THE IRISH DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION: REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTIONS

SALLY CORCORAN

The need for an organisation to represent and support Irish development education practitioners resulted in the creation of the Irish Development Education Association. In this article, **Sally Corcoran** discusses the strategic planning, processes and constraints involved with this new organisation.

The Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) was launched at a meeting in Wynn's Hotel in Dublin in September 2004 and is now involved in the preparation of a strategic plan to be presented this autumn at the Annual General Meeting of the association. In this article I will discuss the process of setting up IDEA, make some comparisons with professional associations in general and outline some of the problems we have encountered.

IDEA grew out of the two meetings held in All Hallows' College, Dublin. These meetings were organised by Dóchas with support from the National Council for Development Education, which has now become the Development Education Unit of Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI). The catalyst for the initial meeting was a report commissioned by Dóchas on the state of development education in Ireland (Kenny, 2002). The authors contacted over one hundred organisations involved in development education and the survey findings were presented and discussed at All Hallows on the 16th May 2002.

One finding was that many of the respondents felt isolated and wanted to have more contact with other groups and to be more aware of best practice in development education. The main points emerging from this report concerned the diversity of the sector; the participants expressed need for

networking opportunities and for the creation of an organisation to represent the sector. The rationale behind the first All Hallows seminar was to bring practitioners together to discuss and explore the various challenges and opportunities facing development education. A wide-ranging discussion at the meeting led to the formation of a Task Group to explore the possibility of setting up an association and to report back to the next meeting.

At the second All Hallows meeting on the 5th June 2003 a presentation from the Task Group outlined various options for organising an association. Treasa Galvin, from Trinity College Dublin, also gave an account of how the Sociological Association of Ireland had set up and developed and this helped to give shape to the proceedings. The discussion, which emerged from these two elements, resulted in a general agreement to produce a vision and constitution for the fledgling organisation. Consequently, a new Task Force was set up, headed by Oran Doyle and Carlos Bruen, to go about these tasks over the next year.

Over the year the vision and constitution were developed through a participatory dialogue involving all members of the Task Force. There was consultation with the wider development education community at the following Development Education Advisory Committee seminar. Further revisions were undertaken and the results were presented to a Round Table of development education practitioners in June 2004 who helped to fine-tune the texts. The final versions of the vision and constitution were presented to the General Meeting that launched IDEA in Wynn's Hotel on the 23rd September 2004. They were adopted by the meeting and IDEA became a reality. A National Council, consisting of fourteen members from various sectors, was elected with Eamonn Lenihan and Sally Corcoran agreeing to act as co-convenors. There was much discussion over the best way the new organisation should proceed and how it should develop. At the end of the meeting it was agreed that the National Council would develop a 'strategic priorities' list and present it to the membership. This process would lead into the strategic planning for IDEA.

During several meetings since then the Council have worked on various areas. It was decided that, instead of a strategic priorities list, a facilitator should be sought to consult the membership and others in the sector to develop a draft strategic plan to be presented to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October/November 2005. A funding proposal was drawn up and presented to DCI, Concern and Trócaire to enable this to happen. With funding achieved, the Council tendered for a facilitator to undertake the work. In July 2005 the Council appointed Adrienne Boyle to consult widely and facilitate the process with IDEA. In addition IDEA has worked on getting charity status, on confirming and attracting membership, and has made a submission to the DCI White Paper on Development. All those who were involved in the launch or who expressed an interest in IDEA have been contacted and asked for feedback which helped in the process of drawing up the strategic plan. We are planning a website in the near future and again this will be publicised as widely as possible.

