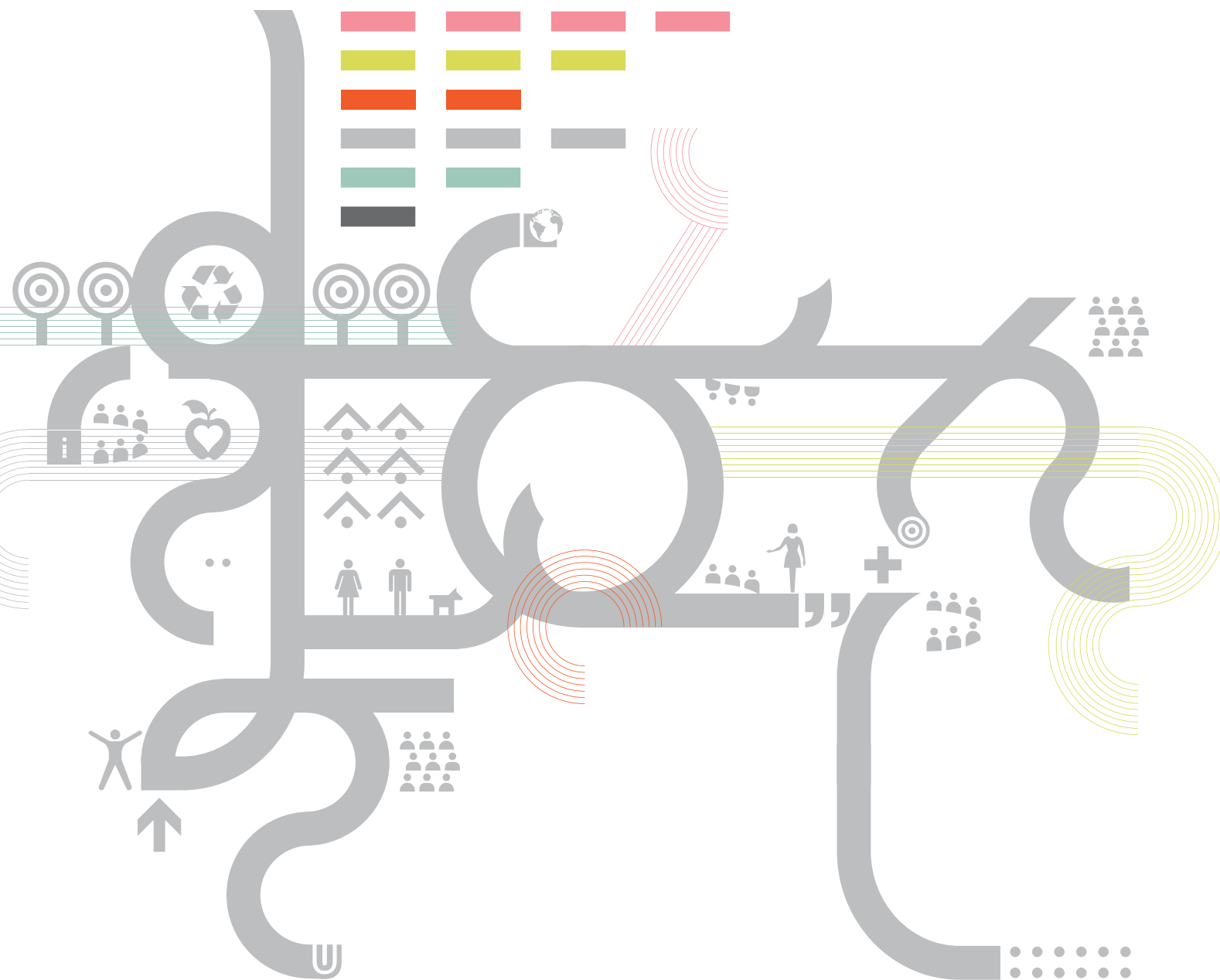


Mapping Civic Engagement  
*within*  
Higher Education  
*in*  
Ireland



# Mapping Civic Engagement *within* Higher Education *in* Ireland

//////////

Editors

Lorraine McIlrath, Alison Farrell, Jean Hughes, Seamus Lillis & Ann Lyons



# Publication Information

Mapping Civic Engagement within Higher Education in Ireland

## Joint publishers

AISHE – All Ireland Society for Higher Education

Website: <http://www.aishe.org/>

Campus Engage – Network for the Promotion of Civic Engagement in Irish Higher Education

Website: <http://www.campusengage.ie>

## Editors

Lorraine McIlrath

Alison Farrell

Jean Hughes

Seamus Lillis

Ann Lyons

## Designed by

Siobhan O'Carroll

## Funded by

Higher Education Authority (HEA) Strategic Initiatives and SIF 1.

ISBN 978-0-9550134-4-7

## Copyright

©2007. Released under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 licence.

## Copyright

### Original Works

The separate and original works comprising this collection are subject to copyright by their individual authors. The aggregation of the works into the collection and all ancillary original works are copyright by the editors. All these original works are made available under the Creative Commons<sup>1</sup> licence identified as Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike3.0.<sup>2</sup>

### Informally, this means that you are free:

- to share— to copy, distribute, and display the work, and
- to remix — to make derivative works,

### under the following conditions:

- Attribution. You must give the original author(s) credit.
- Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- Share Alike. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.

### Note:

- All other rights are reserved by the copyright holders.
- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of the work(s).
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder(s).
- Your fair dealing and other rights are in no way affected by the above.
- This is an informal, human-readable summary of the licence terms, which has no force in its own right. The legal terms of the licence are determined solely by the Legal Code (the full license)<sup>3</sup>.

### Third Party Copyright Works

Unless otherwise indicated, all usage of third party copyright works in this collection, by way of quotation or otherwise, is done in good faith under the “fair dealing” and/or “incidental inclusion” provisions of the Irish Copyright And Related Rights Act, 2000<sup>4</sup>, sections 51 and 52. Any specific query in relation to such usage should be referred to the individual author(s).

<sup>1</sup> <http://creativecommons.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/legalcode>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/ZZA28Y2000.html>

<b>Table of Contents</b>	003
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	004
<i>Editorial</i>	005
<i>Notes on Editorial Committee &amp; Contributors</i>	006
//////////	
<b>Section One</b>	
Foundations For Civic Engagement Within Higher Education In Ireland	016
<b>01</b> <i>Driving Civic Engagement Within Higher Education In Ireland: A Contextual Picture Of Activities From The Local To The National Through The Evolution Of A Network</i> <b>Lorraine McIlrath &amp; Ann Lyons</b>	018
<b>02</b> <i>Active Citizenship And Higher Education</i> <b>Caitriona Ryan &amp; Deirdre Stritch</b>	030
<b>03</b> <i>Democratising Knowledge - The Role Of Universities</i> <b>Gerard Quinn &amp; Lorraine McIlrath</b>	040
<b>04</b> <i>Defining Innovation In The Engaged University</i> <b>Finbarr Bradley</b>	048
//////////	
<b>Section Two - Case Studies</b>	
Case Study One - University Community Engagement From Michigan To Mayo	056
<b>05</b> <i>Community Engagement In Rural Ireland: A Lecturer's Perspective</i> <b>Diane Doberneck</b>	058
<b>06</b> <i>Pride Of Place Competition In Mayo Abbey: Students' Perspective On Community Engagement</i> <b>Ryan T. Cook And Scott M. Pitera</b>	072
<b>07</b> <i>A Partnership Between The Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (Mayo) And Michigan State University: A Community Perspective</i> <b>Maureen Lally, Diane Doberneck, Seamus Lillis And Brendan Sammon</b>	082
Case Study Two - Service Learning In Nurse Education	092
<b>08</b> <i>Service Learning: A Method Of Facilitating Cultural Awareness In Undergraduate Nursing Students</i> <b>Dympna Casey &amp; Kathy Murphy</b>	094
<b>09</b> <i>Student Insights Into Service Learning And The Zambian Experience</i> <b>Meabh Sheridan &amp; Siobhan Lynch</b>	108
Case Study Three - Models & Modelling Civic Engagement	114
<b>10</b> <i>Learning From Life: The Uaneen Experience In Dublin City Univeristy</i> <b>Jean Hughes &amp; Una Redmond</b>	116
<b>11</b> <i>Critical Conversations</i> <b>Eilish Rooney</b>	124
<b>12</b> <i>Community Learning In Action - Lessons From The 'Finglas For Diversity' Research Initiative With DCU From A Community Perspective</i> <b>Kerry Lawless &amp; Jean Hughes</b>	138
<b>13</b> <i>To Be Or Not To Be Altruistic: Students' Reactions, Reflections And Resistance To Service Learning</i> <b>Hannah Barton &amp; Jean Hughes</b>	148
Case Study Four - University & Community - Defining Experience	158
<b>14</b> <i>A Pilot Project At The Centre For Non-Profit Management At Trinity College Dublin: Some Unexpected Consequences</i> <b>Catherine Breathnach</b>	160
<b>15</b> <i>Active Citizenship: An Opportunity For Committed Engagement And Innovation Within The Third Level Sector</i> <b>Seamus Lillis</b>	170
<b>16</b> <i>Engaging Learning Communities: Valuing Experience</i> <b>Rosemary Moreland</b>	182
<b>17</b> <i>Service Learning. So What?</i> <b>Brian Ó Donnchadha</b>	192
Case Study Five - Theory To Practice - Perspectives From The US & India	202
<b>18</b> <i>Letter Home</i> <b>Surya Kalra &amp; Richard Bawden</b>	204
<b>19</b> <i>Civic Engagement, Community Development And Implications For The Academy - From Los Angeles To Ireland</i> <b>Maria Avila</b>	216
<b>Section Three - Conclusion</b>	226
<b>20</b> <i>Reflections On Civic Engagement</i> <b>Saranne Magennis</b>	228

# Acknowledgements

The following publication, entitled *Mapping Civic Engagement within Higher Education in Ireland*, would not have been possible without the commitment of 30 collaborators in community university partnerships whose diverse perspectives both challenge and complement the context of civic engagement within higher education in Ireland.


The opportunity to collate this resource follows from a project which was funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) entitled the 'Service Learning Academy'. For this innovative project and work, we would like to thank the HEA for allowing the space and resources to think of new means and methods to address the civic role of higher education. The Academy gave students, academics, policy makers and community the opportunity to discuss the implications for civic engagement in Ireland, through the exploration of practice, philosophy, policy and partnership. The myriad of perspectives offered in this resource are representative of all who engaged in this project.

In addition, we would like to thank Seamus Lillis for the Trojan work he undertook when approaching and encouraging the contributors to write for this publication, many of whom used this as the first opportunity to formally reflect on their work through civic engagement and partnership. Likewise we would like to thank Catherine Breathnach, Ann Coughlan and Brian Ó Donnchadha for their work in reviewing and proofing during the initial stages of the book's compilation.

The editors would like to acknowledge the stellar work of Mary Bernard of the Community Knowledge Initiative at the National University of Ireland, Galway for her expertise in formatted the original text and preparing the final version for publication.

In addition, we would like to thank AISHE for agreeing to publish this resource and in particular Saranne Magennis, President of AISHE, for her wisdom and advice throughout the editorial process.

Finally, we would like to thank Campus Engage for sponsoring this publication and for carrying forth the work on a national level that commenced through the 'Service Learning Academy'.



# Editorial

This publication *Mapping Civic Engagement within Higher Education in Ireland* highlights a range of activities that underpin civic engagement within higher education in Ireland from diverse perspectives. It is a contemporary record and example of current thinking, experiences and rationale in this area. Contributions have been drawn from those working within policy bodies, universities, and community together with third level students. Themes relating to community based/service learning, community university partnerships and broadly, the role of institutions of higher education within society are explored from academic, professional and personal lenses. In addition, the contributions and experiences offered are independent, and representative of the authors and not of the editors.

The publication is a product of the 'Service Learning Academy', a project funded by the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) Strategic Initiatives 2005 to 2007. The project was led by the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) at NUI Galway in partnership with Dublin City University (DCU), NUI Maynooth and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The 'Service Learning Academy' allowed for an all island debate among students, community and academics. The conversations focused on the role of higher education within society, community based/service learning as pedagogy for civic engagement and the purpose of civic engagement within Ireland, through a series of seminars and discussion fora. This publication was called for at these events to help those new to the field to gain an insight into the ongoing activities within Ireland. It is our intention that this resource will contribute toward thinking and help propel innovative practice. The work that commenced through the 'Service Learning Academy' has culminated in the formation of a network called 'Campus Engage', a partnership of universities in Ireland that has brought together original Academy partners with the University of Limerick and University College Dublin. 'Campus Engage' has been funded by HEA SIF 1 with matched funds provided by each of the five partners.

This book seeks to provide insights into the range of theories, practices, processes and the varying manifestations of civic engagement activities between communities and institutions of higher education in Ireland at present. This unique publication is one of 'voices' – the voices of all the relevant stakeholders with regards to civic engagement within higher education.

The publication has been divided into three distinct but interrelated sections. Section One *Foundations for Civic Engagement within Higher Education in Ireland* takes account of contextual and conceptual issues. Section Two *Case Studies*, which has been subdivided into five case studies, offers multiple perspectives on a range of models, activities and experiences that underpin civic engagement and partnerships between the community and university. Finally, Section Three *Conclusions* offers reflections on the main messages emanating from this publication with some thoughts on future implications for the role of the university broadly within society and specifically within community.

# Notes *On* Editorial Committee & Contributors

**Maria Avila** is the Director of the Center for Community Based Learning at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. Maria is originally from Northern Mexico, and her professional views and approaches are grounded in community organizing experiences in Mexico and the United States. She earned a degree in social work at the Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez in Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico; a B.A. in psychology at the University of Illinois in Chicago; and a M.A. in social service administration and community organizing at University of Chicago.

**Hannah Barton** teaches in the School of Creative Technologies at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology in Dublin, Ireland. Her research interests include Cyberpsychology, Social Psychology, Personality and Psychometrics. Her current research encompasses service learning and the transformational benefits it can bring to students in terms of interpersonal skills and positive emotions. Hannah has presented and written on the benefits of using new pedagogies and technologies in the teaching of psychology.

**Richard Bawden** (AM, PhD, FRSA) is currently a visiting distinguished university professor at Michigan State University; a position he assumed in 2000 following a long career at the University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury and earlier positions at the University of New England, with FAO in Uruguay, and in the research division of Boots Pure Drug Company in England. He was dean of Agriculture and Rural Development at Hawkesbury from 1978 to 1994, was appointed Professor of Systemic Development in 1988, and was foundation director of the Centre for Systemic Development there from 1996 until his retirement in 1999. He has been a visiting professor at Cornell and Rutgers universities in the US, the Open University in England and Natal University in South Africa. He has also been a consultant to systemic development projects in more than a dozen countries across five continents working with such international development agencies as The World Bank, The Asian Development Bank, FAO/UNDP, UNESCO, the Ford and Kellogg Development Foundations, and the international development agencies of Australia and the United States of America. He has published more than 200 journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers and is member of the editorial boards of three international journals. In addition to his academic posts, Richard Bawden is a foundation director of Global Business Network Australia and of the Systemic Development Institute, and is a senior partner and director of the consulting agency Systemic Development Associates in Australia. Professor Bawden has been a Fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (FRSA) since 1990 and on Australia Day 2000 he was appointed to Membership of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of his national and international work in systemic development.



**Finbarr Bradley** is co-author of the book, *Capitalising on Culture, Competing on Difference* [Blackhall Publishing, 2008], an examination of innovation, learning and sense of place in a globalising Ireland. He was a Professor of Finance at DCU where he was first Director of a key graduate degree in the financial services industry. He developed a path-breaking multilingual degree in finance, computing and enterprise at DCU and was Director of Fiontar, the Irish-medium centre there. He is the former chairman of zamano, a telecommunications company founded by former Fiontar students whose IPO is listed on the London and Dublin Stock Exchanges. He also held professorships at the Smurfit Business School, UCD and the Economics Department, NUI Maynooth. He taught at the University of Michigan, Fordham University and the Helsinki School of Economics. He worked as an engineer with General Electric in the USA, Korea and Ireland. He has published in a variety of journals including the *Journal of Portfolio Management*, *Journal of International Finance & Accounting*, *The Irish Banking Review*, *Irish Educational Studies* and *The Irish Review*. He has an engineering degree from UCC and a PhD from the Stern School of Business, New York University.

**Catherine Breathnach** worked as Research Fellow with the Centre for Nonprofit Management at the School of Business, Trinity College Dublin between 2001 and 2008. Her work there concentrated on the Dialogue Programme, and, as an integral part of this, the development of the Visiting Practitionership Scheme. These aimed to improve the quality and type of engagement between the Centre and nonprofit practitioners. The guiding concept in this work was that effective learning relationships between these partners would enable innovation in the work of the nonprofit practitioner and in the educational and research work of the Centre. This work was influenced by that of Senge (1993) and others on the Learning Organisation. Catherine was awarded her PhD in 2002 (NCI). Her thesis focused on the relationship between membership participation, organisational learning and strategic change in democratically structured voluntary organisations. She also holds a Masters in Adult and Community Education (NUI Maynooth) that explored the educational philosophy of youth work in Ireland, and Master of Business Studies which looked at the relationship between the effectiveness of gender positive action in organisations and organisational culture. She was awarded the Outstanding Academic Achievement Award for the latter by the Graduate School of Business in 1997. In the past, Catherine has also worked with the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Centre for Adult and Community Education (NUI Maynooth), the Alumni Development Office in UCD, RTE (TV Programmes) and with the Office of the Minister for Youth and Sport at the Department of Education.



# Notes *On* Editorial Committee & Contributors

**Dympna Casey** (RGN, BA, MA, PhD) is a registered general nurse with expertise in care of the elderly and working in developing countries. She has worked in several different cultures including Australia, Sudan, Kosovo and Angola and most recently as a primary health care programme co-coordinator in Africa. Currently she is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Nursing & Midwifery at the National University of Ireland Galway. Her specialist subjects include service learning and health promotion. She teaches across a range of programmes from diploma to master's level and supervises students undertaking research dissertations at postgraduate and PhD level. Her research interests include issues relating to service learning, culture and health, health promotion, and care of the elderly.

**Ryan T. Cook** is a fourth year student pursuing a Bachelors of Science in Urban and Regional Planning and a specialization in Spatial Information Processing in Michigan State University. His hometown is Portland, Michigan. His future academic and professional endeavors and aspirations will include incorporating his interests in community and economic development to support goals of community social, physical and economic sustainability. These aspirations are supported by his interest in the provision and accessibility of affordable housing, the support of alternatives to motorized transportation, and the realization that community vitality and economic entrepreneurship cannot occur in isolation. Further, he has a strong interest in incorporating GIS and spatial technologies into community visualization for civic engagement. Cook plans to pursue a Master's degree while advancing his experience working in communities.

**Diane Doberneck** is a research specialist at the National Center for the Study of University Engagement and an adjunct assistant professor in the Liberty Hyde Bailey Scholars Program. Doberneck's research interests include outreach and engagement in promotion and tenure processes; faculty integration of outreach and engagement across their teaching, research, and service responsibilities; faculty pathways to careers as engaged scholars; international community engagement; and effective strategies for teaching and learning community engagement. Informed by this research, Doberneck creates and supports the co-creation of professional development programs on community engagement—including Tools of Engagement, Graduate Certificate on Community Engagement, Emerging Engaged Scholars Workshop and Engaged Scholar Speakers Series. Doberneck also co-coordinates an international collaborative with the Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (Co. Mayo, Ireland) that enhances rural community vitality through community engagement. Together, Tochar Valley community members and MSU students assist communities in developing their own deeper sense of place; individual, organizational and community capacities; and cultural and natural heritage assets. In 2008, she won MSU's 1st Annual Curricular Service-Learning and Civic Engagement Award in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources for her international engagement work. Doberneck holds a Ph.D. in organizational and community resource development from Michigan State University.



**Alison Farrell** is Teaching Development Officer in the Centre for Teaching and Learning, NUI Maynooth. She is a graduate of University of Limerick and holds a PhD in American Literature. She has been directly involved in the field of Education since 1994, providing her with the opportunity to teach, research and project manage at all levels from primary to higher education. She has worked in a range of pedagogical areas including curriculum design and development, creativity in Higher Education and civic engagement. She teaches on the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education in NUI Maynooth.

**Jean Hughes**, BSc, MBA, is the Director of SIF (Strategic Innovation Fund) Programmes in DCU, second from her substantial role as Head of Learning Innovation (Teaching and Learning), in Dublin City University. Originally a computer science graduate, she started her career in information technology in industry and moved to higher education in 1992 and has worked in the Institute of Technology, Tallaght (ITTD), the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), Dun Laoghaire before joining DCU in 2005. She held various roles including Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Head of Department and Head of School in the Institute of Technology sector. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Education with Queens University, Belfast where her thesis is focussing on quality assurance and accountability of the academic role. Her research interests include reflective practice, teaching portfolios, curriculum design and managerialism in higher education. She provides training and development activities across a wide range of academic development and student learning areas.

**Surya Kalra**. As an undergraduate in Occidental College, Surya Kalra explored the fields of Community-Based learning and Participatory Research under the guidance of her academic advisor, Jeff Tobin and the mentorship of Maria Avila, the Director for Community Based Learning. She spent time learning from researchers, community organizers and activists in Los Angeles and abroad in Nicaragua, Argentina and India. Notably, all of the people with whom she studied while at home and abroad employed participatory methods for creating sustainable, empowering relationships with communities served. After college, Kalra spent a year as an Indicorps fellow in India, working as a to mentor and motivating rural youth to become change agents in their own villages. She currently works as a community organizer in Los Angeles. Her work focuses on urban education reform through parent empowerment and community-school partnerships.

# Notes *On* Editorial Committee & Contributors

**Maureen Lally** is the manager of the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network Company, County Mayo. This 18 Community Rural Network straddles the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail which stretches from Balla in East Mayo to Croagh Patrick in the West. It is an umbrella organisation established to envision and undertake autonomous rural development, but above all to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage and equality. She has considerable national and international experience having worked in a number of capacities as, teacher, advisor, trainer/facilitator, manager and coordinator/leader of study abroad programmes involving visiting students from Michigan State University, Clemson University, Ohio, University of Wageningen, Holland, and a number of adult study groups from Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Netherlands and the Baltic Countries. In 2006 she received a special award from Michigan State University as a Distinguished Partner in Study Abroad Programmes.

**Kerry Lawless** is currently working with the National Adult Literacy Agency as their Research Manager. Before joining NALA Kerry worked with Dublin City University as research coordinator of the DCU Finglas for Diversity research project. Kerry had previously run her own research and training consultancy, Equality Works! Working with a range of organisations including the European Anti Poverty Network, Fingal County Council, the Health Services Executive, Dublin Port and the DIT Students' Union. She was previously employed by Interculture Ireland, as National Director, and by the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Irish Trade Union Trust in communications and policy roles. With an MA in Political Communication from Dublin City University, Kerry has over 15 years experience in research and policy development at national, European and international level and has been involved in adult education for 20 years. Kerry has a wide range of research interests and has had research published on a number of social issues from prostitution to drug misuse, the impact of interculturalism to effective community development strategies and more recently on adult literacy. Kerry has presented on her work widely. Her most recent research includes studies with older adult learners with literacy difficulties and an evaluation of distance learning for adults. Kerry is currently the Editor of *Literacy Review: Journal of the National Adult Literacy Agency* and is a member of the development Group of IRAACE – the Irish Research Association for Adult and Community Education. Kerry is a volunteer trainer with the Special Olympics, a volunteer tutor and trainer with the Finglas Adult Literacy Service as well as a member of the Finglas for Diversity Network.

