



Civic, Social and Political Education in the
New Junior Certificate Programme

NWCI/The Y Factor Submission January 2014



NWCI - The Y Factor

Founded in 1973, National Women's Council of Ireland is the leading national women's membership organisation in Ireland. We seek full equality between men and women. We represent and derive our mandate from our membership, which includes over 170 member groups from a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations. Our vision is of an Ireland and of a world where there is full equality between women and men.

Our mission is to lead and to be a catalyst for change in the achievement of equality between men and women.

In recent years, NWCI has noticed an increase in the number of younger feminist organisations, some of whom who have sought support from, or wish to work with, NWCI. Schools and universities have also approached NWCI to ask them to provide information to young women. In 2011 the organisation carried out some research with young women about their interests in women's equality, in feminism and what support young people needed. As a result, it sought funding to establish a project that specifically sets out to support young women and men in to become active on, and advocate for, women's equality.

Project Background

The Y Factor is the youth initiative of National Women's Council of Ireland. It has been working with a wide range of young people since 2012 to support young men and young women to become advocates for gender equality. The Y Factor's education and youth group based programme supports learning and awareness raising among young people about gender equality and inequality by developing and delivering discussion based/ education programmes in schools and youth projects with a view to having a suite of tools and resources that can be used by any and all schools and youth projects as part of the curriculum or youth programme.

The project promotes;

- discussion of gender equality issues
- empowerment of young people
- advocacy on equality and social justice

Programme Background

An initial National Women's Council of Ireland study about young women in Ireland identified educational settings as a key space for the respondents' development in interest in gender equality issues. Another common response on how to engage young people was to make advocacy on gender equality more accessible and appealing. As such The Y Factor has as a core objective to implement and support programmes in schools and youth projects which promote:

'women as being equal to men, while dismantling the myths and stereotypes imposed on children from the earliest age, of women as incapable leaders and second class citizens to their male counterparts, support persons rather than actors in their own right. These stereotypes harm young men as well as young women.' (NWCI funding proposal for The Y Factor Youth Project to Atlantic Philanthropies, 2011)

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to NCCA in regards to the draft specification of the CSPE short course within the new Junior Cycle framework.

The New Junior Cycle Curriculum

The Y Factor and NWCI welcome aspects of the new Junior Cycle framework, particularly in its flexibility in curriculum and assessment and cross curricular statements of learning. Concerns arise markedly, however, in the proposed removal of CSPE and SPHE as compulsory subjects. The removal of CSPE as a compulsory subject would be a dramatic move backward from the very positive introduction of 'civics' in 1966. We would hold the view that these two subjects are core to young people's 'active participatory citizenship', as per the stated aim of CSPE, and should be recognised in the curriculum as such. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) requires that children and young people's education should be directed to,

(1)(d) the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin...

In order for this commitment to be adhered to the State must all that every child in Ireland must have the opportunity to explore a Civic, Social and Political Education curriculum which allows them practical skills to engage with the democratic process.

The CSPE syllabus asserts that teachers and students are provided with

enough scope and flexibility to select and deal with issues such as gender equity, racism and xenophobia, interculturalism, the environment, development, work and unemployment, poverty and homelessness, minorities, and conflict situations such as that in Northern Ireland. (CSPE Syllabus, p3, para. 1.2.4)

We welcome this placing of schools, teachers and students within the change process for greater engagement with a democratic Ireland. We support the stated aim that young people will have opportunity to gain an understanding of the cross cutting structural inequalities that lead to gender inequality, poverty and social exclusion. We purport that such a move will require review and investment in further and ongoing teacher training and development. NWCI and The Y Factor have produced research and publications and would welcome being seen as a resource in the implementation of this. In conjunction with this, as a membership organisation we are in a position to offer a wide ranging support on, and engagement with curriculum development. It is suggested within this draft syllabus that teachers and students are encouraged to deal with issues of sensitivity and we would suggest that a process of peer and staff feedback on spaces for support needs are instituted within the school and reflected in a future NCCA review.

Recommendations

Rationale

NWCI and The Y Factor would strongly hold that equality, and pointedly gender equality, should be specifically named in the CSPE rationale statement. The rationale states that the course offers

an understanding of economic, social and political structures at local, national and global levels and gives young people the opportunity to imagine and create ways that they can make a difference to the lives of individuals and communities.

Inclusion gender equality in the statement would ensure that students are given to appreciate that equality with a gender focus is a concern under Ireland's National Women's Strategy and its Social Inclusion targets for 2020.

In this regard we feel that it is central to the young person's learning that they are afforded an awareness of equality and inequality in Irish society and how this relates to gender. This should also take the form of an individual and stand-alone Statement of Learning.

