

Development education, citizenship and civic engagement at third level and beyond in the Republic of Ireland

Despite considerable progress in strategically integrating development education at the third level sector, many challenges still remain. Here, **Su-ming Khoo** explores the relevance of citizenship and civic engagement to development education at Third Level in the Republic of Ireland.

Introduction

This paper explores the relevance of citizenship and civic engagement to development education at Third Level in the Republic of Ireland, and refers to one current initiative to ‘mainstream’ development education at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). The discussion covers four major influencing factors:

- the increasing profile of development issues nationally and globally, creating greater demands for development content across different subjects and disciplines
- concerns about a crisis of citizenship and resulting initiatives to ‘engage citizens’
- the rapid expansion and development of research and increased emphasis on external funding, ‘fourth level’ postgraduate teaching, ‘relevance’ and applied knowledge
- the introduction of ‘service learning’ which integrates civic engagement into teaching.

These developments mean that there are excellent opportunities to expand and deepen development education, but also significant new challenges for researchers, educators and students as they engage with development issues in relation to specific dimensions of research, professional education and practice and the public intellectual role of academia. The inclusion of the third level sector expands the meanings and practices of development education significantly and future strategic programming should take this into account.

Support to development education

Development education is said to have moved “from the margins to the mainstream” in the Republic of Ireland. The official government development education budget from Irish Aid has grown (from €1.4million in 1998 to €2.3 million in 2003 and €3.4 million in 2005) and a more strategic and cohesive approach is being adopted. The current scenario presents a challenging, but optimistic prospect. Development education is also supported financially by a variety of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

A recent assessment of development education finds that there has been considerable progress in strategically integrating the third level sector, through support for teacher education, developing teaching modules, a biennial third level conference, research and support for student groups and organisations (Roche, 2005, p.50). However, this author suggests that this engagement is still at a formative stage and the distinctive contribution of the third level sector has yet to fully unfold. Remenyi’s research on the sector found the third level contribution to be less well defined than that of the primary, secondary and civil society sectors. There was insufficient knowledge about ‘best practice’ and the sector’s potential contribution to teaching, research and policy was “...yet to be fully realized” (Remenyi 1999, pp.6-7). Remenyi specifically recognized that:

“... [T]he tertiary sector has an even greater role to play in the future progress of development education as the focus shifts from an emphasis on information sharing to an increased and more sophisticated understanding of development issues and their significance for good citizenship”.

Some of the major challenges stem from the fact that higher education is itself undergoing rapid change, and this brings new considerations to development education in theory and practice. There is also a major question concerning the relationship between the broader discipline of ‘development studies’ and the specific concepts and practices of ‘development education’.

Meanings of development education

The lack of agreement about the definition of ‘development education’ is often noted (Bourn, 2003, Belgeonne, 2003). It describes a wide range of formal and non-formal education activities, including environmental, peace, human rights and multicultural education and there is some resistance to

attempts to label and ‘discipline’ development education (Bourn, 2003). Some assert that development education has a distinct and unifying values base that emphasises justice and cooperation (Bourn, 2003, p.3). Some contend that development education represents “a distinctive and radical model of learning...[It] encompasses an active, participative approach to learning that is intended to effect action toward social change” (McCloskey, 2003, p.179). This view of development education draws on Paulo Freire’s approach to popular, non-formal education for its vision, concept and practice. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) provided a blueprint for popular mobilisation from the perspective of the poorest and those with the least ‘voice’. His pedagogy rejects didactic methods of teaching in favour of a critically reflective, experiential, activist and mutually transformative worldview. This is a radical view of education which does not usually fit with most people’s perception of third level educational and research practices as elite, technical, theoretical and oriented towards the powerful. Development education is defined in Irish policy as:

“an educational process aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing interdependent and unequal world in which we live. It seeks to engage people in analysis, reflection, and action for local and global citizenship and participation. It is about supporting people in understanding, and in acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect the lives of others at personal, community, national and international levels” (Irish Aid, 2003, p.12).

It is further elaborated as involving:

- knowledge, ideas, and understanding of issues that relate to global poverty and underdevelopment
- an educational process based on learner centred and interactive methodologies
- a strong values dimension based on a commitment to social justice and human rights
- action-orientation, to effect change for a more just and equal world.

