

Perspectives

THE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION SECTOR IN IRELAND A DECADE ON FROM THE ‘KENNY REPORT’: TIME TO FINISH THE JOB?

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Abstract: This article revisits some of the recommendations, findings and observations contained in the Kenny report, a 2002 overview of the development education sector in the island of Ireland. The article assesses the extent to which the sector has addressed the challenges and weaknesses highlighted by Kenny, particularly the lack of strategic clarity and a unified vision for DE. As a development education practitioner in Ireland over the past twenty years, Michael Doorly is well positioned to assess the progress made by the sector post-Kenny. He finds that significant progress has been made by a passionate and diverse sector, particularly in the establishment of the Irish Development Education Association, which has given strength and leadership to the sector. However, the article suggests that the implementation of Kenny remains unfinished business for DE and needs a strong and engaged development sector together with the support of formal and informal education bodies, to finish the job.

Key words: Development education; national strategy; building capacity; unified vision.

When it comes time to write the definitive history of development education (DE) in Ireland, the Dóchas research report titled *Development Education in Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities for the future* (Kenny and O’Malley, 2002) will be a key reference point for anyone brave enough to take up the task. The report was commissioned by the Dóchas Development Education Action Group (note the emphasis on *action*) to obtain an overview of ‘the current provision of development education in Ireland (North and South) and

to identify gaps, needs and opportunities in the sector for planning strategic interventions in the future' (7). Just over a decade on the report still makes for interesting reading. There are parts of it that could have been written this morning: 'funding is a significant constraint for development education in Ireland' (22). Other parts force a wry smile: 'as Ireland moves swiftly to the Irish Government's official commitment to 0.7% of GNP by 2007' (40), and yet still others that make one weep: 'what is development education?' it asks (37).

Overall the report paints a picture of a sector that is passionate, but not confident, diverse but not focused, and busy but not strategic. Perhaps though, as the report itself clearly states, the single most important outcome of the study is that 'there is no definitive, clearly stated strategic plan for development education in Ireland. From Government level to local level there is a lack of strategic clarity, there is lack of consensus and a lack of one clear vision'. As such the report recommends that the sector should take a leading role in developing a strategic plan that along with addressing other key areas will 'Propose a vision that will unify and or sectionalise the development education sector' (41). While significant progress has been made during the past decade, not least the creation of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA), just one year after the publication of the report, there remains some unfinished business. This article revisits some of the recommendations, findings and observations contained in the Kenny report and reflects upon the state of the DE sector in Ireland today. It does so as a contribution to the debate on the need for and possible framing of a national development education strategic plan for the Irish DE sector.

Identity, vision and definition

The sector has always been better at describing development education than defining it. We talk about it in terms of being an 'educational process', about 'transforming structures', and about 'creating a more just and equal world'. However the Kenny report suggests that the 'definition' question 'has dogged the development education sector over all its existence because the term remains broad, diffuse and ill-defined', and 'there is a lack of clarity over

whether development education is a content or a process' (37). The report argues that while there are strong arguments that a broad definition leaves room for individuality, diversity and evolution of DE programmes, 'feedback would show that it confuses people and that DE groups still see it as an obstacle' (ibid). It goes on to suggest that 'there is also an ongoing lack of clarity of the separation of advocacy, promotion (fundraising) and indeed lobbying from the process of education' (ibid).

The 2013 awareness campaign by IDEA entitled 'What is Development Education?' highlights the fact, as much as we may wish it were not so, that eleven years on from the publication of the report, and more than fifty years after the sector came into being, we are still trying to tell people what 'dev-ed' is. It is not surprising therefore that over the past decade alternative monikers such as global education, active citizenship and education for sustainable development have increasingly taken hold in the sector. If we are to take up the challenge of creating a national strategy it is important that the *definition* of our work does not become, as the report states, an *obstacle* to our work. Perhaps we can take a leaf from those in the education for sustainable development sector who can neatly and succinctly define their work as 'development that meets the need of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (Brundtland, 1987) or even better, 'Enough, for all, forever' (Charles Hopkins, quoted in Tormey, 2012: 54).

Beyond definition however is the more important discussion around vision, values and identity. In recent years articles by McCloskey (2011), Storey (2011) and Khoo (2011) among many others, have raised the need to move beyond the 'soft' versions of development education (defined as the so called five 'Fs' of food, fashion, festivals, flags and fundraising) by adopting 'a more overtly political role in society' (McCloskey, 2011: 46), by tackling 'divisive' and 'conflictual' issues at local level such as Irish debt and the Shell to Sea campaign (Storey, 2011: 86) and by starting a debate about 'what Development Education means' by examining the extent to which its

practices and questioning are challenging dominant education thinking (Khoo, 2011).

In the description of the new Junior Cycle CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education) short course it speaks of a focus on *real world engagement* where students will *learn skills that will help them meet challenges beyond the school, take action and influence change* (voice and agency). Such a *real world focus* allows us to ask, was CSPE adequately preparing young people to examine and tackle and respond to the financial crisis as young adult citizens over the last five years? Did students engage with or debate the ‘occupy movement’ or take part in any form of protest or wider activism and if so what was the outcome? Can CSPE properly engage with real world issues if it ignores the role of business, markets and cut backs in government services? Indeed as Tony Daly (2013) writes in a CSPE short course submission, ‘knowing the meaning of “financial institutions” or “Dáil” is not the same as being skilled to critique and challenge bad practice from any of these institutions’.

