

## DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT: THE EVOLUTION OF A FILM-BASED LEARNING RESOURCE

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*Disability and Development* is a film-centred educational learning resource linked to the post-primary school curriculum in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The project concept came about through discussions involving Development Media Workshop, a not-for-profit organisation focused on social development and environment issues based in Enniskillen, and five members of Dóchas (The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations). These organisations were Livability (the Disability and International Development Working Group), Children in Crossfire, War on Want (Northern Ireland), Christian Blind Mission, and Disability Aid Abroad. All of these organisations shared the view that disability issues were largely neglected in development education on the island of Ireland and agreed to become partners in a new initiative to address this gap in practice.

The partners decided to work together to produce a collective learning resource, rather than develop their own individual organisational resources. They chose to follow the format and structure set by a curriculum-linked, film-centred learning resource called *Experiences of Childhood* (2007). To produce the resource, the consortia successfully secured three years' funding support from the Department for International Development (DfID)'s Development Education Mini Grants Scheme for Northern Ireland starting in April 2010. The partners established three aims for the project: first, to develop the capacity of post-primary Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers in Northern Ireland to engage their students in discussion on disability and development issues; second, to create opportunities and provide support for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils in Northern Ireland to explore disability and development issues, and make informed responses; and third, to build the capacity of the partner organisations to deliver effective development awareness activities by working as a team and enabling partners with development awareness experience to share good practice with less experienced partners. This article describes the evolution of the project from

concept to implementation, and concludes with lessons learned that might be useful for others working in similar fields.

### **The learning resource concept and structure**

To develop the resource the project partners focused on the learning needs of young people and asked the question: ‘What do we want pupils to do when using this learning resource?’ Through drafting and refinement it was agreed that the learning resource should facilitate young people to: explore different forms of disability; consider why disability and poverty are often interconnected; discuss the concept of development, including understanding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); reflect on whether disability is a barrier to participation in development, and how this may affect the attainment of the MDGs; discuss human rights in relation to disability; explore attitudes within society to disability; gain insight into the lives of disability-affected young people in the world; and develop and implement a range of action responses and the impact their actions may have on others, both locally and globally.

Taking advice from Anne-Marie Poynor of the Northern Ireland Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) the project partners also recognised that the learning resource should promote cross-curricular learning where issues can be explored across a range of subject areas. For example, it became clear that the resource supported the ‘Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities’ dimension of the post-primary curriculum which encourages students to: manage information; work with others; think, problem solve and make decisions; manage themselves; and be creative. To make the learning resource relevant to, and engaging for, young people the project partners felt it was important to build the learning resource around children living with different types of disability caused by their life situation. The range of disabilities covered included: physical – relating to the physical body and limbs; sensory – relating especially to sight and hearing; and intellectual – relating to mental and emotional abilities.

To explore the interconnection of disability and development it was clear that children's stories needed to be drawn from a range of situations around the world. Through discussion and drawing on the project partners' own overseas programmes and experience, the following films were conceived.

The first concerned spinal injuries in Nepal resulting from falls either from trees while collecting fodder/firewood, or steep rice terraces. The second examined birth defects in Vietnam caused by the intergenerational effects of Agent Orange (a chemical used in the Vietnam war). The third looked at physical injury and limb amputation in Haiti connected with the 2010 earthquake. The fourth considered brain damage at birth caused by poor health care in Bolivia. The fifth was set in Ethiopia and discussed disability caused by malnutrition-related bone disease. The sixth film centred on brain damage at birth caused by poor health care in Tanzania. And the seventh was set in Ireland focusing on visual impairment caused by glaucoma and cataracts from birth. Using international networking amongst overseas programmes and partners, contacts were established in each of the seven countries. These contacts were field-workers with existing relationships within communities who were able to discuss the idea of filming in advance and give people time to think through their contributions. The field workers also had an ongoing role within the communities after the filming, which helped to frame the films within an overall community programme rather than being a one off event with a filmmaker flying in and out without any real regard for the children in the films.