The literature around professional associations raises various questions which are relevant to the development of IDEA. "The modern professions are complex social institutions which select people of varied skills.... and organize them into different levels of operation and diverse interest groups" (Smith, 1958:410). Within development education in Ireland there are many variations in the formal and informal sectors. There are many levels - primary, secondary, third level and adult education. So the complexity of the sector is nothing new for a professional association. A problem that can arise is the dominance of one type or one level over the entire organisation. Some recommendations from an article on meeting the needs of minorities in professional associations (Garcia & Smith, 1990:62) are relevant here. They recommend participation by all levels and sectors, encouraging new thinking, providing forums for discussion and analysis, providing opportunities for professional development and creating links with other professional organisations to allow for the cross fertilisation of ideas. IDEA will undertake all of these tasks. At the first AGM, it is hoped that new members will join the Council, so that development education in Ireland, north and south, is reflected in its composition. The strategic planning process, currently under way, will

allow areas of concern for members to be prioritised. IDEA's membership comprises of organisational as well as individual membership and a range of development education organisations have joined as either full or associate members. Associate membership is open to those whose work is not primarily development education. Our watchword for IDEA's development to date has been inclusion, as the field is wide and varied, and there is no single model or definition of development education. With that in mind, the founding members and the National Council have moved slowly and have tried to involve as many people from the broadest range of development education organisations, and the widest number of individual practitioners as possible.

Other writers in the field such as Cornell and Farkas (1995: 44) examine the value of a professional association and see the benefits to include the sharing of knowledge and career advancement among others. At the various discussions in the All Hallows' meetings knowledge sharing was frequently cited as a key benefit of setting up an association. IDEA aims to fulfil the role of a network for development education in Ireland, north and south. Another point about professional associations is that people have varied allegiances. Most teachers will be members of a teachers' organisation if they are in the formal sector and they may well feel closer to that organisation than they do to IDEA. We have to allow for that feeling and respect it. Remembering the Brendan Behan caution that the first item on the agenda of a new organisation is the split, we must also hope that the shared values of development education will provide the cement that binds IDEA together.

A point made by Harvey L Smith (Smith, 1958:413) is worth reflecting on: "Every profession operates in terms of a basic fiction about itself. These provide the profession with a comforting self-image, some stereotype to help meet and adapt to the varied and often drastic contingencies of everyday operations". He makes the point that the image of the Air Force is the pilot whereas, in reality, pilots are in a minority in the organisation. This is something we should be aware of in trying to create a public image of development education. We should be careful to include all areas and levels and not highlight one at the expense of another.

The principal added value of professional organisations, one that was emphasised in the All Hallows' meetings, is the professional voice. Ideally an organisation, which speaks for the sector, leads to increased recognition for the sector and increased credibility, and influence in political terms.

When we look at other models of development education associations we can see how much an association can achieve and how dynamic a force an association can prove to be. At the Development Education Advisory Committee seminar (2004) Doug Bourn of the UK Development Education Association (DEA) made an interesting presentation on the work of that association and their achievements over the years. The DEA has 240 members and partner organisations and works with networks nationally. Their aims are:

> "To promote the work of member organisations and to facilitate networking and cooperation between members; to influence and develop public policy at all levels; to provide information and support to members; to enhance the quality of professional practice."

There are several similarities here with the IDEA's mission statement: to encourage and co-ordinate good communications and cooperation at all levels of the development education membership to promote a critical awareness of development education and encourage capacity building among the membership by:

 • identifying, developing and promoting best practice in development education
 • promoting and encouraging an ethos of accountability and transparency
 • to develop the organisation's capacity to a stage where it will be capable of representing and advocating for its membership with relevant government departments and bodies, national and international on the challenges facing development education, including ensuring development education is adequately resourced at a local, national and European level.

Doug Bourn also made the point that public support for aid in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries remains consistently high despite reports of aid fatigue, and that donations to NGOs have also been increasing so that there is a positive environment for development education (Bourn, 2004:2). There is also a positive financial environment with figures from a DEA report of 2001 showing that spending on development education in Europe in 1999 varied from €14,000,000 (Sweden) to €1,400,000 (Ireland) and as a percentage of Overseas Development Assistance from 0.19% to 0.8% (Sweden) with Ireland 0.6% (DEA, 2001:14). The 'Make Poverty History' campaign has also raised public awareness and shown that there is support for development issues and it is up to development educators to take advantage of the increased interest and help to "join up the dots".