////////// **Séamus Lillis** works with groups, communities and companies to help them achieve better outcomes from their work through the use of critical theoretic approaches. His areas of expertise encompass a variety of strategies that can be used to promote innovation and to engender raised awareness and more systematic approaches to challenges, whether in companies or in communities. These strategies include action research, appreciative enquiry, outreach and engagement, community development and systems thinking. Formerly of Teagasc, he worked there as an advisor, educator and specialist in leadership and community development. In 1998 he was awarded a scholarship by the United States - Ireland Co-operation Programme in Agricultural Science and Technology towards doctoral studies which he pursued in Michigan State University and University College Dublin on his practice as a rural community development practitioner.

**Siobhan Lynch** was a third year nursing student on the Bachelor of Nursing Science programme in National University of Ireland, Galway when she wrote this account. She had always dreamed of being a nurse and working in Africa, hence her decision to avail of the opportunity to study at NUI, Galway to undertake the service learning module. As part requirement for this module in the second year of her programme she travelled to Zambia and undertook her three months placement in the Ranchhod Hospice Kabwe There she worked with people living with HIV and AIDS. She is now a Registered General Nurse and following her graduation in June 2008 she returned to Kabwe to work fulltime in the Hospice. Her hope is to specialise in a combination of HIV/AIDS care and paediatrics. She is very interested in devising ways to overcome barriers and stigmas associated with HIV/AIDS. Siobhan enjoys travelling and is excited that as a career, nursing enables her to work and live in different countries and cultures.

**Ann Lyons** is the Co-ordinator of Campus Engage, the HEA SIF-funded initiative established in 2007 to promote civic engagement activities in institutions of higher education in Ireland. Campus Engage is a joint initiative of NUI, Galway, NUI, Maynooth, Dublin City University, University College, Dublin and the University of Limerick. Based at the Community Knowledge Initiative in CELT at NUI, Galway, Ann is responsible for establishing Campus Engage as a national platform to support the development of civic engagement activities in Irish higher education.

**Saranne Magennis** is the inaugural Director, Higher Education Policy (HEP) Unit at National University of Ireland, Maynooth. NUI Maynooth is a secular university but traces its history to St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland's national seminary and Pontifical University. Formerly, Saranne was Director of Quality at NUI Maynooth and established a range of critical University services including quality assurance, staff development and training, educational development and institutional research. This HEP Unit undertakes and fosters basic and applied research on national and international higher education policies. Monitoring of national and international research on the role and practice of higher education, assessing the implications for NUIM and Irish higher education of emerging policy trends and developing a network of multidisciplinary research expertise in relation to higher education policy are among its key goals. As Director, Saranne is investigating models of engagement between universities and communities that might be characterized as non-traditional groups for higher education. In furtherance of this, she is working with Associate Professor Peter Howard at the IACE in ACU. She is a founder member and current President of the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE). Founded on 14th March, 2000 to further HE Teaching and Learning on the island of Ireland, AISHE is an individual membership organization, which runs an annual conference, a series of regional seminars and workshops and collaborative events. It has published numerous books in relation to teaching and learning and is about to launch an online journal. Its members include academics, educational developers and members of communities and organizations engaged in higher education. Prior to joining NUI Maynooth, Saranne worked in the Queens University of Belfast and the University of Ulster. These are the two universities in Northern Ireland, and as such part of the UK system of higher education. Prior to that, more years ago than it is comfortable to recall, Saranne taught Philosophy in a number of tertiary education settings in Ireland.

# Notes *On* Editorial Committee & Contributors

**Lorraine McIlrath** is Coordinator of the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) at the National University of Ireland Galway and Academic Staff Developer (Service Learning) based at the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. She is responsible for developing service learning component of the CKI and the overall mainstreaming of civic engagement at NUI Galway. In addition, she is Principal Investigator of a national Irish network for civic engagement within higher education in Ireland, entitled Campus Engage which has been funded by the Higher Education Authority SIF. Prior to her present position she worked at the UNESCO Centre at the University of Ulster where she developed service learning programmes on the Northern Ireland conflict/peace process and a pilot for local and global citizenship for Key Stage 3. She worked for the British Council in Sochi Russia and supported the development of a Soros Foundation funded College for Multicultural Education from 2001 to 2004. Her research interests include the role of education in contested societies, community/university partnerships, academic staff involvement in service learning youth; she has published books and journals in these area.

**Rosemary Moreland** is a Lecturer in Community Development, in the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies, Faculty of Social Studies at the University of Ulster. She has 17 years' experience in the field of community development and community-based education. She devised the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Short Course in the Community Studies Unit, which she now co-ordinates, as well as teaching on the BSc (Hons.) Community Development. She has recently been awarded a Distinguished Teaching Fellowship at the University, for this work. Dr Moreland has excellent and wide-ranging relationships with the community and voluntary sector throughout Northern Ireland and beyond. She is currently a member of the Lifelong Learning UK Sector Skills Council and contributed significantly to the development of the National Occupational Standards in Community Development Work. She is currently a member of the All-Ireland Working Party on Community Development Standards and Subject Moderator for Community Development with the Open College Network (NI).

**Kathy Murphy** (Ph.D., M.Sc. BA. RGN, RNT) is Head of Department & Director of Nursing and Midwifery Studies at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She has extensive nursing expertise in accident and emergency and care of the elderly, having worked as a senior sister in both specialties. She has a keen interest in multiculturalism and her Masters dissertation focused on nurses' experiences of caring for ethnic-minority clients. She represents Third Level Education Establishments involved in the education and training of nurses on the Irish Nursing Board (An Bord Altranais). Her research interests include quality of care and quality of life of older people, person-centered care, service learning and cultural issues in nursing.

//////////

**Brian Ó Donnchadha** qualified as a teacher in 1991 and has been teaching in Ireland and abroad since then. During this time he directed a postgraduate communications programme at NUI Galway. His Masters in Education in 2005 focused on experiential learning which sparked an interest in community-based learning. As a Visiting Fulbright Researcher he spent over a year in the US examining how service-learning is implemented there. On his return to Ireland he continued his research as an Irish Research Council Scholar and is currently focusing on the use of reflection within community-based learning.

**Scott M. Pitera** is a fourth year student pursuing a Bachelors of Science degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Michigan State University. His hometown is New Baltimore, Michigan. His major interests within the scope of Urban and Regional Planning include community economic development and sustainable land use, with a particular fascination in central city revitalization. Pitera intends to utilize knowledge gained from coursework and experience to soon begin a challenging career as a professional planner, to assist communities in improving their quality of life. He also plans to earn a Master's degree in order to expose him to new concepts and competencies as well as to advance his professional experience.

**Gerard Quinn** is a graduate of Harvard Law School and a Professor of Law at NUI Galway. He specialises in international and comparative disability discrimination law. He has served on many national bodies including the Law Reform Commission, the Irish Human Rights Commission and the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and he has worked with many international organisations on disability including the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. He sits on many advisory boards such as Mental Disability Advocacy Centre. He is currently working on a book for Cambridge University Press on the UN disability convention and on a project with the European Commission on eAccessibility. He is the Director of a newly established Centre for Disability Law & Policy at NUI Galway. He co-authored one of the first comparative law textbooks on disability law in 1993 and developed one of the first disability law courses on disability law and policy at NUI Galway in 1994. He was a member of the Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities (1993-1996). He sat as First Vice-President of the European Committee on Social Rights (treaty monitoring body on social justice rights within the Council of Europe, 2001-2006). He worked as a civil servant within the European Commission (DG Employment and Social Affairs, 1996-1997) and has directed many large research projects for the Commission on disability law & policy. He headed the delegation of Rehabilitation International (NYC) at the Working Group that drafted the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2002-2007). He directed research that led to a major work in 2002 on the UN human rights system and disability (Office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights, Geneva, 2002). And he spent two year as Director of Research at the Irish Governments' Law Reform Commission with experience in drafting policy recommendations likely to spur Government action. He currently sits as a member of the Irish Human Rights Commission and is the global 'focal point' for human rights Commissions on disability issues. He also advises the European Foundation Centre (network of European philanthropies) on disability issues. He holds a standing appointment as a research fellow at Harvard Law School (Harvard Project on Disability) and at the Burton Blatt Institute (Syracuse University). He is a member of the Scientific Board of the Academic Network on European Disability (ANED) which is an EU-funded network of European universities concerned with disability issues. He is a member of several international advisory boards including Interights (London), Mental Disability Advocacy Centre (Budapest), Disability Rights Fund (Boston).

# Notes *On* Editorial Committee & Contributors

**Una Redmond** has worked in DCU for over 20 years, originally with the Students' Union, later moving to the post of Administrative Officer of the Student Finance Committee and for the last five years as Manager of the Office of Student Life. She has a degree in Social Science from UCD and a Masters in Business Studies from the Smurfit Business School. In 1998 she also received a Masters of Science in Education and Training Management from Dublin City University. Una has played a key role in the development of the Janeen Module, an innovative scheme which offers credits to final year students for the learning gained through their involvement in extra curricular activities. She has a particular interest in the area of Civic Engagement and Service Learning and the role it has to play in the development of students and in recent years has presented papers on this topic at The Association of College Unions International Conferences in New England. Una is currently Chair of the Association of Student Union Administrators in Ireland and has previously served as International Relations Liaison Officer with ACUI. In 2005, she received their Significant Volunteer Award at the ACUI Annual Conference in Connecticut. In DCU, she serves on many University committees, including Hub Management Committee, Sports Club Committee, Societies and Publications Committee, Health and Safety Committee, Civic Engagement Strategy Committee and the Student Experience working group.

**Eilish Rooney** is a feminist academic in the University of Ulster and an Associate of the Transitional Justice Institute. She has published extensively on women and gender in the Northern Irish conflict and is currently working on the application of intersectionality theory to analysing transitional society. She is Programme Director of the BSc Hons Community Development where she contributes to teaching on globalization, the social economy and social justice.

**Caitriona Ryan** is Head of Policy and Planning in the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Some of her current areas of work include the management of the Strategic Innovation Fund (a €525 million multi-annual fund managed by the HEA on behalf of the Department of Education and Science), the preparation of the HEA's Strategic Plan and a policy study in the area of distance/blended learning. She also managed the Study of New Entrants to Higher Education in 2004, produced the HEA's student enrolment projections to 2015 and was very involved in the preparation of the HEA submission to the OECD Higher Education Review Team. Prior to joining the HEA Caitriona worked with Deloitte & Touche Management Consultants specialising in organisation and strategic reviews. Previously she was a Civil Servant and held different positions in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Health and Children.

**Brendan Sammon** is Project Manager with Eircom. I began my community involvement in the early '70's in the Islandeady Parish Youth Club or Fóroige Club as it was known at the time. Islandeady is a Community that lies between Castlebar and Westport in County Mayo. Holding the position as Chairperson and Secretary of the local Fóroige Club, I gained an early appetite for community development and all it had to offer. In the early eighties I was elected to the Islandeady Community Council where I subsequently held the positions of Secretary and Chairperson respectively. I have been on the Community Council for over twenty five years now and in 2005 I was elected to represent the Council on the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network where I now hold the position as Chairperson.

//////////

My journey in community development has been experiential, enriching and rewarding. A journey that sometimes seems complicated but seeing a community grow and develop is humbling, delightful and makes it all worthwhile. The Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network (18 communities) is a community practitioner's paradise. Networking with transnational networks and universities, community-minded people, local government and State sponsored bodies provides all of the ingredients necessary in making community development happen.

**Meave Sheridan** is from Kilmaine a small village in Co. Mayo. She was a second year student on the four year Bachelor of Nursing Science programme at NUI, Galway when she wrote this article. She has a keen interest in combining her nursing with working and travelling to new and different cultures. Her decision to undertake the service learning module and travel to Africa was, in her opinion, "one of the best decisions of her life". The time spent in Zambia was exciting and was also a great learning opportunity. Currently she is a Registered General Nurse working in St. James's Hospital, Dublin. She plans to gain further experience of working with HIV/AIDS clients and clients with infectious illnesses in Ireland and then to undertake a postgraduate diploma in nursing focusing on this area. She has a keen interest in travelling and hopes to do more of this in the future.

**Deirdre Stritch** is a Project Officer with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQA), where she works on the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications and on qualifications recognition. Previously, she worked in the Policy and Planning Section of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and as researcher to the Royal Irish Academy's report, Advancing Humanities and Social Science Research in Ireland. She undertook her PhD in archaeological heritage-management policy in Israel and the Republic of Cyprus with the Programme for Mediterranean Studies at Trinity College Dublin.





# Section One

## Foundations For Civic Engagement *within* Higher Education in Ireland

01 02 03 04



# Section One

Foundations For  
Civic Engagement  
*within*  
Higher Education  
in Ireland

01   02   03   04

Driving Civic Engagement  
*within Higher Education  
in Ireland:*  
A Contextual Picture of  
Activities from the Local  
to the National through  
the Evolution of a Network

01

---



# Driving Civic Engagement *within Higher Education in Ireland:* A Contextual Picture of Activities from the Local to the National through the Evolution of a Network

**Lorraine McIlrath**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

**Ann Lyons**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

//////////

## Introduction

This chapter will address how the movement towards deepening civic engagement in Irish higher education has evolved over recent years. It will examine the contextual drivers within which this evolution has taken place. These drivers, rooted at local, national, European and international levels have enabled the development of civic engagement activities in Ireland. They can be categorised in terms of policies and legislation, availability of resources (governmental and philanthropic) and expressions of institutional activity and institutional support. These drivers have competing and overlapping characteristics, sometimes static in nature and but also with variously pushing or pulling levels of interest, discourse and practice. Some have stimulated debate and practice, while others have been manoeuvred and applied to the situation by interested parties. This opening chapter will explore some of the top-down and bottom-up drivers and the resultant rise in national interest in civic engagement over the last seven years. A picture of the current state of development of civic engagement activities at institutional levels, in particular the work of NUI Galway through the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) and the recently formed higher education network, Campus Engage will be presented. Campus Engage, like other networks, globally, that support civic engagement within higher education, such as Campus Compact in the USA, AUCEA in Australia, CLAYSS in South America and the international consortium within Talloires, seeks to support and develop the theory and practice in ways in which civic engagement in Ireland can flourish while forging links internationally. The chapter will offer a recent historical overview, pointing to some significant factors in terms of evolving local and national debate in Ireland, focussing on the civic purpose of higher education and initial trends in the development of an inclusive civic engagement network.

In 2001 the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway) was launched. It set out to underpin and realise the civic mission of the University. The on-going principal activities of the CKI are to deepen student understandings of, and commitment to, civic engagement and to consolidate relationships with a range of communities, both on and off campus. This is being achieved through curricular and extra-curricular programmes that aim to mainstream and embed service learning/community based learning opportunities across the disciplines and through facilitating student volunteering both on and off campus. From the outset a goal the CKI was to share knowledge across the Higher Education (HE) sector regarding the contribution that HE can make within community, and to foster in graduates their sense of civic engagement and social responsibility.

As part of the knowledge-sharing strategy and initial successes of the CKI, an informal network, entitled the 'Service Learning Academy' (SLA), was established by NUI Galway in partnership with Dublin City University (DCU), National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUI, Maynooth) and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and supported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Targeted Initiatives funding. The SLA was a bottom-up process aimed at harnessing the enthusiasm of higher education academics and administrators, students and communities, interested in embedding service learning in academic programmes of study and focussing on supporting participants in the process. This initiative, which involved a number of national seminars, highlighted the need to formalise and consolidate activities across the country. Following from the SLA additional funding was awarded by the HEA in 2007 to a consortium of five institutions: DCU, NUI Galway, (lead partner), NUI, Maynooth, University College Dublin (UCD) and the University of Limerick (UL) to establish Campus Engage. The main objective of Campus Engage, is to establish a formal and sustainable network with the aim of increasing the scale of student engagement and volunteering opportunities in the five partner institutions and across higher education in Ireland more broadly.

### **National Context And Social Capital**

"I have a sense that many people are bothered about changes in social and cultural attitudes and behaviour ... it is not just about the practical, day-to-day pressures which shape how we live. There is a concern that we have become more materialist, maybe even more selfish. And if we have, I believe many people would conclude that, for all our new wealth, we are much the poorer..." (Ahern, 2006).

The former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland, Mr. Bertie Ahern outlined his concern regarding the changing nature of Irish society, arising from what was termed the 'Celtic Tiger', Ireland's former economic boom. In his opinion, there was a drift from the collective to the individual, the civic to the material and a decline in levels of social capital nationally. This concern culminated in the creation of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship. Established in 2006, the Taskforce was charged with advising 'the Government on the steps that can be taken to ensure that the wealth of civic spirit and active participation already present in Ireland continues to grow and develop' (Taskforce on Active Citizenship Report, 2007). The following year, the Taskforce made a series of recommendations, two of which concerned higher education. These were (1) to establish a network of higher education institutions to be led by the HEA to promote, support and link civic engagement activities, including volunteering and service learning, and (2) to develop a national awards/certificate system to recognise student volunteering or community activity.

Coinciding with the publication of these significant Taskforce drivers was the creation of Campus Engage. The network developed in direct response to a prevailing national need identified among stakeholders who included students, community, academics and senior managers. It was timely that resources were secured from the HEA in 2007 to develop Campus Engage by five universities within the Republic of Ireland. As set out in its original proposal, Campus Engage will focus on the development of a 'National organisation/framework for the promotion and support of volunteering, service learning and active citizenship in higher education' (NUI Galway HEA SIF Proposal, 2006). The foundations of Campus Engage are advisory and supportive with regard to enabling practice within the HE sector.

//////////

## Crossroads & The Future

In recent years there has been a public perception of a decrease in levels of social capital in Ireland. However the statistics do not support the extent of this public disquiet, as they indicate that over the last fifteen years the scale of community engagement and volunteering has not extensively changed. In fact, Ireland ranks average when compared to other OECD nations in terms of levels of social capital and group membership (OECD, 2005). However, of concern for higher education is that those under the age of 29 are the least active, (after those over the age of 65), with this being the only grouping to experience a drop in volunteering activity, from 16.9% to 14.7%, between 2002 and 2006 (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). In addition, over 55% of those under the age of 25 do not vote (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). These are worrying statistics as over 85% of new entrants to higher education in Ireland are between the ages of 17 to 25 with just over 10% of new entrants over the age of 25 (HEA, 2007). Thus, the statistics indicate that a large majority of younger age-groups are inactive within political and community participation domains. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the potential to respond to this situation by promoting and implementing civic engagement activities, such as volunteering and service or community based learning. From the experience of the CKI at NUI Galway, there is great student enthusiasm for engagement through volunteering and service learning, with the numbers participating exceeding initial expectations and targets. In 2003, the year in which the ALIVE<sup>1</sup> volunteering programme was established at NUI Galway, 25 students were involved, but in the intervening years the number of students engaging as volunteers through the ALIVE programme is in excess of 1000 annually. In addition, community interest in working with students through service learning and volunteering has increased annually, beginning with just ten partners in 2003 and rising to over one hundred today. Service learning modules were first offered in 2003; now there are now twenty-five degree programmes, co-ordinated by over forty academic staff that provide a service learning opportunity at NUI, Galway. Through the pedagogy of service learning, students attain academic credit for learning about their discipline within a community context. For example, Civil Law students offer pro bono legal advice to non-governmental organisations; Mechanical & Biomedical Engineering students build prototypes for the use within the disability community; IT students support and develop IT infrastructure for community-based organisations including youth café websites. Students formally reflect on their level of engagement and their knowledge of their discipline, while integrating theory and practice.

Historically within Ireland, a greater obligation has been placed on primary and post primary education sectors (and to some degree within the informal youth sector) on citizenship education, than on the higher education sector. We need only look at the precursors to, and the current second level subjects such as Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) at Junior Cycle and the introduction in 2008/09 of Social and Political Studies at Senior Cycle (Tormey, 2006). However, in recent years there has been a growing recognition of the role that HEIs can play through formal academic, and informal volunteering activities and through the development of civic engagement partnerships between community and HEIs.

//////////

## Global Perspectives & Networks

The potential role that HEIs can play in civic engagement has been gaining momentum globally, with hundreds of HEIs institutionalising civic engagement on a strategic level and driving the work from the periphery to the mainstream. Many of the key early developments have taken place in the United States, where some commentators have addressed this rise in debate and practice as a 'renewal' of vision or a 'reassertion' of the civic role of higher education (Hollander, 2007). However, it is questionable whether this can be applied to Ireland; did a truly civic university exist in Ireland or would such a perception constitute a romanticised view of our history? It is easier to demonstrate international examples of HEIs

---

<sup>1</sup> ALIVE is an acronym for A Learning Initiative and the Volunteer Experience.

connecting with community through teaching, research and service driven by local need and national support. One instance is that of the evolution and scope of the Land Grant system during the 1850's in the USA.

The economic contribution that HEIs can make has been well established (Feldman and Desrochers, 2003; Hall, 1997; Etkowitz et al, 2000) and there has been increasing attention paid to the contribution HEIs can make to community (Al-Kodmany, 1999; Allen-Meares, 2005; Barnett, 1993; Percy et al, 2006). This is often expressed through institutional mission statements. However, the relationship between rhetoric and reality is frequently fissured. A recent study of Irish HEI mission statements indicates that while there is widespread support for civic and community engagement included within these statements, practice has often been informal and contained on the periphery (Perez-Gonzalez et al, 2007). Furco stresses the significance of the mission statement when institutionalising service learning and emphasises the need to localise service learning within the wider institutional agendas, including the research agenda, and to have it included in the aspirations of individual academic departments (Furco, 2007). Nonetheless, the mission statements of the various institutions within Ireland could potentially act as pivotal, top-down and bottom-up drivers when implementing civic engagement in individual institutions.

Worldwide, a number of national networks have emerged to drive and support institutional visions related to civic and community engagement. Watson (2007) outlined the scale of national networks and institutional endeavours in a range of geographical locations globally. Some of these networks have been buttressed by a series of carefully crafted declarations signed by committed university leaders. One example is the Council of Europe's 'Declaration on Higher Education and Democratic Culture: Citizenship, Human Rights and Civic Responsibility'. Others have been informed by wider governmental policies as in the case of the South African model. There, a network entitled the 'Community Higher Education Service Partnerships' (CHESP) was stimulated by the government's 1997 White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education, to respond to needs within disadvantaged communities. A network that now charts a relatively long history is that of Campus Compact in the USA, established in 1985 as a result of the dedication of just four higher education leaders. Its membership is now in excess of 1,100 HEIs. NUI Galway became the first non-US based member in 2004 and has found this coalition useful in driving practice at the institutional level. Campus Compact has been further strengthened by the 'Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University' (Boyte and Hollander, 1999). The Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) was formed in 2004, led by the University of Western Sydney. It is now supported by over twenty-five institutional members and guided by ten university representatives. The Talloires Network was established in 2006 when leaders of HEIs from twenty-three countries, brought together by Tufts University in the USA, crafted the Talloires Declaration on the 'Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education'. This declaration has established an international network of national networks.

In addition, many partnership models and methods are presented in the literature focussing on university-community collaborations, autonomy and competition within partnership models, national networks and collaboration between diverse HEIs (Jacoby, 2003; Baum, 2000; Temple et al, 2005; Williams et al, 2003). With regard to networks there is little collective or comparative history that details their characteristics, context, culture, evolution or methodology. A variety of reasons could account for this lack of documentation, including networks' recent growth and short history and their responsiveness to local needs and their development in diverse locations.