### **The making of the films**

The seven films were made over a three-month period in 2010 by Michael Brown, Director of the Development Media Workshop, who used a consistent methodology to make the films. The key components of the methodology included meeting initially with the assigned local contact and carefully explaining the filming intentions while taking their advice. The next stage involved meeting with the parents/guardians and children who had expressed willingness in participating in the film and discussing it with them in detail. The methodology underpinning the films was to facilitate families and children in becoming the directors of their own films, so that the films could be made *with* them and not *about* them. This aspect of filming was greatly expedited by field workers discussing the filming within their communities, explaining how and where the films would be used and giving time for families and children to think over the idea of making a film. Families and children who were enthusiastic about telling their story on film were then invited to participate in filming. Once agreement had been reached with parents and children to

participate in the films they were asked to sign a simple and clear permission form which was followed up with agreement on filming dates and times. With these stages completed, it was then possible to commence filming.

All filming was undertaken with a Sony HVR-Z7E camera in Widescreen HD mode, and a radio microphone. This is a small camera that is unobtrusive and non-threatening or overpowering, making it ideal for use within everyday community settings. Using a radio microphone removed the need for a separate sound person, allowing the filmmaker to work quietly and sensitively. Children and families were told that logistics meant that they would not be able to see a rough cut of their film before it was finalised and produced in the learning resource. However, because the filmmaker had spent a number of days within each community getting to know the families and children well, trust had been established. All the children and families involved were content for the filmmaker to edit their films in a manner best suited to the stories they told. As well as filming, Michael Brown edited all the films personally, ensuring integrity and authenticity in the final cut.

### **Development of the learning resource**

The Development Media Workshop created a draft learning resource bringing together the seven films, and writing them into a series of seven sessions: 1. Exploring Disabilities; 2. Life Situations and Disabilities; 3. Poverty and Disabilities; 4. Exploring Attitudes towards Disabilities; 5. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities; 6. Disabilities and the Millennium Development Goals; and 7. Making Action Responses. Each session consisted of two clear learning intentions written around one film. The sessions gave easy to follow instructions for teachers and incorporated a range of active learning methods enabling pupils to explore the issues and films relevant for each session. Each session was planned for delivery in a forty-minute lesson but also allowed for expansion into longer sessions and for homework assignments. The learning resource was piloted by four post-primary schools in Northern Ireland and the piloting teachers were brought together for an induction workshop delivered by Anne-Marie Poyner from CASS and the project evaluator Katrina Collins.

The teachers then spent six weeks using the resource with a range of mixed ability classes within their respective schools. Evaluation of the pilot

testing consisted of pupil feedback through a short survey about the sessions they participated in, pilot teacher interviews and direct observations of teaching sessions including photographic documentation of activities in the classroom. Pupils responded with positive and constructive comments about how interesting, informative and creative the sessions had been. Some suggestions centred on providing more detail about the lives of children presented in the films but overall, there were repeated references to new knowledge and awareness on disability and poverty. Teachers noted how responsive pupils were and their positive engagement with the films and subject matter. Clarity around some details in the films was raised and some teachers said that extra background information would help them to answer pupils' questions.

Teachers also requested more background information on the children in the films as many pupils wanted to know what had happened to the children in the longer term. Lessons learned from pilot testing were then incorporated into the final learning resource along with the following additions: an introduction – stating aims and learning intentions; curriculum rationale – showing explicitly how the learning resource linked to the NI and RoI curricula; overview of learning activities – a table laying out each session, the learning intentions, the suggested activities, and the resources provided; evaluating session – a suggested active learning methodology allowing pupils to give feedback and evaluate their own learning; organisational contacts – a list of the project partners with their contact details, along with the offer of partners coming into schools free of cost to support delivery of the learning resource; a DVD – containing all seven films; a CD – containing all the necessary resources to deliver each respective session, provided in PDFs ready for teachers to print out.

### **Teacher training and learning resource dissemination**

Training workshops for teachers to introduce the learning resource and promote its effective use were planned in partnership with CASS. Sessions were delivered across the five Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in 2012 and 2013. In addition, training was also provided to Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) newly qualifying post-primary teachers graduating from Queen's University Belfast in 2012. In total 180 teachers were trained and all provided with a learning resource for their school. Teacher

training was evaluated by Katrina Collins using specifically developed tools with a sample group of 35 percent of the teachers trained. Teachers who participated included Learning for Life and Work coordinators, Citizenship coordinator/teachers, principals, vice principals, and History/English/Geography/Religion teachers. Before the training, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire focusing on their *knowledge* of disability and development issues, their *confidence* to teach this subject area, and the practical *skills* they have to deliver this subject area in the classroom. This provided a baseline of knowledge, confidence and skills. Teachers then completed the questionnaire at the end of the training. Their levels of knowledge, confidence and skills were revisited at this point with additional questions about the resource: the application of the resource in a classroom setting; its usefulness in actively engaging pupils in discussion and action planning around disability and development issues; its ability to be a cross-curricular resource to explore disability and development issues; its role in teacher skill development when teaching issues linked to disability and development; and the impact of the resource on teacher attitudes to disability and development issues. Teachers' pre- and post-training scores for knowledge and confidence are illustrated in Figures 1-4 set out below. The comparison in scores is shown on the figures and reinforced by statistical analysis of mean scores.

