INCREASING/ENHANCING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES: A COMPARATIVE WORKING ANALYSIS OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATIONAL METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Development education (DE) has become an increasingly central element in formal and informal education in the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland. In this article, **Michael Mahadeo** will explore the effectiveness of DE in the formal and informal education sectors as a means of raising public awareness about the interconnectivity of local and global communities. In formal education, it is integral to the delivery of citizenship education in the school curricula and an established option in university degree programmes and pathways. With informal education, for example, it is sometimes used in the curricula for community development activist training and political awareness, with the aim of enriching understanding of local and global issues, and how community practitioners can connect with these issues. In particular, the article will compare development education at the formal university level with development education in informal community education settings, and assess the strengths and weaknesses of both in increasing public awareness of global issues. The article will begin with some definitions of development education and provide an overview of its evolution from the margins to the mainstream of education practice. It will go on to provide a critical assessment of DE in the formal and informal sectors through case studies and make some suggestions for improvement in delivery.

Development education: A definition

Firstly, it is useful to provide a working definition of development education.. The concept is by now fairly well understood as a theoretical proposition and form of practice. However, there are always variations and debate regarding meaning and application to changing circumstances which can limit definitional usefulness. Indeed, Bourne has pointed out that the concept of development education has been 'defined as one of a number of the adjectival educations [including] environmental education, peace education, human rights education [and] multicultural education' (Bourne, 2003:3).

Nonetheless, a definition can provide a context in which we can focus on and analyse the issues at hand. The article, therefore, uses a definition of development education as 'the consciousness-raising process through which people become involved in the creation of that type of society which fosters autonomy, solidarity, and popular participation in change' (Pradervand, 1982:454). This definition is characteristic of many development studies, which involve:

> "[A]ttempts to understand on the one hand, how and why nation states and their subordinate social organisms attempt, succeed or fail, in increasing the wealth, improving the well – being, and widening the rights and opportunities available to their members…" (Oxenham, 1980:29).

Again, Bourne states that development education, regardless of its learning contexts and evolving agenda, is:

> "[M]ore than one of a series of social and political educations, but a distinct approach towards learning which directly relates to educational and social change. One possible way of seeing development education is as being rooted in development and education for social change, putting human development at its heart" (Bourne, 2003:5).

Therefore, education involving development and global issues must incorporate an ethos to promote change if it is to go beyond simply understanding. It should 'enable the learner to critically assess in their own way and on their own terms the subject under discussion' (Bourne, 2003:5). Development education thus aims to put into effect solidarity, critical analysis, societal transformation and the encouragement of active citizenship (Bourne, 2003; Khoo, 2006). Accordingly, it is a means for analytical and reflective citizens to act in solidarity with human struggles for justice everywhere.

In the above context, Leadbetter points to 'a need, particularly in education, to respond to the challenges of globalisation, to engage and shape it for the benefit of all' (Leadbetter, 2002; cited in Bourne, 2003:6). Bourne adds that innovation and imagination is part of development education in this era of globalisation to help create a better world (Bourne, 2003). Thus development education aims to support learning about global issues through an active learning, participative methodology and ultimately seeks to encourage action towards positive social change. The next section provides a brief history of development education.

Development education: A historical sketch

The concept and practice of development education can be traced to the post-war era and the period of decolonisation. In the three decades from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s, there emerged a group of states and societies termed the 'third world' or the states of the 'global South'. These states originally formed part of the trans-oceanic empires of the Western European powers, only entering the global stage as formally independent societies within the last few decades. Almost immediately, the view that these new societies had to be 'developed' along the same path of development followed by the Western industrial states was adopted by Western governments and their academic policy supporters (Allen & Thomas, 2000). The resulting attempt to 'understand' the 'underdeveloped', with the aim of redressing their status, can be viewed as the beginnings of development education, albeit with significantly different understandings of the relationship between the global North and South seen in today's DE practice.

According to Pradervand, there were three phases of the evolution of development education. The earliest phase covered the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s and was charity–oriented and paternalistic. The ideas expressed in the curricula of the time were calculated to induce a sympathetic response with a view to increasing public spending for various international causes (Pradervand, 1982:451). In this initial phase, the template of Western development was unchallenged largely as the model to follow in the developing world. 'Underdevelopment' was the 'misfortune' of the peoples of the global South and they needed to 'modernise'. With aid in the form of financial and technical help, poor countries could be placed on the path to 'development and progress' mirroring that in the more prosperous global North.

The next phase promoted a more mature attitude to global issues and underdevelopment:

> "With the influence of non-governmental organisation (NGO) activism at home and abroad and the energy crises brought on by the increases in the oil price in the 1970s people were beginning to question their own societies and make the links to the structural causes of underdevelopment" (Pradervand, 1982:451).

