Focus

Development education and research at third level in Ireland

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This article opens up debates about development education (DE) within the third level context in Ireland. It focuses on the research landscape, specifically some impacts and contradictions brought about by the recent expansion of research activity and argues that there is a need for more critical debate on the consequences of this expansion. **Su-ming Khoo, Carol Healy and Kelly Coate** argue that changes in the research landscape push to the fore the wider debate and struggle over what research and teaching are **about** and **for**, and how the two should relate to each other.

Introduction

Research that relates to development education currently comprises a very minor part of the overall research landscape, with relatively little funded and published research on the area. There has been a recent expansion in research, mainly funded by Irish Aid in pursuit of a strategic development education programme. This article primarily overviews the more general trends in research, recognizing that these trends will have an impact on development education. At present, the emerging landscape is complex and research about Irish development education is at a very early stage. Our approach in this paper is to initiate critical debate by documenting some of the challenges facing all educators and researchers, including development educators.

From a DE perspective, education '...has a complex role to play in individual and community development and in the economy, environment, politics and society at national and global levels' (Faul, 2007: 9). This corresponds to a global vision of third-level education as part of

'...economic, cultural and social development' and contributing to '...shared values and ethics which are the foundation of social cohesion and nation building' (UNESCO, 2003:12-13). The expansion of research presents new opportunities for third-level educators, as **researchers**, to explore this complex role and develop new approaches to DE. Yet, our initial impressions of the Irish research landscape suggest that the expansion of research, when coupled with more intensive teaching activities, may lead to tensions and contradictions. There are now more opportunities to conduct research and improve teaching. However, proponents of DE as an emancipatory and humanistic educational project may be concerned at the demands of the new research landscape and the instrumental view of knowledge embedded in the new research programmes.

Research impacts on DE in different ways. On the positive side, it brings the promise of new, more informed activities and audiences, and may lead to new meanings of DE (Khoo, 2006). However, as research becomes more programmatic and policy focused, new constraints and unintended outcomes are also likely to follow. The current research funding mechanisms favour a narrow, instrumental view of knowledge production, and embed competitive processes that run counter to the more cooperative, egalitarian, 'sharing' modes of working that inform development education practice.

While third-level institutions continue to defend long-standing traditions of scholarship, marketisation is problematic for those who view knowledge as a public good. Economistic and instrumental goals and values have been consistently emphasised and successively re-affirmed in Irish and European education policy, most recently in the Lisbon Agenda and the Irish responses to it (*An Taoiseach*, Bertie Ahern, 2005).

Jenkins and Mackenzie (2007) review a similarly changing landscape in the UK and pose several pertinent questions: How should development educators deal with the 'marketisation' of education? In what way does the globalising economy impact on the content of DE? Should DE engage with business as well as trade unions? What is the 'skills and knowledge balance' needed for learners to become both social and economic actors on the global scale? These questions show how aware development educators are of the inherent tension between marketised understandings of education and the need to critique such understandings. The engagement with business and the focus on work and skills show how far the DE goalposts have already moved away from traditional preoccupations with radical and emancipatory critique. We take the debate about marketisation to be crucial and suggest that many other key questions are linked to it.

The expansion of research

Before 1998, funding for research was comparatively limited and there was relatively little emphasis on it. Irish researchers mainly followed the 'lone scholar' model, with little strategic direction or programmatic funding (Forfás, 2007:12). A new phase of public investment at the end of the 1990s brought dramatic changes. Two new Research Councils were created to direct and channel research funding - the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET). In addition, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) became a major research funding agency when it took over the research role of Enterprise Ireland in 2003. Its research budget grew rapidly from €11 million in 2003 to €114 million in 2004. Under the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, SFI will fund €1.4 billion of scientific research in two targeted areas – biotechnology and information technology.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) runs the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI), cross-cutting other dedicated research programmes by funding infrastructural development for research. Between 1998 and 2003 the PRTLI scheme committed three cycles of funding worth €604.5 million. Two-thirds of PRTLI funds were spent on buildings and equipment, the remaining one-third going to recurrent expenditure on research projects (HEA, 2004).

European research programmes add another layer of complexity. The Seventh Framework Programme 2007-2013 (FP7) will be a substantial contributor to Irish research. Over €50 billion will be available over the seven year period from the European Commission to develop a more integrated European Research Area. Most of the funding will targeted at creating collaborative pan-European research teams, with a broad focus on economic growth, employment, competitiveness and sustainability (Cordis, 2007).