This official definition blends development content and Freirian process, following a potentially visionary “...imperative to develop and describe a ‘new story’ of the human condition and of where we are going in the future” (Irish Aid, cited in Bourne, 2003, p.4). The question is to what extent can ‘mainstreaming’ and the integration of third level serve to realise this vision?

The following section explores the centrality of citizenship and civic engagement to this question.

Public and private citizenship

Citizenship is a multidimensional and dynamic concept and the literature on it is large, but this discussion will begin by making a simple distinction between two main interpretations - the liberal and the civic republican. Following Mullard (2004) we can label these 'Private Citizen' and 'Public Citizen', respectively.

The liberal idea of the citizen is that of autonomous, private, independent individuals whose participation in the public sphere is fairly 'thin', aside from voting. The liberal tradition emphasises the importance of negative liberties or 'freedoms from'. By protecting the private sphere from undue interference, a 'good society' is achieved by maximising individuals' private choices. The civic republican tradition on the other hand involves more positive conceptions of 'freedoms to' and civic responsibility. Civic republicanism is a 'thicker' version of democracy which obliges citizens to participate actively, engage with public matters and use the public sphere to further the public good.

We can additionally introduce the concept of social citizenship, and differentiate communitarian versus cosmopolitan views of citizenship. The idea of social citizenship underpins citizens' claims to particular rights and entitlements. Ward remarks that "citizenship is a living and a life process - citizenship begins with birth, and ends with death. How we engage with our citizenship is another matter" (2005, p.8). Honohan (2004) rightly observes that the enjoyment of social and economic rights does not necessarily involve the citizen doing something actively. Communitarian thinkers emphasise the obligation of each individual citizen to actively contribute to the collective good of their communities. However, Honohan is wary of communitarianism's conservative tendency to understand the 'active' citizen as the 'obedient' citizen. She makes a distinction between the 'good' citizen and the 'critically engaged' citizen, whose engagement may involve standing up against existing authority. Ward also expresses reservations about prescriptive formulas for 'active citizenship' where 'active' "...suggests participation in a range of approved and laudable activities and its opposite is 'passive', which is undesirable and reprehensible" (2005, p. 10).

Globalisation and consumerism have transformed the way in which we think of citizenship. Since the late 1990s more diverse and multilayered concepts of citizenship have emerged. National concepts of citizenship may be giving way to global conceptions (Honohan, 2002; Schattle 2003).

Alternative conceptions of globalisation have emerged as a counterpoint to market-driven globalisation, advocating the development of a new global ethic (Küng, 1998) and global civil society (Kaldor, 2003). Development issues have put meat on the bones of the idea of global civil society as new coalitions of NGOs and people have emerged to mobilise against war, unpayable debts and unfair trade. Global citizenship involves active engagement and self-identification as a global citizen (Dower, 2003, p.11). It enlarges the ideas and practices of civic republicanism beyond the traditional boundaries of state and nation. The ‘cosmopolitan citizen’ acknowledges the universalism of human rights regardless of state boundaries, and has distinct responsibilities to act in ways that contribute to the realisation of such rights.

Engaging citizens - the ‘active citizenship’ debate and education

Since the 1960s, ‘mainstream’ Irish education has arguably placed the emphasis on engagement through work and economic citizenship rather than civic engagement through critique. Dunne (2002, p.69) fears that “we may no longer be able to educate for citizenship”, as the notions of freedom and equality promised by economic growth are essentially competitive, necessarily undermining the possibility of solidarity. It is not easy to balance the three necessary roles of citizen as economic producer, as rights bearer and as an independent and yet engaged citizen. In Dunne’s view, only civil society can provide the plurality, civility and trust that are the bases for solidarity. The development of civil society is essentially an educational project, but Dunne is pessimistic about the ability of the formal education system to successfully “counter the deep-lying tendencies of society” (2002, p.87).

Development education largely deals with the question of citizenship within formal education as a curricular matter for schools, focusing on the values and attitudes necessary for **future** citizens. School pupils are largely treated as ‘not-yet citizens’. The processes, culture and institutions of schooling lack an adequately democratic and participatory ethos (see Harris, 2005, pg.32 ff.), and are perhaps more oriented to producing ‘obedient’ communitarians rather than ‘critically engaged’ civic republicans. Since the early twentieth century, progressive educationists have argued for teaching and learning practice to become more experiential, democratic, and critically reflexive. Yet the global restructuring of education since the 1980s has arguably led to the “wide scale detheorization of education”, replacing critical ‘why’ questions with technical ‘how to’ questions, and resulting in a quietist and conservative set of ‘standards’ being perpetuated in both

teachers and students (see Hill, 2004).