//////////

## The Service Learning Academy & Campus Engage

Undoubtedly, the development of Campus Engage has been guided by international exemplars, combined with efforts made to secure resources from the Irish government. The network has been supported in the main by the HEA Strategic Innovation Fund 1 (SIF 1) which seeks to support innovation and creativity within the landscape of higher education in Ireland. Funds have been matched by five partner institutions and total 1.4m euro. In the SIF 1 call for proposals, civic engagement was highlighted as a key area in terms of innovation within higher education, being described as ‘the development of individual students to attain their full capacity both in careers and as citizens in a democratic society facing profound change’ (HEA, 2006).

The precursor to Campus Engage, the Service Learning Academy (SLA), ran for a period of two academic years, from 2005 to 2007. It was both a top-down and bottom-up approach in terms of evolving a national network. It generated collaborative conversations on the implications for civic engagement within higher education between academics, policy makers, senior administrators, students and community, with guest inputs from the international community. The SLA was collaborative in nature, led by NUI Galway in partnership with Dublin City University (DCU), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and NUI Maynooth. Its purpose was to debate the implications of service learning and civic engagement within higher education in Ireland. To this end national events were held which included exploration of the development of a network for the promotion of civic engagement activities in Irish higher education. Participants’ discussions throughout the SLA events stressed the importance of creating partnerships between communities and HEIs and the potential enhancement of students’ education offered by the pedagogical tool of service learning. However, they were mindful of the likely problems with the term ‘service learning’, which is highly contextualised in terms of the USA. It was important, and still is, to craft a term culturally appropriate to the Irish situation. Furco (2007) highlights that over two hundred definitions of service learning exist within the literature. Concerns were raised about appropriate resourcing and staffing within the different institutions and the need to recognise prior work in the area, whether this practice is rooted within the formal, informal or higher education sectors. Issues raised for debate centred on the concepts of partnership, in particular between the HEIs and the wider community, the development of an institutionalised civic engagement strategy, definitions of ‘community’ and the conceptualisation of service learning within academic disciplines (Service Learning Academy Open Space Technology Report, 2006).

These issues have informed the work of Campus Engage, and the remit of the network is broad, so as to include, rather than exclude, practice in an environment which is receptive to notions of civic engagement but is also fragile and vulnerable. It gives prominence to the promotion of activities that underpin civic engagement values and methodologies including student volunteering and service learning, and research with community, and it will seek to work with HEIs throughout the island of Ireland. As stated in its original proposal, Campus Engage aims to widen “the scope of such activity to ensure that Ireland plays a leading role in the promotion of active citizenship in Europe through the development of social and civic “competencies” as a key element of the student experience” within higher education (NUI Galway HEA SIF 1 Proposal, 2006). Specifically it will:

- Commission a comprehensive national review of volunteering, service learning and community research by an expert in the field, leading to recommendations for long term, sustainable development
- Increase the scale of student participation and volunteering opportunities in all partner institutions, through the development of appropriate models based on experience and evaluation
- Establish a formal National Network to support such activities across the sector, providing training materials and organising events (including a major conference on Civic Engagement & Active Citizenship)



The five institutions collaborating through Campus Engage are at different stages and levels in terms of embedding civic engagement strategies. The process of localising pedagogies for civic engagement within Ireland has been documented by Boland and McIlrath (2007). They emphasise the importance of 'localisation' with regard to the manner and shape in which it becomes embedded. Localisation factors are dependent upon typologies of cultures, conceptions and contexts at national, local and disciplinary, as well as, department/schools levels. Therefore, when supporting and developing civic engagement activities in Ireland, Campus Engage must be sensitive to local need, context and culture. In addition, it must negotiate and work with local, national, European and international drivers, such as government policy, institutional support mechanisms, national and international declarations on civic engagement and funding sources.

//////////

## National Institutional Expressions & The Campus Engage Five

NUI Galway, in 2001, received 1.6m euro from a number of philanthropic donors including Atlantic Philanthropies, to realise a civic vision as part of its core activities and established the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI). The CKI activities, as documented in its original proposal, were viewed as "integral to the University's strategic mission and involved a fundamental examination of the role of the University in the social fabric" (CKI Strategic Plan, 2001). NUI Galway's Academic and Strategic Plans (2003-2008) acted as top-down drivers as the CKI was afforded prominence in each, laying out its aims and objectives and inter-relationships with other organisations and structures, and the mainstreaming of pedagogical activities related to the CKI. These institutional strategic plans have been instrumental drivers in terms of situating the work and propelling its importance locally, within NUI Galway and with community partners. While the philanthropic funds allowed top-down drivers, it also enabled a bottom-up process including the appointment of a CKI team to manage and guide the work, under the direction of local and international boards. The CKI's four strands seek to place communities at the centre of debate and educate students for civic engagement, and include:

- Research: in, by and for the community, exploring issues in community and rural development, social participation, volunteering and the roles of higher education
- Student Volunteering: promoting both the personal and the civic dimensions of voluntary activity, serving the community and giving of time, effort and skills
- Service Learning: embedding community focussed volunteering and work experience into academic programmes, giving recognition to the academic potential of such service and encouraging deeper engagement and understanding of the context of programmes of study
- Knowledge Sharing: wider dissemination of results of research and scholarly activity, events with community focus, outreach work and collaboration.

While the availability of financial resources and institutional support were pivotal drivers, legislation related to NUI Galway also aided the CKI. NUI Galway maintains a 'special relationship' with the Gaeltacht<sup>2</sup> communities of Ireland built into the University Act 1929 and articulated in the NUI Galway Mission Statement. The proposal for the CKI was created and steered by the senior academics and administrators enabling a top-down process that was multidisciplinary in nature. Research conducted by Boland (2005) indicates that there was a multifaceted rationale among leaders at NUI Galway in terms of its commitment, which mirrored governmental concerns regarding levels of social capital. At that time the university leaders<sup>3</sup> also made reference to drivers

<sup>2</sup> The Gaeltacht is an Irish speaking region within Ireland, much of which is located along the western seaboard of the country.

<sup>3</sup> University President, Deputy President and Registrar and Vice Presidents.

related to the institution itself, including a commitment to the transformation of the student experience and community need. In terms of community, those behind the CKI saw the task of resource building with the community as a realistic aspiration for the university. With regard to students, they saw it as presenting a maturing opportunity and something that could potentially counteract the drift from public to private domains, from physical interfaces to iPods and social networking sites. In addition, it was viewed as an opportunity to differentiate the institution within a highly competitive national and international market, giving NUI Galway an entrepreneurial edge.

To date, CKI has connected NUI Galway to over 100 local and national community and voluntary organisations and 2,300 students have been awarded NUI Galway Certificates through the ALIVE programme for their volunteering activities on and off campus. As previously mentioned, over twenty-five undergraduate and postgraduate programmes now have an optional or mandatory service learning opportunity, connecting student academic learning in their discipline to a community context. This currently involves over 300 students annually, and there are additional pilot opportunities planned for the coming years, for example the service learning aspects of the BA Connect programme, a recently launched four-year Bachelor of Arts programme in designated areas such as Human Rights, Children's Studies and Film Studies, whereby students in their third year will have placements in a service capacity in a community context.

The motivations of academics at NUI Galway, who have established service learning opportunities, mirror those documented in international analyses (McIlrath, 2004). For example, they reflect what Stanton et al (1999) found regarding those involved in the development of service learning in the US, in being focussed on a range of aspects, including, educational / pedagogical questions, issues of social justice, preparing students for effective, democratic engagement. In addition, academics at NUI Galway have indicated that service learning could potentially be a means towards career advancement. This highlights the significance of institutional vision and leadership acting as drivers with regard to promotion and career advancement practices.

While the availability of philanthropic funding acted as top-down and bottom-up drivers at NUI Galway, the funding offered to the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) by the Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs has been an important driver in that institution. In 2005, DIT received €330,000 to develop the Community Learning Programme (CLP) at DIT with the aim of spreading community based learning 'throughout the DIT by encouraging and supporting key lecturing staff to incorporate it in aspects of their teaching' (DIT CLP, 2005).

The funding awarded by the HEA to enable the development of Campus Engage has also acted as a key driver in terms of aiding practice at the local level. It has allowed for two of the partner institutions to appoint personnel to facilitate the growth of civic engagement activities. At UCD the Centre for Service Learning, Civic Engagement and Volunteering was established in 2007. This centre offers a stand-alone service learning module across the institution, through the Quinn School of Business (McGourty, 2008). The centre will also harness existing civic engagement activities, facilitate service learning pedagogical practice and pilot a volunteering programme, entitled ROVE, (Recognition of Voluntary Engagement) from the academic year 2008-2009.

DCU has been developing a 'thickening' approach to civic engagement through a 'Civic Engagement Strategy' (2007) under the umbrella of the DCU strategic theme of 'Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development' (IISD) and guided by a Theme Leader. In 2003 DCU introduced a stand-alone module entitled the Uaneen module which awards credit to students for extra-curricular work in communities on and off campus as described in Chapter 10 by Hughes and Redmond. Uaneen is unique within the context of

higher education in Ireland in that students choose to opt into it and it is a module that stands outside of the required curriculum. In addition, DCU personnel appointed through Campus Engage funds are carrying out an audit of existing civic engagement activities. A publication entitled 'Guiding Framework for Community Based Learning at DCU' was published in 2008 (Finn, 2008).

At UL an audit of civic engagement activities in which staff and students of the university are involved is currently being carried out. Arising from this audit, a directory for use by staff and students will be produced. The directory will be divided into the following 3 areas: (1) Volunteering opportunities, (2) Research project involving civic engagement and (3) Civic engagement activities in the classroom. To date ninety-five civic engagement initiatives have been identified. These include campus-based projects such as the UL Farmers Market, projects in Nepal, Uganda and South Africa. Some projects, such as Earth Hour 2009, are brief; but others have been in existence for 11 years or more. Over 800 members of the UL community are or have been involved in these initiatives.

NUI, Maynooth has developed a partnership with the community organisation Kildare Volunteer Bureau (KVB), in order to create volunteering opportunities for its students. An on-campus KVB volunteering co-ordinator, co-funded by NUI Maynooth, and co-located in both the University and the community has been put in place. Through its Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), NUI, Maynooth is also developing a small grant scheme to support civic engagement activities in the University; CTL will also, in collaboration with the University's Centre for Applied Social Studies, fund a civic engagement placement research project. In addition, NUI Maynooth will host a visiting international scholar to work on a civic engagement project, over a three year period, in its Department of Adult and Community Education from 2009 - 2012.

//////////

## Identifying Useful Policy Drivers

While the civic engagement landscape within Ireland is evolving, we must ascertain whether we are drawing on drivers which can potentially secure future growth and activity. Coate and MacLabhrainn (2008) highlight that the dominant policy vision for the HEI sector in Ireland, as articulated by a range of internal and external actors including the HEA, tends to focus on the knowledge-based economy and its role as a stimulant of economic activities. However, other policies are making reference to wider societal dimensions, such as the necessity to create 'an inclusive society' (HEA, 2004). Some examples of potential legislative and policy drivers include the Universities Act of 1997, which goes into some detail as to the civic aspirations of higher education, through for example, the promotion of the 'cultural and social life of society', 'learning in its student body and in society generally', highlighting economic as well as 'social development'. In addition, it welcomes collaboration with all types of organisations including 'communities' (Universities Act, 1997).

The 2002 review of Irish higher education, entitled "The University Challenged", by Malcolm Skilbeck, has valuable and helpful comments on the civic dimension of Irish higher education. Skilbeck argues for a system "which aims to advance knowledge through inquiry and research, strengthen cultural values, foster responsible citizenship and provide service to the community." This is an important report and is deserving of greater attention than it has received to date.

In the European context the Bologna Declaration, which has aims associated with enhancing levels of co-operation across Europe and working towards the development of a 'European Higher Education Area' by 2010, identifies civic aspects of higher education, noting the importance of a:

Europe of Knowledge ... for social and human growth ... to enrich European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space (Bergan, 2007).

Levin (1998) contends that sometimes it is 'the politics of the sign rather than the substance of the meaning that moves across national borders'. The contribution that these various policy drivers can make in terms of advancement of democratic citizenship through HEIs is substantial but it is uncertain whether this dimension may become 'lost' within the 'politics' of implementation.

//////////

## Conclusion

This paper has explored a number of top-down and bottom-up drivers which have led to a rise in interest, discourse and practice with regard to civic engagement in Irish higher education. The drivers, while not exhaustive, relate to policies and legislation, and availability of resources (governmental and philanthropic). Expressions of institutional activity and support have been assessed in terms of localising practice and in terms of sustaining this work through Campus Engage.

The growth that has occurred in civic engagement activities in Irish higher education in the past seven years demonstrates that there is enthusiasm for developing the civic dimension of higher education in Ireland. There is a growing awareness that institutions of higher education have a significant and particular contribution to make to the debates on active citizenship and social justice. With regard to government policy there has been the establishment of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship and within educational individual educational institutions there have been increasing levels of activities that provide students with opportunities to engage with the wider society as part of their educational experience at third level. It is clear that there is a growing commitment to enhancing levels of civic awareness and participation among the student body and that there is greater attention being paid to the civic role of higher education in institutional mission statements. The establishment of the Campus Engage network, with the support of HEA SIF1 funding, represents another significant driver of the civic mission of universities and other institutions of higher education. Campus Engage held its inaugural conference in June 2009, which attracted an attendance of more than 200 hundred people, with over 100 presentations on the theme of community-higher education partnerships, indicating that this is an opportune moment for the development of the civic mission of Irish higher education.

While it is clear that there has been an increase in civic engagement activities in Irish higher education, what is not clear is the precise nature and extent of these activities, and full appreciation of their most significant drivers. It is therefore timely and necessary to carry out an audit or mapping of civic engagement activities in Ireland, and this is research that will be undertaken by Campus Engage. Data from this research will be important in making recommendations for the long-term, sustainable development of civic engagement and active citizenship in Irish higher education. The research will also provide base-line information regarding practices across various aspects of civic engagement activities, for example, volunteering, service and community based learning, research, knowledge-sharing. In addition it will provide a database of practitioners who are implementing civic engagement activities, and who are willing to share their expertise and experiences, in local- and context-sensitive ways. The research has the potential to create 'communities of practice' which would support both individuals and institutions in the development of locally relevant and locally responsive civic engagement initiatives.

It is also desirable that there is an inclusive national forum, such as Campus Engage, which can support and encourage a culture of 'engaged scholarship' in Irish higher education – to facilitate partnership, collaboration, knowledge transfer and general sharing of resources between academic and civic communities. A national forum will be a significant resource in invigorating the civic mission of higher education in Ireland. Invigorating the civic function of higher education is an acknowledgement that higher education is about more than preparing students for the labour market – it is also about preparing them to be responsible citizens.

## Bibliography

- Ahern, B. (2006) 'Speech by Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern T.D. at the first regional seminar of the Taskforce' Taskforce on Active Citizenship [website] <http://www.activecitizenship.ie/index.asp?locID=12&docID=52>, accessed 20 May 2008.
- Al-Kodmany, K. (1999) "University-Community Partnerships: Unleashing Technical and Local Expertise", *Journal of Urban Technology*, 6, 39-63
- Allen-Meares, P. Hudgins, C.A. Engberg, M.E. and Lessnau, B. (2005) "Using a Collaboratory Model to Translate Social Work Into Practice and Policy," *Research on Social Work Practice*, 15, 29-40
- Barnett, K. (1993) *Collaboration for Community Empowerment; redefining the role of the academic institution. Developing new partnerships to improve Community Quality of Life*. Berkeley: Berkeley Center for Community Health, School of Public Health, University of California
- Boland, J. and McIlrath, L. (2007) "The Process of Localising Pedagogies for Civic Engagement in Ireland: the Significance of Conceptions, Culture and Context," in L. McIlrath and I. Mac Labhrainn (eds.) *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives*. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Boyte, H. and Hollander, E. (1999) *Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University*. USA: Brown University, Campus Compact
- Coate, K. and Mac Labhrainn, I. (2008) *Irish Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy*. (unpublished)
- Etzkowitz, H. Webster, A. Christiane C. and Castisano Terra B.R. (2000) "The future of the university and the university of the future: evolution of ivory tower to entrepreneurial paradigm," *Research Policy*, 29, 313-330
- Finn, A. (2008) *Community Based Learning at Dublin City University*. Dublin: Dublin City University
- Feldman, M. and Desrochers, P. (2003) "Research Universities and Local Economic Development: Lessons form the history of John Hopkins University," *Industry and Innovation*, 10, 5-24
- Furco, A (2007) "Institutionalising Service-Learning in Higher Education," in L. McIlrath and I. Mac Labhrainn (eds.) *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives*. Aldershot: Ashgate
- Gonzalez-Perez, M.A, Mac Labhrainn, I. and McIlrath, L. (2007) "The Civic Purpose and Avowed Mission of Higher Education Institutions – Diversity or uniformity?," *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities & Nations*, 7, 2, 187-198
- Government of Ireland (2007) *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship*. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, Dublin: The Stationary Office
- Government of Ireland (2007) *Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland*. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, Dublin: The Stationary Office
- Hall, P. (1997) "The university and the city," *GeoJournal*, 41, 301-309
- Healy, T. (2005) "Social Capital and Well-Being in Ireland" *Presented at Annual CORI Conference on Social Policy*, 4 October 2005
- Higher Education Authority (2007) *Discipline choices and Trends for High Points CAO Application 2006*. Dublin: HEA
- Higher Education Authority (2006) *Strategic Innovation Fund Call for Proposals July 2006*, Dublin: HEA

- Jacoby, B. and Associates (2003) *Building partnerships for Service-Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Lynch, K. (2006) "Neo-liberalism and marketisation: the implications for higher education," *European Educational Research Journal*, 5, 1, 2-17.
- McIlrath, L. and Mac Labhrainn, I. (eds.), (2007) *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives*. Aldershot: Ashgate
- McGourty, O. (2008) *Service/Community Based Learning at University College Dublin*. Dublin: University College Dublin
- National University of Ireland, Galway (2001) *CKI Strategic Plan 2002-2005*. Galway: National University of Ireland, Galway
- National University of Ireland, Galway (2006) "Civic Engagement, Student Volunteering and Active Citizenship," *Section 3.4 of the Strategic Innovation Fund Proposal (2006) (SIF) 1 2006*, Galway: National University of Ireland Galway
- OECD (2001) *The Well-Being of Nations, The Role of Human and Social Capital*. Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- OECD (2005) *Society at a Glance*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Percy, S. Zimpher, N. and Brukardt, M. (2006) *Creating a new kind of university: institutionalizing community-university engagement*. Boston: Anker
- Service Learning Academy (2006) "Service Learning Academy Open Space Technology Report," Service Learning Academy: A collaborative project between the National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Dublin City University (DCU) and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Athlone, Hodson Bay Hotel
- Skilbeck, M. (2002) *The University Challenged: A Review of International Trends and Issues with particular reference to Ireland*. Dublin: HEA & CHIU
- Stanton, T. (1999) *Service-learning: a movement's pioneers reflect on its origins, practice, and future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Talloe Declaration and Network Homepage (2008) [website] <<http://www.tufts.edu/talloeiresnetwork/?pid=17>>, accessed 15 May 2008
- Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2008) 'Homepage [website] <<http://www.activecitizenship.ie/>>', accessed 12 May 2008
- Temple, J. Story, A. and Delaforce, W.H. (2005) "AUCEA: An Emerging Collaborative and Strategic Approach Dedicated to University - Community Engagement in Australia," *Proceedings International Conference on Engaging Communities*, Brisbane: Australia.
- Tormey, R (2006) *Social and Political Studies in Senior Cycle – a background paper*. Dublin: NCCA
- Universities Ireland Act (1997) No 24/1997, Homepage [website] <<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1997/en/act/pub/0024/index.html>>, accessed 20 May 2008
- Watson, D. (2007) *Managing Civic and Community Engagement*. Berkshire: Open University Press
- Williams, M.R. (2003) "Partnerships among Institutions from Different Sectors of Higher Education: Expanding Views of Collaboration for Outreach and Community Service," *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 8, 2, 25-40

# Active Citizenship & Higher Education

02

---



# Active Citizenship & Higher Education

**Caitríona Ryan**

*Higher Education Authority*

**Deirdre Stritch**

*National Qualifications Authority of Ireland*

//////////

## Introduction

*"... colleges and universities have a civic mission, which includes being good institutional citizens that serve their communities in multiple ways; providing forums for free democratic dialogue; conducting research on democracy, civil society, and civic development; and educating their own students to be effective and responsible citizens".<sup>1</sup>*

Higher education institutions are an integral part of our communities and are central to the development of civil society and the promotion of social inclusion and active citizenship. In addition to developing individuals to participate in civic society and realise their full potential, higher education academics and researchers have a crucial role to play in informing public debate and policy on matters of cultural, social and economic importance.

This paper presents an overview of the broad role of higher education in promoting active citizenship, the work of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in this regard and details of initiatives supported by the HEA aimed at encouraging higher education institutions to achieve their active citizenship missions. The paper also looks at how higher education institutions are engaging with local communities in order to promote increased equity of access to higher education and ensure that more citizens benefit from higher education. Finally some opportunities for the further development of active citizenship in higher education are highlighted arising from the Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

//////////

## The Role Of Higher Education in Active Citizenship

### **Development of Individual Capacity for Civic Engagement**

We live in a society where higher education has never been more important - to individuals, to society and to the economy. Higher education performs multiple roles; Government and society look to higher education in order to deliver on important goals, including enhancing social inclusion, improving skill levels and supporting social, economic, regional and cultural development. It is important, however, that we do not let our discourse on the importance of higher education emphasise the economic role of higher education at the expense of the critically important social contribution that higher education makes to our society.

Higher education has the potential to develop individuals so that they may realise their full potential and contribute to society in meaningful and holistic ways. Higher education develops students' capacity for critical and independent thought and the ability to apply these analytical skills outside of their chosen field of study. In this way, it equips individuals with one of the most important competencies necessary to negotiate the increasing complexities of modern society. It fosters the skills and mindsets necessary to engage with, participate in, and contribute to, modern civic life.

<sup>1</sup> The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching & CIRCLE (2006) *Higher Education: Civic Mission & Civic Effects. A Report by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and CIRCLE (The Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)*. The Carnegie Foundation. p.1



Higher education institutions also provide individuals with a range of opportunities during their daily student life. These opportunities help to develop and enhance their social citizenship skills which they will apply throughout their lives. Membership of clubs and societies ranging from youth political parties, Gaisce award societies and charitable organisations give students the opportunity to develop and hone their social and civic skills. Participation in such activities is a major factor in students' development as active citizens while also contributing enormously to the spirit of the institution and to the wider community.

Research conducted in the US has identified a broad spectrum of benefits, both public and private, arising from higher education participation (outlined in Figure 1). While it is not possible conclusively to link higher education to all of these benefits, research suggests that higher education has a broad range of positive impacts and may be associated with numerous social benefits. In any community, the presence of a higher education institution has the potential to bring significant benefits in the form of increased civic engagement. When best practice is employed, institutions and their students engage with both the local and the broader community, and are a pivotal element in the vibrancy of daily life in that community.