The Irish Aid (IA) - HEA Programme of Strategic Cooperation and the Health Research Board's (HRB) Global Health Research Programme, are more specifically relevant to development cooperation. These research funds announced the provision of €12.5 million and €1 million respectively in 2007. Neither are designed for commercial advantage, both aiming to explicitly benefit disadvantaged groups on a global scale. Both programmes are based on Irish Aid policies, outlined in the White Paper on Irish Aid (Irish Aid, 2006). This policy emphasises poverty reduction, gender equality, good governance, and the environment, with special reference to Irish Aid's programme countries (predominantly the poorest African

countries).

A new institutional emphasis on research has developed, permeating the strategic direction and culture of the whole tertiary sector. In order to manage these changes, every university has made senior appointments (Deans or Vice-Presidents of Research). However, the research landscape still appears somewhat uncoordinated, with different funding bodies administering separate academic research schemes, each with its own criteria and deadlines. The number of overlapping research agencies and initiatives in Ireland is problematic because of the small size of the system, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recommended more centralized and strategic research planning. One of their specific recommendations is that SFI's role should be expanded to cover the IRCHSS and IRCSET (OECD, 2006: 67). While the same report acknowledges the role of universities in promoting the 'intellectual and artistic life of the nation and…contribution to citizenship and civil society' (2006:24), the implications are that non-commercial research areas could get subsumed under the priorities of industry-driven science and technology research.

Marketisation: Academic capitalism?

The growing influence of market rationality on the higher education systems has led some observers to coin the phrase 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie, 1999). Academic teaching and research are pushed towards the realities of a global knowledge marketplace as institutions compete for fee-paying students and research funding. In national and regional fora, the tertiary sector is understood as a site of production for the growth economy - producing ideas and people to drive economic development and national competitiveness. While academia is still regarded as a site of traditional scholarship, teaching and learning have become somewhat 'marketised'. There is greater emphasis on graduate teaching and research, and evident bias towards specific areas of science, technology and engineering, as well as pro-market values. In PRTLI, biosciences accounted for half the research grants, while physics and environmental sciences accounted for a further 10% each. Social and information sciences research gained about 5% of research funds, while the least commercial humanities sector accounted for only 2.7% (HEA, 2004). A review of the PRTLI acknowledges that the primary goals for the PRTLI are not strictly market-led, however it openly and uncritically recommends the ultimate goal of 'embedding an ethos of commercialisation' (HEA, 2004:3).

Running somewhat counter to the rather narrow definition of science

and technology research, the recent Royal Irish Academy (RIA) Report (2007) defends the traditional importance of non-commercial research in a wide range of subjects for 'balanced development'. The RIA promotes a broader interpretation of 'innovation' and presents the humanities and social sciences as being '...integral to the development of culture, the economy, and society as a whole' (RIA, 2007xiii). However, even this report acknowledges the dominant logic of academic capitalism. It justifies humanities research as investment in the knowledge-based economy, highlighting the supporting role played by the arts and humanities to Ireland's economic growth. The proportion of research funding allocated to the social sciences and humanities shows a divergence between teaching and research priorities. 58% of undergraduates choose humanities and social sciences (HEA, 2007a). One challenge is the limited opportunity for progression to research in the humanities and social sciences subjects due to the small proportion of research funding that these subjects receive. As we write, a further €230 million of PRTLI funding has been allocated, with greater spending (18.7%) than previously on the humanities and social sciences (HEA, 2007b), which may offer better prospects.

Academic capitalism has led to a market rationality entering an essentially non-market landscape (Skilbeck, 2001). In the UK, this has led to some bitter comments about the negative effects on research quality and academic morale, as researchers and departments are ranked in a crude, materialistic and psychologically destructive way (Harley, 2002 quoted in Sidhu, 2006:121). However, the Irish tertiary sector is not very marketised in the literal sense. It is almost entirely government funded with the state contributing 85-90% of all funding in 2001-02. The sector became *less* private when the government moved to provide free undergraduate tuition in 1995-6 (OECD, 2004:15). Despite its highly public nature, the market language of the new research agenda seems to pull the sector in contradictory directions. The next three sections explore three areas of tension and contradiction before returning to discuss the prospects for DE. These are the public-private paradox, the demands and risks of research and the tensions between research and teaching.

The public-private paradox

There appears to be a paradoxical public-private relationship when we examine funding vis-à-vis the benefits of research. Irish research for the 'public good' has been substantially financed by private and mainly *overseas* sources, whilst national public funding appears to be directed towards corporate profit and accumulation. International philanthropy has been a

major source of research funding in Ireland, especially in non-science and technology topics such as public service reform, children, young people, ageing, peace and reconciliation and human rights. One large single donor has predominated - Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). Between 1982 and 2004, AP awarded over US$1 billion in grants to the island of Ireland, US$666 million of which went to the Republic, largely to the higher education sector (AP, 2007). This included co-funding for the Irish Government's PRTLI scheme. Herein lies the paradox - a single private philanthropist has provided a large proportion of research funding to remedy the Government's historical under-funding of research toward the social and public good.