By contrast, the less formal voluntary and adult education sector has at its core adults who are recognised as ‘citizen learners’. Adult education is seen as an entitlement of social citizenship and also as a means to express that citizenship. Adult and community education tends to privilege the Freirian ethos of engagement, critique and reflexive practice prized by the ideal of development education. An important background concern to the civic engagement agenda is the critique of consumerist attitudes and a suspicion that such attitudes might be both a determinant and a product of the educational system. The advocacy of ‘education as an ends in itself, and not as a means to an end’ has remained an enduring core value of non-formal adult education.

Where does the third level sector fall in relation to these two models of ‘curriculum for future citizens’ versus the ‘citizen learner’? The broader public debate about civic engagement reflects long-standing concerns about the health of democracy in the face of increasing individualism and consumerism. The ‘social capital’ debate came to the fore with the public discussion of Robert Putnam’s book *Bowling Alone* (2000), which suggested that trends of civic disengagement are leading to a social crisis in America. He argued that not only were voting and party political involvement declining, but there was also decreasing involvement in voluntary work, community involvement and other associational and collective activities. A kind of moral panic pervades the discourse about political apathy and the negative impacts of civic disengagement on societal health and wealth. In the Irish context, a number of recent studies have pointed to similar declines in voter participation, political involvement and volunteering, and suggest that a new ‘work hard and play hard’ ethos leaves little room for altruism, particularly amongst younger citizens (see Cullen, 2004, p.28 ff.).

The civic engagement agenda has thus emerged out of a sense of crisis. This is accompanied by a profound unease with consumer culture, particularly where consumer choice is either being confused with, or simply supplanting, genuine civic participation - for example viewer voting in reality television programmes is actually a passive form of consumption that merely gives the appearance of engaged and democratic choice. The Frankfurt School’s (school of predominantly neo-Marxist social theory, social research and critical theory philosophies) dystopian critique of mass culture seems more contemporary than ever. In particular in its critique of consumer culture’s ability to supplant critical engagement with political quietude through the creation and satisfaction of individualised “false needs” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979).

Democratic renewal and civic engagement in Ireland

Putnam argued for America to engineer a return to the Progressive Era by creating “new structures and policies (public and private) to facilitate renewed civic engagement” (2000, p.403). The Irish project of democratic renewal and civic engagement is, to an extent, a product of these new structures and policies as many of these projects have been supported by American and other private philanthropic funds.

Ireland’s Democratic Audit initiative has shed some light on the debate by providing some concrete information about trends in Irish civic engagement. The Democracy Commission’s interim report (2004) found that Irish citizens are “[d]isempowered and disillusioned, **but not disengaged**”. The report makes a case for democratic renewal, though it does not present an alarmist vision of civic disengagement. While many 18-35 year olds did not vote in the 2002 election, the Commission’s final report, (Harris, 2005) found that the most prevalent reasons for this failure to vote were not necessarily attitudes of disengagement, but procedural barriers around voter registration. Their survey of public perceptions of democracy indicates that Irish people “have a strongly egalitarian sense of democracy” (Clancy et al, 2005, p.3). There is a “...sharp awareness of existing inequalities in Ireland”, “overwhelming support for the enforcement of social and employment-related rights...” such as the right to education, housing and health. Social inclusion and “a more equal society [are] seen as the single most important issue for Ireland today”.

In contrast, a free market economy is perceived by the Irish public as the least important social and political objective (Clancy et al, p.6). These survey findings are important because they do not bear out the assumptions underlying the civic disengagement argument. Two thirds of the public surveyed felt that ordinary citizens can really make a difference if they attempt to influence politics. Almost 40% of Irish people have done some sort of voluntary work and levels of community activity are much higher in comparison to formal politics. These survey findings seem to indicate that there is not necessarily a crisis of social capital. They also underline the relevance of the core values of development education to the wider Irish public and to the proposition that there are reasonable levels of civic engagement, of both local and global nature.

Civic engagement at NUIG

In 2002 NUIG launched a major strategic initiative to develop a civic engagement through the establishment of a Centre for Excellence in

Learning and Teaching (CELT) and Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI). This was funded through a €1.6m grant from Atlantic Philanthropies, the American Ireland Fund and other sources (CKI Implementation Plan, 2004).