Figure 1: Level of teacher knowledge on teaching issues related to disability and development BEFORE receiving training on the resource

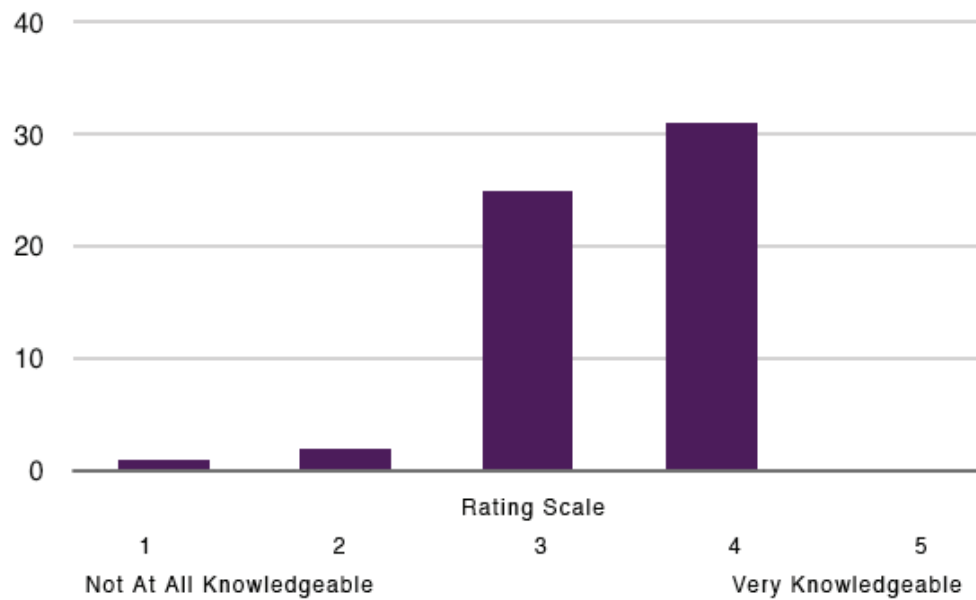


Figure 2: Level of teacher knowledge on teaching issues related to disability and development AFTER receiving training on the resource

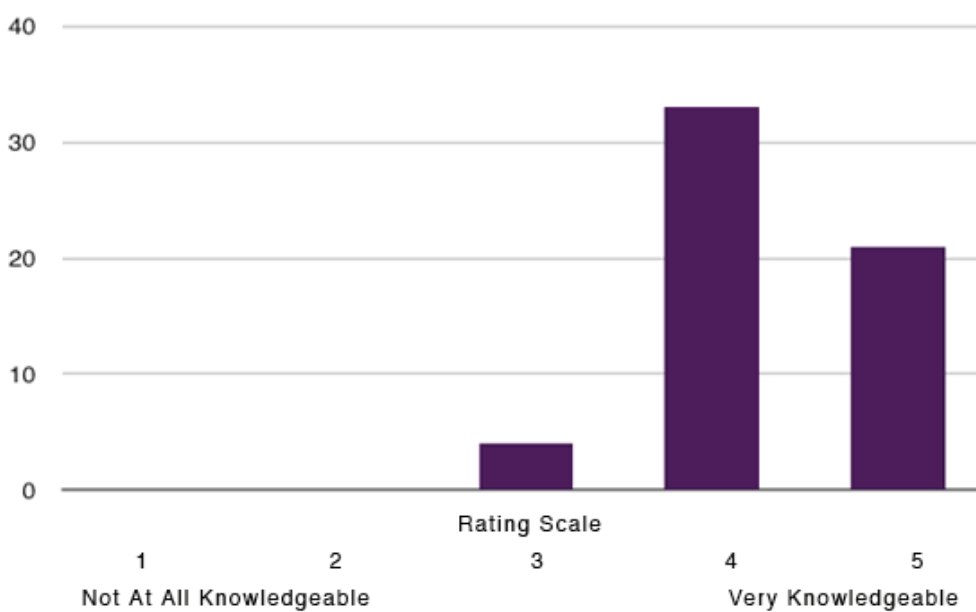


Figure 3: Level of teacher confidence on teaching issues related to disability and development BEFORE receiving training on the resource

