Editorial

Round Pegs in Square Holes? Development Education, the Formal Sector and the Global Knowledge Economy

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Education is at a critical juncture. While its role and effectiveness in nurturing a sense of values, critical enquiry and civic engagement have been debated for centuries (see, for example, the celebrated work of John Henry Newman, 2013), such debates have been eclipsed in recent years by the new language and exigencies of the global economy. Talk of civic values, justice, transformation, and flourishing has been replaced with talk of efficiency, performance, competition, and employment. A range of new forces, influences and technologies has entered the field and the work in rewriting the scope, ambition and mission of our schools and colleges, together with that of their students, is almost complete. As the contributions to this volume ably demonstrate, this new vision for education – one that places it at the service of the global economy rather than society more broadly, building 'knowledge economies' rather than 'knowledge societies', poses significant challenges to development educators. Attempting to introduce development education, with its critical and transformative approaches and practices, into these formal spaces is akin to attempting to drive a round peg into a square hole. There are scrapes and splinters. At times the peg does not fit at all, yet at times it finds its way. And, as many of the articles in this volume demonstrate, driving the peg through requires considerable imagination, determination and ingenuity as well as an acute appreciation of the precise parameters and context within which manoeuvre is possible.

Round pegs and square holes: The challenges of development education in the formal sector

The challenge of carrying out development education within the formal sector is an all too familiar experience for many readers of *Policy and Practice.* And, as the years progress, it has not become any easier. As Khoo and McCloskey (2015: 9), reviewing ten years of development education, have recently noted:

> "'Education' has … narrowed, not widened in scope. Education has come under increasing global pressure to define itself in terms of a direct instrumental economic role, and to relate its role to narrow and generalised understandings of 'poverty alleviation'."

This trend is also noted by Bryan (2011: 4) who points to:

> "an inherent tension between the goal of development education – which seeks to develop active citizens who can respond to pressing global issues – with a more dominant instrumental approach to schooling which views the primary purpose of education as to prepare students for competitive employment in the global marketplace".

This is glaringly apparent at primary, post-primary and tertiary levels alike. At both primary and post-primary levels, Bryan (2011) refers to policy proposals which instill a 'relentless focus' on literature and numeracy within teacher education and in schools, citing the 2010 Department of Education and Skills' *Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* as evidence of this trend. Indeed, this narrow, instrumental focus on education as 'the three rs' (reading, [w]riting and [a]rithmetic) surfaces in a number of contributions to this volume. Furthermore, as Bryan (2011) also notes, the exigencies of the national examination system at post-primary level adds to the difficulties experienced by teachers as they struggle with engaging students critically with complex development issues and the pressures to produce "'safe' and acceptable answers" within their exams. These contradictions between the exam-driven focus of post-primary level education and the need for in-depth exploration of complex development themes is also raised by Bryan and Bracken in their comprehensive study into development education within the

post-primary system (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). Within this study, the authors also highlight the marginal status of development education within the formal curriculum where it is widely seen as a 'Cinderella subject', together with the persistent framing of development activities in charity terms where activities are dominated by what the authors term a "'three Fs approach' – Fundraising, Fasting and Having Fun" (Bryan and Bracken, 2011).

Within the field of higher education, Khoo and Lehane (2008) discuss the impact of the increased marketisation and commodification of third level education on development practice and meaning. Noting the narrowing of space for critical reflection and debate, they urge development educators within third level institutions to create and participate within such spaces. Also focusing on the tertiary level, I have previously argued that the relentless global market-focus of higher education institutions, while producing skilled workers for the global economy, is neglecting to produce critically engaged citizens capable of negotiating, interrogating and, where necessary, challenging and transforming these economies (Gaynor, 2010). Indeed, an analysis of the strategic plans and graduate learning outcomes of the seven universities in the Republic of Ireland uncovers a bias towards volunteering and/or charity as dominant forms of civic engagement or activism promoted within these institutions (Gaynor, 2015). As we will now see, these challenges all form part of the broader trend of marketisation and commodification of the formal education sector.

Marketisation, commodification and the 'new managerialism' within education

Writing of developments within the education sector broadly, Kathleen Lynch is fiercely critical of what she sees as its growing marketisation and commodification, together with its associated technologies of 'new managerialism'. She warns (2012: 96) that this move towards education as a marketable commodity rather than a human right 'has implications for learning in terms of what is taught (and not taught), who is taught and what types of subjectivities are developed in schools and colleges', going on to argue that this market-driven model of education defines students as economic

maximisers, acting in individual capacities and governed by self-interest. As she notes (2012: 96), "there is a glorification of the 'consumer citizen'" and so, it is no great step to understand how the dominant form of development activism among third level students is seen to be fair trade or 'activism as consumerism' (see Gaynor, 2015).