**Figure 1: the array of higher education benefits<sup>2</sup>**

	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>
<b>Economic</b>	Increased tax revenues Greater productivity Increased consumption Increased workforce flexibility Decreased reliance on government financial support	Higher salaries and benefits Employment Higher saving levels Improved working conditions Personal/professional mobility
<b>Social</b>	Reduced crime rates Increased charitable giving/community service Increased quality of civic life Social Cohesion/appreciation of diversity Improved ability to adapt to, and use, technology	Improved health/life expectancy Improved quality of life for off spring Better consumer decision making Increased personal status More hobbies, leisure activities

The extent of the social and civic benefits of higher education have been analysed and recognised in many studies. Research in the US found that those with a higher education qualification were significantly more likely to report ever volunteering (36% compared to 21% of the population with a high-school diploma).<sup>3</sup> Civic involvement, as indicated by voting rates, was also positively correlated with higher education participation; the research showed that 56% of the population with secondary education had voted in the most recent presidential election, compared to 76% of those with a higher education qualification.<sup>4</sup>

Research conducted in the UK yielded similar results, finding that higher education graduates were more likely to vote in elections and more likely to be members of charitable organisations than non-graduates.<sup>5</sup>

In the Irish context, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship found that, *“Level of educational attainment – and by association socio-economic status – were very strongly related to engagement measured by volunteering or active community organisation membership”*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Institute for Higher Education Policy (2005) *The Investment Payoff: A 50 State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Washington. Institute for Higher Education Policy

DATA: Institute for Higher Education Policy (1998) *Reaping the Benefits: Defining the Public and Private Value of Going to College*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

<sup>3</sup> Institute for Higher Education Policy (2005) *The Investment Payoff: A 50 State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Washington. Institute for Higher Education Policy. p.15

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Higher Education Policy (2005) *The Investment Payoff: A 50 State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Washington. Institute for Higher Education Policy. p.17

These research findings are a demonstration of the potential contribution of higher education to the development of a society enriched by active citizens. They also highlight the importance of enhancing the education attainment of the population as a means of ensuring social equity and access to political and community decision-making.

### **Academe and Civic Engagement**

*“Civic professionalism places scholars inside civic life rather than apart from or above it, working alongside their fellow citizens on questions and issues of public importance”.<sup>7</sup>*

Higher education institutions are well positioned to foster informed debate and provide solutions and directions in response to major challenges and broad ethical questions in society. The presence of expert representatives from the higher education sector on Government and State Boards, for example, is commonplace. In addition to their teaching and research functions, higher education institutions and academics play an integral role in the community by informing and assisting the direction of public policy. This dialogue between academic and civic cultures is vital to the progress of an advanced and self-aware society, capable of identifying and addressing emergent social, cultural and economic challenges.

Higher education institutions engage with their host community in order to effect positive change. The institutes of technology have regional responsibilities as part of their statutory mission. Each institution is faced with a unique set of local circumstances arising from geographical location, local industry and the needs of potential learners in the host community. A key element of the mission of institutes of technology is to respond to these local and regional demands. For example, the institutes of technology engage and collaborate with local employers in order to ensure the on-going relevance of the programmes available. Under the Universities Act, 1997 universities have statutory objectives in relation to the promotion of learning in the student body and in society generally and the promotion of the cultural and social life of society.

//////////

### The Role Of The Higher Education Authority

The HEA is the statutory planning, funding and development body for higher education and research in Ireland. The HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the higher education sector. The HEA strives to foster the development of a higher education sector which is accessible to all potential students, is recognised internationally for the high quality of teaching, learning and research which has the capacity to address the changing needs and challenges in our society. It is an objective of the HEA to facilitate and support active citizenship in higher education. The HEA recognises that exclusion from education may ultimately lead to exclusion from employment opportunities, economic prosperity and exclusion from full engagement with the social, cultural and political life of the nation. It therefore strives to adopt policies and strategies to increase higher education participation rates among all potential learners.

<sup>5</sup> Bynner, J., Dolton, P., Feinstein, L., Makepeace, G., Malmberg, L., and Woods, L. (2003) *Revisiting the Benefits of Higher Education: A Report by the Bedford Group for Lifecourse and Statistical Studies, Institute of Education*. Bristol. Higher Education Funding Council for England. p. 3

<sup>6</sup> Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007) *Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland*. Dublin, p. 3

<sup>7</sup> Peters, S. 2003. Reconstructing civic professionalism in academic life: A response to Mark Wood's paper, 'From service to solidarity.' *The Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* 8(2):183-198 as cited in Fear, F.A. and M. Avila *Frames and Discourses: Exploring the Meaning of Engagement* Vol. 2, 2005.

## Examples Of HEA Initiatives

The HEA is very aware of the importance of higher education in civil society, and works to support and empower the institutions to deliver on this role to the greatest extent possible. Through its various funding programmes, the HEA has had the opportunity to support projects and initiatives that have a particular emphasis on the development of civil society and active citizens. Some key examples of such initiatives include:

- Service Learning in Higher Education
- Civic Engagement, Student Volunteering and Active Citizenship
- The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL)
- The North-South Programme for Collaborative Research (Strands 1 and 2)

### Service Learning in Higher Education

Through its former Strategic Initiative Scheme,<sup>8</sup> the HEA was pleased to support a project entitled 'Service Learning in Higher Education'. Higher education institutions from both the university and institute of technology sectors participated in this project led by NUI Galway which sought to introduce the pedagogy of service learning within higher education institutions in Ireland. Service Learning seeks to reinvigorate the civic mission of higher education and instil in students a sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. This encourages students to learn and explore issues vital to society, inside and outside the classroom. Students learn from engaging with communities by active participation and academic credit is associated with this learning. The value and potential benefits of service learning was endorsed in the Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

### Civic Engagement, Student Volunteering and Active Citizenship

Under the first cycle of allocations from the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF)<sup>9</sup> the HEA was pleased to allocate funding amounting to €700,000 to a civic engagement, student volunteering and active citizenship project. The objective of this project is to develop a sustainable national network to promote greater levels of civic engagement by students in higher education. This project is being led by NUI Galway, in partnership with DCU, UCD, NUIM and UL.

The key actions include:

- Commissioning a comprehensive national review of volunteering, service learning and community research by an expert in the field, leading to recommendations for long term, sustainable development.
- Increasing the scale of student participation and volunteering opportunities in all partner institutions through the development of appropriate models based on experience and evaluation.
- Establishing a formal national network to support such activities across the sector, providing training materials and organising events such as the hosting of an international conference on civic engagement and active citizenship.

<sup>8</sup> Between 1996 and 2006, the HEA made provision to competitively allocate a small proportion of the overall core grant for institutions, in order to support particular policy goals of national or sectoral interest. This scheme provided an opportunity for institutions to prepare proposals for innovation in areas of particular importance, such as widening access and progression, student retention, teaching, technology in education, quality assurance and promoting the Irish language. Institutions used the scheme to develop new plans and means to deal with such issues. In 2006, in light of key developments, such as the implementation of the new recurrent grant allocation model and the development of a new approach to performance funding, it was agreed that the Strategic Initiative Scheme would be discontinued in its current form.

<sup>9</sup> The Strategic Innovation Fund was established by the Government in Budget 2006 to promote collaboration, support change and enhance quality in Irish higher education so that it is equipped to meet the challenge of driving Ireland's development as a leading knowledge economy. Key objectives of SIF include, *inter alia*, supporting innovation and quality improvement in teaching and learning, including enhanced teaching methods, programme restructuring, modularisation and e-learning.

### **Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions**

The HEA manages the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL). The PRTL is a component of the National Development Plan (NDP) and its launch in 1998 marked a milestone in the State's investment in research in higher education. The programme provides support for institutional strategies, inter-institutional collaboration, large research programmes and infrastructure. Over the course of the first three PRTL cycles, some €30 million has been allocated to very significant projects whose objectives are particularly relevant to the development of civil society. Examples include:

- The Urban Institute at University College Dublin (UCD), which seeks to address the challenges posed by the growth being experienced in our urban areas, and addresses issues such as sustainable living, urban regeneration, traffic congestion, house pricing and management of space;
- The Geary Institute at UCD, which conducts public policy evaluation in areas such as crime, health economics and human and social capital;
- The National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, NUI Maynooth, maps changes in Irish society, placing regional development, suburbanisation and local governance under the microscope.
- The Centre for Transportation, Research and Innovation in People (TRIP) at the University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD), which explores new methodologies for traffic management geared towards a new generation of traffic control systems;
- The Centre for Innovation and Structural Change at NUI Galway, which focuses on understanding the sources and impacts of innovation on the economy and on society; and
- The Institute for International Studies at TCD, which adopts a global perspective with research underway on the world economy, international regulation and globalisation.

The recently launched Cycle 4 of the PRTL is also funding projects important to the development of civil society, including:

- The National Programme of Research on Knowledge, Innovation, Society and Space (KISS) has been allocated almost €16.5 million. This programme links together significant and complementary centres of social science and humanities expertise across NUI Maynooth, University College Cork, NUI Galway, Dublin City University and the University of Limerick. This national research programme will focus on three inter-related areas:
  - Innovation and the building of the knowledge society/economy;
  - Social inclusion and the creation of sustainable communities; and
  - Spatial strategies and promoting balanced development and competitiveness.

### **North-South Programme for Collaborative Research (Strand 1)**

The North-South Programme for Collaborative Research, administered by the HEA, supports research and development between higher education institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The particular focus of this programme is to enhance research capabilities on the island of Ireland. Over the life of the programme, 21 projects have successfully obtained funding amounting to over €5.5 million, with research spanning a variety of thematic areas. Two significant examples of this research of particular relevance to active citizenship include:

- The 'Toward Richer Decision Making' project is an initiative designed to increase understanding of effective public decision making. The researchers examine methods to increase the involvement of citizens in the process of public decision making; and
- A study examining 'Women in Public and Cultural Life in Twentieth Century Ireland', explores the activities of some of the largest women's organisations in twentieth-century Ireland and their role in formulating public policy in relation to the status of women.

### **North-South Programme (Strand 2)**

The North-South Programme (Strand 2) engages the education and research community in new, co-joint cross-border initiatives that support peace and reconciliation and has been given almost €3 million in funding from the HEA over its lifetime. This objective-based programme looked at inclusive versus exclusive identities, equality and social inclusion, pathways to cross-border co-operation, all-island virtual centres and more specifically, in the area of active citizenship and e-consultation.

Examples of relevant projects include:

- The e-consultation project ‘E-Consultation: Evaluating Appropriate Technologies and Processes for Citizens’ Participation in Public Policy’ looks at the use of information technology as an enabling tool for communication across social and political divisions. The use of systems and software to support mediation, negotiation and the promotion of wider engagement in decision making, offers a new approach to encourage wider participation in activities which ultimately affect the society in which we all live; and
- The Equality and Social Inclusion in Ireland project has been established to examine and promote dialogue regarding equality issues between academics, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), statutory and government sectors.

Examples of the issues that have been considered include:

- equality of opportunity;
- care and social inclusion;
- living standards in Northern Ireland;
- disability and equality; and
- human rights and anti-racism.

### ////// Equity Of Access To Higher Education

Given the extent of benefits arising from participation in higher education, both to the individual and society, it is of critical importance that participation in higher education increases and that higher education is accessible to all members of society. This is a key Government priority and in 2003 the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (National Access Office) was established within the HEA. The National Access Office facilitates educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education - those who experience socio-economic disadvantage, students with a disability, mature students, travellers, refugees and students from ethnic minorities.

The success of initiatives aimed at increasing and widening participation in higher education has been reflected in recent findings published by the HEA. Participation in higher education in Ireland has increased dramatically over the past two decades. The participation rate is currently 55%, 11% higher than the rate in 1998,<sup>10</sup> and almost three times the rate of participation in 1980 (20%).<sup>11</sup> In addition to the traditional high rates of participation amongst the higher social classes, participation has also increased significantly amongst the lower socio-economic groups who have traditionally experienced low participation rates. There is clear evidence of a trend of improved equity of access to higher education, although there remains considerable room for improvement.

### National Access Initiatives – Importance of Relationships with Communities

Improving access to higher education cannot be achieved by higher education institutions alone. Rather, partnership whereby collaboration is achieved between the National Access Office, higher education institutions, schools and further education centres, the Department of Education and Science and other relevant government departments, area partnerships, specialised expert bodies and agencies in the community and voluntary sectors is required.<sup>12</sup> Such a partnership is developing in Ireland and higher education institutions foster active links with a range of community, voluntary, regeneration and development agencies, including:

- community-based projects;
- networks of out-of-school services;
- local childcare committees;
- youth work organisations;
- local learning fora;
- local partnership agencies; and
- education networks and education committees of city and county development boards.

Almost all higher education institutions work with designated, disadvantaged secondary schools, by providing pre-entry supports for students and offering alternative routes of entry. Instances of partnership with further education colleges are also increasing and are based on implementing access, transfer and progression routes within the national framework of qualifications, particularly with reference to mature students. Collaboration with primary schools is an area where it is hoped that such links will grow in the near future. Some higher education institutions have introduced activities such as sport and summer camps for primary school pupils. Such activities have helped to raise educational aspirations in communities by familiarising pupils with the college campus and by introducing the idea of higher education as a real possibility for their future.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> O'Connell, P., Clancy, D. and McCoy, S. (2006) *Who Went to College in 2004? A National Survey of New Entrants to Higher Education*. Dublin, Higher Education Authority. p. 98

<sup>11</sup> Clancy, P. (2001) *College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education*. Dublin, Higher Education Authority. p. 113

<sup>12</sup> The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2006) *Towards the Best Education For All: An Evaluation of Access Programmes in Higher Education in Ireland*. Dublin, HEA. p. 32

//////////

## Future Opportunities

Increasing participation rates means that more and more Irish citizens are benefiting from higher education. These benefits are experienced by both the individual and by wider society. Higher education provides a critically important social and civic contribution to our society, and this contribution must continue to be nurtured and developed for the benefit of our communities and all of society. The HEA looks forward to continuing and furthering its work in this area.

The HEA has been particularly pleased to contribute to the work of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship. The establishment of this Taskforce was a very welcome Government initiative and the HEA was delighted to make a submission to the Taskforce and to host a consultation event with higher education stakeholders on its behalf.

The HEA supports the recommendations of the Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship and looks forward to working with the proposed Active Citizenship Office in furthering the recommendations of the Taskforce and building on existing projects and initiatives currently underway.

The Taskforce's call for the establishment of a National Observatory on Active Citizenship is welcomed. This observatory will provide a critical resource for the further development of well-researched, evidence-based active citizenship policies. This Observatory could be ideally located within the higher education sector and the HEA is of the view that it should be established following a competitive call for proposals to higher education institutions where proposals would be independently evaluated according to key criteria such as quality, collaboration and strategic orientation.

## Bibliography

- Access Made Accessible (2007) *The Power in Numbers, 1997 – 2007: Celebrating Ten Years of Innovative*, Dublin: Collaborative Practice in Higher Education Access Programmes
- Bynner, J., Dolton, P., Feinstein, L., Makepeace, G., Malmberg, L., and Woods, L. (2003) *Revisiting the Benefits of Higher Education: A Report by the Bedford Group for Lifecourse and Statistical Studies, Institute of Education*. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching & CIRCLE (2006) *Higher Education: Civic Mission & Civic Effects. A Report by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and CIRCLE (The Centre for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)* Stanford: The Carnegie Foundation.
- Clancy, P. (2001) *College Entry in Focus: A Fourth National Survey of Access to Higher Education*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.
- Fear, F. & Avila, M. (2005) *Frames and Discourses: Exploring the Meaning of Engagement*, Paper given at conference on Engagement: Transforming Learning 3rd Level and Community, Dundalk Institute of Technology, 20th-21st October 2005.
- Government of Ireland (2007) *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship*. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, Dublin: The Stationary Office
- Government of Ireland (2007) *Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland*. Taskforce on Active Citizenship, Dublin: The Stationary Office
- Institute for Higher Education Policy (2005) *The Investment Payoff: A 50 State Analysis of the Public and Private Benefits of Higher Education*. Washington: Institute for Higher Education Policy.
- National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2006) *Towards the Best Education for All: An Evaluation of Access Programmes in Higher Education in Ireland*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.
- O'Connell, P., Clancy, D. and McCoy, S. (2006) *Who Went to College in 2004? A National Survey of New Entrants to Higher Education*. Dublin: Higher Education Authority.
- Peters, S. (2003) 'Reconstructing civic professionalism in academic life: A response to Mark Wood's paper, "From service to solidarity."' in *The Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. 8, 2, 183-198 as cited in Fear, F.A. and M. Avila, *Frames and Discourses: Exploring the Meaning of Engagement* Vol. 2, 2005.



# Democratising Knowledge - The Role of Universities -

Speech made at the Launch of the Community  
Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway in 2001

03

---



# Democratising Knowledge - The Role of Universities -

Speech made at the Launch of the Community  
Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway in 2001

**Gerard Quinn**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

//////////

Context

**Lorraine McIlrath**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

The following chapter is a speech delivered in 2001, by the former Dean of Law, and present Director of the Centre for Disability Law and Policy at NUI Galway, Professor Gerard Quinn. The speech set out to mark and celebrate the introduction of the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) at NUI Galway and the context in which it was delivered is significant, as Ireland was in the throes a vibrant economic boom. At that time the development of the CKI was an important departure for higher education in Ireland, in that it sought to address and counteract, what Professor Quinn will conceptualise his extremely eloquent words, as 'social deficits'.

The Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) set out to underpin and realise a civic mission as part of the institutions core activities and was supported by a number of philanthropic donors including Atlantic Philanthropies. This project, the first of its kind within the context of Ireland, aimed to promote greater civic engagement at the levels of students, staff, courses, programmes and the institution as a whole. It aimed not just to strengthen existing links with the local, national and international communities, but also to foster an ethos of civic spirit, active citizenship and social responsibility.

The Community Knowledge Initiative's (CKI) activities, as documented by its original proposal, were viewed as "integral to the University's strategic mission and involved a fundamental examination of the role of the University in the social fabric"; they were subsequently reflected as a core priority by NUI Galway's Academic and Strategic Plans 2003-2008 which lay out aims and objectives of the CKI and its inter-relationships with other organisations and structures, and the mainstreaming of pedagogical activities related to the CKI, service learning and social responsibility.

Within CKI there are four strands that include, Research, Student Volunteering, Service Learning and Knowledge Sharing. Since inception the CKI has pioneered a number of formal (curricular) and informal (extra-curricular) activities that aim to foster a culture of civic engagement within the institution. The ALIVE (A Learning Initiative and the Volunteering Experience) Student Volunteering programme was established in 2003 to harness, acknowledge and support the contribution that NUI Galway students make by volunteering. Since that time over 2000 students have been recognised for their volunteering commitment within a variety of pathways including community and non-governmental organisations, societies and clubs, homework clubs and peer to peer student mentoring programmes.

Also, in collaboration with over academic staff across the institution, the CKI has established over twenty-five service learning opportunities. These experiential learning opportunities are connecting student learning to community, providing students with real world problem solving insights with the ultimate aim of being of benefit to community. Service learning seeks to reinvigorate the civic mission of higher education and instill in students a sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. It is a pedagogical tool that encourages students to learn

and explore issues vital to society inside and outside the classroom. Students learn from engaging with communities by active participation through their discipline.

Whilst funded initially by philanthropic donations, the CKI has now achieved one of its primary objectives that of ensuring that the civic engagement agenda is part of the mainstream of NUI Galway's core activities and mission. Since June 2008, the CKI has been funded from the University's core budget and the Institution has begun the development of its third Strategic Plan; the indications are clear that civic engagement will play a vital part in the University's future plans and its self-conception.

//////////

## Introduction

*Ireland has moved rapidly from the Parish Pump to the cold, clinical anonymity of the garage forecourt.*

I am here at the launch of the Community Knowledge Initiative at NUI Galway – like you – for two reasons. First, I am here because Ireland has changed almost beyond recognition in the short space of two or three decades and that change affects all of us. Most of this change had been for the better. If there has been a negative impact it has been on the quality of our social or communal life. One could call this the 'social deficit' of recent economic change.

Secondly, and most importantly, I am here because of my strong belief that universities have a valuable role to play in helping to ensure that this change remains positive. As an academic I am proud of this University's announcement today that it stands ready to play its part in sustaining and regenerating community. It does so not because of a calculation of self-interest, still less because of image and profile. It does so because, in doing so, it fulfils the original mission of any university worthy of the title – namely to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to harness that knowledge in the name of humanity. I call this the 'democratization of knowledge'.

The Community Knowledge Initiative has the potential to provide a model of partnership between the University and the community - a model that will resonate far beyond the walls of this institution and indeed our shores. Through this Initiative we signal our willingness to find practical ways of placing our knowledge and social capital in the University at the disposal of our communities. To me this represents the University - both as an idea and as an institution - at its very best.

In the time available, permit me to say a few words on the nature of the 'social deficit' as I see it and to expand on the potential contribution of the university sector in general and the actual contribution of NUI Galway and indeed all Irish Universities in challenging this 'social deficit'.

//////////

## The Impact Of Economic Change On The Social Fabric

The economic change experienced by Ireland has been profound. The changes wrought by the Celtic Tiger over the past ten years have been particularly positive as well as profound. In truth, the seeds to these changes were sown at least 40 years ago by Ken Whitaker and Sean Lemass in the opening of the Irish economy to world markets. It is as if three hundred years of Western economic and social history had been telescoped into four short but highly tumultuous decades in Ireland – something that makes our progress a matter of endless fascination to the newer Member States of the European Union and others.

Few, if any, lament the passing of a stagnant economic and social order. Economic stagnation ruined lives and rent families apart through emigration. The social impact was just as great. The resulting closure of social space and lack of social mobility bred countless valleys of 'squinting windows'. One might even conjecture that this closure of social space also impacted negatively on the quality of the democratic life of the nation. It could even be argued that to a certain extent - and especially in the 1960s and 1970s - the Courts made the most important strategic decisions and not the Oireachtas.

The regeneration of the economy has led to enormous change. But let us be clear on one thing. All change – no matter how positive – can dislocate people and communities. The 'costs' of change are not always evenly spread and some vulnerable communities can suffer more than others. At least people felt some 'belonging' to an entity higher than themselves in the 1950s. Now it seems our sense of belonging is much more instrumental - depending on the interests (golf) or comparative wealth ('purchasing' the community we inhabit by buying property in certain areas) that we happen to share with others.

Despite (or maybe because of) the positive economic changes brought about the past decades, many people sense the need to re-discover our social selves and the need to bring our collective existence back into alignment with the new economy. There is a growing sense that with our new-found economic opportunity comes the need for more, and not less, commitment to community. One can see this generally. But it is particularly evident in the rise of philanthropy in Ireland and the rise of the willingness of successful entrepreneurs to 'give back' to the culture whence they came.

In truth there is nothing exceptional about Ireland's recent economic success and indeed the social difficulties it gives rise to. Karl Polanyi's classic work 'The Great Transformation' charts in great detail the social and other changes brought about by the introduction of market forces into England in the seventeenth century. He recounts the march of an idea and metaphor – 'the market' – and how it worked itself pure from generation to generation and from one economic sector to another. His analysis suggests three things that strike me as having particular resonance in Ireland today.

First, there seems to be no outer limit to the market as an idea or as a mechanism. Everything is potentially commodifiable (including, infamously, human life itself in the form of slavery in times gone by). His analysis reveals the verity that society must be confident enough in its own values to impose limits to markets and not the other way around. Secondly, his analysis reveals that that market metaphor can also re-make society itself. That is, it is not just a mechanism for the allocation of goods and services through the laws of supply and demand. It also leads to a different worldview on society itself. If so, then the terms of co-existence (which are collective in society) can indeed be radically altered. The social world can be comprehensively re-made through the eyes (and self interests) of the unencumbered individual - that is, an individual who acknowledges no organic connectedness to others, much less any positive duties, to others. All social and economic arrangement can be made reducible to individual interest. Thirdly, his analysis reveals a different (market-based) way of valuing human relations. Put simply, all human interactions that cannot have a monetary value placed on them are simply not valued. The classic case in point is the 'work' done by mothers within the home. Hence the 'social capital' that itself makes capitalism possible is degraded.