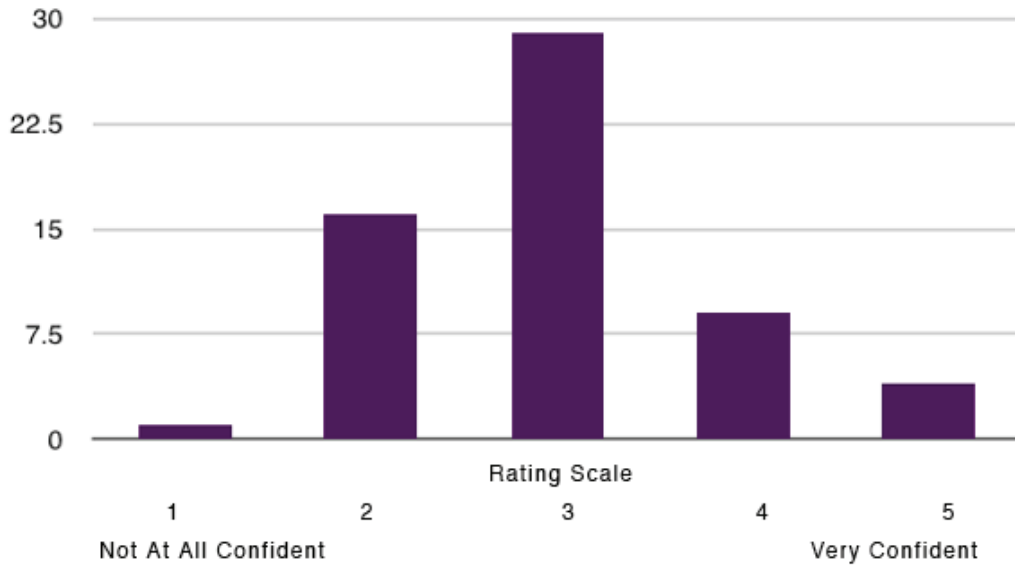
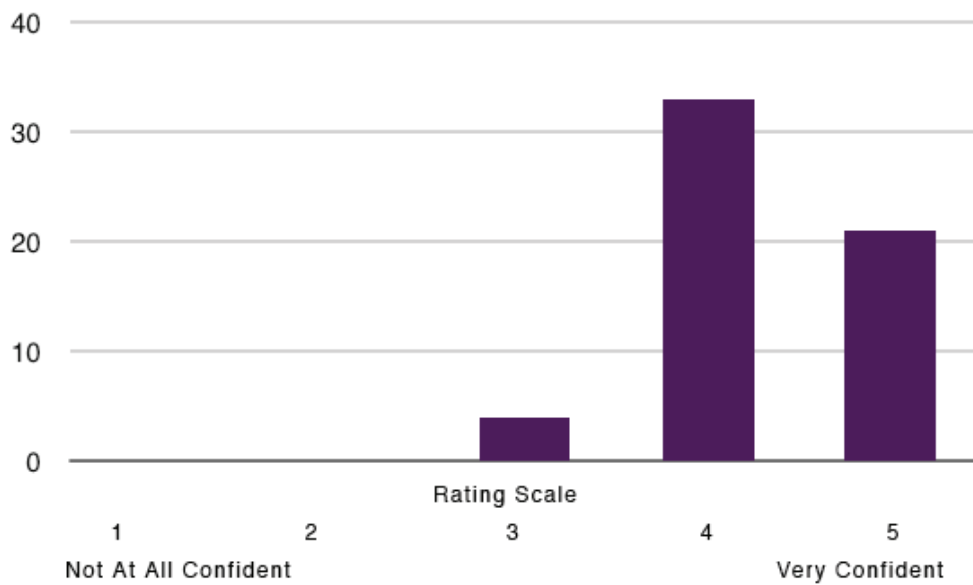


Figure 4: Level of teacher confidence on teaching issues related to disability and development AFTER receiving training on the resource





Tables 1 and 2 indicate the positive shift in participant ratings following the training based on their self-rated level of knowledge and confidence around disability and development issues. The shift was statistically significant ( $p < .000$ ) for both the indicators of knowledge and confidence.