While the foundation will commit a further $250 million to Irish higher education between 2006-2008, the Irish government's implicit reliance on it to co-fund its tertiary sector is clearly not sustainable as AP has planned to spend its entire endowment by 2020. Philanthropic giving of this sort may, in some way, encourage governments to avoid full responsibility in respect to higher education. Issues of accountability and participation are also raised by this paradox, since foundations are mainly accountable to their donors and their investment in public oriented research is driven by their own agenda, rather than one decided by the electorate. On the other hand, their independence also means that they may be more prepared to fund contentious, critical and non-commercial research and that in itself strengthens and diversifies the public sphere.

In contrast, public funding has emphasised more narrowly defined and commercially oriented research. For example, SFI combines the national aim of scientific excellence with that of commercial relevance. Its policies for 2008 are to recruit 50 'top tier' researchers or research teams in biotechnology and information and communications technology, but also to deepen links between universities and 'at least 10 foreign owned multinational firms' and five indigenous companies. Scientific knowledge is seen as 'a technology transfer system that brings maximum economic benefit to Ireland through leading-edge intellectual property…' (SFI, 2004:4). Research success is measured in conventional scholarly terms - numbers of researchers, scholarly publications and membership of elite international academic bodies. However, success is also measured by the number of patents, commercial start-ups and linkages with foreign multinational companies.

The two national research funds that hold promise for developing public interest research, as discussed above, are the IA-HEA Programme of Strategic Cooperation and the HRB's Global Health Research Programme. Such initiatives reflect a new role for research in meeting Ireland's stated aspirations to become an exemplary aid giver. Irish Aid's policies are

comparatively progressive according to both official multilateral evaluations (OECD, 2003:11) and NGOs (Eurodad, 2006:20).

Research about development is central to DE, especially where it claims to conduct research for global public benefit and poverty reduction. The €13.5 million funding allocated for development-oriented research may be a relatively small proportion of all Irish research funding, but it represents excellent new opportunities to widen the scope of public-funded research to focus on issues of development cooperation. The success of these dedicated development cooperation research grants depends on how closely they fulfil their commendable policy aims.

The demands and risks of research

The new research programmes and agencies also bring considerable additional demands and risks. One of the most problematic aspects of the new research landscape is the model of 'competitive collaboration' demanded by most of the research programmes. Competition is seen as a necessary logic based on the supposition that the best outcomes and 'value for money' arise from market competition. However, underdeveloped infrastructures and the small size of the Irish research sector mean that inter-institutional collaboration is essential to maximise outcomes, counterbalance limitations of scale and prevent replication (O'Sullivan, 2005). Institutions are required to bid competitively against each other for research grants; but they are simultaneously compelled to collaborate in order for their bids to succeed. The Taoiseach has criticised academic institutions for failing to work with each other (Healy, 2006), however the research funding mechanism itself precludes institutions from becoming fully cooperative to achieve win-win outcomes and fulfil the policy aims, as the process is predicated on only selected institutions winning.

So far, research funding processes have tended to be unpredictable and lacking in transparency, though the many commissioned reviews and evaluations may lead to gradual learning and improvement. They have taken a stop-start character, punctuated by long delays, 'pauses' and budget uncertainties. Researchers are expected to produce bids in rapid response to unpredictable processes and comply with demanding deadlines, complicated bureaucracy and shifting goalposts. The principal applicants for research funding are academics who are primarily engaged in teaching and this gives rise to tensions that will be examined further in the next section. If a research bid is successful, demanding administrative and managerial roles will immediately ensue. The processes of competitive elimination mean that discouragingly few researchers and a minority of institutions can succeed in

any given funding round. In Cycles 1-3 of PRTLI, less than half of the eligible institutions gained any funding (15 out of 35) and the three most elite institutions University College Cork (UCC), University College Dublin (UCD) and Trinity College Dublin received the largest grants (HEA, 2002).

Tensions between research and teaching.

The growth of research activities has made tensions and compromises between teaching and research more starkly apparent. Academics are now expected to maintain their traditional roles as teachers, but also to be research entrepreneurs, attracting funding, managing research portfolios, supervising researchers, and producing copious evaluation and monitoring reports. Although there is not (yet) an Irish equivalent to the British Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) system, the metrics of academic success are following those of the UK and the rest of the world. What counts is the quantity of research funding awarded, participation in elite research teams and the number of prestigious publications. The embedding of a system based on these criteria has become inescapable as Irish institutions and academics are already part of highly internationalised labour and knowledge markets.