The same trend seems to have befallen educational policy and practice in the UK. Hill (2005: 259) sets out a range of policy developments that have taken place in recent years. These include deregulation and decentralisation; the importation of 'new public managerialism' into the management of schools and colleges; a fiscal regime of cuts in publicly funded schooling and further education services; the charging of fees; outsourcing of services to privately owned companies; and the privatisation and ownership of schools and colleges by private corporations. Observing these developments, Hill argues that the plan for education in the UK has now become 'to produce and reproduce a work force and citizenry and set of consumers fit for capital'.

Writing primarily in relation to third level education, Henry Giroux has long been an ardent critic of these developments. His writings trace the transformation of higher education from its central role within the global project of democratisation, educating students to be willing and able to engage in issues of equality and social justice within public life, to its reconfiguration 'on the model of a discredited business model, reducing faculty to contract labour, and positioning students largely as customers' (Giroux, 2009: 669). He goes on to argue that:

> "as universities adopt the ideology of the transnational corporation and become subordinated to the needs of capital, they are less concerned about how they might educate students in the ideology and civic practices of democratic governance and the necessity of using knowledge to address the challenges of public life" (Giroux, 2009: 672).

A new role for education? The rise of the global 'knowledge economy'

While it is tempting to view these trends as simply indicative of the general spread of neoliberalism throughout cultures and institutions worldwide, it is important to be aware that they are, in fact, part of a far more deliberate, strategic plan for education. This is important because it signals a decisive, planned shift in formal education policy and practice, with significant attendant implications for development educators funders and practitioners. This shift can be traced back to 1996 when the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a widely circulated report entitled *The Knowledge-Based Economy* (OECD, 1996). Within this report it is stated that 'knowledge, as embodied in human beings (as human capital) and in technology, has always been central to economic development' (1996: 9). Developing this thesis, the OECD goes on to argue that 'government policies, particularly those relating to science and technology, industry and education, will need a new emphasis in knowledge-based economies' (1996: 18).

This subordination of education to the service of the economy rapidly became the focus of a number of other influential global institutions, including *inter alia,* the World Bank. With the OECD focused on Northern institutions, the Bank, through its *Education for the Knowledge Economy* programme is targeting educational policy and practice in the global South where it aims, in its own words, 'to cultivate the highly skilled, flexible human capital needed to compete in global markets—an endeavour that affects a country's entire education system' (World Bank, 2009). As the Bank notes in a comprehensive volume devoted to the topic (World Bank, 2007: xiii)

> "…whatever their level of development, countries should consider embarking on a knowledge- and innovation-based development process. In these times of accelerated globalization, 'grey matter' is a country's main durable resource."

Thus, education reform is key to this process. At primary level, universal primary enrolment remains a priority, as reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); at second level the Bank maintains that reforms need to focus on the development of 'programs relevant for working life as

well as for tertiary education'; while at third level the focus is firmly vocational, with the Bank advocating that education be aligned with the skill needs of economy (World Bank, 2007: 118). Indeed, our collective progress in this regard is now on record – through the Bank's Knowledge Economy Index, an aggregate index that represents the overall level of development of a country or region towards the Knowledge Economy. Ireland is currently ranked 13th and the UK 8th out of 315 countries (World Bank, 2012).

These global policy shifts are directly linked to developments within the field of education in the Republic of Ireland. In 1994 the government established Forfás, a national advisory policy agency for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation. Run by a board appointed by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, the agency argued that major changes were required in the formal education sector in order to create the skilled and innovative workforce required to drive the economy (Forfás, 1996). Two years later, echoing the recommendations of the 1996 OECD report, Forfás officially recommended to the government that Ireland should reposition itself as a 'knowledge-based economy' (Forfás, 1998: n.p.). In line with these developments, in 1997, in a largely unremarked upon but nonetheless remarkable development, the Department of Education (in existence since 1921) became the Department of Education and Science, later (in 2010) to become the current Department of Education and Skills. This shift represents an official move to equate education, first with the pursuit and acquisition of scientific knowledge and, following some afterthought, with skills to fuel the knowledge economy more broadly. Indeed, as Kirwan and Hall in a recent paper fascinatingly demonstrate, the so-called 'crisis in maths' at post-primary level, which has been widely reported and commented upon in the popular media and which has formed the basis of significant policy reforms in the subject, was a construct of economic agents acting upon educational discourse and centring on market-led reform and a redefinition of 'human capital' in service of the market (2016: 377).

