

POSTGRADUATE NETWORK

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

30.07.20 | ONLINE MEETING

ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT: POST GRADUATES DISCUSS

EVENT DETAILS

The DSAI Postgrad Network held its second Zoom meeting for Summer 2020 on the 30th of July between 2.00-3.00pm.

It was chaired and moderated by Ami Matsutani, Convenor of DSAI Postgrad Network.

Speakers were:

Kirsty Nash, BSc (Hons) student, Department of International Development & Food Policy, UCC.

Hannah Mc Mahon, Primary school teacher at community national school.

OVERVIEW

Kirsty Nash gave a presentation on the findings of her final year dissertation 'Breaking the Stigma: Why Menstrual Health & Hygiene is Critical to the Fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals'.

Her research explores the cultural and religious taboos surrounding menstruation in developing countries, efforts being made in the international development sector to address the stigma, and the relevance of menstrual health and hygiene to the Sustainable Development Goals. She was inspired to do this research as a result of her work placement in Malawi last year where she worked with a small community development NGO focusing in the facilitation of a reusable sanitary pad and menstrual education workshop with teenage girls. This experience opened her eyes to the reality of lack of education on how menstruation is perceived in developing countries, and the devastating impacts that the stigma has on millions of women and girls across the world.

Kirsty began her research by looking into the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite the clear need to address menstruation as a multisectoral development issue, Kirsty's findings show that neither 'menstruation' nor 'menstrual hygiene' is even explicitly mentioned in any of the SDG's, despite being directly linked to the fulfilment of several objectives, including: SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production.

POSTGRADUATE NETWORK

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

30.07.20 | ONLINE MEETING

ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT: POST GRADUATES DISCUSS

Kirsty argues that the absence of menstruation from the Sustainable Development Agenda ultimately serves to enforce the consensus of menstruation as a subject of 'taboo'.

Drawing on a variety of cultures and religions across the world, Kirsty's research demonstrates the many taboos, superstitions and stigmas associated with menstruation, whereby menstruating women and girls are considered 'polluting', 'impure', 'dirty', or 'poisonous'. For example, in Nepal, the ancient practice of Chhaupadi forces a menstruating woman or girl to reside in a 'menstrual hut' (typically a livestock shed) throughout the entirety of their period, where they are unable to maintain personal hygiene, avail of a nutritious diet, attend school, or even interact with other members of the household.

Kirsty's research presents the menstrual stigma as a multisectoral development issue that requires significant attention in efforts to advance the status of women and girls in the Global South. Kirsty hopes to continue her research and raise awareness around this topic as she goes on to study her MSc in Global Health Policy in the University of Edinburgh this September.

Hannah Mc Mahon presented about the petition which she has started to try and change the leaving cert curriculum to enable students to study authors of colour on the English syllabus. She mentioned that since the murder of George Floyd in the USA, there has been a huge increase in national and international discussions about racism. Racism is a complex social issue which is still prevalent in Ireland in discreet and indiscreet ways. Racism cannot be defined merely by singular events, but rather, the foremost hierarchical, dominant positions and systems, which continue to benefit those who are white, and to discriminate and separate them against those who are not. An example of one of these systems is education. She believes that their current leaving certificate english syllabus has many excellent creative works, but it is very outdated. It does not include enough authors, poets or playwrights who are black/of colour.

For young Irish secondary school students, reading and learning about creative writing from black authors, poets and playwrights, and authors, poets and playwrights of colour, needs to begin sooner than university study. In fact, Robin DiAngelo, author of 'White Fragility: why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism', counters: 'people can get to graduate school, teacher education training, business school, law school, med school, and so many more fields of higher education, without having any ability, whatsoever, to engage in the complexity and nuances of issues around racism'. Their education system has a significant role to play in the perpetuation of dominantly white narratives and perspectives.

POSTGRADUATE NETWORK

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

30.07.20 | ONLINE MEETING

ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT: POST GRADUATES DISCUSS

Without any novels, poetry, plays, stories and other pieces of creative work from brown and black authors on the curriculum, they are intentionally perpetuating a collective ignorance, as they continue to turn their backs not just from the remarkable talent, flair, complexity and nuanced style evident within these works, but necessary topics and themes, which are fundamental, for meaningful discussions, social awareness and fostering humility, fairness and compassion amongst our future generations in Irish classrooms around the country. She firmly believes that if they are to change the landscape for equality and inclusion in our country, they need to make their mainstream education system more receptive and responsive to fair, broad and balanced representation of authors of all different skin colours. With that in mind, She made a petition to widen the representation of their leaving cert english syllabus, so that students can learn about authors, poets and playwrights, who are black, white, and of colour. She is confident that this is a positive step in the right direction for educating young people of Ireland about important issues sooner, rather than later.

Equally, secondary school teachers need more training in the area of teaching about complex social justice issues, such as racism, and supports need to be put in place to facilitate them. She believes that diversification of the english syllabus (and other subjects), will allow their young generation to be more conscious, informed and well rounded in their perspectives as they make their way to third level education. It has to be acknowledged that there has been considerable, unprecedented upheaval in the current educational landscape at secondary school level. Cancellation of the leaving cert examinations, predictive grading and a change in the nature of the CEO application system, have been at the helm of nationwide discourses over the past couple of months. It may be argued that curriculum reform, to include more representation of authors and creatives of colour, is not a priority at this time. But if not now, when? The new government has promised change, and she believes that the sooner their Irish government shows openness to provide conversations about this important issue, the sooner they can tackle curricular reform, and pave the way for a more egalitarian education system. "The heartbeat of racism is denial"-Ibrahim X Kendi. She addressed that, 'Let's stop denying that the problem of racism exists, and start taking meaningful action to change our education system' strongly and passionately.

Format: The group reflected on the online meeting format. It was noted that there was only a small number of participants. Factors may be (1) the Convenor did not mention about the concrete topic or agenda when she sent an email to all Postgrad Network members, (2) summer holidays, (3) postgraduate students were busy writing and submitting thesis. The group agreed. Having two speakers was best practice as it should not be rushed

POSTGRADUATE NETWORK

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

30.07.20 | ONLINE MEETING

ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT: POST GRADUATES DISCUSS

HIGHLIGHTS

- The meeting with small number of participants allowed a chance to share their comments, thoughts, experiences and cultures in their countries.
- Having two presentations was useful because it meant word was getting across and more students will find this platform useful to share their research.
- Kirsty's approach was interesting because she linked the cultural and religious taboos of menstruating girls to its neglect even by the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Hannah's talk on petition was a passionate plea to end racism and spread interculturalism in Irish education system in the true sense of the term.
- Dr Mishra recommended participants to watch "Pad Man", which is an Indian film about spreading the use of sanitary napkins, to understand cultural taboos, the relative unimportance given to women's need for hygienic practices surrounding menstruation in rural India. The absence of access to adequate water was highlighted. The importance of alternative environment friendly sanitary napkins was discussed.

RESOURCES

- Kirsty Nash power point presentation available on the DSAI website.
- Petition of Hannah "Widen the intercultural diversity of Ireland's leaving cert English syllabus e.g. poetry": <https://www.change.org/p/department-of-education-and-skills-widen-the-nterculturaldiversity-of-ireland-s-leaving-cert-english-syllabus-e-g-poetry/dashboard>