

ACTIVATE

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The Newsletter of the Association of CSPE Teachers (ACT)

Supporting Citizenship Education in Ireland

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www.cspeteachers.ie



Marian Harkin, MEP, Guest Speaker for the 2013 Conference

Conference 2013

This year's Conference and AGM will take place in the Radisson Hotel Galway on Friday 11th and Saturday 12th October. Our guest speaker will be Marian Harkin MEP. The AGM of the Association will be on the Friday night, and on Saturday we will have an Open Forum on the place of CSPE in Junior Cycle reform. By that stage the new CSPE short course will be out for consultation. Workshop topics will include Water as a Resource (for the UN Year of Water Cooperation), Human Rights, the Seanad Referendum, and EU Year of the Citizen, along with our usual workshops on Action Projects, Inspection, and using IT in CSPE. We are still working to finalise the programme. Information updates will be on our website, and will be sent to schools in late August/early September.

CSPE Exam

This year's CSPE Exam will take place on Mon 10th June 2 pm to 3.30 pm. Our usual meeting to discuss the exam paper will be in Blackrock Education Centre, Dublin, from 3.45 pm on the same day. This annual review meeting is open to all members and we would urge as many as possible to attend.

Action Project Ideas

A few referendums are proposed for the Autumn but one of the more accessible for our students is the referendum aimed at abolishing Seanad Éireann. For a generic outline of using a referendum as an Action Project see our guide at <http://www.cspeteachers.ie/referendum.html> Specifically for this referendum helpful resources will include the Referendum Commission website <http://www.refcom.ie/en/> and the relevant sections of the Constitution – Articles 18 and 19.

See:

<http://www.constitution.org/co ns/ireland/constitution ireland-en.htm>

Also coming up are the European and local elections, likely for May 2014, which will be useful for action projects and general class work in area of democracy and EU study. For example candidates could be tracked leading up to the vote and results analyzed in September 2014.

Membership Matters

If you have received this edition of Activate you are a currently paid up member of the Association. Renewal notice for next year will sent with the Autumn Newsletter.

News

Funding available for Schools Social Justice Initiatives

Is your school involved in Peace & Justice or Development Education? Then help could be at hand! In early May Worldwide Global Schools (<http://worldwiseschools.ie/>) is making a call out to all schools to apply for funding for any social justice, development education or peace and justice initiatives that they are planning to run for the academic year 2013 - 2014. The funding is being provided by Irish Aid through the Worldwide Global Schools (WWGS) programme in order to support schools' social justice agenda.

What can be funded? You can apply to fund any aspect of your social justice and development education work such as: production of resources, training days and workshops, activities such as art projects, debates, awareness days, travel costs, teacher training, staff costs required to set up, manage and maintain a school network, activities related to Young Scientist Projects or Young Social Innovators projects where there is a development education element, to name but a few! Schools must be part of a network, which must comprise of a minimum of two schools. Networks can be geographically based, ethos-based, project-based. The permutations are endless! The activities or initiatives must have a global dimension. Initiatives that are only Ireland-based cannot be considered for funding. In order to be transparent and accountable, there are guidelines to be followed in terms of indicating how money is spent. Log onto <http://worldwiseschools.ie/> for more updates and the application form. Not sure if you're eligible for funding? Contact info@worldwiseschools.ie or ring the Worldwide Global Schools office number on 01 6852078.

Vote.ie

The website vote.ie is part of the voter education project run by the Vincentian Partnership, which has provided workshops at several of our annual conferences. The site features many useful resources for the study of democracy.

CSPE in Junior Cycle Reform

The place of CSPE in Junior Cycle reform is becoming clearer. CSPE can be a 'short course' of 100 hours duration (compared to the current 70 hours). The intention is that it will not be compulsory as it is at present, nor will it be assessed externally. Schools that do not have CSPE as a short course will have to show that they are meeting the relevant requirements of the 'statements of learning' in the NCCA *Framework for Junior Cycle* document of October 2012, especially statements 7 (active citizenship), 9 (social, economic and environmental), 10 (living sustainably), 23 (ideas from conception to realisation). The NCCA is in the advanced stages of producing a draft short course in CSPE, which will be available for consultation in September/October. It is proposed that the course will be built around three strands – Rights and Responsibilities, Global Citizenship and Exploring Democracy. There will be an emphasis on collaborative and active learning, the development of skills in citizenship, research, reflection and taking action. A range of assessment approaches is under consideration, including a reflective journal and a record of action taken that can take various forms. All this will be discussed at a special open forum at our Annual Conference on Sat Oct 12th in the Radisson Blu Hotel, Galway. We will be urging all members to engage with the consultation, which, it seems likely, will be online at ncca.ie

For the Oct 2012 version of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (earlier versions are still online) go to (http://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/JC-Framework_FINAL_02oct12.pdf)

Letter to the Newspapers and beyond ...

This is our letter to the newspapers regarding Junior Cycle reform as it applies to CSPE.

Dear Sir,

We are writing to you as the committee of the Association of CSPE Teachers in Ireland to register our dismay at the prospect that CSPE will be removed as a compulsory State examinable subject in the new Junior Cycle curriculum.

At present every Junior Certificate student in the state studies this subject which has at its core an exploration of the meaning and application of active citizenship in society grounded in an understanding of international human rights.

The removal of the compulsory status of this subject is a matter of grave concern to us and while we are aware that the NCCA is formulating a similar, but optional short course, to replace CSPE and that the completion of the proposed new Junior Certificate requires cognisance of its associated statements of learning which demand for example that students “value what it means to be an active citizen with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts”, we believe that the current provision of citizenship education is superior.