The aims of the CKI are “to place Communities at the centre of debate” and “to educate students for civic engagement” through “**service learning**” and the promotion of a civic engagement programme for staff and students. Its initiatives include the introduction of service learning courses and a student volunteering scheme (ALIVE, A Learning Initiative and Volunteering Experience), which has attracted growing numbers of students (from around 150 at its establishment in September 2003 to around 500 in 2006). Service learning is defined as:

“an academic strategy that seeks to engage students in activities that enhance academic learnings, civic responsibility and the skills of citizenship, while also enhancing community capacity through service” (Furco & Holland, 2004, cited in CKI brochure).

In 2002, NUIG was the first non-United States (US) university to join Campus Compact, an association of 950 US universities that undertake service learning. Service learning combines practical, project and problem-oriented learning with ‘service to the community’ through projects that meet a need defined by a community group or service provider. Examples of service learning courses include a socially-responsible module for mechanical and biomedical engineering undergraduates, an International Nursing course and a new MA applied ethics course (Cultural Change and Globalisation). This reflects a transition away from narrow conceptions of formal schooling to broader conceptions of education: “...as a lifelong process which includes life skills, social responsibility, ethical and moral development and professionalization” (Kanji, 2003). Service learning provides a template for development education to engage with professionalisation, upskilling, greater accountability and outcome-driven approaches, but within a context of ethics and civic engagement.

Global development issues inspire considerable interest and engagement among lecturers, researchers and students at NUIG across a variety of disciplines, including Sociology and Politics, Medicine, Nursing, Engineering and Human Rights. Significant interest and expertise in development has built up over decades in various disciplines and departments, though the connectedness and continuity of these efforts is somewhat patchy. Much of the existing capacity for development education is connected to postgraduate training, although interest and capacity are also

present in research and educational outreach programmes. The Department of Engineering Hydrology enjoyed a strong relationship with Irish Aid between 1979 and 2000 when the aid programme supported postgraduates from developing countries to train in hydrology; however, funding was discontinued in 2000. Postgraduate courses are currently available in a number of areas relevant to development, including community development, youth and social work and human rights. The Irish Centre for Human Rights at NUI Galway was established in 2001 and now has some 30 doctoral students and over one hundred Masters students. New taught Masters programmes include an MA in Public Advocacy and Activism and MA in Applied Ethics.

Over the past two decades, a significant proportion of medical students has always opted for elective placements in developing countries. The students organise this themselves, and raise substantial funds for the healthcare facilities they visit. Student demand has led to the provision of an optional global health and development course. A vibrant interest in development issues has developed over the past few years within the student body more generally, evidenced by the prominence of development issues in student societies' events and campaigns and student demand for informal development education lectures and courses.

In 2005, lecturers, researchers and students formed a Development Education and Research Network to share interests and build a development education programme capable of linking the education, research, professional practice, and advocacy dimensions of development. This has fed into a new development education programme for 2006-2009 that will focus on providing development education that is relevant to professional education.

Development issues and the policy and research environment

Development issues gained greater political and media currency in 2004-5 due to the higher profile of debt relief, trade and the Millennium Development Goals and the widely-publicised 'Make Poverty History' campaign in the run-up to the 2005 G8 and Millennium Summits. There was a strong public outcry in response to the Irish Government's admission before the 2005 Millennium+5 Summit that it would not be meeting the UN official aid target of 0.7% Gross National Income (GNI) by 2007. Despite the backsliding on targets, the absolute amounts of aid have increased, and the amount budgeted for 2005-2007 is at a historic high of €1.8 billion. More funds mean more demand for public scrutiny and the government was prompted to draft its first White Paper on aid and development policy, and

to call for public consultation and submissions in relation to it.

The changing research environment and how it interacts with policy will be important factors affecting the evolution of development education at third level. The nature and role of the university is changing as a “new learning economy” evolves (Peters & Olsen, 2005, p.38). Third level institutions are now far more involved in research involving new and complex research structures and partnerships. The government’s Programme for Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) has invested over €600 million in research capacity since 1998 and private philanthropic funds have added substantially to this. This coupled with ongoing investment has provided both enormous impetus for research and significant new challenges for researchers. Specifically, it obliges third level institutions to undertake conflicting processes of collaboration and competition in search of research funding as well as collaboration in order to form the multi-institution and multi-disciplinary research teams needed to produce fundable research with international credibility. It also creates competition as third level institutions are obliged to compete against each other for funding. Third level research funding has tended to privilege “useful knowledge” (Peters & Olsen, 2005, p.38) that is output and funder-led and short-term. The new political economy of research is driven less by traditional scholarship, with its core values of intellectual autonomy and disciplinary integrity, and more by the requirements of national funding bodies and transnational research consortia.