Statements of Learning

SOL 7 states that

Student-led action based on an understanding of human rights and social responsibilities is encouraged.

We would propose that it is included in the language herein that the intersectional relationship between human rights and the impact of gender is clearly recognised and that this is seen as a viable option for the two action pieces. Proposed actions should be developed under this statement of learning. NWCI and The Y Factor are doing extensive work around course content in this regard and would welcome invitation to engage on development on curriculum content.

SOL 9 states that

Students gain an understanding of the causes and consequences of a range of global challenges and identify how different issues, people and places are connected.

Within this statement there should be a clear commitment to a 'national' understanding within the overall learning. This should recognise and communicate the broad range of citizens and activists, and variety of perspectives, engaged in the shaping of the current form of democracy in Ireland with a strong dimension of the role many women played in this. There are many great resources concentrating on this and NWCI would welcome invitation to provide further advice and documentation.

Key Skills

Managing information and thinking

Students question their assumptions and the assumptions of others

The Y Factor supports the inclusion in the Key Skills section of a critical engagement and analysis aspect for the student. The Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that all children and young people should be given the space and necessary skills to express their views freely on all matters affecting them and that those views be taken seriously. (Ibid, Article 12) We welcome the assessment aspect of this course which focuses more on an active engagement with the course content and would suggest an emphasis on peer on peer education and feedback.

Working with others

Through taking action, students become more empowered and see how, by working with others, they can make a real difference.

Whilst greatly advocating for the enhancement of young people's empowerment to engage with the democratic process, and in view of the proposed reducing of the voting age, we would hope that within this aim young people are equipped with the practical and practicable skills to effectively 'work with others'. This should include an understanding of processes such as forums, quotas, committees and others which reflect collective decision making processes. The students should be encouraged to experience these and reflect on how they work in wider society. A focus should be given to the importance of representation and diversity in the decision making process as internationally recognised and reflected through European policy and research in areas such board composition and through recent public statements from the IMF.

Strand 1 - Rights and Responsibilities

Human dignity – the basis for human rights

NWCI and The Y Factor see the relationship between human dignity and gender as inseparable, particularly in regards to issues of major import to young women such as bodily autonomy and dignity. We would therefore, wish that gender is named as a specific module within this strand.

1.5 Creative actions such as the 'needs basket' are an encouraging addition to methodology and we would respectfully suggest addition of the concept of the living wage to this action.

Human rights instruments

We feel strongly that equality should be specifically named in this strand not only as a concept but also within 1.7's aimed understanding of international human rights instruments. The young people should be encouraged to explore Ireland's equality legislation and what a rights based approach might mean in relation to public policy. In this regard we welcome the introduction of the mock equality tribunal and hope that relevant equality instruments can be reflected on.

Strand 2 - Global Citizenship

Sustainability

Within this strand sub-theme young people should be supported to explore our use of natural resources from local and global perspectives. This is an issue which disproportionately affects women and therefore is a core gender concern. Young people should be encouraged to explore and understand social sustainability alongside ecological sustainability, exploring gender and development from the local to the global. Gender has been recognised as a cross cutting issue in Ireland's approach to international development as outlined in One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development 2013. NWCI has active links to a number of international development organisations and is currently looking at the development of a joint educational resource to mark Beijing+20, the twentieth anniversary of the major UN Conference on Women in

Beijing. This resource will look at the changing situation of women as global citizens over the last twenty years and towards the future. We would be very happy to link further with the NCCA around how such a resource might contribute to the development of curriculum content.

Strand 3 – Exploring Democracy

The meaning of democracy

3.4 states that students should be able to

research contemporary examples of a variety of systems of government, taking particular note of the ways in which the state interacts with its citizens.

In respect of the active citizenship aspect of this course we would ask that an addendum would be ‘..and citizens shape their state’

3.4 states that students should be able to

demonstrate belief in the democratic process

We would also see that students would be supported to explore issues of representation in democracy including gender balance in participation. They should explore the dynamic nature of democracy including the legislative processes and changes to the constitution.

The law and the citizen

3.7 states that students should be able to

discuss why laws are needed

This aim should also include a piece discovering how laws are made and enacted.

Conclusion

NWCI and The Y Factor see the CSPE draft specification as a positive document and welcome many aspects of the short course. We cannot emphasise enough, however, our inability to support the removal of the compulsory status of either CSPE or SPHE courses. We consider it a fundamental human right as stated in the Convention of the Rights of the Child that each student is enabled to explore their active participatory citizenship and democratic autonomy alongside and equal to their peers. We also reflect on our extensive work with young people and research undertaken with them which places educational settings at the centre of an individual’s understanding of the structural causes of gender equality and how this impacts on theirs’, and others’, lives. We hope that you can take our recommendations on board and we offer our support, engagement and sizable research and publication resources.