**Table 1: Mean scores and difference in knowledge levels before and after training**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Current level of knowledge	59	2.5	0.7
After training level of knowledge	59	1.7	0.6
Difference (current level of knowledge - after training level of knowledge)	59	0.598	0.9

**Table 2: Mean scores and difference in confidence levels before and after training**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Current level of confidence	59	3.0	0.9
After training level of confidence	59	1.7	0.6
Difference (current level of confidence - after training level of confidence)	59	1.3	1.0

Table 3 details the response of the sampled teachers to questions about the application of the resource.

**Table 3: Application of the resource to the classroom**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Completely Agree</b>	<b>Partly Agree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
This resource will actively engage pupils in discussion and action planning around disability and development issues	59%	34%	7%
This resource will be used across the curriculum to explore disability and development issues	54%	29%	17%
This resource will increase my skills in teaching issues linked to disability and development	61%	29%	10%

In addition, qualitative feedback was gathered from participants. The comments put forward suggest teachers viewed the resource as beneficial both

on a personal and professional level. It was apparent from comments received that the resource helped put the issue of disability and development into perspective for them and that the active learning methods communicated through the resource would enhance their delivery of this topic in a classroom setting. Comments included: ‘really opened my eyes to issues and raised awareness’; ‘showed me how disability affects the whole world’; ‘made me realise how to tackle sensitive issues’; ‘more interactive ways to approach the issue than I thought’; ‘I can see how diverse disability can be’; ‘a reminder that disability is a worldwide issue’; ‘a great resource to enable me to transfer this information’; ‘puts things into perspective, takes into consideration the families too’; ‘a great resource that has already made me confident’; ‘given me wider knowledge and understanding’.

### **Pupil responses**

Qualitative evaluations were carried out with 210 pupils across seven schools in two ELBs following delivery of sessions using the resource. Results indicated there had been an attitudinal change in relation to disability. Pupils discussed stereotypes they held with respect to persons with disabilities and acknowledged their lack of awareness of issues linked to the root causes of poverty. Session facilitators and teachers reported that the active learning tools offered in the session plans encouraged explorations of attitudes that had been formed about disability.

A difference in pupils’ levels of knowledge and awareness about disability and development was observed. This was noted in changes in knowledge about root causes of poverty through discussions about interdependence and connectedness to the rest of the world. Pupils’ role as global citizens and the responsibilities of countries in their contribution to key issues affecting development were examined in sessions. It was apparent from the evaluation of these sessions that pupils’ understanding about their role in promoting equality and social justice had been deepened and widened through their engagement. Comments made by pupils suggest they found the resource engaging, informative and interesting. Comments from pupils included: ‘I looked at how what we do here affects people in the rest of the world’; ‘it really made me think about things in a different way’; ‘great films that speak a

thousand words'; 'helped us talk about issues which people don't really want to talk about'; 'loved the activities, very different and fun'.

In addition to single schools, a partnership between a Special Educational Needs (SEN) school and a mainstream school was formed to explore issues of disability under the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy (CRED) programme, an educational initiative within Northern Ireland seeking to support schools to become more inclusive of difference. The resource was used to facilitate eight sessions with the two schools. Through creative methods, students acquired new skills, challenged existing attitudes and learned to think creatively about disability and development. The partners reported that:

“[T]his work is ongoing and relationships are being built between the schools and more importantly between the young people. In the different sessions students developed knowledge, skills and confidence through creative methods including drama, story-telling, and interactive tasks to explore, understand and address development and disability. Students grasped issues in ways that are engaging and relevant to their lives. They learned by doing and came to understand how development and disability impacts upon children's rights. The Disability and Development resource provided the backdrop for exploring real life stories” (Collins, 2013).