There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with individualism as a philosophical concept. Yet, as the famous Canadian political philosopher, C.B McPhearson, once observed – the otherwise laudable ethic of individualism can all too easily degenerate into 'possessive individualism' in a market State. That is, the healthy regard that we naturally have for others in community becomes difficult to maintain if we no longer acknowledge any meaningful attachment to others except through transaction-based relationships.

If we push this 'possessive individualism' to one extreme, as Margaret Thatcher arguably tried in the 1980s, then the social sphere may disappear altogether. We are left with 'Man and the State' and with a cold and inhospitable desert between the two. And something else becomes degraded when economic power is allowed to suffocate social space. Civic virtue – considered to be the hallmark of democratic culture – also diminishes. Without steady and ongoing habits and patterns of social interaction our capacity to decide local issues democratically and without recourse to – say, the courts – erodes through time. That is to say, social erosion also undermines the habit of interaction, which breeds respect for difference and tolerance - values that underpin the democratic order and sustain our capacity for self-governance.

I think the lessons from Polanyi are clear and very relevant for contemporary Ireland. First (and not necessarily foremost), society has to be defended because it is the precondition for a market economy in the first place. Social solidarity underpins efficient markets and does not undermine them. If this weren't so then one might expect Scandinavia to be backward economically. In this sense it might be said that society and 'social capital' are a 'productive factor' in an advanced market economy. Secondly, the social sphere is also worth defending and retrieving because it is pivotal to democratic culture. Maintaining healthy levels of social interaction goes to the capacity of communities to solve their own problems without outside intervention whether through the courts or otherwise. In this sense, one might call the social sphere a 'democratic factor'. Thirdly (and most importantly), society is also worth defending for its own sake. Society enables human interests such as health and well-being to be articulated which are not naturally or best advanced through market mechanisms. In any event, all economic forces ultimately revolve around human beings whose lives cannot simply be reduced to economic factors. In this sense it might be said that society and 'social capital' are a 'civilizing factor'. In sum, community, civil society and social interaction can be defended instrumentally as serving the ends of the economy and of democratic culture. But community can - and should - also be defended as an end in itself.

One caveat. If we agree that community is important, it has to be emphasized that the concept of community and the place of the individual within that community is, of course, deeply contested. No one wants to revert to a form of community life that suffocates the person. The notion of community at stake is one that preserves organic ties without intruding on the space of the person. It is a new sort of community – a new re-balancing in the quality of our collective lives. While many hesitate – and rightly – at the potentially stifling implications of community, few really doubt the need for better connectedness with community in contemporary Ireland. Thus, our traditional commitment to community which is one of our defining assets - an asset that allowed the dispossessed Irish in America in the 19th century to get ahead despite adversity - needs to be seen as a treasure worth preserving for future generations. While we live in market economies we are not necessarily fated to live in market societies.

//////////

## The Role Of The University In Retrieving Community

Universities might seem like strange places to look for tangible assistance in re-balancing Irish life and sustaining community. In assessing the potential contribution of the Academy it pays to remind ourselves that Universities are (and are meant to be) highly peculiar environments. Universities are in fact pulled in two different directions. On the one hand, universities stand apart from the world around them. Indeed, they are supposed to be apart from it! It is precisely this separateness that gives universities authority, credibility and the capacity to engage in fresh and critical thinking – thinking that can often lead to solutions for pressing issues in the broader world. It is vitally important that this separateness should not be compromised nor seen to be

compromised. That is why academic freedom is not academic – it is in fact vitally necessary to enable new ideas to emerge and to enjoy broad circulation. And it is through fresh thinking that new ways can be found to address old problems.

On the other hand, universities are naturally drawn to the world mainly because their knowledge comes from the world and it belongs to the world. Indeed knowledge is power - especially the power to change the world. To be more exact, knowledge provides the wherewithal to solve pressing problems and to move public policy forward. As knowledge holders in a wide variety of disciplines we, as academics, are naturally drawn to the world in different ways.

How can universities make a difference? Reverting to the language of the market for the moment it could be said that our primary 'product' is our students. They will hopefully capitalise positively on the skills and knowledge they acquire when here in their own lives. Knowledge gives them access to a relatively privileged life. But consider this. Our graduates are also privileged in another way. They bring their knowledge directly into contact with the world. They deal with 'what is' - and yet they have the vantage point to glimpse and articulate 'what ought to be'. They therefore have the means to effectuate change. Our core educational mission, to me, extends beyond the familiar market-based one of skilling-up people to lead rewarding and productive lives. It also extends to include equipping graduates with the skills needed to contribute positively to wider processes of change in society and in community.<sup>14</sup>

Student volunteering and service learning in real-time environments are not ends in themselves. They are means to higher ends. I suppose the first higher end is purely intellectual. It is one thing to study family law as a law student in the abstract - it is quite another to witness how family disputes are resolved in negotiations. It is one thing to learn about ergonomics as an engineering student. It is quite another to talk to someone with a lifting problem and design a kettle that allows them to make their own tea (and make a real difference in their lives). The point here is that students cannot really 'know' their subject unless they see it close up in environments that matter. So the first argument for volunteering and service learning is purely intellectual. That explains why there will be increasing emphasis in our universities on the clinical dimension to the learning process across all faculties.

Yet the reasons for volunteering and service learning run much deeper. It is important that students acquire the reflex of 'giving back' to community. This is especially true - and life transforming - for students who (through no fault of their own) have led insulated lives and are not naturally inclined to see how the 'other' lives. By opening hearts and minds student volunteering and service learning helps to dispel prejudice which can coarsen public debate and so reduces the danger that such debates will needlessly polarise. There is another advantage which may take some time to manifest itself. Students have the capacity to become moral agents of change in our democratic life. They have the capacity to advocate for change - to enter public life and to craft rational arguments about why change is needed and how it can be accomplished. That is, the inculcation of the 'civic virtue' of public participation that is the glue that holds public life together can remain with students throughout their lives and motivate them to get involved in processes of change that assist people and their communities.

What of universities themselves and the academics that compose them? It is true that we in the universities sometimes suffer from the delusion that the world is perfectly rational and that the 'right' kind of knowledge will lead to the 'right' kind of change. Chaos more than rationality often seems to drive the process of change. Yet knowledge makes the decisive difference in the process of change. As knowledge providers we plant seeds often without knowing how they will take root.

<sup>14</sup> Quinn G., *The Future of University Legal Education in Ireland: Lawyers as Moral Agents of Change in our Republic*, speech delivered in Trinity College, Dublin, 29 December 2006.

The above conclusion that our graduates participate in and often lead change and that the democratic value of knowledge is that it can fuel the process of change is fortified when one recalls that the university is not merely a 'market player' – it is also a community in its own right. And the 'academic community' has its own values. Perhaps the most important value at stake in today's proceedings has to do with the place of the university in the democratic life of the nation. Perhaps the chief civic virtue of the academic is to give back to the community the wherewithal to solve its own problems for itself. This is not something to be engaged in because academics have a superior vision of society. It is not something to be engaged in because of a patronising attitude toward community. It is something to be engaged in order to equip people to achieve their own vision of society and in a spirit of humility.

Many academics already do this. They advise a myriad of local groups and NGOs in areas such as community development, the environment, family dynamics, etc. They help these groups craft solutions to their own problems. They contribute important research to a wide variety of public bodies - bodies dedicated to identifying the public interest (e.g., in my own case the Law Reform Commission) and making relevant policy proposals to Government. Often this research is of direct relevance to the quality of life in our communities and locally. They join important research networks (e.g., funded by the European Commission) which leads to research that informs European law and policy that is also often of tangible benefit to the community.

And the flow is not all one way. Academics gain because the knowledge they already hold acquires new dimensions and is constantly refreshed once brought into meaningful contact with the world. Academics gain because of the personal satisfaction that they play their part in the democratic life of the community. Irish Universities already acknowledge and reward this in their promotions schemes. One could certainly argue that it should count for more when it comes to promotion and other supports.

Parenthetically, the advent of the Information Society has enabled many academics to participate in virtual knowledge communities throughout the world. Again, the beauty of the CKI is that it will give local communities from Barna to Ballina access to these wider virtual communities of knowledge.

//////////

### The New Economy Initiative & The NUI Galway Commitment To Community

If we live in market economies but do not aspire to live in market societies and if the retrieval of community is deemed important then how will the CKI deliver on this University's commitments in this regard?

The emphasis on volunteering and experiential learning should prove valuable. Knowledge comes ultimately from the community. It is entirely fitting that 'learning by doing' should become as valorised as learning in the library in the University of the future. We should consciously see our students as agents of change and equip them to take some responsibility for the 'way things are' and to motivate them to participate in the public life of the nation to help make things 'what they ought to be'.

This University has always had very strong research and other ties with the community. This Initiative marks yet another step in achieving one of the core missions of any university which involves harnessing knowledge for the benefit of humanity. In pioneering the democratization of knowledge we aim to play our part as a corporate citizen in the regeneration of community. We owe this to the community from which we spring. It may well be that we are also re-situating our University life within the democratic life of the nation. To me, this represents the University at its best. And it is now more important than ever as a shrinking economy exposes a vacuum in our social fabric and accentuates the need to regenerate community.

## Bibliography

MacPearson, C.B. (1964) *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: from Hobbes to Locke*. USA: Oxford University Press

Polanyi, K. (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origin of our Times*. Boston: Beacon Press.

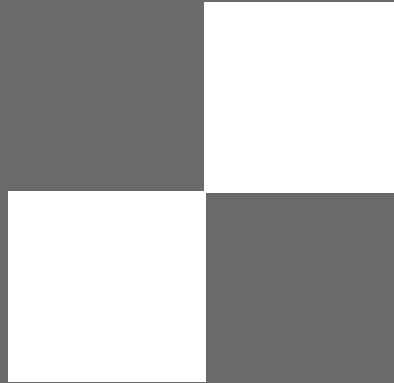
Quinn, G. (2006) *The Future of University Legal Education in Ireland: Lawyers as Moral Agents of Change in our Republic*, speech delivered in Trinity College, Dublin, 29 December 2006.

Spencer, H. (1982) *Man versus the State: With Six Essays on Government, Society, and Freedom*. USA: Liberty Fund Inc.



# Defining Innovation in the Engaged University

04



# Defining Innovation in the Engaged University

**Finbarr Bradley**

*Former Professor at DCU, NUI Maynooth and UCD*

//////////

## Introduction

The factors that drove Ireland's economic boom of the period 1993-2008, particularly low corporate tax rates and over reliance on foreign direct investment, are not sufficient to ensure future competitiveness. Until recently, little attention was devoted to science and technology as drivers of Irish development. Now a key policy objective is to develop a knowledge-driven or learning society to generate high productivity and sustainable competitiveness. Under the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*, the State is investing a staggering €8.2 billion in science, technology, and innovation over seven years. The *Science Strategy Report (2006)* contains a commitment to spending on R&D of some €3.8 billion in public and private funds. State agency, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), is spending enormous resources on the development of R&D centres in third level institutions. This policy is designed to help Ireland become a world-class player in research as well as to achieve a learning or knowledge society. However, spending money on research alone, especially if founded on scientific-based approaches, will not lead to a learning society which is fundamentally about fostering personal growth, capability and creativity. A learning society is inclusive, participative and concerned about well-being and quality of life. *The Science Strategy Report* ignores the complicated links between scientific research, learning, commercialisation and innovation. Innovation has many sources, including the codified knowledge produced by scientific research. The crucial aspect is what is done with knowledge, not its generation or even the knowledge itself. Action and practice, emotions and meaning, self-knowledge if you will, play a critical role in innovation. Scientific and technological knowledge, together with innovation, contribute to the economy and society. Yet, without self-knowledge, innovation is unlikely to occur.

Learning is not only for individuals. As Etienne Wenger (1998) explains, a flawed assumption is that conventional learning "has a beginning and an end: that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching" (Wenger, 1998). If the social or cultural context is ignored, investment in science and technology will not be money well spent. For a culture of innovation to take root, it must nurture relationships of community and trust. This is why the concept of the engaged university is so important. It is also the reason a true innovation culture is not possible without a fundamental revamp of the Irish third level education sector. Engagement happens when colleges and communities jointly identify and pursue projects, generally not the spirit in which collaboration currently occurs. This article argues that an engaged university, one that actively encourages a culture of mutual respect and purposeful activities involving academics, students and members of the community, is ideal for fostering an innovation spirit. It is also the most appropriate foundation for developing a learning society in Ireland. More attention needs to be paid in public policy to determining ways of encouraging such a culture of engagement within the higher education sector. It certainly will not happen if engagement is seen as peripheral to the institutional mission or an instrument for academic 'experts' to push one-way service delivery or 'solutions' to a needy community.

## ////////// Exploration & Meaning

It is primarily intangible assets such as ideas, emotions, community and culture, rather than knowledge acquisition *per se*, that create value in today's economy. Knowledge is often more constructed than received, and not simply about facts or theories. Its most valuable characteristics are often the networks of human interactions embodied in relationships. Hungarian born chemist and social scientist, Michael Polanyi (2007) argues that science is not value free and pointed to the existence of a tacit aspect to knowledge. He said that creative acts, especially acts of discovery, are imbued with strong personal feelings and commitments. Not surprisingly, one of Polanyi's (1975) most famous works is called *Personal Knowledge*. Captured nicely in the phrase, "people know more than they can tell", he held that informed guesses, hunches and imaginings are exploratory acts motivated by what he called "passions". Like scientific research, these may be aimed at discovering 'truth', but may not necessarily be in a form that can be stated in propositional or formal terms. He placed a strong emphasis on context and the role of conversation, meaning and dialogue within an open community. He also recognised how strongly people hold opinions and resist changing them but having to reflect on (and defend) a position can itself become crucial to learning and discovery.

As Harry Boyte (2000) states, "science asks 'how' questions, but it neglects questions of meaning, purpose and value". Yet, because of the authority of science, the focus in the US is now on efficiency and technology rather than on the meaning and significance of what is created, the work process itself and the definition of 'wealth'. Teaching is often regarded as merely 'instruction' or training and is accompanied by the fast disappearance of a sense of community, collegiality and public purpose within institutions. Many academics have disengaged from public life, and this ethos of disengagement is further fed by an uncritical celebration of science. Even though discredited intellectually, the philosophy of positivism shapes and determines research, disciplines, teaching and institutions. This ethos also pervades development and outreach programmes between the universities and industry, government and communities. Its proponents argue that science rests on the discovery of permanent standards of rationality that have been waiting to be discovered and applied. This model slights 'ordinary knowledge' and deprecates the capacities, talents and interests of the non-expert and the amateur. It is also antagonistic to common sense, folk traditions, intuition, craft and practical knowledge mediated through everyday experience even though these resources have a record of contributing to entrepreneurship, innovation and development.

Ireland is no different, and may perhaps be a worse offender, in this regard. Following the US research model, many academics in Irish third level colleges regard research and teaching as worlds apart. Research is regarded as a source of both personal satisfaction and recognition while teaching is too often seen as a chore. Many students fail to receive a coherent body of knowledge at university, graduating without knowing how to think logically, write clearly, communicate coherently or conduct even a small piece of research. Lectures to classes of hundreds of students are common and what is learned often cannot be carried beyond the lecture-hall. Moreover, many students with a highly developed classroom knowledge of a subject are unable to put this knowledge to much use, except perhaps in the rarefied context of university examinations.

Students thrive in an atmosphere that nurtures creativity, imagination, intuition, personal development and mutual respect. Students should have practice and experience in exploring their inner emotional world. This is best done within the

supportive environment of a learning community. The more confident students are at creatively dealing with change and open to new possibilities, the better they are able to contribute in innovation. Exploration through engaged learning should be at the heart of the education experience to enhance individual and community well-being. Exposure to such self-discovery means students are likely to emerge as engaged, responsible and creative citizens.

Learning should be based on cultivating the natural curiosity and impulse to learn of individuals rather than rewarding them for performing, as the current examination-driven culture ensures, to standards set externally by others. Without doubt, in recent years Irish-third education has seen the emergence of innovatory initiatives such as problem-based and evidence-based learning. A proper learning ethos should support students as they strive to attain their own goals, guided by their values, not the approval of an outsider such as a lecturer or teacher. Students should see themselves as *discoverers* with inquiry at the heart of their educational experience. To quote former Cornell University President, Frank Rhodes (1999), “education is really closer to a DIY job than a spectator sport”. As he puts it:

*The notion that you “receive” (education) passively is just a total falsehood. Education is something you create for yourself. And you no more receive it than you can receive a career, you have to create it for yourself. And the student who prospers will be one who is endlessly inquisitive, endlessly curious,....*

//////////

## Innovation & Place

As place becomes the central organising unit in the learning society, researchers on urban and regional development point to the special role of community and diversity as an incubator of innovation. However, in today’s globalised world, the erosion of a sense of place is often cited as an indicator of confidence and independence. Rootedness is not seen as crucial to competitiveness. But while knowledge is global, learning and innovation are local and the countries and regions that combine the benefits of global markets with local relationships based on quality, community, tradition and trust will prosper in the long run.

Richard Florida (2004) in his best seller, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, illustrates the power of distinctive quality places, having what he calls ‘authenticity’ and ‘uniqueness’, to spur innovation. For example, emphasising a particular musical genre such as the blues in Chicago or Motown in Detroit make these cities unique and special. Creative people cluster in such authentic places since they offer them the lifestyle they crave. They are attracted by the qualities of such urban communities, which in turn attracts enterprise. Unlike the past where reducing the cost of business or clustering companies in industrial estates on the edges of town was central to development, attracting creative individuals to special Irish places could likewise ensure their long-term competitiveness.

Creative centres provide an integrated eco-system where all forms of creativity – artistic and cultural, technological and economic – take root and flourish. The ‘qualities’ of a region, or its special cultural, social and natural environment are now crucial to its economic base. The implication is clear: places in Ireland that emphasise community will attract and keep the most creative people and organisations, be the most innovative and have the highest quality of life. These places will be multi-culturally diverse, fiercely proud and respectful of the past, have a sustainable ethic and be unique!

In an increasingly globalised world, the best way for a small country like Ireland to influence its destiny is by identifying and developing local capabilities, especially those which are relatively immobile (Bradley, 2004). This means concentrating on greater complexity in products and services where native capabilities can add the most value. Ireland must learn

to mediate connections between the local and the global, and influence how its own specific assets are mobilized within the range of opportunities available globally. Brendan Tuohy (2007), former Secretary General of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, considers a sense of identity very important in innovation, especially in the forging of connections between the local and the global. As he told graduates at a recent Conferring at University College Cork:

*As we tackle global issues and play on the world stage, it is that strong sense of our own identity that will support us. And that comes not just from us as individuals but also from the communities in which we grew up and in which we now live. It is nowhere more visible than on the hurling and football pitch where the sense of commitment to local, county or national team can be so strong.*

//////////

## The Engaged University

So what is the best way for the Irish university to contribute to and promote innovation? The key is the quality of the links between students, academics and the local community. An exciting role would be to have the university serve as a public space for ongoing local conversations about the future direction of technologies, markets, products, services, and social issues that affect the community. Irish third level institutions, like many of their overseas counterparts, at present seriously underestimate the importance of this public space role (Lester, 2005).

A linear model of innovation, namely basic research leading to commercialisation through technology transfer, is no longer, and probably never was, the best approach to stimulate an Irish learning society. Yet Irish universities, following the now largely defunct US research university model, still rely on this approach as their main contribution to innovation. In 1990, Ernest Boyer (1990), head of the Carnegie Foundation, wrote a seminal treatise questioning the dominance of research as the pre-eminent measure of academic scholarship. Boyer's rationale was that the mission of universities should expand to reflect a changing world where with traditional empiricist research was too narrow to encompass the new emerging social order. Boyer's work has persuaded many State and Land Grant Universities to substitute 'discovery' for 'research' in their mission. Even though within a decade Boyer's work liberated many US academics from the confines of positivism, Irish universities still uncritically embrace an outdated model that US academia is largely abandoning.

The innovative idea and its development have many inputs of which scientific research may be just one of many. The most powerful innovation approach is where third level research acts as a window on the world, identifying and acquiring knowledge from elsewhere as well as internally. A university should aim to adapt knowledge originating worldwide to local conditions, aligning its own contribution to what is actually happening in the place in which it is situated. This can help unlock and redirect knowledge that is already present within communities located in that region but not as yet put to productive use.

A powerful contribution universities can make to a local innovation culture is to design programmes with value creation, not knowledge, as the guiding principle. This means helping students to understand, through engagement and practice, the value of resources, whether financial, human, social, cultural, technological or natural. A recent Information Society Report (2006) suggests the development of an organisation's capital is best acquired in communities and societies, which in addition to rationality, also emphasise values and emotional intelligence. This presupposes the care and

development of resources rather than their overexploitation. In a learning age, most of an organisation's resources are in the form of intangible capital. Relationship or social capital, defined by the network of relations between people is probably the most difficult component to develop. Yet, an investment in this form of intangible capital is likely to provide a more sustainable competitive advantage than investment in physical capital. Intangible capital, for instance, can greatly increase productivity, be successfully duplicated and utilised in various places at the same time.

There are parallels conceptually between the various sources of capital that organisations as well as countries possess. For instance, both cultural capital, which arises from human creativity, and natural capital, which comes from the beneficence of nature, are together inherited from the past. They impose a duty of care on each generation, the essence of the concept of sustainability (Throsby, 2001). They are also similar in that the function of natural ecosystems is to support and maintain the 'natural balance' while cultural ecosystems support the cultural life and vitality of a society. A fundamental principle of sustainability is that no part of the system exists independently of any other part. Cultural capital, therefore, makes a contribution similar to that of natural capital. Just as neglect, overuse, disregard or underinvestment of natural capital can lead to an ecosystem breakdown, so too with cultural capital. A failure to sustain the cultural values that provide individuals with a sense of identity and meaning in their lives can lead to a loss of well-being and economic output.

By embedding a learning environment within a sense of community that emphasises the local, innovative practices have the best potential to flourish. An equitable, culturally diverse, wise, globally focused but locally led society will result if policies - founded on creativity, resource efficiency, citizenship, and value for money - are put into practice. Such a perspective shares features in common with that advocated by Jonathon Porritt (2006) in his visionary book, *Capitalism as if the World Matters*. There, he draws upon a core of ideas and values that speak directly to people's desire for a higher quality of life, emphasising enlightened self-interest and personal well-being of a kind not experienced at present.

A common misconception is that a country's capacities for productivity gains, innovation and competitiveness depend on how much it spends on research. The heart of an innovative culture is really a frame of mind or way of thinking rather than the discovery of new knowledge. The best way to create a powerful educational environment is through active learning activities that help students understand how to create, exchange, share and sustain value. Emphasis should be on practical skills, and this means that an apprenticeship form of education is especially suitable. A mutual learning network, involving academics, students and community members should emphasise purposeful conversation, thereby helping students see connections between the value created by various resources, both money and non-money. If programmes are conceptualised and designed properly, and creatively, a rich dynamic environment means those from different disciplinary backgrounds such as business, arts, engineering or science would learn from each other, while still permitting specialisation in their own areas of interest. Here is where learners have the opportunity to reflect on and explore with others within the learning community their own sense of identity. Learning programmes should not be about individual subjects directed at individual learners. Instead, they should be built round interdisciplinary clusters that centre on value creation. Each cluster would then help students understand the contribution of that resource to the creation of value through a process driven by reflection, conversation and action.

## Conclusion

Because of the enormous pace of economic, social and technological change, there is a danger that higher education will sell itself short by thinking its future lies in the aggressive take-up of new technologies such as online learning. This is not where a real transformation is required. Rather, it is in creating dynamic learning communities founded on experience, engagement and practice.