The strategic planning process, which IDEA has just initiated, aims for wide consultation within the development education community. As part of the consultation by the facilitator, development education practitioners and organisations may well be asked or have been asked for their views. These views will be fed into the strategic plan for IDEA, which will be presented to the Annual General Meeting in late October or November 2005. Having been refined by discussion at the AGM they will then form the basis of the future direction of IDEA and operational plans for the next few years should follow naturally from this process.

Establishing a national development education association has not been without difficulties. The diversity of the sector makes it very difficult to find a model to suit and reflect all the interests of potential members. Great interest has been expressed in IDEA but attaining a broad membership on the Council is proving difficult. This can be put down to pressure of work in a sector with a high proportion of volunteer and part-time workers; the perennial difficulties in achieving a regional balance in national bodies where participation can involve travel; and to the natural reluctance to get involved until the organisation is more established. Another problem, which is common

to all associations in the development stage, is the reliance on volunteers who are trying to fit the tasks required into their other lives, and therefore does not allow the organisation to grow quickly. Therefore, the feeling of the Council is that IDEA needs a co-ordinator who will accelerate moving the organisation forward and that this should be a priority for the immediate future.

IDEA has developed from small beginnings and is now poised to take off as an association. Professional associations have a role to play in the development of a sector. Any problems we have encountered are not insurmountable and at the AGM we would like to expand the representation to tackle the real work ahead of implementing the strategic plan. Any readers who are interested should contact one of the Council members listed below with a view to joining us and furthering the cause of development education in Ireland. Ní neart go cur le ceile.

Acknowledgements: My thanks to Oran Doyle and Maeve Taylor of the IDEA Council who helped in the preparation of this article

Appendix A
IDEA National Council Members:

Eithne Brennan	*Trócaire*	ebrennan@trocaire.ie
Sally Corcoran	*DSL UCD*	Sally.Corcoran@ucd.ie
Michael Doorly	*Concern*	michael.doorly@concern.net
Oran Doyle	*Freelance*	eteducation@hotmail.com
Barbara Gill	*CICE*	bgill@cice.ie
Michael Fitzgerald	*Near FM*	localpoint@nearfm.ie
Nora Hennessy	*UCC*	n.hennessy@ucc.ie
Darran Irvine	*Schools Across*	
*Borders*darran.irvine@ireland.com		
Rachel Kavanagh	*Ecounesco*	ecounesco@eircom.net
Rachel Parry	*Galway OW C*	galwayowc@hotmail.com
Astrid Pérez Piñán	*Comhlámh*	astrid@comhlamh.org
Maeve Taylor	*Banúlacht*	banulach@iol.ie

Appendix B

The following organisations are members of IDEA to date:

80:20	Irish Missionary Union
ACTIONAID Ireland	Irish Red Cross
AfrI	Just Forests
African Cultural Project	KADE
Amnesty International	KVDA (Kenya) Community
AONTAS	LASC
ASTI	Lourdes Youth and Community
Centre for Sustainable Livelihoods	Services
Centre for Global Education	Near FM
Christian Aid	NYCI
Comhlámh	Refugee Trust International
Concern	Schools Across Borders
DCI Development Education Unit	Sierra Leone Ireland Partnership
Development Studies Centre Kimmage	Skillshare International Ireland
	Voluntary Service Overseas
Development Studies Library, UCD	VSI
DICE	West Papua Action
ECOUNESCO	Wingspread
Equality Studies Centre, UCD	Workers Co-op
Galway One World Centre	World Development Centre
ICTU Pax Christi	UCD Centre for Development
Irish Girl Guides	Studies

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Sally Corcoran is the Librarian of the Development Studies Library at University College Dublin. The Development Studies Library is open to the public and contains materials of interest to development educators. If you would like to use the library please contact Sally on email: Sally.Corcoran@ucd.ie