### **Wider project impacts**

The *Disability and Development* learning resource has now been created online where teachers can download all lesson plans and supporting resources, and view all films. A total of 1,500 copies of the resource have been produced for distribution to schools through teacher training and project partner school visits. Based on feedback from teachers and curriculum advisors, a conservative estimate would suggest that between thirty and sixty teachers per annum are using this resource within mainstream schools. Taking an average year group of seventy pupils, over a five-year period the estimated exposure to this learning resource is between 10,500 and 21,000 pupils. The project partners held a half-day film screening followed by a panel discussion at Queen's University Film Theatre on 7 December 2012. The key speakers at this event were pupils from

Collegiate Grammar School in Enniskillen and their teacher Mervyn Hall, the Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly All Party Working Group on International Development, and Alan McMurray from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The panel discussion focused on the learning resource and its important role in educating the young people of Northern Ireland about international development and disability issues.

Following this event CCEA requested project partners' permission to make links to the resource on its web site under 'Local and Global Citizenship' at Key Stages 3 and 4, and to use *Disability and Development* to develop assessment tasks at Key Stage 3 for talking and listening. Moreover, the Western ELB actively used the *Disability and Development* resource within CRED's training to teachers, as an example of a high quality learning experience that allows pupils to explore issues of equality and diversity. These are just two examples of the many learning outcomes resulting from the development of this resource and its dissemination into the education system in Northern Ireland.

## Conclusion

The project partners identified five main lessons to be shared from this project. The first concerns the *collaboration* of the six partners in pooling their experiences and perspectives which influenced the films made around the world, and the content areas of the resource. The breadth and quality of the resource would not have been possible if based on the work of just one organisation. Collaboration adds value to a project and allows for the sharing of experience and knowledge that builds the individual capacity of each partner organisation as well as producing more effective development education for external target audiences. A second key lesson was *school engagement* which succeeded because of the strong links and support developed with the CASS service which facilitated cluster trainings for teachers and offered credibility to the training content and methodology. Clearly, developing strong links with the educational services that support teachers and schools is vital in rolling out effective teacher training and gaining effective access to schools and teachers.

The third key lesson was in the area of *evaluation* and, in particular, engaging an external evaluator from the outset which enabled the partners to

put in place a mechanism for measuring the impact of the project against the established criteria. Establishing a baseline of knowledge, confidence and skills of teachers' pre-training exposure enabled partners to draw out clear evidence of impact within schools. Embedding evaluation strategies from the outset is essential to providing clear evidence-base of effectiveness of impact. Fourthly, *online interactivity* was crucial to the success of the project. Providing the learning resource online, as well as in hard copy, proved very effective because it allowed for greater distribution and mitigated against teachers losing the DVDs or resource pack, which commonly happens within schools. However, in order to develop interactivity through an online blog the partners recognised that a dedicated staff member is needed to regularly manage and monitor the blog site to ensure it is not misused and to ensure child protection issues are addressed.

Finally the project illustrated the effectiveness of *using films within educational resources*. The films of children living with disabilities around the world were shot and edited in a style with minimal narration, allowing the pictures to tell the story and the viewer to interpret things for themselves. This has proved very effective with the eleven to sixteen year old age group, and goes against much-voiced opinions that young people today have very short attention spans and need screen images to be fast moving and flashy. In terms of embedding films into a resource, it proved very effective to embed one film into each learning session, and to build activities around each respective film. Young people can be engaged with documentary style films that allow pupils to watch a story unfolding and to make their own observations rather than being overly narrated, and that building short films into each learning session promotes engagement and interest with pupils.

*Disability and Development: A DVD-based learning resource for Key Stage 3 and 4* (2011), Enniskillen: Development Media Workshop, available: [www.disabilityanddevelopment.ie](http://www.disabilityanddevelopment.ie).

## References

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**Michael Brown** trained in design and communication in the United Kingdom, before applying these skills to international development work. He spent six years living in Nepal, where his work developed into participatory approaches using communication as a methodology for social change, influenced by the principles of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In 2005, Michael Brown founded the Development Media Workshop in Northern Ireland, a not-for-profit organisation using media and communication to focus on development issues both locally and globally. The Workshop produces documentary films, educational resources and facilitates participatory processes in which individuals and groups can address issues that directly affect them. Email: [d.m.workshop@btinternet.com](mailto:d.m.workshop@btinternet.com).

**Katrina Collins** worked as a Research Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown, before founding her own consultancy company in 2003. Since that time she has been involved in a wide variety of research and evaluation activities for Government, NGOs and INGOs based in the North and South of Ireland. She has worked on development projects in Nepal and Romania supporting the evaluation activities of organisations, funders and community members. Katrina Collins has worked alongside Michael Brown over the past number of years combining their skill, expertise and enthusiasm for

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