The social animal innovates when there is room for individual commitment and a sense of belonging. The absence of an ethic of civic responsibility or citizenship is one of the largest social problems now facing Europe (van der Hoeven, 2007). Citizenship cannot be taught but may become learned if educators create an environment where tradition, identity and community are respected and valued. It would help if students had opportunities, as a central feature in their education, to engage with and learn from the local community. Education for creativity must foster idealism and identity to invigorate civil society. For as long as young people believe their vision can change the world, they will continue to be motivated and willing to lead change and innovate.

The great education philosopher John Dewey (1987) classified education as a process of living and not as a preparation for future living. One-dimensional thinking has plagued Irish development since the foundation of the State. Pride in place, cultural traditions such as language and music along with a new emphasis on sustainability and biodiversity, can form the bedrock for a learning society. The engaged institution has a special role in helping the country achieve dynamic knowledge-based enterprises, a multifunctional agriculture sector, a 'living countryside', with innovative communities living in both rural and urban Ireland.

Engagement is increasingly cited as a distinguishing characteristic of the best learning in American higher education today (Bowen, 2005). The emerging Irish learning society offers wonderful opportunities for Irish universities if connections with the local, the indigenous and the community are fostered. This will require, however, paradigm shifts in the mission, programme design and structures of Irish third level institutions. How, what and the way academics teach will also have to change. Tacit knowledge will need to be emphasised as much as codified knowledge. Assessment approaches, in particular, will require radical transformation, departing from an examination culture. Instead, the focus should be on action, exemplified by, for example, the application by students of imaginative solutions to risky ventures the university commits to with local communities.

In an innovation age, a sense of place must be central to the learning and development process, contributing to wholeness, integrity, civic responsibility, aesthetic sensibility and ecological concern. Policies that recognise the specific nature and feelings of the population, even if latent or unexpressed, will achieve an inimitable competitive advantage for Ireland. People identify with what they might call 'our project', founded on shared values and deeply felt respect for local roots (Oinas, 2005). This is the great opportunity, and yet an undoubted challenge, if universities are to engage with communities in developing a learning society.

## Bibliography

- Boyer, E. (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. New Jersey: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bowen, S. (2005) 'Engaged Learning: Are We All of the Same Page?' in *Peer Review*. 7, 2, 4-7.
- Boyte, H.C. (2000) 'The Struggle against Positivism' in *Academe* 86, 4, 46-51.
- Bradley, J. (2007) 'Small State, Big World: Reflections on Irish Economic Development' in *Dublin Review of Books*, 3, (available at [http://www.drj.ie/sept\\_smallstate.html](http://www.drj.ie/sept_smallstate.html), accessed 13 November 2007).
- Dewey, J., (1987) 'My Pedagogic Creed' in *The School Journal* 54, 3, 77-80.
- Florida, R. (2004) *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.
- Government of Finland (2006) 'Efficiency and Vitality in Future Finland' in *The Information Society Report*. Finnish Government.
- Government of Ireland (2007) *National Development Plan 2007-2013: Transforming Ireland*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Government of Ireland (2006) *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, 2006-2013* Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Lester, R.K. (2005) 'Universities, Innovation and the Competitiveness of Local Economies, Summary Report from the LIS Project-Phase 1' in MIT Industrial Performance Centre, Working Paper 05-010.
- Oinas, P. (2005) 'Finland: A Success Story?' in *European Planning Studies*, 13, 8, 1227-1244.
- Polanyi, M. (2007) 'Michael Polanyi and Tacit Knowledge' available at [www.infed.org/thinkers/polanyi.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/polanyi.htm). Accessed 13 November 2007.
- Polanyi, M. and Prosch, H. (1975) *Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Porritt, J. (2006) *Capitalism as if the World Matters*. London: Earthscan.
- Rhodes, F. (1999) *Conversations with History Series*. Berkeley: University of California. 31 March.
- Throsby, D. (2001) *Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tuohy, B. (2007) Address at Conferring, University College Cork, 10 September.
- Van der Hoeven, M. (2007) 'Time to rethink what it mean to be a citizen in today's society' in *The Irish Times*, 19 March 2007.
- Wenger, E. (1998) 'Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System' in *Systems Thinker*. 9, 5, 3.



# Section Two

## *Case Studies*

*Case Study One*  
University Community  
Engagement From  
Michigan to Mayo

*05* *06* *07*  
■ ■ ■

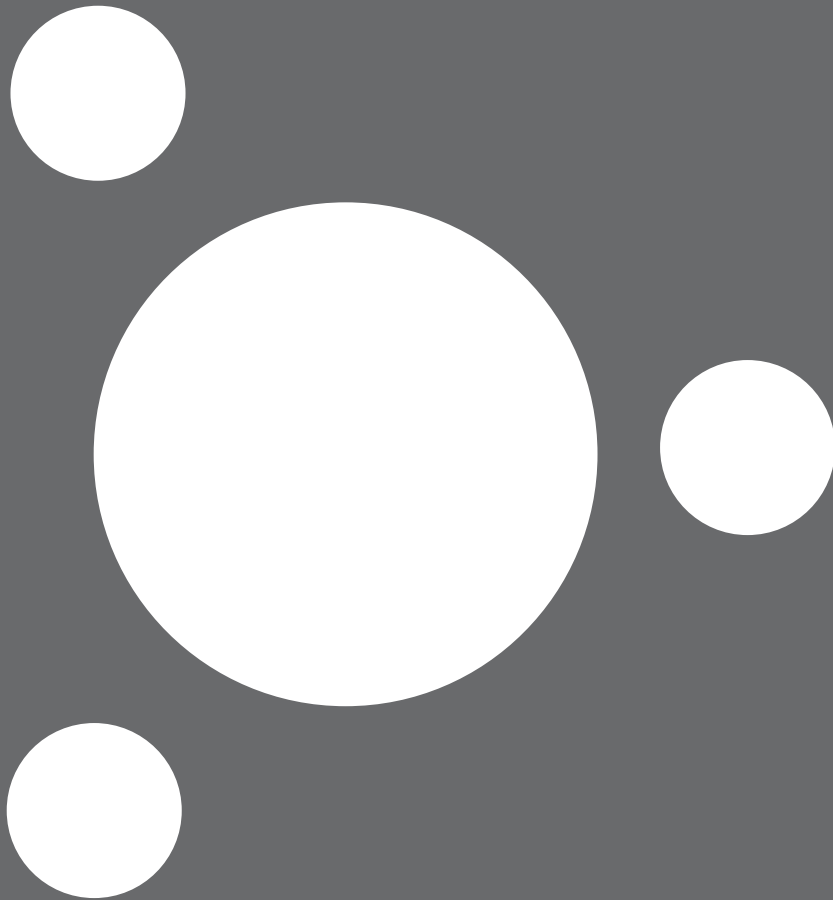
Section Two  
*Case Studies*

*Case Study One*  
University Community  
Engagement From  
Michigan to Mayo

*05* *06* *07*  
▬   ▬   ▬

# Community Engagement in Rural Ireland: A Lecturer's Perspective

05



# Community Engagement in Rural Ireland: A Lecturer's Perspective

**Diane M. Doberneck**

*Michigan State University*

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground that overlooks a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solutions through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to the individuals or society at large, however, great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to the prevailing standards of rigor, or shall he descend into the swamp of the important problems and non-rigorous inquiry? (Schön 1987, p3).

//////////

## Introduction

Twenty years later, the tension between the high, hard ground of the academy and the swampy lowland of the practitioner continues to bedevil leaders of higher education as they grapple with questions, such as: What is the purpose of higher education? How do we serve the broader needs of society? How do we prepare the next generation of leaders to address the problems of contemporary society? For the past decade, I have been a member of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Scholars programme, a non-residential interdisciplinary learning community that seeks answers to those questions through connected and engaged learning at Michigan State University (MSU)<sup>15</sup>. In my role as lecturer, I have been fortunate to be a co-leader of the Community Engagement in Rural Ireland study abroad programme, organised collaboratively with the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network (TVN)<sup>16</sup>, which has been described at length in Chapters 6 and 8 in this book. Along with my colleagues in County Mayo, I have considered these questions as well as the day-to-day challenges of community engagement over the past six years. We have worked closely together to create learning experiences that introduce students to the fundamentals of community engagement and support them as they put these ideas into practice in rural Ireland. In this essay, I draw upon my experiences and the TVN-MSU team's learning over time to explain our approach to community engagement, describe pedagogy for engaged learning, and discuss the relevance of engagement for third level institutions.

//////////

## Engagement Interface

In the United States, colleges and universities (our third level institutions) interact with communities in a wide array of ways—ranging from ad-hoc, short-term events to multi-year commitments. A plethora of activities that do not fit the definition of research or teaching are often lumped together and described using an almost equally wide array of terms, such as service, outreach, engagement, civic engagement, public scholarship, etc. This essay will focus on 'community engagement' and discuss the unique ways in which all partners might learn, benefit, and grow from experience at the engagement interface.

<sup>15</sup> Michigan State University, founded in 1855, is a research-intensive, land-grant university with significant international commitments. Its mission is to advance knowledge and transform lives. MSU currently enrolls 45,000 students, employs 4,500 faculty academic staff, and boasts of over 200 study abroad programmes across all continents. In 2007, MSU was designated an "engaged institution" by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

<sup>16</sup> Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network is a limited partnership company established in 1998 to help rural communities to help themselves. TVN is comprised of 17 villages in southwest County Mayo, spanning from Balla in the east to Murrisk in the west.

//////////

## Community Engagement

In community engagement the flow of knowledge is multi-directional; that is communities inform universities and universities inform communities in a generative, iterative exchange. Simply put, engagement takes place when “a group of people organise around an issue or topic of common concern. They interact collaboratively and deliberatively for the purpose of creating and enacting a shared learning agenda. Then, they apply what they learn to ameliorate situations in their community” (Fear, Rosean, Bawden, & Foster-Fishman 2005, p293). In community engagement settings, new understandings, meanings, knowledge and practices are often co-generated from the interactions between community partners and members of the third level institution. The engagement interface is a “dynamic, evolving, co-constructed space—a collaborative community of inquiry—where partners work together with an activist orientation to seek transformative ends for both the community and the academy” (Rosean, Foster-Fishman, & Fear 2001, p10). In other words, the engagement interface is the swampy lowland.

Participating with community members as equals in a process of discovery and learning requires a particular set of skills. Attention needs to be paid to the essential practices of engagement, which contribute to a shared culture of respect, reciprocity, and responsiveness. Colleagues of mine at MSU have described an essential set of practices in the following way:

*1st Practice: Constructing Joint Purposes:* means connecting to a bi-lateral requirement, grounding work in community relevance and linking that work to intellectual question(s) of scholarly relevance

*2nd Practice: Developing Shared Norms:* requires listening to and respective diverse voices of those participating; proceeding always with skills grounded in informed practice of dialogue and discourse

*3rd Practice: Bringing Unique Perspectives and Skills to Bear:* means integrating participants' knowledge and abilities in the world; viewing the practice arena as a formal learning laboratory for learning with, from, and through one another

*4th Practice: Engaging in Shared Appraisal of Outcomes:* means taking time to assess the quality, outcomes, and impact of the work; doing that in ways that conform to recognised and accepted forms of evaluative inquiry (Rosean, Foster-Fishman, & Fear 2001, pp16-17).

These essential practices of engagement are not necessarily common at third level institutions; nor are they part of the habitual routines of their US lecturers. To some extent, these practices require lecturers to abandon the role of knowledgeable expert and to resume the role of learner. Giving up the status of expert or relinquishing the power of being the most knowledgeable, for many lecturers, counters the reasons they were drawn to the academy in the first place. In addition, institutions of higher education are more likely to reward their lecturers for outstanding research and scholarly publications. They may recognise outstanding teachers, but rarely do they bestow rewards for engagement. Engagement, as a result, runs counter to the traditions and the practice of most lecturers at third level institutions. Because it is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and unrewarded, working at the engagement interface presents challenges for many lecturers.

In addition, to put these engagement principles into practice requires a commitment to reflective practice or learning from experiences, based on a cycle of “concrete experience, mediated through observation and reflection, which becomes the source for formation of abstract theory that can be tested in a new situation” (Schall 1995, p204). Throughout this essay, I have indicated instances where the TVN-MSU team has modified its practice based on reflection, dialogue, and learning over the years.

//////////

## Community Engagement In Rural Ireland

Since its inception, the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network has partnered with Michigan State University on a variety of rural community and economic development initiatives, which have taken various forms at various times, including rural development consulting, dissertation research, leadership development and training, short-term student placements, and study tours. In 2002, the TVN-MSU team pilot-tested the short term study abroad programme for MSU students and TVN communities. Since that time, the TVN-MSU team has supported over 40 community-student projects in TVN communities.

Community Engagement in Rural Ireland is a five and half week study abroad programme that immerses MSU students in communities in rural Ireland each May and June. Communities and students work together collaboratively to organise, manage, and complete a community development project the local people deem to be important. Community mentors, village councils, host families, resource people, TVN board members work alongside MSU students and lecturers at the engagement interface. In the process, students come to understand the nature of grassroots community development, gain experience with community engagement, and give something back to the communities in which they live, work, and play.

### **Responding to communities**

The Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network works with its member communities to prioritise community development needs and identify potential student projects during the fall and early spring of each year. Community projects may advance specific community initiatives (i.e., child care, heritage) or involve the entire community in a participatory process (i.e., community resource assessment, village enhancement priorities). Some examples of community-student projects include the following:

- feasibility studies for crèche or child care,
- historical research on deserted famine villages,
- plans for an organic demonstration garden,
- youth leadership development programmes,
- history and mapping of local cemeteries,
- amenity guides for local tourist development,
- sign boards noting heritage sites of interest,
- environmental interpretation signage,
- community resource assessments,
- development of river walk park,
- scoping document for loop walk development.

Community projects vary each year according to the needs of the communities and the skills and interests of the students. Communities set their own priorities, and Michigan State University follows their lead. This responsiveness is the bedrock of an autonomous approach to community development (Carmen 1996). We recognise the “potential dysfunctionality of advice offered from the outside rendered by experts, who import trendy techniques and processes. [We] are familiar with the tyranny of technique; it can displace rather than foster collaborative inquiry and discovery (Fear, Lillis, Desmond, Lally & Hartough 2002, p25).

The TVN-MSU team is ever mindful that local people are in control of the decision-making and that the American presence and role is one of co-learning and not of advisor.

### **Seeking those who love the swamp**

At the same time, MSU lecturers recruit students for the Community Engagement in Rural Ireland programme. Students at various levels of the university (first years through fifth years and graduate level) and from various programmes of study (social work, engineering, outdoor pursuits, history) are invited to consider the study abroad programme. Interested students visit an information table at the annual campus-wide Study Abroad Fair, attend information sessions, email questions to lecturers, and speak with past programme participants to get a sense of the programme's activities and philosophies. If the programme continues to be of interest, prospective students submit a skills and interests survey, interview at least twice with programme leaders, and undergo a reference check.

As the TVN-MSU team has come to understand what it takes to engage communities successfully, the student recruitment process has become more selective over time. The current process is less focused on traditional indicators of academic success, such as grade point average and academic honours, and more focused on interpersonal, communication, and engagement skills. Lecturers assess prospective students' capacities to engage in conversation, ask questions, listen attentively, and interact comfortably in group settings. Strong candidates for the programme demonstrate motivation to do good work, interest in learning about another culture, capacity to cope with uncertain and changeable situations, willingness to try new things, ability to organise and complete projects without constant supervision, and emotional resilience.

### **Identifying mutually beneficial community-student placements**

Once TVN has identified potential community projects and MSU has identified prospective students, a series of conversations takes place between the Irish and MSU programme leaders. We work together in an iterative process to match communities and students. In the early years of our collaboration, we spent much less time on the matching process because we believed making placements was straightforward. Initially, we considered the most basic criteria—topic of community project and interests of students—when making the placements. For example, we would automatically match a community who wanted to develop a loop walk with a student studying outdoor pursuits or a community who wanted to develop a crèche with a student learning about family community services.

Our shared definition of a “successful match” has deepened and evolved through experience, reflection, and dialogue over time. As a result, the community-student matching process has taken on more significance and has become increasingly complex. We now consider the community-student match systemically, that is, from multiple perspectives (i.e., community, mentor, host family, student, TVN, etc.).

The TVN-MSU team recognises a variety of factors as it seeks to optimise placements:

- development needs of communities,
- students' interests and strengths,
- quality of experience with prior students,
- students' challenges,
- number of prior student projects,
- students' academic requirements,
- community mentor availability,
- proximity to faculty mentors,
- community mentors' strengths,
- host family preferences & restrictions,
- community mentor challenges,
- host family location (proximity to village centre),
- TVNs overall development priorities,
- resources leveraged by completed project,
- impact of the community-student project.

Because we consider the whole person, not just the community project, we have become more sensitive to matching student and community gifts (or strengths) and minimising challenges or weaknesses, to the extent to which we can anticipate these in advance (Weisberg 1999). For example, in the course of interviewing prospective students, we might learn that students do their best when a project is clearly defined and firm deadlines are set; when left on their own, they struggle to impose organisation and structure upon themselves. We would consider matching these students with mentors who have strong project management skills, do not mind suggesting firm deadlines, and are available to meet with the student on a weekly basis. In another instance, students may express profound concerns about missing their family while they are away in Ireland. We would consider matching these students with host families that bustle with activity and have young, active children (instead of with quieter families where the children are away at university).

Paying attention to these subtle aspects of making placements has improved the Community Engagement in Rural Ireland programme dramatically—and for good reason too. Research has shown that individuals are more successful when they are both challenged and supported (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). If students are challenged too much, they will become overwhelmed and will not be able to perform well. If students are not challenged enough, they will become bored and fail to reach their full potential. Knowing the students, community mentors, and host families well helps the TVN-MSU team assess potential matches more thoroughly. A key to successful matches for community-student placements is finding the optimal mixture of challenge and support for each student and community.

//////////

## Mutual Benefit And Reciprocity

When community-university relationships are based on the values of mutuality, partnership, equity, respect, and reciprocity, community engagement benefits all the partners involved significantly. Community Engagement in Rural Ireland strives to embody mutual benefit and reciprocity, key components of true engagement. Irish communities and MSU partners make contributions to the effort and receive benefits from the collaboration. On a very rudimentary level, the Irish communities identify and contribute host families, volunteer mentors (or mentor teams), occasional transportation, access to local experts, and other resources as needed. MSU identifies and contributes motivated students, lecturers who oversee the student placements, transportation, and financial resources generated through student tuition and programme fees.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Student participants in Community Engagement in Rural Ireland pay tuition fees for the credits they earn and a programme fee to cover room and board, transportation, and other related expenses. The TVN, its communities, mentors, and host families are not required to contribute to the programme financially—though many community members are very generous with their time and resources.



The communities, as well as the Tóchar Valley Network itself, benefit from the collaboration in tangible and intangible ways. Students' final project reports are professionally produced so that they may be submitted to funding agencies or local authorities to secure grant aid and other resources for the villages. For example, feasibility studies for crèche and child care facilities have been submitted to Mayo County Childcare Committee to secure funds to build new facilities in three TVN communities. Students also provide communities with other professionally prepared final products, such as brochures, directories, maps, posters, sign boards, curricula, as determined by the mentors at the outset of the programme. These materials are often immediately available for communities to use.

Less tangible benefits accrue to communities as well. The enthusiasm and "fresh eyes" the students bring to the communities often help community members to see their unique community assets in new ways.

Sometimes, it is the consultative process that students employ in the communities that has lasting effects. The momentum they create in the process of completing their projects continues after the student has returned to Michigan. We actively guide our students to make sure leadership for the project is vested in the community and to avoid creating dependency relationships. The idea is for the student's contribution to advance the project in such a way that capacity to continue to lead the project is built during the process (Michigan State University 1996).

The benefits of engagement extend beyond the individual communities to the Tóchar Valley Network itself. For example, successful completion of community-student projects frequently requires knowledge and expertise of resource people. To meet this need, community-student teams seek out and invite local experts and professionals to assist with the projects. Over the years, community elders, archaeologists, historians, ecologists, birding experts, walk developers, bat experts, foresters, genealogists, web design experts, artists, school teachers, public health nurses, folklorists—not to mention, various officials from the Mayo County Council, LEADER, the Rural Social Scheme, FÁS—have made key contributors to the community engagement projects. These individuals form an ever-expanding network of resources for the TVN and its member communities to tap in the future, as needed. This demonstrable increase in social capital is an indication of how the TVN-MSU engagement projects support authentic community-based, capacity-building.

MSU students benefit from their engagement experiences in rural Ireland. As evidenced in their final projects, reflective essays, and evaluations, they benefit from their participation both personally and professionally. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live and work in a rural Irish community is a transformative experience for them. Many MSU students, who are from the suburbs and cities, find themselves for the first time in their lives in a rural community where the pace, rhythm, and values of everyday life differ from theirs at home. Because they engage with the communities, students have a chance to look in-depth at another culture, its values, and its customs. As a consequence, they start to examine American values and customs critically, recognising that on many issues there is more than one way to view the world.

The experience of working collaboratively with community members on a project is also beneficial to students in a very practical way. They report that their confidence increases because they have managed a complex project successfully. In addition, they often use their final projects as part of their professional portfolios at job interviews. Several students have told me years later that their ability to talk to a future employer about the "real world" project they completed in Ireland was what helped them to win the job.

Some students, not all, are inspired by their experience in rural community development and seek new career paths.

Lecturers, who participate in the Community Engagement in Rural Ireland programme, are also changed by the experience. Our understanding of community work at the engagement interface deepens every year through new experiences with students, communities, and our Mayo colleagues. For lecturers open to it, their research, teaching, and other engagement activities are affected by their experience in Ireland. For example, several of the MSU lecturers have pursued and won grant applications to support action research projects in Ireland. Our scholarly output, measured through conference presentations, publications, and grant aid, has increased due to our engagement work in Ireland. We have enriched our classroom lectures with examples from rural Ireland, incorporating much needed international examples into our teaching and learning activities. Finally, we have pursued community and economic development opportunities in rural Michigan as a result of our experiences in Ireland. We have been sensitised to issues facing rural communities in Michigan and, as a result, have been inspired to lead in community development initiatives in our own home areas.

//////////

## Teaching & Learning at The Engagement Interface

Community Engagement in Rural Ireland is an academic programme, organised by a degree-granting department, lead by lecturers, and supported by university units focused on student success (i.e., Office of Study Abroad and the Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement). Through the study abroad programme, students earn academic credit fulfilling degree requirements or electives for their course of study. Regardless of community project, the study abroad curriculum focuses on four main areas: autonomous community development; cross-cultural learning; personal growth/self-development; and experiential, community-based learning. Students are expected to learn in multiple ways, namely through assigned readings, journaling (or a field notebook), experiential learning activities on two weekends, weekly group discussions, resource people or experts in the field, interactions with their mentors and village councils, and informal interactions with Irish people they meet in their communities. The assignments include: personal journal/field book, group reflections, process of engagement, community project, final presentation, and reflective essay. Lecturers evaluate their accomplishments using a qualitative assessment tool called a rubric which assigns standardised points on a graduated scale according to the extent to which student's work meets predetermined criteria. Not all students receive full marks for their work (despite the persistent myth that overseas study abroad programmes are easy A's). One 2005 student remarked, "this is the toughest study abroad you'll ever love."

