



## **NGO and academic partnership: Writing for Policy & Practice**

*Policy & Practice*  
A Development Education Review

**Seminar report**

**Saturday, 17 October 2009  
Irish Aid Conference  
University of Limerick, Ireland**

This event has been funded by:



## Contents

	Page
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Aims of Seminar</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Presentation</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Facilitator information</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Lawrence Cleary and the Shannon Consortium Regional Writing Centre for facilitating this workshop, and to Jenna Coriddi and Stephen McCloskey for chairing the session. The Centre also thanks Irish Aid for financially supporting the seminar as part of the Centre's *Building Capacity in the Development Education Sector in Ireland* project.

## **Introduction**

This seminar was organised by the Centre for Global Education and facilitated by Lawrence Cleary, Jenna Coriddi and Stephen McCloskey as part of the Centre's larger 'Building Capacity in the Development Education Sector in Ireland' project, supported by Irish Aid. The other key elements of the project are the publication of a development education journal, *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review* and an annual development education conference for practitioners and academics.

Policy and Practice has recently gone online, and is now exclusively available in an open-access website: [www.developmenteducationreview.com](http://www.developmenteducationreview.com). To launch the new website and introduce users to the features that this new access will allow, the 'NGO and Academic Partnership: Writing for Policy and Practice' workshop was organised. The workshop was developed to guide those of us who are more heavily involved in the daily practice and delivery of development education than long-term qualitative and quantitative research, and/or those who have limited experience or confidence in writing and publishing pieces of research or work. Sharing and learning about practice-based research and informal DE delivery is as important as formal sector-based research, although often informal practitioners do not have as much experience or confidence in writing and publishing articles, or they lack the time to do so.

Practice-based articles should explain, share and critically review various programmes and projects; they should review the challenges faced, including structural design, misunderstanding of target audiences' previous knowledge of the, difficulties in securing funding, etc.; and most importantly should share this knowledge and these experiences with our colleagues in a way that helps to advance the sector as a whole and better our capacity to deliver effective development education.

With these aims in mind, we invited Lawrence Cleary, Research Officer for the Shannon Consortium Regional Writing Centre based at the University of Limerick, to help participants develop their writing skills and learn how to create an article from a neutral and critical standpoint. The seminar was an hour-long participatory workshop forming part of the 2009 Irish Aid conference at the University of Limerick. It attracted participants from a variety of formal and non-formal settings, including the University of

Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, the University of Cambridge, Trocaire, Kyambogo University in Uganda, Bishop Willis PTC in Uganda, Africa Centre, Bothar, AONTAS, National University of Ireland at Maynooth, University College Dublin, Dublin City University, Seattle University, Latin America Solidarity Centre, the Society For Fair Trade in the Czech Republic, DICE and Irish Aid. The report will also be included on the website's Contributing page providing writing resources for potential contributors.

## **Aims of Seminar**

Participants will learn how to:

1. Critically describe their work in an article in a publication such as an academic journal;
2. Organise information in a way that is appropriate and understandable for a formal publication;
3. Become aware of their writing processes and strategies;
4. Become aware of the various aspects of the context into which they write;
5. Assess their writing strategies in terms of their appropriateness to the context in which they're publishing;
6. Learn more about *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, the editing and publication process, and how to contribute an article.

## **Presentation**

Lawrence Cleary discussed a number of writing principles that are important to keep in mind when preparing an article for publication.

Context: It is important to look at the initial context that the author is 'writing into', meaning what has been produced in the sector to ensure that the contribution being made is unique and not repetitive. It mustn't be assumed that simply because the article touches upon the subject matter (in this case development education) that it will be interesting or relevant to readers. One must also look to see what level of writing is featured in the publication: highly academic, moderately academic or conversational/informal.

Suggestions to establish context included:

1. Contact the editors: they can tell you if the article would be interesting or relevant to their readers;
2. Read any descriptions of the publication that are available;
3. Identify your target audience versus the target audiences of the publication;

4. Look at work previously published in the journal/publication as models, including critical analysis of authors, and how references are cited.

Describe the work:

1. The first point is to identify the organisational principle, or the thesis statement.
2. What question will the article try to answer; what will it solve or claim; what will it defend or hypothesise; what will it affirm or negate?
3. Attempt to state the thesis in the form of a question or claim.
4. Limit the thesis to one sentence!! The author must be judicious about what to include, taking into consideration what can be done within the length or time allowed, and must make assumptions about the reader. Sometimes in the process of writing an article most questions arise, and if this happens it is important to somewhere along the line identify the central question or thesis, and then review the article to ensure that the arguments are all still directed at answering or defending the thesis statement.