This subordination of the education system to the demands and exigency of the global economy – widely hailed as one of the key factors

behind Ireland's celebrated yet problematic 'Celtic Tiger' economy (see Fitzgerald, 2000 for example) – continues apace. At the launch of the National Skills Strategy in January 2016, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) (in attendance with the Minister for Education and Skills) emphasised this relationship.

> "The Government has a long term economic plan to keep the recovery going and the first step of that plan is the creation of more and better jobs. The ability to attract new jobs, and having our people fill those jobs, is dependent on having a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable work force. This National Skills Strategy aims to provide an education and training system that is flexible enough to respond to a rapidly changing environment and that can provide the mix of skills needed over the next ten years, and beyond…" (Department of Education and Skills, 2016a).

More recently again (September 2016), in his Forward to *The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019*, the Minister for Education and Skills, having noted his Department's broad-based aims for education, goes on to emphasise that 'By delivering the best training service in Europe, we will ensure that we can create more of the sustainable well-paying jobs that we so badly require' (Department of Education and Skills, 2016b: 6).

It is important to reiterate that this market-driven ambition and logic is not limited to curriculum reform alone. The 'knowledge economy' project has also significantly impacted in the areas of both policy making and management within formal education. Educational policy is no longer the purview of educationalists alone. It is now permeated by the language and values of, and powerful actors from the business sector. Meanwhile, as Lynch et al (2013) have comprehensively outlined, a new managerialism, replete with its constrained and constraining technologies of oversight and control, now sculpts and defines what is acceptable and possible within formal education at all levels. As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, this poses significant challenges to development educators operating in this context. Yet, more positively, the contributions also demonstrate that, with some ingenuity,

imagination and critical awareness, spaces for manoeuver, reflection and independent action can still be reclaimed.

Challenges, innovation and criticality: Contributions to Issue 23
Collectively, and in many diverse ways, the contributors to Issue 23 of *Policy and Practice* struggle with the challenge of fitting critical exploration and analysis of complex issues – many the product of the global economy which the formal sector is now fuelling – into structures and curricula which privilege skills acquisition and readily quantifiable outcomes and outputs tailored to the global marketplace. They struggle to fit their round pegs in the uninviting, and at times, unyielding square holes. Challenges raised in this regard include the dominance of a charity approach to development within schools and colleges; the individualisation of teaching, curricula and action; and the increased pressures and stresses on students and teachers alike wrought by the new managerial emphasis on accountability and results in the form of quantifiable indicators and measures in an era of austerity and rationalisation.

However, as any carpenter knows, round pegs can fit into square holes if the holes are adapted to the purpose. A number of the articles presented here offer ways in which this has and is being accomplished. These include the questioning of and critical reflections on the charity model; efforts towards more collaborative approaches with non-formal actors, together with a targeting of institutional leaders; the use of digital tools to reduce the time pressures of new managerial reporting requirements; and approaches to measurement and targeting as a means of learning and development rather than control. Taken together, the articles presented here offer much food for thought for development education policy makers and practitioners, highlighting both the challenges posed by the marketised square box of formal education and a range of possibilities for the round peg of development education in this context.

This issue begins with an article by Downes which highlights the persistence of a charity model within imagery and messaging within higher education institutes. Her research, which engages staff and students in

analysing over 200 images displayed within the institution, demonstrates that there has been little change from a charity-based vision to one centred on empowerment, and that 'development pornography'/Live Aid style paradigms are still rife. More optimistically however, her findings also show that students are somewhat aware of the manipulative and problematic nature of representations of poverty. As Downes concludes, her research suggests that:

> "higher education students have a much more sophisticated reading of visual images than we might anticipate… their insights and responses challenge the assumptions of image makers, who it appears, underestimate the critical literacy skills of their audience."

The persistence of this charity approach to development is also evident in the findings of research conducted by Doggett, Grummell and Rickard which focuses on the attitudes and activities of second level school leaders in relation to development education. Their online survey of 186 post-primary school leaders coupled with interviews with principals of 11 schools also uncovers an individualism in engagement where involvement in development education is very much dependent on the commitment of individual teachers and students who struggle to fit this into the formal curriculum. The authors thus conclude that:

> "a holistic sense of commitment to development education in the institutional structures and culture of an organisation is crucial ... More collaborative conditions, critical reflexivity and supportive contexts are needed for development education that promotes active learning."

Wilde's contribution draws from a year's ethnographic research in an organisation working with returned British volunteers on their gap year between second and third level. Reflecting on how development issues are presented and taught to these volunteers, she finds a marked lack of structural analysis in the treatment of development issues with such analysis being dismissed by the coordinator as too 'academic' and off-putting. As Wilde notes: 'questions about what development is, the global structures and

bureaucracies involved in it, indeed any form of "academic knowledge" are rejected here in favour of "experience"'. In line with some other contributors to this volume, Wilde also finds that the practices of citizenship that emerge from the programme result in individualised actions:

> "These global citizens take on individual responsibility for social problems and global issues and seek to change their own behaviours, rather than reflecting on or tackling political, economic and structural causes collectively."