In the early years of the TVN-MSU collaboration, we (somewhat naively) believed that students would arrive in Ireland prepared to engage communities successfully and respectfully. Our main concern then was to help them adjust to the new culture in which they were working and living. Accordingly, we planned a number of in-country orientation activities to help them appreciate the culture, history, and social norms of the West of Ireland (Aalen, Whelan, & Stout 1997; Cowley 2006; Duffy 2007). We wanted them to be grounded, to understand the broader socio-cultural and bio-physical context in which their work takes place as well as specific day-to-day behaviours that would enhance their interactions in the Irish communities. We continue these important in-country orientation activities today.

In very short order, however, the TVN-MSU team recognised that Irish culture and history were not the only topics MSU students needed to understand at the beginning of their community engagement experience. MSU students typically do not arrive in Ireland prepared to engage rural communities respectfully and effectively. Because their academic experiences at MSU prepare them to interact with those around them as credentialed, knowledgeable

experts (much like their lecturers), they often lack the sensitivity and skills needed to approach communities from a position of collaboration, reciprocity, and co-learning. Rarely does the university encourage students to be both masters of knowledge and humble learners from the broader world around them.

Recognising this gap, the TVN-MSU team identified key attitudes and engagement skills our students need to have before they begin their work with rural Irish communities. Through conversations over a number of years, we have substantially revised the pre-departure orientation, so that students arrive in Ireland better prepared for the engagement part of the programme. To frame this part of our orientation, we have borrowed Robert Chambers's idea of reversals, the need for professionals to unlearn certain practices or attitudes and to adopt an almost opposite set of collaborative skills necessary for working with community respectfully (Chambers, 1983). The reversals we teach during our pre-departure orientation and re-emphasise throughout the experience in Ireland are the following:

### **Reversal 1: Listening Deeply, Not Just Telling**

Upon their arrival, many MSU students expect that they will earn an academic credential in four or five years that will lead them on a successful career path. They believe they will ascend the career ladder by transmitting what they learned at university to those in the "real world." This belief, reinforced at the university, leads to a fallacy adverse to community engagement—that being a knowledgeable expert, ready to impart knowledge to "those who do not know," leads to success. Unfortunately, this stance undermines the values of respect and equity that are fundamental to engagement (Michigan State University 1996).

Instead of approaching community members with an idea of "telling them what they don't know," our students are encouraged to abandon this attitude and adopt a stance of deep listening.

Sitting, asking, and listening are as much an attitude as a method. Sitting implies a lack of hurry, patience, and humility; asking implies that the outsider is the student; and listening implies respect and learning. Many of the best insights come this way. Relaxed discussions reveal the questions outsiders do not know to ask, and open up the unexpected" (Chambers 1983, p202).

During pre-departure orientation, we discuss the importance of listening to individuals and communities, of asking open ended questions and of creating a space for communities to be the first to speak.

### **Reversal 2: Engaging In-Person, Not Just Through Technology**

For many of MSU students, their most comfortable mode of interacting with others is electronically—they send emails, text messages, voice mails, and instant message. Holding a conversation in-person, especially with someone who they do not yet know or with someone who is not their age-mate is outside of their immediate experience. Making small talk, it turns out, is no small matter. In rural Ireland, one main mode of communication is personal, face-to-face conversation. People call in on one another or stop by for a cup of tea and a chat. During these seemingly unimportant visits, much of the behind the scenes work of rural community development is tended to. When students meet with Irish community members informally, they often fail to recognise the value of these interactions, impatiently waiting for the niceties to conclude in order to get down to the real business of community development.

To engage communities successfully, MSU students must learn how to strike up a conversation with a stranger, and through that conversation, discover new information or answers to their questions. They must learn how to talk to someone over a stone wall during a walk or how to chat with a neighbour over a cup of tea. It is by talking to one another, listening deeply, and speaking the truth that we come to know one another in meaningful ways. As Margaret Wheatley points out,

For conversation to take us into this deeper realm...we have to practice several new behaviors...we acknowledge one another as equals; we try to stay curious about one another; we recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners; we slow down so we have time to think and reflect; we remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together; we expect it to be messy at times (Wheatley 2002, p29).

During pre-departure orientation sessions, we talk with students about the importance of conversations and teach them about the distinctions between debate (convincing others of our perspective) and dialogue (understanding the perspective of others before speaking). We challenge them to understand the difference between seeking power over others through debate and embracing power with others through dialogue (Ellinor & Gerard 1996; Fear & Doberneck 2004; Isaacs 1999; Wheatley 2002). We also practice conversations during our orientation meetings and ask students to reflect upon how different the interactions feel when an easy-paced dialogic approach is taken. During our weekly reflection sessions in Ireland, the TVN-MSU team reinforces the importance of being conversational when interacting with community members in informal and formal settings.

### **Reversal 3: Respecting Local Knowledge, Not Just Expertise**

MSU students, like other university students in the US, are taught their subjects through a curriculum, stripped of local context and without reference to place, where professors “own no allegiance to geographical territory...[and] belong to the boundless world of books and ideas, and eternal truths, not the infinitely particular world of watersheds, growing seasons, and ecological niches” (Zencey 1996, p15). They have been encouraged to think globally, to wrestle with big ideas, but have little experience in interpreting them in a local context (Amato 2002).

In addition, a highly academic notion of what counts as scientific knowledge and expertise is reinforced through lectures, class assignments, and research papers, where students are rewarded for relying on new knowledge generated through the scientific method or facts conveniently archived in journals and books. Few MSU students (save perhaps those studying anthropology) are ever exposed to alternative ways of knowing, indigenous knowledge systems, or the richness of local knowledge and oral history. As a result, they are ill-prepared to navigate their way through a community steeped in history, bolstered by a strong sense of place, and influenced by local knowledge.

The TVN-MSU team, in marked contrast, encourages our students to tap into local knowledge, which we believe to be the “dynamic and complex bodies of know-how, practices, and skills that are developed and sustained by peoples and communities with shared histories and experiences” (C.S. Mott Group 2007). To successfully engage communities, our students must acknowledge the significance of local knowledge, to understand the many (positive and negative) ways in which it influences their project, and to discover ways to tap into it to engage their communities more fully. We emphasise local knowledge because it represents the heart and soul of community. “Passed down from generation to generation, this collective knowledge helps to identify relationships between people, place, and nature, and forms the economic, social, and spiritual foundation of a community or culture” (C.S. Mott Group 2007).

In pre-departure orientation sessions, we explain that an important role of community mentors, host families, resource people, and village councils is to help the students understand the collective wisdom that often invisibly shapes and defines individuals and the communities in which they live. This reversal continues to be a difficult lesson for MSU students; it is not uncommon for students to comment in their final essays, "If I had it all to do over again, I would have spent less time at the library. I would have started talking with community members earlier. They had so much to share with me."

#### **Reversal 4: Valuing the Nearby History, Not Just Published Resources**

Similarly, many MSU students rely heavily on internet resources to find answers to their questions. One pre-departure orientation activity is designed to sensitise students to the limitations of an "internet-only" mindset. Students are asked to conduct background research on their village and to bring three basic facts about their village to the next orientation session. Almost all of the students search for their villages on the internet and find very little information. The TVN-MSU team agrees that "computers can be useful to historians but they are neither all-sufficient nor infallible tools for exploring the past. The notion that 'if it matters, it is on the net' is rank foolishness" (Kyvig & Marty 2000, p9). We debrief this exercise together as part of a broader conversation about whose knowledge counts in community engagement, why local knowledge and history is important, and how, as an outsider, they might tap into local knowledge and access sources of nearby history (Amato 2002; Chambers 1997; Duffy 2007).

To engage with their communities successfully, students learn to appreciate *nearby history*. By nearby history, we refer to an examination of change over time, focused on dynamics and interrelationships, not static, one-dimensional snapshots of history disconnected from the broader forces influencing community change.

Rather than identify this past as "local" or "community" history as some have done and limit it to a concept of place, or call it "family history" and restrict it to a concept of relationship, or talk about material culture and confine the discussion to objects, we have chosen the term "nearby history" in order to include the entire range of possibilities in a person's immediate environment (Kyvig & Marty 2000, p5)

Another pre-departure orientation activity challenges students to brainstorm five different sources of *nearby history* that they might use to complete their projects. They might identify any number of sources, including storytelling/traces, published documents, unpublished documents, oral histories, visual documents, artefacts, landscapes and buildings. For their projects to be relevant to communities, they must incorporate—not ignore—nearby history, which is often revealed in serendipitous ways. For example, a 2006 student researching the history of a Church of Ireland church was referred to "a lady who might know something about it." When he arrived at her home, he was welcomed with tea and invited to review some old letters she had in a drawer. The letters turned out to be a stash of original, hand-written correspondence between two important community leaders involved in the church's organisation. To his great surprise, tea with "a lady who might know something about his project" revealed primary historical documents, not available in libraries, archives, or on-line databases. Tea led to a major breakthrough on his project. Though the details vary, this seemingly "accidental" discovery is not an atypical experience for our students in Ireland.

Over the course of their five and a half weeks in Ireland, the students begin to experience the community at deeper and deeper levels. As trust grows between the

community and the students, sources of local knowledge and nearby history are often revealed to them. The TVN-MSU team believes engagement along these lines embodies a sense of *communityness*, a deep sense of place, belonging, and nestedness (Michigan State University 1996). We believe that successful community-student projects rely on the incorporation of ‘nearby history’ resources. To reinforce our commitment to this engagement value, a major proportion of the student’s final grade is earned through the process of engaging with community members (and not solely on the production of a final project).

### **Reversal 5: Community-proofing, Not Just Lecturer-proofing**

MSU students are accustomed to completing their academic work to please the professor. Many highly successful students have honed their skills at ferreting out a lecturer’s expectations, preferences, and definitions of good academic work. Armed with this knowledge, they complete course work with one audience in mind—the lecturer—and for good reason. This strategy usually results in immediate benefits to the student—excellent marks, academic rewards, and accolades.

To engage with communities respectfully, our students must re-orient themselves and re-focus their efforts in a completely different direction. Their community projects must please the community first and the lecturer second. The TVN-MSU team makes it clear that it is unacceptable for students to write brilliant reports that are inaccessible to community members due to language differences or to propose recommendations that are beyond a community’s capacity to implement. In essence, their work must be community-proofed.

To counter their natural tendency to orient their work to purely academic audiences, we teach students the concept of *groundtruthing* during pre-departure orientations. Groundtruthing is a process typically associated with the natural sciences and used to reconcile what a computer model or aerial survey has generated with what actually exists on the ground. In other words, groundtruthing is “walking the ground to see for oneself if what one has been told is true” (Williams, 2004:28). To groundtruth or community-proof their work, MSU students are required to meet regularly with the mentors, mentor committees, and village councils to make sure their work makes sense in the Irish context and aligns well with community expectations and needs. Final projects, reports, and presentations are all to be reviewed by both community mentors and lecturers and revised based on their critical feedback. It is in this way that we strike a balance between *pragmatism* and *scholarship* (Michigan State University, 1996).

To be clear, the TVN-MSU team does not advocate the silencing of student knowledge, abandonment of communication technologies, rejection of scientifically generated information, disregard for the written record, or relaxing of academic standards. Instead, we promote an approach to community engagement that reverses the dynamics of a typical university-community relationship. We find that much of our underlying philosophy is similar to the principles outlined in Michigan State University’s Points of Distinction, a 1996 document outlining quality outreach and engagement and promulgating an underlying set of values for the university’s lecturers to embrace in their work with communities. These core values include:

- Mutuality and Partnering,
- “Communityness”,
- Equity and Respect,
- Cross-disciplinary approaches,
- Developmental,
- Scholarship and Pragmatism,
- Capacity-building,
- Integrity.

The evolving relationship between the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network and Michigan State University embodies many of these engagement principles. Over six years, we have developed a healthy respect for what each of us brings to the table. We are committed to an on-going process of experience, reflection, assessment, and improvement—in this way, we have worked developmentally with one another and have helped one another build capacity to support this type of community-student learning.

The five reversals we teach our students also embody the engagement principles and help our students put them into practice in very practical ways. The TVN-MSU team makes these reversals an explicit point of conversation during pre-departure orientation and a focus of on-going conversation while the students are engaged in rural Ireland.

The extent to which all involved—students, lecturers, community mentors, host families, resource people, and community leaders—understand these principles and put them into practice, operating from a stance of humility, co-learning, and respect varies considerably. Sometimes we are more successful than others. Engagement, truly authentic partnering with communities, is not necessarily straightforward, easy, or natural. As Terry Tempest Williams reminds us, engagement “is not altogether pleasant and there is no guarantee as to the outcome. Boos and cheers come in equal measure” (Williams 2004, p23).

//////////

## Questions To Consider

Schön describes the “varied topography of professional practice” as the hard, high ground and the swamp. According to Schön, practitioners face a choice: they may stay on the high ground where they can solve less important problems or they can descend into the swamp of important problems. But, in fact, this dichotomy is not and should not be a real choice. Leaders in today’s challenging society must master both kinds of terrain. “They must be able to solve the ‘high ground’ technical problems that present themselves. And they must be able to navigate their way and lead others through the swamp and its messy reality” (Schall 1995, p206). Unfortunately, students enrolled in US institutions of higher education do not receive the education they need to be successful in both realms; nor do they learn to dance skilfully between the high, hard ground and the swampy lowland. Through my experience in County Mayo, I have learned how challenging and invigorating it is to help students understand what it means to be engaged and to learn the skills necessary to do so effectively and respectfully.

As third level institutions (both in the US and in Ireland) re-evaluate how they serve the needs of society, I wonder if they will consider Schön —asking themselves if they will remain on the high, hard ground the academy is traditionally known for or will they descend into the swampy lowlands? If institutions of higher education choose to help communities address issues, confront challenges, and solve problems, they will need to revise institutional expectations of lecturers and realign institutional structures to reward their work at the engagement interface. What would it take to make such radical transformations? Of equal importance, will lecturers be willing to abandon tried and true “lectures and recitations” approaches and adopt more engaged pedagogies in their classrooms? In other words, how will students be supported—both on campus and in the community—as they learn new attitudes and skills required to engage respectfully and effectively? What would be required for such a pedagogical paradigm shift to take place? Given the pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges facing contemporary society, how can US and Irish institutions more effectively engage communities in seeking solutions to the important, complex, and messy problems that resist solution through technical, rational, and scientific means?

## Bibliography

- Aalen, F.H.A., Whelan, K. and Stout, M. eds. (1997) *Atlas of the Rural Irish Landscape*. Cork: University of Cork Press.
- Amato, J. A. (2002) *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Biggs, J. (2001) *Teaching for Quality Learning*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Carmen, R. (1996) *Autonomous Development, Humanizing the Landscape: An Excursion into Radical Thinking*. London: Zed Books.
- Chambers, R. (1983) *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Chambers, R. (1997) *Whose Reality Counts?* London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Crowley, E. (2006) *Land Matters: Power Struggles in Rural Ireland*. Dublin: Lilliput Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) *Flow: the psychology of the optimal experience*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University (2007) *Local Knowledge*. <http://www.mottgroup.msu.edu/AboutUsMission/LocalKnowledge/tabid/876/Default.aspx>. Accessed 22 July 2007
- Duffy, P.J. (2007) *Exploring the History and Heritage of Irish Landscapes*. Maynooth Research Guides for Irish Local History. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Ellinor, L., & Gerard, G. (1996) *Dialogue: Rediscover the Power of Conversation*. New York: Wiley.
- Fear, F., Bawden, R., Rosean, C. and Foster-Fishman, P. (2002) A model for engaged learning: frames of reference and scholarly underpinnings in *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. 7, 3, 55-68.
- Fear, F. and Doberneck, D.M. (2004) 'Collegial Talk: A Powerful Tools for Change' in *About Campus*. 9, 1, 11-19.
- Fear, F., Lillis, S., Desmond, M., Lally, M. and Hartough, J. (2002) 'Beyond Convention: An Irish-American Collaboration in the West of Ireland' in *Ceide: a Review from the Margins*. 5, 4, 24-26.
- Fear, F., Rosean, C., Bawden, R. and Foster-Fishman, P. (2005) *Coming to Critical Engagement: An Auto-ethnographic Exploration*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Random House.
- Kyvig, D. E. and Marty, M. A. (2000) *Nearby History*. 2nd ed. New York: Altamira Press.
- Michigan State University. (1996) *Points of Distinction: A Guidebook for Evaluating Quality Outreach*. East Lansing: Michigan State University
- Rosean, C., Foster-Fishman, P. and Fear, F. (2001) 'The Citizen Scholar: Joining Voices and Values in the Engagement Interface' in *Metropolitan Universities*. 12, 4, 10-29.
- Schön, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Schall, E. (1995) 'Learning to Love the Swamp: Reshaping Education for Public Service' in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 14, 2, 202-220.
- Vitek, W. and Jackson, W. (eds.) (1996) *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Weisberg, M. (1999) 'Discerning the Gift' in *Change* 31, 3, 28-37.
- Wheatley, M. (2002) *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to The Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Williams, T. T. (2004) *The Open Space of Democracy*. Barrington, MA: The Orion Society.
- Zencey, E. (1996) 'The Rootless Professors' in *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place*, W. Vitek and W. Jackson. (eds.), New Haven and London: Yale University Press.



# Pride of Place Competition in Mayo Abbey: Students' Perspective on Community Engagement

06

---



# Pride of Place Competition in Mayo Abbey: Students' Perspective on Community Engagement

**Ryan T. Cook,  
Scott M. Pitera**

*Urban and Regional Planning Students, Michigan State University*

//////////

## Abstract

The following chapter offers two students from the United States perspectives on an international service learning experience in Ireland. Ryan Cook and Scott Pitera spent part of a semester in Tóchar Valley in Co. Mayo working on a community engagement strategy organised by Michigan State University and the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network. The six-week long programme offers students from that university the opportunity to immerse their learning through real life experiences of engaging with communities in an environment different to their own. The chapter captures the voice of the two students, highlighting their own academic and personal journey. It outlines the chronology of their process of engaging with Mayo Abbey residents, describes the challenges encountered, and how they worked with community members to address those challenges.

//////////

## Introduction

"It's not a question of if you'll go, but WHEN?" is a common Michigan State University (MSU) slogan encouraging students to study abroad as part of their undergraduate educational experience. Annually, MSU sends more than 2000 students to live and learn in other countries through over 200 study abroad programmes (MSU Office of Study Abroad, 2007). In 2006, we had the opportunity to participate in "Community Engagement in Rural Ireland," an international community engagement experience, co-organised by the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network and Michigan State University's Bailey Scholars Program. For almost six weeks, we collaborated with community leaders and community members to prepare materials for the 'Pride of Place' competition for the rural village of Mayo Abbey, Co. Mayo, Ireland. In the chapter, we will describe our background and expectations, the challenges we faced and how we overcame them, key learning from our experience, and how the experience changed us personally and professionally.

//////////

## Background and Expectations

Incoming students at Michigan State University (MSU) are introduced to the idea of studying abroad and during the first-year orientation, we were introduced to the MSU Study Abroad Program. MSU is home to the largest single-campus university study abroad program in the nation. Each year, more than 2000 students take advantage of over 200 different programs (MSU Office of Study Abroad, 2007).

As students of 'Urban and Regional Planning' we found the study aboard programme an attractive option. The intensive community development aspect to the curriculum offered us a chance to earn required credits towards our major. It provided us with the opportunity to gain practical experience in community planning, something we desired in a move from theory to practice. To be successful in the field of urban and regional planning, it is expected that students begin gaining planning experience as early as undergraduate school. Professional guest speakers, faculty and graduate students strongly emphasise the

importance of experiential learning for undergraduates. With most government bodies having limited funding, students often have to volunteer in order to gain any sort of experience. The study abroad programme allowed us the chance to earn credits towards our major, while gaining real world community planning experience at the same time.

*Ryan Cook's Reflections* - I became interested in the field of Urban Planning late in my final year of secondary school and I researched the career of planning, mainly through the internet and uncovered a programme at MSU. I decided to attend MSU but officially began study in the business college, but nevertheless enrolled for one urban planning class. After completion of the course, I was drawn to continuing taking classes in the programme. . In the early weeks of spring semester during my second year, I was present in one of the required urban planning classes where a guest lectured on development ethics in cross-cultural contexts. At the end of the discussion the speaker made her "shameless plug" to a study abroad program where she was one of the faculty leaders.

I enrolled in the programme for the summer between my second and third years because of the unique profile of the Community Engagement in Rural Ireland programme including the process of project placement. Each spring the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network and MSU recruit eight students to assist in community work in a collaborative learning process. The academics in charge of the programme seek projects that correspond with each student's particular interests.

I was attracted to the opportunity to contribute to an international community, while immersed in the community where I was working. Engaging with a community, through community based research while staying as a guest in the home of a member of the community, was the personal and professional learning experience I desired. An exciting aspect of the programme was the application of theory transitioning from the lecture room to practice in the community; the programme provided a hands-on approach to learning and experience-based analysis. In a highly competitive job market, having international experience distinguishes my application in future endeavours.

//////////

## Studies for a Career in Urban & Regional Planning

Planners develop long and short-term plans to use land for the growth and revitalisation of urban, suburban, and rural communities, while helping local officials make decisions concerning social, economic, and environmental problems (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Course work at MSU evolves from the formation of a liberal arts education, which provides an urban planning student with a toolset to work on plans in broad settings while furthering needs of individual communities.

Within the diversity of the profession, a student utilises this toolset to assist in the many different aspects of planning. The profession may lead a student into fields of concern for the environment, economics, design, or public policy. Settings for a planner may include government planning, non-profit work, and private sector consulting. Planners seek proactively to address future challenges through a highly participatory process. A skilful community planner draws the vision for the community from the residents themselves. These ideas are evaluated in terms of their probability of success and their potential effectiveness in achieving the agreed goals. Often in these visioning sessions the question asked of a community is, "What do you want to be when you are 10 years older?" In order for a community to accurately envision

what it wants to be like in ten years, it is vital to understand what it is today. 'Pride of Place' is a programme in Ireland that examines this essential context.

//////////

## What Is 'Pride Of Place'?

Each year, the 'Pride of Place' competition recognises communities throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland that have demonstrated a high level of commitment to community work. Co-operation Ireland, a non-governmental organisation, has responsibility for the competition under its Local Authority Programme in conjunction with the all-island Local Authority Steering Forum. Since 2003, the 'Pride of Place' competition has been dedicated to promoting better relations between the people on the island of Ireland. The concept behind the competition is very simple – to recognise and celebrate the vital contributions that community groups make to society. The goal is to celebrate civic pride created by groups that work together for the benefit of the parish. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the local people working together to shape, change, and enjoy all that is good about their area.

In 2006, Mayo County Council nominated the village of Mayo Abbey for the 'Pride of Place' Competition in the category of villages under the population of 500. That year, over one hundred entrants representing communities from cities, towns and villages were nominated after which the community prepares for a presentation to a team of visiting adjudicators who travel the island examining each community's local pride.

The 'Pride of Place' competition provided the impetus for the Mayo Abbey community to begin to display and to discuss the story of the community. Previously, all attempts to discuss history of the parish were highly specialised focusing on single aspects of the community such as: historical connections, village enhancement success stories, or recent records of church functions. As a community, they had not stepped back from their many activities to gather, reflect, analyse and synthesise the broad picture and story of their own community development journey.

//////////

## Community Engagement Process

As we settled into our villages on the first weekend, community leaders in Mayo Abbey were beginning to grasp the responsibilities and challenges we would face as we worked together to prepare the village for the competition.