The research and teaching activities that traditionally fell under the heading of ‘development studies’ are facing new expectations that they will be policy relevant and ‘bridge the research-policy gap’. The research agenda is under pressure to become more ‘applied’, technical, and results oriented. Education strategies focusing on lifelong learning and professional education have significantly changed the educational landscape with a new emphasis on ‘fourth-level’ postgraduate training and research activity. How will the university regard intellectual independence and its public intellectual role and can it take on an advocacy role for development education’s avowed core values of justice and cooperation, given the new research economy? One important area of consideration is the researcher’s own role as a global citizen. There are important questions around how researchers engage in developing research and knowledge - as public or private goods and whether they relate to their professional and research activities as private or critically engaged public citizens.

In 1990, the Commission on Health Research for Development estimated that less than 10% of the global health research resources were being applied to the health problems of developing countries, which

accounted for over 90% of the world's health problems - an imbalance subsequently captured in the term the '10/90 gap'. The impetus on researchers as global public citizens is to concentrate on research that can redress this kind of inequality and injustice. However, the mainstream trend for third level institutions is towards commercialisable research and partnerships with the business sector (see Peters & Olsen, 2005). Even the non-commercial and less well-funded research in the arts, humanities and social sciences has become driven by the new pressures of competitive and project specific funding, which discourages 'blue skies' research and unimpeded academic freedom (Peters & Olsen, 2005, p.45-6). The drive to recruit students from developing countries is largely seen as a way of attracting in high international fees to benefit the corporate university, not as a strategy for sharing knowledge. This is effectively a way of increasing, not reducing, inequality.

Conclusion - the opportunities and perils of mainstreaming

Ireland's development education strategy sees "the integration of development education at third level as a necessary prerequisite for support of development education in the formal and non-formal education system" (Irish Aid, 2003). Third level institutions are seen as having a critical role, particularly in "...strengthening...the interface between development studies and development education". Their research capacity is invoked to "support and assist the integration of a development perspective in priority work areas". So far, relatively little attention has been paid to the potential of integrating development education into professional education to actively engage future educators, researchers, doctors, nurses, engineers, economists, and so on to realise their roles as global citizens. This is now set to be a key aspect of 'mainstreaming' at NUI Galway over the next few years, focussing on students, researchers and teachers as adult learner-citizens and emphasising the professions as a key area of life and learning with an important contribution to make to civil society.

Development education is being 'mainstreamed', but for the third level sector, the mainstream is undergoing radical transformations which pull it in contradictory directions. These structural changes in the formal education sector will have a lasting impact on the conception and delivery of development education. The increased profile of global development issues coupled with new teaching and learning strategies provide strong opportunities to introduce development education as content and process in a wide variety of disciplines and pathways. Mainstreaming offers greater credibility and resources to teachers and learners, but it will also involve

greater commitment, higher expectations and the possibility of being co-opted. Critical and reflective concerns are gradually emerging around the moral, affective, emotional and processual dimensions of development education, and these contrast quite starkly with professionalised, strategically-driven visions of mainstreaming (see e.g. Ikeda, 2005; Tormey, 2002).

Development education can contribute powerful dimensions of global citizenship to professional and research practice. It is not just about 'facts' and knowledge, but about the active construction of knowledge through civic engagement. In this conception, learning implies change and a process of active engagement with experience. It is more than just learning facts about the world, it may involve an increase in skills, knowledge and understanding, but it must also involve a deepening of values or the capacity to reflect (Dillon, cited in Bourne, 2003). The citizenship and civic engagement agenda has helped to revitalize the debate surrounding the public intellectual role of the university. Intellectual independence, critical thinking and autonomy are deeply held values in the third level sector. Yet the new values of policy relevance, applied and commercial knowledge and private sector funding may contradict the tradition of critical independence and autonomy. It is crucial that the sector holds on to this intellectual independence, because it is the key resource for critical engagement and for the health of civil society and public citizenship, national and global.

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Dr. Su-ming Khoo

Lecturer

Department of Political Science and Sociology

National University of Ireland, Galway

s.khoo@nuigalway.ie

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