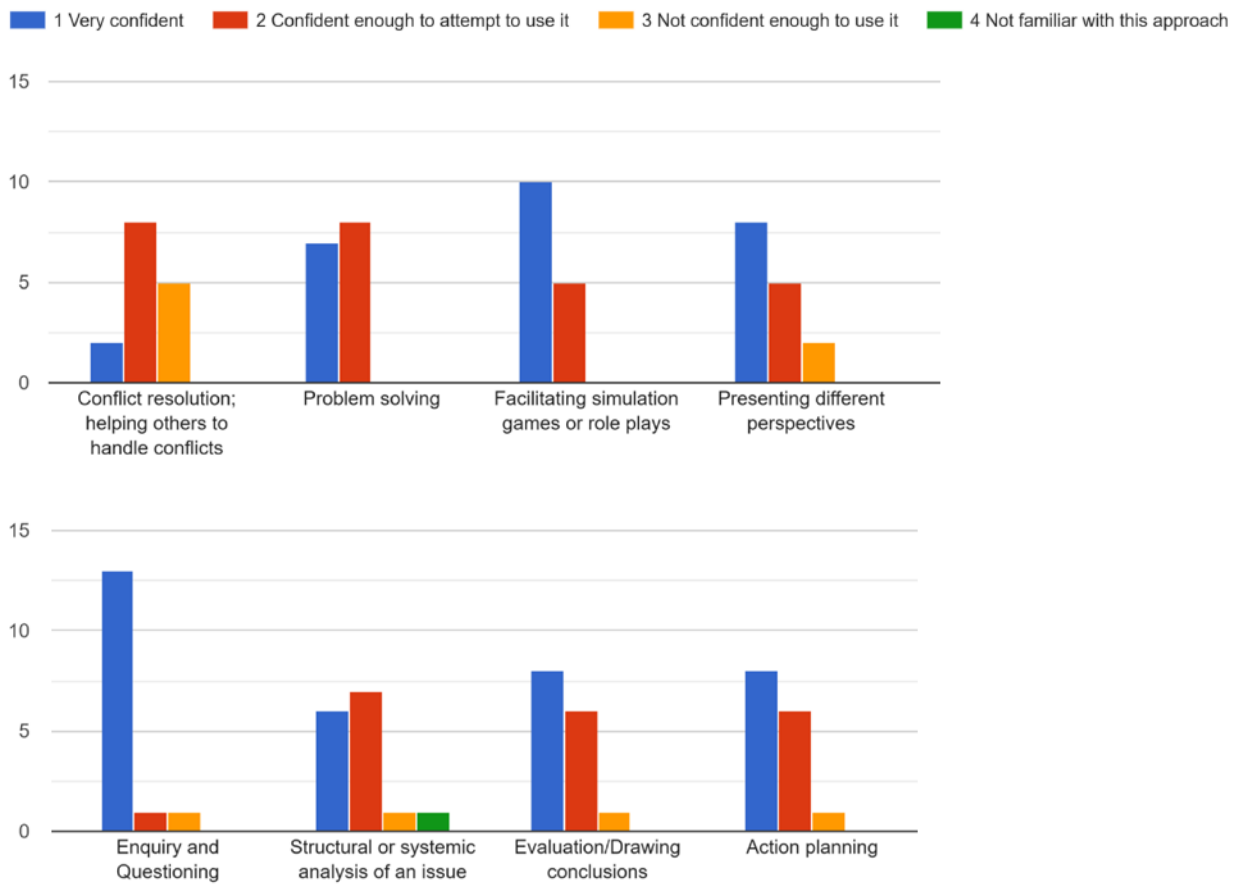
In the capacity-building of development educators and international development personnel through Dochas and IDEA (if they were to start engaging with it).

8. Using methodologies and tools. Have you used the following methodologies/tools in any of the courses, workshops or events you organised or facilitated?

■ 1 I have used it often
 ■ 2 I have used it once or a few times
■ 3 I am familiar with this approach but have not...
 ■ 4 I am not familiar with this approach



9. Using difference methods. How confident do you feel to facilitate the use of the following skills or approaches in a workshop, course or seminar?



10. Other methodologies and tools. In exploring root causes or systemic global economic contexts of an issue are there other methodologies or tools that you have found particularly helpful?

