

# **Evaluation as research or research as evaluation: towards a dialogic relationship between research and evaluation in the context of development education.**



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# The story of this research



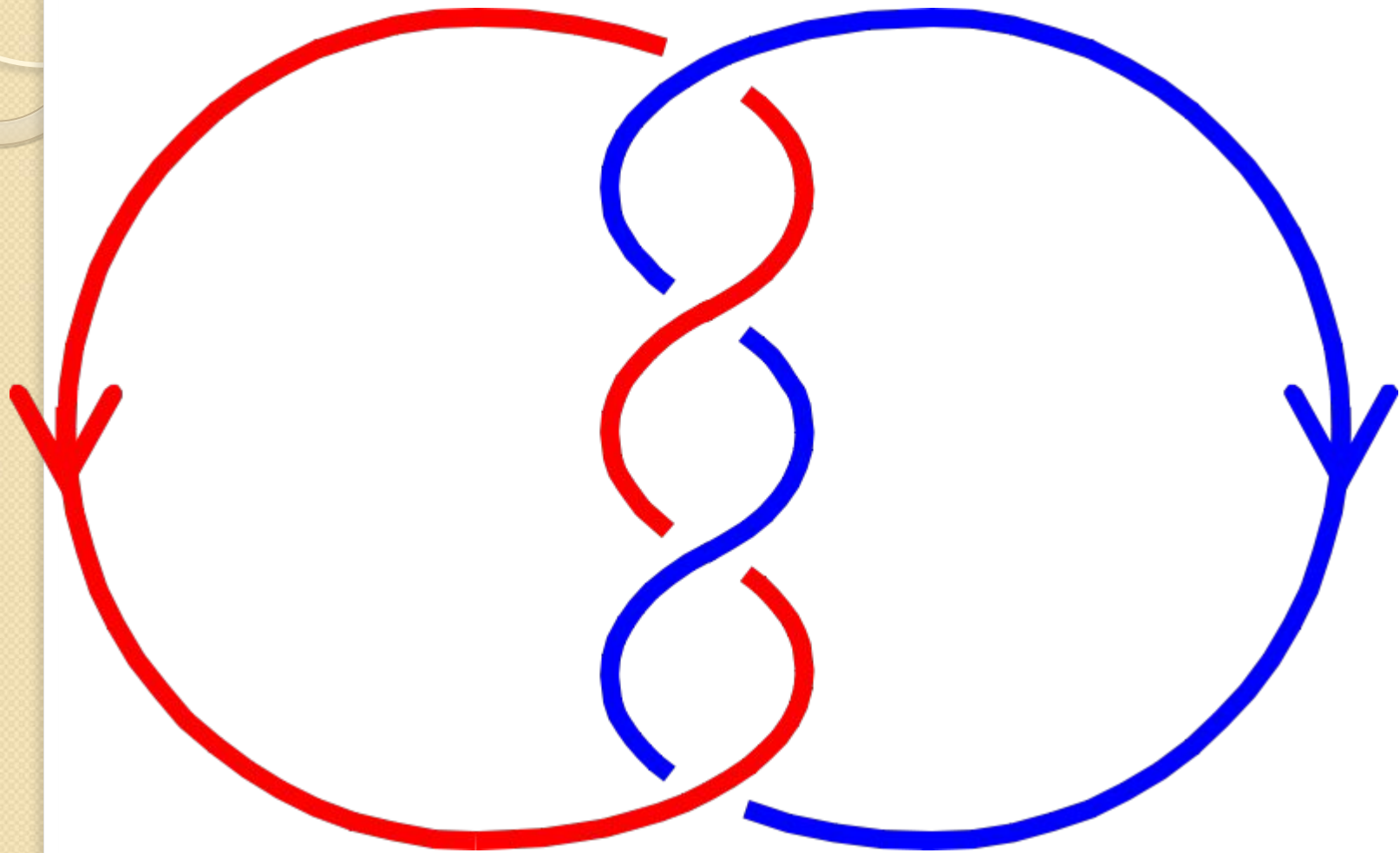
# Over view of this presentation

- Definition of terms
- Exploration of research and evaluation in the context of development education
- Evaluation of linking project
- Some reflections about evaluating development education
- Recommendations

# Development Education



# Linking





*Linked schools  
Ireland and South Africa*



# Educational Research

Cohen and Mannion (1980) look at research as a problem solving activity.

Stenhouse (1984 ) defined research as

‘systematic activity that is directed at providing knowledge, or understanding of existing knowledge which is of relevance for improving the effectiveness of education’.

Bassey (1990) ‘systematic critical and self critical inquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge’.

# Evaluation

- 'Evaluation refers to the process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process' Scriven (1991:139).
- 'Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information collection about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs to make judgements about the program, improve program effectiveness and/ or inform decisions about future programming' (Patton 1997:23).



# Evaluation and Research

The terms used interchangeably

- They have different purposes.
- They respond to different audiences' information needs.
- They pose different kinds of questions.
- They communicate and report their findings in different ways and to different groups.
- They have different expectations regarding the use of the results.

# Evaluation Research

- Robson: 'real world research'
- Much enquiry in the real world is evaluative to some degree.
- Evaluation research: 'a study which has a distinctive purpose, it is not a new or different research strategy'.

# Evaluation as a research theme

- Dolan's (1993) research found that evaluation levels in Dev Ed were very low.
- I wanted to see what changes, if any, had occurred in the evaluation of Dev Ed over the past 15 years.
- I also wanted to explore North-South issues within the context of Dev Ed evaluation.



Initial research question,

*‘How are Ireland-South school links being evaluated?’*

I hoped to investigate:

- What criteria were used in evaluation?
- What methodologies were employed?
- Who was involved in the evaluation process?
- What changes in links have occurred as a result of evaluation?