Evidence from the UK suggests that funding policies and management strategies are pushing teaching and research further apart (Jenkins et al 2007). The increasing importance of research means that attention is pulled away from teaching, the latter getting 'downgraded' as a less prestigious activity. The result is a tendency towards a two-tiered system, with research, market priorities and knowledge competition in the dominant position and teaching, social priorities and knowledge sharing relegated to a subordinate space.

Pressures within teaching are intensifying, due to larger student numbers, more courses and increases in higher level postgraduate courses. Participation in third-level education in Ireland has risen to become one of the highest in the OECD – at around 60% of school-leavers. The government's Expert Group on Future Skills Needs suggests that this should be increased by a further 15% by 2020 (Flynn, 2007). However, as universities constantly expand and take on a permanent growth imperative, there is an overwhelming concern to maintain increasing student recruitment. With new undergraduate entrant numbers remaining static for the past 3 years (HEA, 2007:5), institutions are increasingly competing against each other for school leavers and trying to broaden enrolment from more 'non-traditional' students.

Since the late 1990s, the sector has struggled to cope with a dramatic

increase in class sizes, which together with an increasing focus on efficiency and 'output' have tended to decrease contact time between teachers and students. This is not an ideal scenario for development educators who privilege critical engagement and individual learning which are better developed in smaller classes with more contact time. Modularisation and semesterisation have also led to more compact and intensive courses, though these changes also provide more flexibility to bring development education into, and make it relevant to, a greater number of courses.

The drive for student numbers has focused increasingly on the 'value added' of each student. There has been an increased focus on the 'fourth level', with postgraduate enrolments growing at a faster pace than undergraduate enrolments (HEA, 2007:6). More funding for doctoral students, with the national aim to double postgraduate student numbers by 2013, should mean better complementarities developing between research and teaching. However, the new research funding programmes have led to the establishment of a relatively large number of new Irish research institutes which face considerable sustainability challenges. So far these institutes have engaged in little or no teaching, but an interest in developing professional postgraduate programmes will increase as competition for funding intensifies. There are already significant pressures in terms of space and resources to accommodate research students and activities. For example, HEA and Forfás note that in sociology departments the 'infrastructural issues verge on the insurmountable in terms of the amount and quality of space available in the existing buildings' (2007:27).

These tensions between research and teaching pose a number of serious challenges. Since the new developments in research funding appear to prioritise marketisation, development educators need to engage more fully with the new research opportunities to drive research in more development friendly directions. Development research is becoming more policy driven, given that investment in research has itself become part of official development policy (DCI, 2003; Irish Aid, 2007). While policy-based research is crucial, there needs to be a balance between policy-based research driven by government agencies and critical engagement with policy that helps advance research, but is not tied to specific policy priorities or government agendas. The disciplines and areas where participatory research methodologies are being advanced may hold particular promise, but this requires an article in itself. The teaching landscape offers some avenues of hope that may complement the re-orientation of research towards a more development friendly direction.

Pedagogies of hope and their complementarities with development education

DE shares common ground with other types of education that privilege egalitarianism and emancipation such as workers' education, feminist education, environmental education, intercultural education and peace education. The questions that are raised by the changes taking place in higher education also apply in these other fields of emancipatory education. As critical and emancipatory educators, the process of learning is as important as the content. The skills, values and outcomes promoted by development educators aim to counter passivity, encourage critical reflection and bring about emancipatory action and change. Given the ubiquity of marketisation and managerialism, is it possible that critical reflection might not lead to emancipatory change, but instead result in pessimism and a greater sense of alienation?

Hope for an escape from alienation lies in the possibility of creating greater complementarities between research and new teaching practices. New pedagogical spaces have emerged which make research more central to teaching (e.g. the Reinvention Centre at Warwick University in the UK) (see Jenkins et al., 2007). There are also newly-established centres promoting progressive and innovative learning and teaching practice within the universities previously associated with non-formal education. A familiar local example is the Community Knowledge Initiative/Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at NUI Galway (see Khoo, 2006).