9 responses

5:50:500 biscuit game speaking seats to get perspectives on controversial issues photo analysis the water of systems change

My practical experience of supporting a project and the issues that have arisen

In general I would use a critical pedagogy, decolonial, anti-oppressive, feminist approaches. I emphasise the impact of colonialism a lot and explore historical and contemporary power imbalances in global economic systems. Also Intersectional analysis – Examining how economic injustices intersect with race, gender, and colonial histories. 2. Participatory & Experiential Learning: I use role playing e.g. a WTO negotiation simulation. Case studies e.g. Analysing how IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes have impacted economies in the Global South. Walking debates – Students physically move to different parts of the room based on their stance on an economic issue, encouraging reflection and discussion. Fieldwork and community engagement – I think engaging with local and global organisations that challenge economic injustices is good eg ran a partnership with a Mexican university but also with Trocaire on the theme of Business and Human Rights 3. Systems Thinking & Visual Tools: I have used power mapping in a basic way. 4. Creative arts 5. Data and media literacy - critical analysis 6. Fact checking and policy analysis 7. Looking at degrowth and post-capitalist strategies ... eg workshop on doughnut economics 8. Campaign development. Advocacy training. 9. Direct action eg students running BDS campaign

Mapping workshop activities and learning to different frameworks e.g. SDGs, human rights, GCE components - not necessarily leading to a direct exploration of root causes but it supports learners to make connections between different elements of global development which is an important part of systemic thinking.

It would be useful to introduce concepts such as degrowth and discuss socialised forms of wealth distribution.

<https://www.youth.ie/programmes/global-youth-work-and-development-education/gpg-supporting-tools/>

Carefully and ethically using case studies can help people see the direct impact of systems - it makes addressing 'big issue' more approachable

Facilitations by the the 'oppressed'. In our case, we create a space for the disability movement to take over the role of the facilitator to discuss inequality, provide agency and ensure authenticity.

Ranking Root causes, using the Rules video, WWGS Digging Deeper model of questions, simulation games: Beat the System, Trading Game, Biscuit game.

11. Helpful and problematic methodologies or tools. What have you found particularly helpful or problematic about any of the methodologies or tools mentioned in the previous questions?

7 responses

5:50:500 - dated figures whatever allows people connect with and experience something through the methodology (very simple exercises showing arbitrary allocation of resources that people can connect with emotionally) problem tree/water of systems change - allow people to appreciate levels

Confident to attempt these methodologies but not familiar with them.

anything that relates to real life campaigns or actions is good. problematic is trying to relate to individual disciplines when you teach across disciplines

Several of them are helpful because they provide a visual representation of complex systems e.g. problem tree analysis, why, why, why.

Nothing specific comes to mind.

Sometimes they are too academic and expect a high level of knowledge from participants - people are often busy and struggling with things in their own lives, and can struggle to access some which can make it seem exclusive to those that have time, resources or prior access to education

The Biscuit game should be redesigned for wealth levels rather than continents.

12. Suggestions? What would help you in developing your experiences of using a global economic root cause approach in your work on poverty, inequality or injustice?

7 responses

more clarity on the approach, the theory behind it alternative perspectives or views need for politics, power analysis as well as global economics

A course or workshop and contact list of teachers, community groups and interested parties in the financial services sector
ongoing training and dialogue group

Mapping out how different methodologies and tools could be used in teacher training for teachers' own knowledge and understanding, and how to link this learning to classroom practice.

Training opportunities. More discussion on the impact of neoliberalism and how to develop alternatives.

Helping people understand how it directly impacts on the lives of them and other individuals - the bigger picture can seem too big, so it needs to start where the person is at

Mainstreamed through every theme we cover in GCE so that suggested actions in particular are all towards the same target-we want economic justice and this will impact ----- E.g climate change, gender equality, child labour etc so that no matter what thematic area the educator it comes up!!

13. Finally... Do you have any other comments or suggestions about introducing a systems thinking/root cause approach in DE/GCE?

5 responses

Agree it is very important needs significant differentiation across levels of education no single solution in terms of analysis - so also need power analysis; maybe also imperialism and its politics

At the level of people who facilitate global greed, politicians, financial advisors and business people, it would need to be pitched in a way that was possibly advantageous to them, e.g. the need to turn towards Africa to develop non exploitative partnerships in trade and business.

We take for granted that people know what 'root cause' means. In fact it has come to my attention that people you think would understand the concept, don't! Before introducing a systems approach, the DE and ID sectors need to acknowledge that (a) neoliberalism is a problem and (b) it should be part of our development education work, advocacy work and peer education activities. We haven't started this conversation.

Continue to question with your group until they come to their own conclusions on it-use stories