This was a period of the 'awakening of social criticism' (Pradervand, 1982:451), as public consciousness of development issues and the causes of global poverty and inequality began to grow in the global North.

This shift in thinking enabled educators to analyse issues in a cultural environment more conducive to a critical view of the global order. The enriched discourses around race, class, decolonisation and the emerging environmentalist movement made for a more proactive focus on international development within schools' curricula. Increased public understanding, moreover, served as a catalyst for the next qualitative change in development education. It 'forced development educators to broaden their critique to more and more aspects of our own societies' (Hirsch, 1976; quoted in Pradervand, 1982:451). Pradervand goes on to point out that, by the 1980s, links between global issues such as waste build-up, the arms race, refugees, environmental degradation and unequal development, began to be formed. This process was reflected in the focus of development education, which became 'broader every day, to the extent one might describe it with the old Latin saying, "*nihil humanum mihi alienum est*", "nothing pertaining to the human condition is alien to me"' (Pradervand, 1982). The concept of development became then more holistic, applying to both the global North and South with an increased awareness of the commonality of the human condition within the global system.

Today, development education policy is established at national levels in both the UK and Ireland, supported by government departments devoted to educational initiatives in the formal and informal education sectors. Moreover, the non-governmental sector, experienced in delivering DE to a variety of target audiences, has over the years brought ideas of humane holistic development to the public in the UK and Ireland (Pradervand, 1982; Jolly & Luckham, 2006). As a result of the above, public awareness of development issues has grown steadily over the years in all regions of the UK. More specifically, McCloskey points to the uneven but steady rise in development education activity in the north of Ireland:

> "In its formative stages, development education activity was marginal to government policy-making, poorly funded and lacked strategic direction which limited its impact on civil society. However today we can detect broad public understanding of the importance of development issues and a greater willingness to become actively engaged with global agendas" (McCloskey, 2005:7).

Citing as examples anti-war demonstrations in 2003 and the Make Poverty History campaign in 2005 , McCloskey reminds us that 'the importance of these public manifestations of solidarity with developing countries should not be underestimated in a society where conflict denied opportunities for engagement with the wider world and created inward – looking perspectives'

(2005: 7). This solidarity does not necessarily imply a great understanding of developmental and global issues, but does indicate a basis for raising public awareness around interconnections with the wider world and mutual interdependence. This public attitude reflects real progress by the Irish and British governments as well as NGO practitioners in engendering public support for development. The next section examines development education practice in the tertiary sector.

Development education at university level

It is useful to analyse global and development educational practice in contrasting educational contexts in order to ascertain whether different institutional settings increase public awareness to the standards of the definition as outlined above. The two environments examined in this article are the formal tertiary education sector and the informal community education sector. At university level, development education is mostly delivered to undergraduate students in final year modules. In first and second year courses, global developmental issues tend to be incorporated into other modules. Modules dedicated to development topics are usually in the final year programmes. These modules have proven to be popular with and challenging to students, with dedicated social science courses on development issues being offered for over a decade in Northern Ireland.

Students show a reasonable awareness of the importance of the modules on global/developmental issues and many have completed courses focusing on globalisation or environmental issues as part of undergraduate degrees in subjects like geography, sociology and politics. The students taking these modules are usually equipped thereby with an above average overview of development topics and global interdependence and can often recognise how development issues are connected to a range of subject areas.

Student awareness of development issues tends to reflect the increasing level of public concern with global poverty and the mindset of 'what can be done' to support developing countries. Most participants believe that the UK and Ireland can and should do more to help the poor and marginalised. As German states, 'there is no evidence that the humanitarian instincts of the public have weakened' (German, 1997:15). Lader (2007) finds a similar pattern of consistent public concern in a recent survey of public attitudes to development. The survey was carried out in 2006 for the UK's Department for International Development (DfID).

However, there are a number of structural impediments that can prevent development education from more effectively elevating the

awareness of students towards a more critical, change-orientated education. The first of these obstacles is the structure of university level education which traditionally employs a teaching methodology comprised of a formal lecture of approximately two hours, followed by a one hour seminar or tutorial. The latter session could be delivered up to a week after the lecture. Aside from the interaction of the seminar there is limited engagement with students afforded through tertiary education with the lectures normally involving students passively listening to the transfer of information coming from the lecturer. Mixed teaching techniques can be used to enhance interaction and to allow for a better understanding or appreciation of the topic. But, the primary exchange of information is the traditional 'top-down' approach with the flow from the lecturer. This is exactly the type of education which Paulo Freire argued against and which education for liberation is trying to combat (Freire, 1972; Allman, 1987). Development education cannot follow comfortably this standard format, as it aims to educate beyond mere 'facts about the other' (Bourne, 2003; 2007).