Critical descriptions:

1. What makes a critical description critical?
2. Use definitions: define the terms for the context of the article, look at others' definitions and analyse the advantages and disadvantages of using various definitions for the purpose of this particular work;
3. Provide background information to ensure that readers are aware of the historical development of the topic or issues;
4. Pay close attention to the organisation of the text, ensuring that it progresses logically and that each section is relevant to the thesis and to that point in the argument;
5. Describe and discuss: given what the author provides in regards to facts, quotes, definitions, and background information, what conclusions can be drawn?
6. It is important to analyse the given information neutrally and critically; critical analysis is beneficial for the author as well as for the readers.

Lawrence Cleary's powerpoint presentation can be viewed below:

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Writing for the Centre for Global  
Education's *Policy and Practice: A  
Development Education Review*

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Lawrence Cleary, Research Officer,  
Shannon Consortium Regional Writing  
Centre, University of Limerick

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Describe your work

- Identify the organizational principle: your thesis.
  - What question will it try to answer/problem, solve/claim, defend/hypothesis, affirm or negate?
  - Attempt to state it in the form of a question or claim.
  - One sentence.
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## Critical Description on your Work

- What makes a critical description “critical”?
    - Defining terms delimits the study
    - Defines and explains terms in terms specific to a context
  - Context
  - Describe ***and*** Discuss
    - When describing your work, discuss how it fits into the prevailing understanding of this kind of work.
    - Describe similarities and differences in understandings and discuss the significance of that in terms of your own work.
    - Justify understandings with respect to those understandings held by others.
    - Cite and reference sources.
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## Things Critical Texts Do

- **Context** (discourse/communities of practice)
  - **Relevance** (who cares and why?)
  - **Analysis** (logical breakdown, categorisation/classification)
  - **Evidence** (truth values)
  - **Argument** (balance)
  - **Discussion** (academic ethos/integrity)
  - **Conclusions/ Recommendations** (grounded in evidence)
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## Outline

- Outline your sections
  - Work from headings: Headings should allow readers to predict what is coming
  - Number 1, 2, 3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.2.1, etc., if helpful
    - Focus on first-level headings
    - Five minutes
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## Order

- Claims, Questions, Hypotheses
  - Defences, Answers, Affirmations/Negations
  - Conventions
    - What do we expect to be included?
    - In what order?
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## Organization and Function

- Introductions that state the problem and its context(s), agree to definitions and conceptualisations in order to delimit the study.
  - Methods for approaching the problem and both practical and theoretical justifications for choices
  - Findings and interpretations of findings and justifications for interpretations
  - Conclusions to be drawn, justified by reference to the evidence provided by the findings
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## Intertextuality

- Writing and research are social activities.
  - Joining conversations and communities of practice.
  - Knowing whether you are breaking new ground or confirming the findings of others.
  - Your audience and the forums where you gather are part of your context.
  - Don't speak until you have listened.
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## Balance and Academic Integrity

- Good scholarship exposes the extent to which something is true and honestly assesses the value of that truth in a given context
  - Good scholarship reviews all sides of the argument that are relevant, and honestly evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of both positions.
  - Good scholarship relies on the truth of the evidence gathered through valid methods of inquiry.
  - Good scholars display a lack of emotional investment in the outcome of their research, but treat the outcome fairly and surrender to the truth revealed in the evidence or arrived at through logical reasoning.
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## Writing Centre

- Good writers' practices:
    - Attention to process
    - Careful analysis of context for writing
    - Monitoring and assessment of writing strategy effectiveness
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The workshop was well attended, attracting almost 30 participants. Overall, it seemed that many people were interested in contributing an article to a future issue of Policy and Practice and information was distributed on the processes of submitting and publishing an article. Towards the end of the workshop the discussion veered toward the need for collaboration between academics and practitioners especially in the area of publishing.

## **FACILITATOR INFORMATION**

### **SPEAKER**

**Lawrence Cleary** is the Research Officer for the Shannon Consortium Regional Writing Centre, which is currently in its second year and is the first academic writing centre in Ireland. The Centre focuses on systematic writing training, and is based at the University of Limerick in Limerick, Ireland.

### **CHAIRS**

**Jenna Coriddi** is the Executive Editor of Policy and Practice. She has worked at the Centre for Global Education in Belfast, N. Ireland as the Training and Research Officer since 2007. She sits on the National Council for the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) and the Editorial Group of INDEX, Comhlamh's development education newsletter. She has a Masters' in Political Science from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Bachelors' in International Studies from the University of Richmond.

**Stephen McCloskey** is the Managing Editor of Policy and Practice and Director of the Centre for Global Education in Belfast, N. Ireland. He has extensive experience of managing and delivering global education projects, strategic planning, advocacy and monitoring / evaluation. His publications include *The East Timor Question: The Struggle for Independence* from Indonesia (IB Tauris, 2000, with Paul Hainsworth) and *From the Local to the Global: Key Issues in Development Studies* (Pluto Press, London and New York, 2003 with Gerard McCann; 2nd edition published in August 2009).