## Why this approach did not work

There was a shortage of available data, because very few (if any) evaluations of Ireland-South school links were taking place.

Therefore a change of focus was needed: Instead of using evaluation as a research theme, I aimed to undertake 'evaluation research'.

## New Approach

I decided to design and carry out an evaluation of a small number of Ireland-South school links....

Through a criterion sampling process, I chose the 'Amawele' programme of Irish-South African school links as the subject for my evaluation.



# Challenges encountered in setting up the evaluation

- Many participants lacked clear objectives for linking
- Relatively short timescale of linking projects to date
- Reluctance of some stakeholders to engage in process
- Power dynamics between Irish and South African schools
- My own position as a Northern researcher





*Computers for the Southern School are often part of the linking arrangement*



# Evaluation Strategy

- *Criteria:* The extent to which the links supported the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with Dev Ed
- *Methodology:* Involve as many participants as possible, use creative workshop techniques
- *Values:* Awareness of the subjectivity/bias inherent in the evaluation process



*Workshop with South African principals*

# Findings

Linking supports some Dev Ed aims, most clearly in the area of attitudes and skills:

- Increased tolerance of difference in global and local contexts
- Increased cross-cultural communication skills
- Increased ability to recognise stereotypes
- Increased self-esteem
- Some evidence of increased understanding of the power relationships underlying linking



*These students from Steenberg High School were running a card game competition with Gaelcholaiste Cheitinn students via a 'Skype' link*

# Some recommendations

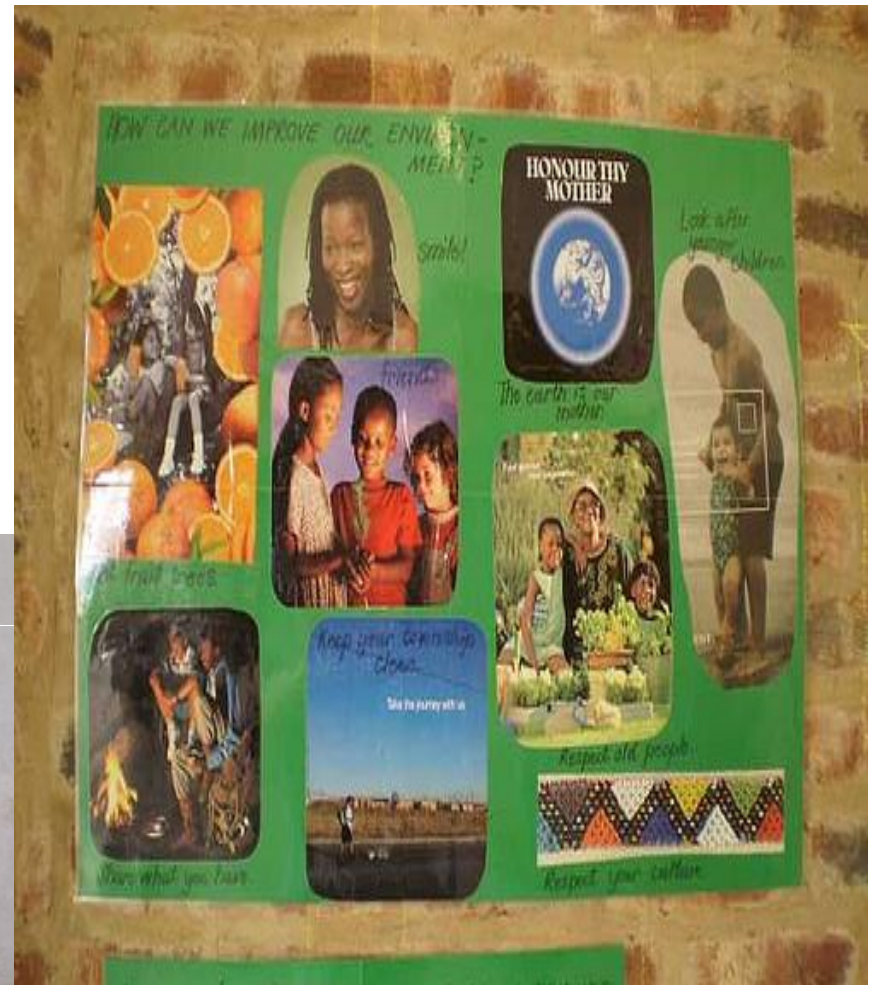
- The need for documentation-

*Teachers expressed an intuitive and sincere sense that real learning was taking place, but it does linking a disservice to have this learning remain undocumented.*

- The need for clear Dev Ed objectives

*If Irish Aid and other funders wish to support linking as a form of Dev Ed, then specific Dev Ed objectives need to be made explicit, and monitored carefully.*

## Examples of Project Work in Linked Schools





## Linking, evaluation and research: North-South issues

- Northern perspectives have dominated the learning agenda for linking.
- Further evaluation and research in the area of N-S school linking needs real collaboration from Southern partners



# Questions about research and evaluation

My study caused me to consider:

- Whose needs are met by evaluation—those of the researcher or those of the subjects?
- What happens to evaluations once they are published?
- Who sets the agenda for future evaluations and research?
- How can evaluation and research strengthen on-the-ground Dev Ed practice?

# Development education and evaluation- some reflections!!

- *The absence of 'a solid educational theoretical framework' (Bourne, 2003, p. 3).*
- The need for evaluation findings to contribute to knowledge
- The need for a symbiotic relationship between research and evaluation
- The need for evaluation findings to be communicated
- Design evaluation strategies which are framed by a development education perspective