At present every child in the state is afforded the same opportunity to engage in a syllabus based on the following 7 concepts, human dignity, human rights and responsibility, stewardship, understanding of development, democracy, law, and interdependence. It includes an externally assessed state exam (40%) as well as the completion of an action project (60%) which has been innovative, beneficial, popular with students as well as internationally regarded.

The possibility will exist under the new proposals for citizenship and human rights education to be delivered in a across curricular and piece-meal fashion. Available research from the U.K has shown this to be less than satisfactory.

Further to this, as pointed out in by the Irish Commission for Human Rights in a report in 2012, “the re-designation of CSPE as a non-compulsory subject means that there would be no mandatory citizenship education available to **all** students for the first time since 1966”.

It should also be pointed out that Ireland has an obligation to provide human rights education as a result of various United Nations Conventions to which the Irish State is a party.

For the above stated reasons we feel that the Junior Certificate proposals are a retrograde step, which will remove equality of opportunity in regard to human rights and citizenship education in the Irish Education system. We therefore call on the government to reverse this decision.

Yours faithfully,

Jeanne Barrett (Chairperson, Association of Civil, Social and Political Education Teachers in Ireland), Philip Irwin (Vice Chair), Catherine Byrne (Secretary), Patricia Dennehy (Vice Secretary) Finbar Loftus (Treasurer), Brendan O'Regan (Public Relations Officer) Bernadine O'Sullivan (Press Officer)

***Activate* is published once per school term by the Association of CSPE Teachers—supporting citizenship education in Ireland. Articles and letters for publication should be sent to the editor, Brendan O'Regan, Arklow CBS, Co. Wicklow, or emailed to act@esatclear.ie**

Opinion: The Future of CSPE by Bill Doherty, Mount Sion C.B.S.

Citizen Education (C.E.) is again at a crucial juncture within the Irish education system and within Irish society. The future of Civic Social and Political Education (C.S.P.E.) at Junior Certificate level is under review and the outcome will clearly indicate the value Irish society puts on Education for citizenship.

If in theory C.E. is so valued, why has it failed in practice to move from the periphery of our education system? Political, social, economic, business, sporting and religious leaders have all accepted that education for citizenship gives pupils the knowledge, skills and understanding to play an effective role in the society at local, national and international levels. It helps them to become informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and rights. It promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, making them more self-confident and responsible both in and beyond the classroom. It encourages pupils to play a helpful part in the life of their schools, neighbourhoods, communities and the wide world. It also teaches them about our economy and democratic institutions and values; encourages respect for different national, religious and ethnic identities, and develops pupils' ability to reflect on issues and take part in discussions.

Provision for social and political education is consistent with the aims associated with education in general. The government white paper on education states that one of the aims of education is to "create tolerant, caring and politically aware members of society". Each Leaving Certificate syllabus, on its inside cover states that a particular emphasis will be placed on the preparation of students for their role as "participative, enterprising citizens". But do we actually provide this type of education?

And what will become of the most explicit form of C.E. when the Junior Cycle review is complete and C.S.P.E. is pushed even further to the periphery? C.E. through the subject C.S.P.E. is explicit because it is compulsory, it has a slot on the timetable, it has a syllabus and is a state exam with 60% of the marks awarded for taking action.

If the theory and rhetoric were translated into action, subjects "tolerated" on the periphery of education would move towards the centre. Take for example three issues of concern for Irish society today (particularly in relation to young people); obesity, alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour. If schools are to play a role in addressing these issues, a greater emphasis on P.E. (obesity), S.P.H.E (alcohol abuse) and C.S.P.E. (anti-social behaviour) is to be expected. Ironically these three subjects are at the periphery of education.

What do we need to teach young people if they are to learn the responsibilities that come with citizenship? Where on the curriculum do we teach justice, equality, respect, human rights, democracy, law, the environment, development and where do we tackle the issues of racism, anti-social behaviour, voter apathy, homelessness, animal rights...? The greatest lie perpetrated when I was a young teacher is that these issues can be "caught and not taught". Hoping that something as precious as democracy, or as crucial as the environment may be "caught" is a fallacy. These issues must be taught and schools must teach them. And it is well recognised that the most effective teaching and learning takes place when the issue is examined (I am convinced the most enlightened "Civics" programme of the 1960's failed because it was not examined).

C.S.P.E. can teach all these issues effectively. The subject is anchored by seven concepts that teach our young people about the responsibilities for citizenship. Examine for one moment two of the concepts; democracy and law. These two issues have no place in the formal curriculum outside C.S.P.E., and yet they form the foundations for a civilised society. We take these issues for granted at our peril. Think back to the London riots of 2011 and realise how fragile our foundations can be. Not only must we teach citizenship education but for it to be effective **it must be examined**.

C.S.P.E. has been examined at Junior Cert. Level since 1999. I have seen over half a million projects go through the exam system and I know the value of C.S.P.E. Every N.G.O., voluntary organisation, T.D., environmentalist, human rights activists, local councillor, garda, animal rights groups,.....have queued up to visit our schools during the C.S.P.E. programme. Tens of thousands of young citizens through the C.S.P.E. programme have visited our courts, our jails, our Dáil, our local councils, our recycling centres, our animal shelters, our old folks homes.....and have explicitly have been taught the values of citizenship.

All of these arguments for citizenship education must place C.S.P.E. at the centre of the Junior Cycle review. While a review of how we currently access C.S.P.E. is timely, an effective form of assessment is fundamental to the teaching and learning process.

(*fuller version of this article will be on our website www.cspeteachers.ie/articles.html).