Additionally, the university time-table is designed for rapid 'processing and production' of students, who are then supposed to successfully enter the world of work and individual achievement. This ethos is evident in the way subjects are fragmented into modules of ten to twelve weeks. This does not afford much time for students to develop awareness beyond absorbing the information required for them to perform competently in coursework and exams. Students are committed to a range of modules within the same time limit per semester and they tend to focus on assignments and exams in order to complete the course requirements before moving onto other modules in the next semester. Sometimes too, development education module choices may not quite link to main degree programmes but occupy an optional segment. This again can inhibit a more comprehensive understanding beyond the module itself.

The restrictive university time-table explains the inbuilt tendency towards short-termism in student attitudes, with an emphasis on measurable module performance and outcomes. It is therefore difficult to develop the necessary effective and involved public awareness consistent with the more radical and holistic approach of some informal approaches to development education. The more limited approach to development education found within the tertiary sector is a product of the current system's learning culture. According to both Professor Denis O'Hearn (Queen's University Belfast) and Dr. Patricia Lundy (University of Ulster at Jordanstown) (both interviewed for this article in January 2009), the present modularisation of the curriculum and the assignment/exam orientation of assessment procedures make for a student attitude of 'doing enough' to get through the

programme before moving on to another aspect of their university studies. They shared the view that a significant number of students either do not have time or are not inclined to do much beyond the strict letter of the time–table requirements, unless there is an explicit link to an extra reading, audio/ visual session or guest lecture that is useful to their performance in the coursework or exam. This has also been the experience of the author within his experience of teaching at university level.

An example of this minimal approach occurred recently in a development studies module when one of the interviewees invited a speaker to deliver a guest lecture. Although the lecture was well attended, the students afterwards expressed the feeling that the same points could had been made by the lecturer in the normal lecture time. They felt that the guest lecturer failed to add anything to what they needed for their assignments and that examples from the lecture were too 'foreign' to be useful in their studies.

An important related factor is the average age and level of experience of undergraduate university students. Most are in their late teens to early twenties and their overall experience and awareness of wider issues is limited by their lack of life experience. Additionally, some students in Northern Ireland have at times shown a reluctance to engage with issues beyond the provincial, Ireland or UK levels. The historical legacy of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' has left its mark on student attitudes to anything deemed 'too risky or political'. McCloskey alluded to this when asserting '…conflict often denied opportunities for engagement with the wider world and created inward-looking perspectives' (McCloskey, 2005:7). All these factors can result in students leaving university with an unsatisfactory awareness of developmental issues.

The wider political and economic context within which universities are situated reinforces this situation. For almost three decades, there has been an increased penetration of capitalist market relations into the higher education sector. Khoo *et al.* articulated the detrimental effects this tendency is having on development education at university level. They assert that:

> "[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" (Khoo *et al*, 2007:12-13).

Importantly, Khoo *et al.* (2007) go on to suggest that the type of learning process development education, indeed all emancipatory education, seeks to promote in terms of critical reflection towards change, could be compromised by the market-orientated agenda. In this climate, the degree to which critical education is possible is limited.

However, the success of development education in increasing public awareness varies depending on the type of course and student background. For example, my experience of teaching modules on globalisation to community development undergraduates has proven to be quite rewarding in terms of the awareness that they already bring to classroom interaction and the richness of their discussion and assignment research efforts. Two crucial factors are at play in creating such an experience, which is more akin to development education practice within the informal education sector.

Firstly, all of the students tend to be in their mid–twenties or a more mature age category. Thus, the experience deficit alluded to above is largely absent. This enables teaching to tap into prior learning and acts as a vital resource for students to be able to make links with their own lives. Secondly, students pursuing such degrees are already involved with community development projects and are pro–active around local politics of transformation and empowerment, either at a group or wider community level. Thus, the elements of action and change that development education intends as outcomes are already there at some level. The awareness of global issues in community development activists and workers is therefore much higher than in the younger undergraduates.

Additionally, the ethos of such degrees is about having the potential to analyse and be an agent of change, despite the increasing marketisation of education and society that can sometimes limit more radical efforts toward active citizenship. Therefore, within community development teaching the idea of change is not as radical or foreign as to other degrees. The next section contrasts the teaching of development issues in the formal tertiary sector with that in the informal community education sector.