She attributes this individualisation of action to the auditing requirements of the programme's funder which focuses on readily measurable quantitative targets. Her research highlights the pervasiveness of the new managerialism within the development as well as education sphere.

This target-driven focus within development circles is also the focus of Gallwey's article which examines targets for education in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Noting that 'results' in development education are notoriously difficult to define, let alone measure, she cites three examples of innovative practice from Ireland in this regard. Gallwey's overall argument, that progress in development education requires co-operation, dialogue and diverse approaches to outcome measurement among and between different actors, together with the employment of targets as means of learning and development, rather than as a means of control, is a timely reminder to policy-makers and funders alike.

Golden's article turns our attention to primary level and the clash between development education approaches and those of the British government. Her article, which draws on a case study of a primary school in the UK which developed an integrated curriculum focused on global citizenship education, provides an excellent example of a case where teachers managed to cater to the demands of the new managerial target-driven culture, while implementing a more integrated, student-led curriculum. This is facilitated, in this case, by a digital curriculum tool which, allowing teachers

to tick of national targets once they are met, aims at reducing stress and repetition, thereby opening the space for more transformative approaches.

Lest any of us should be tempted to rush off and try to implement some of the more innovative practices and approaches outlined in these articles, Kazima et al's article, which presents the evaluation findings of a collaborative student teacher placement programme between universities in Malawi, Mozambique, Northern Ireland and Uganda, offers a salutary lesson on the dangers of seeking to export models of 'best practice'. Highlighting the distinctiveness of some of the local issues uncovered which impacted on the programme, the authors note that 'it is essential to be mindful of the complex, challenging, context-specific realities…' in which practice is delivered. They go on to caution against

> "the dangers of international agencies urging developing countries to adopt 'best practices' with regard to teacher professional development that ignore the everyday realities of the classroom, and the motivations and capacity of the teachers to deliver such reforms."

While the authors are referring to resource constraints in their own particular cases, their words of warning apply equally to development education policy-makers and funders seeking transformative results within the formal sector.

The contribution of McCarthy and Gannon turns our attention once again to the post-primary sector and the findings from the final evaluation of the WorldWise Global Schools programme in the Republic of Ireland. The programme sought to tackle many of the issues raised in the other contributions to this volume – notably the dominance of the charity approach to development education, its low status within schools, and the lack of shared tools to measure impact. Among the findings reported by the authors are varying results in a move from charity to justice approaches within participating schools and a dominance of individualised action over more political type action among students. McCarthy and Gannon stress the need for financial support for development education work (for substitution etc.) as well as strong support and commitment from school principals.

The final article in this volume also reviews evaluation evidence from a development education programme implemented in schools, this time both primary and post-primary in Northern Ireland. Aimed at strengthening the capacity of lead teachers and school leaders to embed development education in an integrated, holistic manner, the programme, although still at an early stage, is reported to be bearing fruit. Research findings reported by McCloskey reveal evidence of 'a shift in the Lead Teachers' thinking from charity-based solutions before the training to solutions based on collective responsibility and education after the training'. These positive outcomes notwithstanding, McCloskey does sound a note of caution, highlighting ongoing challenges associated with rationalisation within the sector; and the difficulties inherent in introducing an integrated 'whole of school' approach into a 'silo-ed' system focused on literacy and numeracy where development education is often perceived as a mere 'add on' to an already packed curriculum. He notes the importance of engaging senior leadership support in this context, and also highlights the usefulness of drawing on development educators from outside the formal education sector for teacher training.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume highlight the sharp contradictions – in values, content and practice – between development education and the marketised model promoted within the formal sector at all levels. This point should be noted by funders and policy makers within the respective Irish government departments (Education and Foreign Affairs and Trade) as it evidences, once again, the lack of joined up thinking within government policy. However, the contributions also demonstrate that, while it is indeed difficult to introduce and promote development education within these formal spaces, it is not impossible. Round pegs can indeed fit into square holes. Indeed, eighteenth century woodworkers are said to have employed both to increase the structural integrity of their buildings. What matters here is context. It is important that, in driving the pegs through, we take care not to deform or damage them in any way. In other words, in attempting to implement development education in formal contexts, it is imperative that we examine and analyse our approaches and practices in the context of the wider

power relations, structural imperatives and institutional structures, discourses and practices with which they interact.

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