In a sobering reminder, if one is needed, that change ‘comes dropping slow’ in formal education, Gerry Jeffers writes:

“In 2006, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) began consultations for a new Leaving Certificate subject, Politics and Society. A draft syllabus was presented to the Minister for Education and Skills in 2011. It is exciting and imaginative, relevant and challenging. It seeks to develop young people’s ability to be reflective and active citizens by using the insights and skills of the social and political sciences. It embodies very well the key skills of information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking and working with others. Unfortunately, it remains on the shelf” (2014).

There is no doubt that huge strides have been made in further embedding development education particularly in the formal education sector over the past decade: there is WorldWise Global Schools; there is the Ubuntu

Network in the University of Limerick providing post-primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in DE; there is the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) project promoting DE in the primary curriculum; there are web resources like DevelopmentEducation.ie; there are schemes like the Irish Aid One World Awards that raise standards of practice in DE; there are development education weeks at initial teacher education and cross-faculty levels in Maynooth and Galway; there are development education categories at Young Social Innovators and Young Scientist Exhibitions; we have the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) and fellow travelers in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) which have created many opportunities for DE in curriculum reform at primary and post primary level; and there remain many NGOs still active in DE practice across the island of Ireland.

Before giving ourselves too mighty a pat on the back, however, it is worth debating the distance we have travelled from the report's following observation:

“yet, Development Education has only a tenuous link with mainstream education at primary, secondary and third level. Though some activists are knocking at the door of formal education and while recognizing that progress is ongoing there is little evidence of recognition of development education as being an integral part of integrated education” (Kenny and O'Malley, 2002: 38).

And again:

“If development education is to be defined as essentially an educational paradigm then it must have a stronger, indeed central, input from mainstream education bodies. Therefore the allocation of funding to development education should not come from Ireland Aid, but from... the Department of Education and Science. This shift requires a political and administrative adjustment based on a focused policy input. Otherwise those involved in development

education will remain tinkering around the edges of ‘real’ education” (ibid).

Capacity and funding

Despite the current reality of results based frameworks, indicators, outcomes and never ending evaluations one wonders if, over ten years on, the following description of frazzled development education practitioners could be written today:

“These people appear generally overworked, stressed and pressured. They are working as hard and as best they can on the informal edge of various sectors. They do not know whether they are doing well or not so well. They are doing their best and they hope this is enough. They are seeking to do their work while managing local/national organisations that are constantly feeding the demands of short term funders. They deliver activities or produce materials without significant feedback on the impact of those inputs or materials in the end game of influencing attitudes and actions” (39).

It is no wonder then that among the greatest obstacles to the provision of development education the report lists the ‘lack of staff, the lack of volunteers, and the difficulty in retaining people’ (32). Despite this however, one of the surprises is that so many of the 116 groups that took part in the report’s research study are still active today (with the exception of the large number of ‘solidarity groups’) and, also, how many new groups, networks and configurations have come into being whether at third level, through school based religious networks, or in the community sector.

Not surprisingly, funding to the sector is described as a ‘significant constraint’ for the delivery of development education in Ireland as groups are limited not only by the quantity but also by the short term nature of the funding they receive and the differing requirements of funding agencies as well as the ‘overall absence of an integrated policy on resourcing the sector that would enable groups to make long term plans’ (ibid). What is worth noting however is that despite a ‘wide range of funding sources tapped for

development education’ that included the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform as well as the Combat Poverty Agency, Development Education for Youth (DEFY), non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) and the European Union, 87 percent of the funding provided to the sector came from the Department of Foreign Affairs (through the National Committee for Development Education, NCDE). Here again the quantity of funding from the NCDE is raised as an issue as ‘more than one in three respondent groups/organisations (35.4%) received £2,000 or less and more than half (50.8%) ... received amounts of £4,000 pounds or less’ (25).

What does this tell us apart from the fact that as a sector we have not been able to retain our ‘wide range’ of funders, that we have failed to attract any significant new funding sources, and that there continues to be an (over)reliance on Irish Aid? From a domestic point of view this is hardly surprising given the past six years of austerity but it continues to remain a challenge that the sector has not yet come together on.

Leadership

As was mentioned earlier the discussions and drive that arose out of this report ultimately led to the founding of IDEA which has been has given strength and leadership to all those involved in development education over the past ten years. The rise of IDEA however led to the unintended consequence of a strategic step back from the NGOs in Dóchas, the national network for development NGOs in Ireland, not as individual organisations but as engaged and recognised leaders in the sector. The aim of NGOs was always to involve others in development education but was never the intent to give it away altogether. Does the development education sector need a strategic plan? The report is unequivocal:

“but there is no group willing at present to champion the development education sector by putting forward a strategic plan. There is a fear that such a plan would cause division in the sector,

would exclude some of those presently active and would render some of the present structures and organisations less useful. But perhaps that is needed” (40).

If we are to take up the challenges and recommendations forwarded in this report we need a strong and engaged Dóchas, we need IDEA, and we need Irish Aid (indeed they are the only ones with *the* strategic plan). We also continue to need the support of the NCCA/CDU in formal education as well as trade unions, youth and community groups, and other sectors we have not yet reached.

Should we engage on such a path we must learn lessons from our colleagues in the UK who became victims of their government’s slash and burn strategy by terminating projects on the basis of value for money and an increased focus solely on the demand side of DE from schools? We need to continue our strong relations with DE groups and organisations in Europe, recognise the new challenges that the Beyond 2015 agenda will bring, look back at where we have been and ask ourselves some hard questions about where we are and where we want to be. I’ll leave the final words to the report’s authors:

“The greatest challenge (to the development education sector) is the lack of a national strategic plan that will consolidate the development education sector, prioritise targeting and secure resources” (7).

Perhaps now, over a decade on, it’s time to finish the job.

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