Informal development education in community education

In this article, development education delivery in the informal sector will be examined through the operations of a community education body. The Ulster People's College (UPC) was formed in 1982 with the explicit aim of facilitating community development and political democracy through education services in Northern Ireland (http://www.ulsterpeoplescollege. org.uk). The organisation uses participatory learning methods to support wider societal change as well as personal development. Of course, education

can be used for a variety of purposes, but in the UPC there is an overt commitment to realising a wider dynamic in society.

The UPC has moved recently beyond its traditional terrain of community development to explore wider development issues as part of a new development education project called Global Connections. According to Finola Hunt, project tutor and community organiser with UPC, the project has been supported by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) through its Development Awareness Fund for the three year period of July 2008–June 2011 (Hunt, 2009). The programme focuses on the issues and concerns of development education using a reflective learning methodology and promoting awareness of environmental education, citizenship education, anti-racism and interdependency between both the global North and South.

The teaching methodology is both formal and informal with an emphasis on group work and peer education, with student-led learning actively encouraged in class interactions on specific topics (Hunt, 2009). The feedback received by the College from course participants has been very positive. In their evaluation of the first course in 2008, students commented on how the course experience has encouraged them to pay more attention to wider issues in their communities and, where possible, to relate them to global affairs. Participants are also encouraged to be proactive in campaigning and lobbying on international issues.

The Global Connections project addresses a range of themes including: immigration, the push factors that force people to leave their countries of origin and the pull factors associated with their migration to countries in the global North; climate change and its environmental impact; and the causes of poverty within the current global economic system characterised by accelerating globalisation and, more recently, global recession. Course participants reported feeling empowered with a better understanding of their lives in the context of their communities and the wider world (Hunt, 2009). The course therefore serves a classic public awareness agenda.

The average age of UPC students, between 21 and 40, is also helpful in the delivery of this educational project. All are involved in community politics and socio-economic activities as activists and facilitators, as this is a requirement for participation on the course. Such background experience is vastly different from that of the majority of students enrolled on university undergraduate courses and considerably increases the potential for greater public awareness.

A second example of informal development education examined here is the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (S.T.E.P) in

Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland. This community development programme focuses on poverty reduction and work skills, but an important component of the work is delivery of training to immigrant groups and community development activists. Here, there is an explicit curriculum of politicising participants in global and developmental issues and discussing how their communities are part of a wider dynamic of local and global interconnectedness. As the course tutor states, 'we try to maintain a "think globally and act locally" [course structure], making connections between people's experiences and what we can do as community workers and citizens, to overcome differences and stereotypes' (McAliskey, 2009).

In comparing teaching global and development issues in the formal and informal sectors, McAliskey asserts her preference for the latter. She points out the richer awareness brought to the learning environment by mature students and the greater potential to make a positive impact on wider society, bearing in mind that the students in such courses are already involved with their communities in a very politicised way. Their previous experiences help to enrich and inform the growth of their awareness of global issues.

In both the S.T.E.P. and UPC cases, the traditional methodologies of the formal sector are not completely avoided. For example, guest lectures are organised both within the institutions and at university locations. Both projects reported good attendance at such sessions, and lively discussion afterwards (Hunt, 2009; McAliskey, 2009). Another important element in their comparative successes is a small class size and a strong focus on the components of development and its meaning. Thus, there are no big time constraints on staff and students in the same way as one typically finds in the university environment.

Conclusion

Formal higher education can be a useful environment to use the development education agenda to promote or enhance the ethos of public awareness, especially given the massive resources available. However, given the structural constraints of the university environment, the teaching of development and global issues to increase public awareness is better served in the informal education sector.

Such dichotomies need not exist in this way. The formal sector can be more innovative in using teaching techniques and facilitating learner involvement in ways that enable learners to understand how development is relevant to students' lives (Khoo et al., 2007). The informal sector has had more success in encouraging student participation in actions around

development issues through their existing involvement in community development. We need a formal education system that focuses less on 'banking knowledge' and 'top–down' learning. Arguably, the learning process should be less of a 'production line' geared toward league tables, tick boxes and employability in a crudely instrumental way. It should instead focus more on the personal enrichment of students, where they are taught to be aware of the world around them and critical of how global, local and national processes work.

While Khoo *et al.* (2007) call for 'pedagogies of hope' in combating the present inegalitarian education system, O'Hearn feels that an educational overhaul will only be possible if there is a movement for systemic change in the entire education system and not just at university level. He believes that the formalised culture of learning, while not immune to innovation, needs to be radically revised in order to achieve better learning potential and realise the goals of any development education agenda, or indeed 'education for liberation' itself (O'Hearn, 2009). Nothing less than a total review of the learning culture is necessary for sustained public awareness towards progressive change.

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