These spaces are useful for exploring the relevance of DE at third level and merit more detailed examination, but only a brief overview is possible within the scope of this article. There is significant advocacy for re-embedding teaching and learning in the wider community context, accompanied by efforts to revitalise the roles of universities as public institutions, embodying human knowledge and values essential to the civility of society (McIlrath and MacLabhrainn, 2007). Such efforts are essential if universities are to play their part in creating an educational culture that challenges pessimism, responds to the challenges of globalization and shapes it for the benefit of all (Leadbetter, quoted in Bourn, 2003, see also Edwards, 2004). An interesting example from the University of Essex shows how community engagement is central to the creation of alternatives to commodified conceptions of learning. The process of re-embedding the learner in the local community took local food and quality of life issues as a starting point. The use of local issues empowered learners to connect to wider environmental and justice debates by first addressing local forms of alienation (Strange, 2005).

While these initiatives may provide 'pedagogies of hope', the danger is that tensions may lead to an outright split into a two tier system, if efforts are not made to develop greater complementarities between research and teaching. Research is an important area of complementarity, linking DE to the wider body of educational theory and critique. Bourn (2003) maintains that we need more theory about DE and suggests that DE has tended to become somewhat self-referential. At third level, DE has yet to become central to both teachers and researchers. Development educators will have to work to highlight the opportunities for researchers to engage with issues of global justice and empower them to develop research that contributes to the theory and practice of critical education, and to the stock of knowledge that enhances the public good. DE for researchers involves the conscientisation and mobilisation of researchers to engage in research that can benefit the poor and enhance sustainability and justice. Research funding for public goods needs to be defended and expanded where possible, especially in the areas of science and technology where the dominance of commercially oriented research has been noted.

Conclusion

The rich intellectual tradition of progressive and adult pedagogy places great emphasis on critical learning and the creation of open and democratic spaces of learning. Yet the transformation of the third-level landscape seems to be taking us simultaneously nearer and further away from those ideals. The expansion of research has driven third-level institutions towards a more complex set of aims and practices. The growth and expansion of higher education has provided new opportunities for development educators to communicate their ideas and values and find a place for them within research and teaching. However, these core meanings, values and practices are significantly challenged by the contradictions of academic capitalism, the demands and risks of research and the tensions between research and teaching.

Research intensification has been accompanied by many other new demands on those who play multiple roles as educators and researchers. The core values within development studies and DE are moving away from economism and increasingly towards humanism and ethics (e.g. Gasper, 2005). This contrasts with the marketised and managerialist concerns beginning to predominate within both research and teaching at third level. Capitalist education embodies competitive, monopolistic and inegalitarian ways of working that are deeply at odds with DE's traditional allegiances to democratising, inclusive and egalitarian values, practices and behaviours.

For development educators such as Bourn and Faul, the crucial and inescapable questions are about how development educators can respond creatively and innovatively to the processes of globalisation. Is education in this new era 'one of resistance/transformation/accommodation to globalisation or something yet to be defined?' (Bourn, 2006:5, 9).

Despite the tensions that might ensue, the evolution of third level DE and the incorporation of a DE research agenda is, on balance, a welcome set of opportunities for the third level sector. However, this development may also have unintended effects on the ability of non-governmental and civil society actors in DE to conduct their own independent and 'bottom-up' research as funding becomes more programmatic and oriented towards third level institutions. As research funding is further channelled through policy-oriented programmes and competitive bidding processes, it becomes harder for smaller organisations to compete for funding and this could lead to some tensions emerging between these smaller organisations and the universities.

In contrast to the tensions and demands of programmatic funded research, a 'barefoot' approach might seem attractive. Barefoot development practice is so-called as it signifies a back-to-basics, bottom-up approach. In the context of DE and research, it could signify a sense of academic freedom and freedom from frustrating forms of bureaucracy, managerialism and top-down control. Conversely, such an approach might lead to marginalisation and the lack of relevance, credibility and resources.

The scramble for research funding undoubtedly leads to narrowing-down and processes of elimination since research funding is an inescapably competitive process. It seems striking how little critical debate there is in Ireland about the new research funding and wider processes of marketisation and competition in higher education and research. Critical debate is crucial for development educators since the tendencies of funded research may not fit well with the open, critical and dialogic approaches favoured within DE. Critique is the essential tool for overcoming alienation, and for achieving the broader humanistic vision of education discussed at the beginning of this article. There is perhaps an inherent risk with any attempt to 'mainstream' DE as it places high hopes on emancipatory and resistive pedagogies that are innately sceptical towards the 'mainstream'.

Ideally, DE should aspire to 'cultivate humanity', producing well-educated citizens of the world who are able to place the needs of all humanity above their particular loyalties of nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender and class (Nussbaum, 1997:9). Such aspirations are not easy within a higher education system that arguably reproduces social divisions and works through exclusive and competitive practices. The challenge is to find a path through the contradictions in the everyday work of universities: the

teaching, research and public roles of academics need to be brought together in ways that complement each other rather than pull them apart.

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