*Week One* - The challenge in week one was to understand the parameters of the 'Pride of Place' competition; to frame the focal point of the competition (Mayo Abbey Community Centre or Mayo Abbey Parish) and to invite and facilitate broad community participation. We gradually came to realise that Mayo Abbey was changing rapidly through added services, enhancements and new opportunities. These areas of growth of community development prioritised community work into seizing and leveraging the next beneficial opportunity versus analyzing patterns of change internally. We were well aware of our time and the constraints we faced when helping the local community prepare for the competition. Our community based research and community development practice were to occur throughout the course of our stay, a six week period! Our initial plan of action was developed during our first week working with the village.

After an organisational meeting was held with the community, we began to explore further the origins of the Mayo Abbey Community Centre, where we were headquartered for office purposes during our stay. Our mentors were community members and employees at the centre and for them community work began, entered and left the community through the centre doors. We grasped the tremendous influence this space represented for the community and for the lives of its people. We encouraged the scope of community work to widen and

encompass broader aspects of Mayo Abbey in order to identify other points of pride. To uncover these sometimes obscure or unrecognised treasures we raised the profile of the competition locally and published announcements in the Mayo Abbey Parish Newsletter and local print media. We explored and engaged members of the village through information chats and visits. These methods led us to recognise the necessity to link existing community networks with their constituents. A selection of such groups in Mayo Abbey includes: the Church, Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), Foróige (Youth Group) and Childcare Committee. A coalition and partnership of support from this influential and large network of community members provided confidence and trust in the endeavour and a greater recognition of all community work.

*Week Two and Three* - We worked with the community leaders and began to craft their story into a concise presentation. We shared the belief that it was the story of the community we were trying to convey and many voices and representative needed to convey it. However, at the time of this realisation, it was still early in the project and we were trying to observe and interpret what the personal working style of the community leaders was and the cultural context. At this stage a challenge presented itself as how we might describe what aspects of the community were significant to highlight: the challenge of balancing multiple community perspectives with our own and considering different formats for the competition. In addition, we were challenged as to how to work cross-culturally.

We used this transformative time to adjust our research methods and to be progressively more participatory. We also sought a way to convey our research, within the competition's presentation form that would best enhance Mayo Abbey's chances. Initially in the process, an idea discussed amongst the community (before our arrival) was to have a video produced which would highlight the overall story, as a neighbouring community in County Mayo (Ballycroy) had done previously. However a video production was not within the means of Mayo Abbey.

We worked to construct a storyboard for each community group to showcase the story of Mayo Abbey. Coming in as the two outside lads, we had an unbiased perspective regarding the relevance of the selected pieces to be showcased on the boards. However, there was divergence in terms of opinion. It is important to note these differences and the reasons they developed. To begin with, we, before our arrival in Mayo Abbey had limited knowledge of the community. It was our opinion that the team of judges coming to Mayo Abbey would share a similar lack of knowledge regarding schemes in Mayo Abbey. Therefore, we proceeded by constructing the boards in order to get the attention of the judges quickly, and to highlight the most important aspects. However, what was distinctive in our minds conflicted with what leaders deemed most important. To navigate the challenge, to avoid endless edits of our work and to keep the broad picture in focus, we attempted to bring clarity to the situation in a number of ways.

First, we tried to arrange a meeting with the liaison officer for the competition at Mayo County Council. We hoped he would clarify precisely if we were covering the story of the community centre or the Mayo Abbey Parish. Additionally, he would be able to explain in more detail which procedures needed to be considered for planning the day of the competition. This meeting was scheduled so that select community leaders could also be present and therefore reduce the risk of having any information loss.

Meanwhile, we continued to meet directly with the other community groups so that we might completely understand their pursuits and purpose. At each meeting, members were encouraged to share what they were most proud of in their group: often times a photo, emblem, or other visual material was identified which represented

the ideals of the group. By using this approach we believed we could eliminate revisions because we were receiving direct contributions. At this time what would become our final deliverables and presentation materials began to take shape.

*Weeks Four and Five* - Another challenge emerged as to how to create an agreed theme and symbol; to revisit “inclusion”- that is who is not included and how we might include them; to finalise the format for competition presentation. Many conversations were held as to how best encapsulate the pride so evident in Mayo Abbey. In a timely breakthrough a community member described the community as a jigsaw; each piece represented the linkages of community assets and how they related to the community as a whole. It was noted that that all members of the community contribute to its greatness and that like a jigsaw puzzle, the community could not possibly function without all its parts. In addition, local business, educational institutions and agricultural cooperatives were identified and we drew them into our discussions.

We worked to create a final product and deliverable which would function for the community beyond the competition day and a comprehensive Community Resource Guide was designed.

*Week Six* - Our challenge during this period centered on the wrap up and hand over of our part of the preparations and too prepare for not being there when the actual competition took place. During the final week in Mayo Abbey with the local people we formulated a ‘Pride of Place’ working committee to complete the remaining tasks after our departure. Their responsibilities included co-ordinating and finalising the presentation materials for the day of adjudication. Our final products were presented to Mayo Abbey Community Council and Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network at this time.

//////////

## Adjudication Day - June 29, 2006

Mayo Abbey won first place in the competition! The culmination and celebration of years of community work and weeks of preparation for the competition occurred during a formal presentation by the Community Council Chair to visiting adjudicators and a tour through the heart of Mayo Abbey Parish followed. Community members were at the forefront of this effort and adjudicators gathered in lively discussion with them while viewing storyboards of their work. To mark the day entertainment was provided by Foróige Youth Group as a demonstration of the vitality within Mayo Abbey and a yew tree was planted to mark the Gaelic names of the village, ‘Muigheo’, the plain of the yews. Our collaborative job was done, Mayo Abbey is recognised as one of the most progressive small communities on the island of Ireland. The community received the first prize in the small village category with an award of 2,000 Euros and a crystal trophy

## ////////// Key Learnings

A key element in service learning experience is reflection; examining our experiences so as to understand the lessons learned and to identify key learnings. During weekly reflection sessions, through our journal, our final paper, and conversations with our Irish and US lecturers, we asked ourselves: what have we learned about community development from this experience? how has this experience changed our perspectives on our careers? On reflection the following key learning themes emerged from this service learning experience in Ireland:

### **Understand “Place” is fluid**

Where is Mayo Abbey? was not a straightforward question. Rural communities, in the U.S. and in Ireland, may not be defined by traditional jurisdictional boundaries; nor are they necessarily delineated on existing maps. Community members just “know” where their community begins and ends; common understandings and feelings of association define a place. We learned that it is best for community developers not to draw a boundary between those who are in or out of a particular place, but instead seek a description that encircles all who are involved.

### **History Influences the Future**

Understanding the history of the village provides insights into its current condition and context for community development. Identifying the influence of history reveals forces of continuity and why things might remain the same; forces of change and why things might change (Axinn & Axinn, 1997). We learned that wise community developers seek to understand underlying reasons and implications.

### **Everyone is Connected**

Longstanding relationships, even if largely invisible to community developers from the outside, must be acknowledged in collaborative, community-based processes. Neighbours are often co-workers, fellow parishioners, or distant relations, who are likely to participate in school, church, or community activities with one another. These overlapping spheres of influence are not to be underestimated and we learned that successful community developers seek to understand and tap into these social connections.

### **Recognize and Involve Youth**

In compiling this community's assets we found that young people were often forgotten as community assets and were often overlooked in collaborative community processes. Engaging youth is essential to the community's vitality because they are its future leaders and present dynamic community members. In addition, Mayo Gaels Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), youth sports' leagues and activities are also significant rallying points for young and old alike. We learned that recognising youth and involving them is vital to full and sustainable community engagement.

### **Include Stakeholders Early and Often**

Community projects benefit from the guidance of committees composed of key stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Regular communication with all prevents undue influence by dominant individuals and guarantees enough diversity to generate creative ideas. Remembering to ask—who is not here?—helps

to reveal additional stakeholders that could be included in the group, or at the very least, in the collaborative community process. For example, by posing this question, we realised that local businesses were not considered at early stages and had to be added toward the end of the project.

### **Acknowledge the Power of Volunteers**

Community volunteers contribute significantly to a community's vitality, often without any expectation of compensation or reward. Community developers are often in the unique position to recognise the unsung heroes, promote continued voluntary effort, and strengthen social connections. For example, we were able to recognise the man who has been maintaining the soccer pitch for more than fifty years free of charge on one of our storyboards.

### **Manage Communications Clearly**

Too much collaboration is as problematic as too little and we learned that community developers must solicit community input judiciously. For example, when the community council said, "The lads are looking for a few bits of information," community members brought in all sorts of information that did not quite meet the needs of our project. A more strategic call for participation resulted in the necessary background information for the community storyboards. Similarly, general calls for feedback on our storyboards and draft booklet resulted in endless revisions, while requests for more targeted input advanced the storyboards and community guide appropriately.

### **Remember 'there are many ways forward'**

The role of the community developer is not to tell the community exactly how to move forward, but to support the community as it finds its own way forward. Community developers can, however, use a variety of techniques to draw stakeholders into the process that will assist the community in bringing ideas so that they can determine their own future together.

### **Expect the Unexpected**

Community engagement is not a straightforward process. Unknowns and unexpected roadblocks abound and it is often necessary to step back from the day-to-day work to reflect on new or different ways forward. For example, we encountered an unexpected roadblock when we needed accurate population data for Mayo Abbey Parish, which was not available from the census data. Subsequently we found quite unexpectedly that the parish priest had conducted a door-to-door census and was willing to share the data with us.

### **Benefits of Our Engagement**

Community engagement is based on the premise that all parties involved in the activities benefit from them. A mutually beneficial experience provided an opportunity for all involved partners to realise their greatest potential. This positive feedback cycle both benefited Mayo Abbey and us in the immediate future and in our longer-term pursuits and endeavours.

Whilst learning about community work from within the homes of Mayo Abbey and through the daily lives and interactions of our host families, we also participated in a professional learning experience by striving to provide a tangible benefit for the leaders who guided us in our development as individuals and as professionals. We provided Mayo Abbey with a more thorough understanding and realisation of their own pride, previously confined largely to the village, and now shared and celebrated with the island of Ireland.



The service learning experience provided a base of working knowledge of communities. Through the coursework and the experience of the competition we realised that each member of a community makes a significant contribution to community work; each member of the community shares a story of their lives within the perspective of the whole. This experience is a lifelong lesson of the possibilities available to those individuals, teams, and groups who strive for better inclusion, access, and distribution of the available resources.

*Ryan* - On a personal level, the experience allowed me to become aware of my strengths, weaknesses, and areas where I should seek additional training. The challenges in Mayo Abbey were personal and non-replicable through lecture and classroom settings. Through the process, I learned the necessity for maintaining positive enthusiasm around the progress being made, while at the same time I became aware of the restraints of setbacks. We both struggled to find the balance of voicing our opinions versus following the unrestrained guidance, suggestions and responsibilities of elders; in addition to seeking the approval of our instructors, community leaders and host families. We now realise that each situation requires time to understand the workings of the intricate details and networks.

*Scott* - I feel that working along with Mayo Abbey for the competition was extremely beneficial. The study abroad programme gave me real world experience in community planning; working with professionals, government officials, and community members in a variety of settings. I was exposed to the inner workings of Irish local government structures, community organisations, and even office politics. However, most beneficial of all was the international experience. The community of Mayo Abbey is very different to any community I have been exposed to back home. Being pushed out of my comfort zone and experiencing a different way of life, was an experience that I can't put a price on. The challenges and opportunities that I encountered during this project will undoubtedly serve me well during the rest of my schooling and future career.

## Final Thoughts

*Ryan* - In the summer of 2007, we applied the lessons learned during the Mayo Abbey 'Pride of Place' Competition to additional community experiences in Michigan. I facilitated a nine-day, volunteer aided, curbside makeover of an urban street in a low and moderate-income neighbourhood. In addition, I administered over \$25,000 of Michigan State Housing Development Authority Neighbourhood Preservation Program grant monies for utilisation in Extreme Street Makeover event, hands-on home repair training workshops and a launch of Neighbourhood Tool Lending Library. Our key learnings from Mayo Abbey provided an insight into community development that held true in our local community. We entered the neighbourhood with the knowledge that the people and schemes there were worthwhile and relevant.

Communities do not exist in isolation and to attempt to work alone is a path towards less constructive ends. Communities consist of numerous stakeholders and involving them all was fundamental towards the completion of a curbside makeover encompassing all homes. Realising that stakeholders in the homes exist beyond the foundations but into the lives of the community incorporated the broader coalition necessary to revitalise an area. Job training and education, youth and adult health resources and financial literacy were amongst the concerns of residents in the block. I worked with multiple stakeholders in an effort to assist the community as it found its own way forward and contributed to achieving the goals of community development.

Scott - In the Michigan project, I prepared and presented a comprehensive report on the concept of a business incubator to a County wide small business organisation. In order to formulate the report, I was forced to take input and consider opinions from multiple stakeholders. I drew from the skills acquired in Ireland while working under the Mayo County Council. My time in Ireland was the first experience I had which allowed me to develop the skill of encompassing the visions and philosophies of multiple stakeholders into a common initiative. The skills obtained during my experience in Mayo Abbey will no doubt serve me well in my continuing education, as well as my future career in the public realm.

## Bibliography

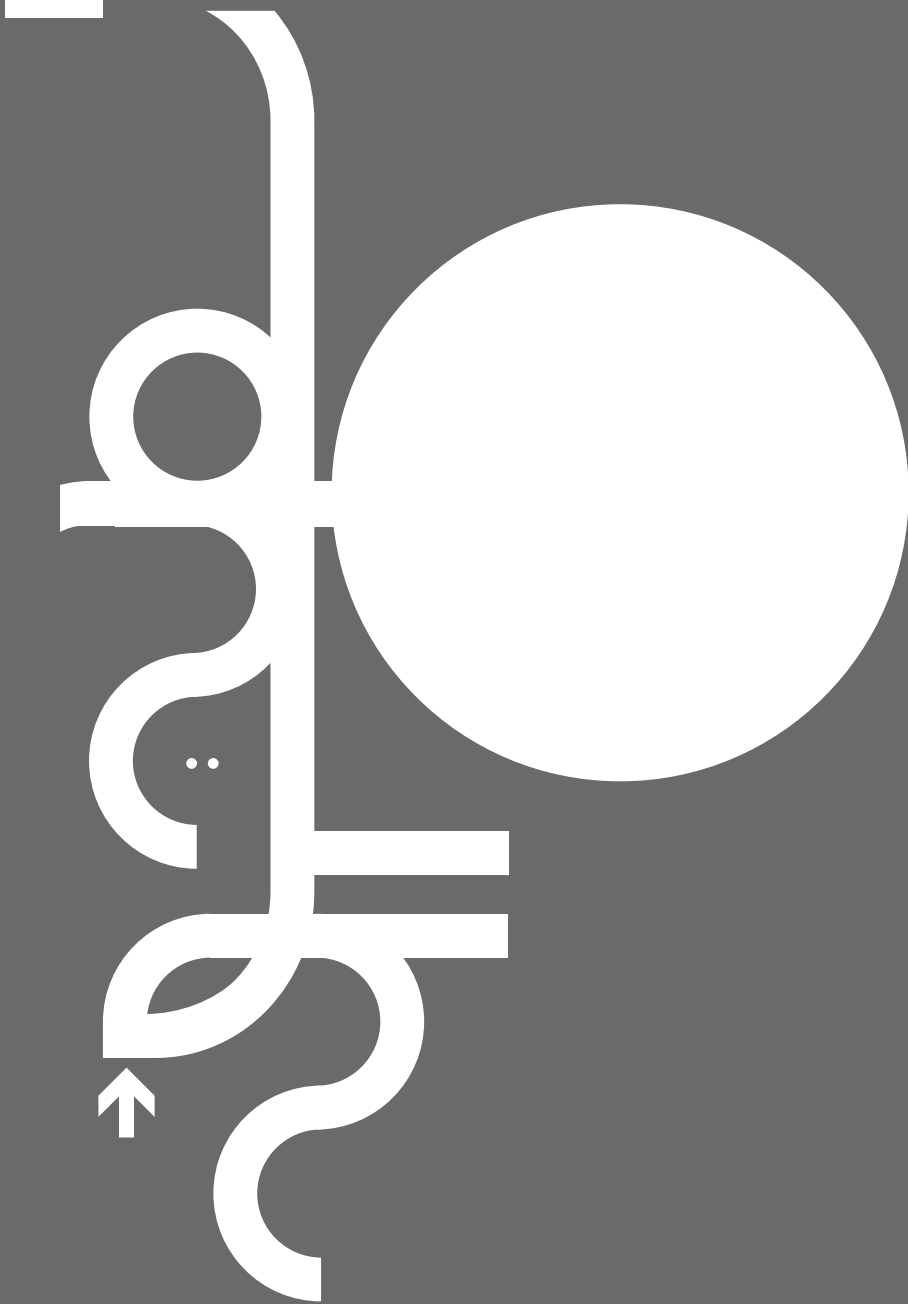
Axinn, G. H., and Axinn, N. W. (1997) Indigenous knowledge systems, *Collaboration in international rural development: A practitioner's handbook*, 165-169. New Delhi: Sage.

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-07 Edition*, Urban and Regional Planners, <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos057.htm>. Accessed September 4, 2007.

Michigan State University Office of Study Abroad. (2007, September 21), from <http://studyabroad.msu.edu/>, Accessed 21 September, 2007

*A Partnership Between*  
The Tochar Valley Rural  
Community Network (Mayo)  
&  
Michigan State University:  
*A Community Perspective*

07



# *A Partnership Between* The Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (Mayo) & Michigan State University: *A Community Perspective*

**Maureen Lally,  
 Diane Doberneck,  
 Seamus Lillis,  
 Brendan Sammon**

*Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (Mayo)*

//////////

## Abstract

In this chapter, Sr Maureen Lally (managing director) and Brendan Sammon (chairperson) of the Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (TVN) tell the story of their partnership with Michigan State University (MSU). Their unique relationship with an American third level institution has evolved over ten years to include a variety of activities jointly envisioned and implemented by TVN and MSU. The chapter details these activities from the perspective of community leaders and explains why they believe the underlying philosophy makes this ‘a partnership with a difference.’

//////////

## Background & Introduction

In 1998, Terry Gallagher (a retired Teagasc colleague of mine) and I became concerned about the findings of a Teagasc study about the future of agriculture in Co. Mayo. In it, researchers predicted severe threats to the viability of smallholder agriculture and a deterioration in the quality of life in rural Ireland. If their predictions were to come true (and Terry and I had no reason to believe they would not—and in fact, the predictions came true more quickly than they anticipated), the farmers and other rural people in Co. Mayo were going to face serious problems in the very near future. Terry and I held meetings throughout southwest Mayo to bring these trends to the attention of communities and to encourage them to face these challenges head on. We asked communities: What’s alive and well in your village? What do you want your village to be like in 10 years time? Will your community still exist in 20 years time? We listened to their responses.

As a result of what we heard in those meetings, Terry and I formed a limited company by guarantee—a voluntary, grassroots network, with the overall theme of helping communities to help themselves. Our thinking at the time was that—*no community on its own can achieve as much as a network of communities working together toward shared goals.*

Ten years later, our vision remains the same. TVN remains a voluntary grassroots rural community network, committed to the empowerment of rural people in the development of sustainable rural communities. Today, TVN serves 18 communities (expanded from the original 12) in southwest Co. Mayo, from Mayo Abbey in the east to Murrisk in the west. The network emphasizes community enhancement, income generation, youth involvement, walks development, leadership training, natural and cultural heritage, and women’s involvement.

From the start, Michigan State University has been a key partner all along the way—giving us encouragement, ideas, and resources. The TVN-MSU relationship has been based on

principles of engagement that are about learning together. In this chapter, I (with some help from my TVN and rural community development colleagues) tell the story of the TVN-MSU partnership and explain why I feel this is 'a partnership with a difference.'

//////////

## Learning How to Work Together

Over the years, the TVN-MSU partnership has taken different forms at different times. Various MSU lecturers have worked together with the TVN on board development; leadership training; community-based action research programmes; semester long and summer study abroad programmes for Michigan State University students; study tours and learning exchanges for community development practitioners from Ireland and Michigan; and strategic business planning. Some of these activities are on-going, while others are more of a once-off activity, designed to meet a specific need at a specific time.

//////////

## Our Beginnings

Through contact established by a Teasgasc colleague, Seamus Lillis, I first met MSU people, Frank Fear, Richard Bawden, and Peggy Desmond, at a Cross-Border (Irish Republic and Northern Ireland) Peace and Reconciliation conference in Derry City in 1999. At the conference, I presented the history of the Tochar Valley Rural Community Network as case study on grassroots approaches to rural community development. After my presentation, Frank Fear asked whether the TVN had written up our case study and wondered whether the TVN would be interested in having an MSU student support us in that endeavour. My colleague and friend, Terry Gallagher said, "Why not? You never know where something like this might lead." He was certainly right. I had no idea that a conversation during a tea break would turn into the wonderful partnership the TVN has today.

Our first joint venture was a grant application to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to support a new model for third level institutions and communities to work with one another on issues we (not the university experts) deem to be important. From the outset, Terry and I knew we wanted to work with the lecturers from MSU in a way that was completely different from 'business as usual.' Luckily, MSU wanted to work with TVN in a new way as well. In our application, we explained our new model by contrasting it to the more typical technical assistance approach commonly promoted and offered by third level institutions. MSU was to be more of a 'guide by the side, than a sage on the stage.' Writing together, TVN and MSU described our new model as autonomous development:

Universities and colleges around the world have a tradition of working with local people to improve local quality of life. Technical assistance (including information technology transfer and extension) has been the dominant form of institutional engagement model. In this model, university expertise—often in the form of research-based knowledge—is made available locally. This model works well when indigenous capacity is limited and when local people benefit from adopting outside ideas, practices, or technologies. The technical assistance model is less appropriate when local people have experience envisioning and organizing local development efforts. When local development is conceived and directed locally—known in some quarters as 'autonomous development'—outside influence is locally regulated, that is targeted by local people in ways that make sense locally. Expressed simply, autonomous development involves local people taking control of their development agenda. It is the ultimate form of empowerment (Fear, Desmond, & Hartough, 2000: 1-2).

With this funding, MSU lecturers, Extension professionals, and graduate students got to know us—as individuals and as communities—through regular visits to southwest Mayo. During these visits, TVN organized bus tours to showcase the region’s cultural and natural heritage, held meetings, and shared meals together with MSU colleagues. At our request, the MSU people organized trainings for the TVN’s newly formed Board of Directors, to support us in developing a shared vision for our network and to define roles and responsibilities for ourselves. Through these interactions, the TVN people and the MSU people truly got to know one another and develop trust. This foundation of trust has made it easier for both of us to work along side one another to address important issues facing the TVN communities.

With the W.K. Kellogg grant aid, MSU leveraged additional grant aid from Michigan Campus Compact to support a doctoral student whose research was titled, “Engaging change while rooted in tradition: a community development response to dynamic times in Co. Mayo.” Her work focused on understanding how the autonomous development approach was of benefit to communities.

TVN and MSU together decided to use some funding to involve a few MSU undergraduate students in community work in TVN communities. TVN organized and hosted two, four-month placements for MSU students—one in a secondary school to work with Transition Year Students and teachers and another to work with parents and youth interested in forming a youth centre. From this experience, both TVN and MSU learned so much in those early years about what it takes to prepare students and communities to work together.

//////////

## Expanding Our Partnership

Based upon these early successes and our growing confidence, especially with the student placements, TVN and MSU decided to develop a six-week student placement program through MSU’s Office of Study Abroad, with support from MSU’s College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. In 2002, I worked with Peggy Desmond to pilot the study abroad program, evaluate it, and fine tune the program for future years. The basic model—community interests are identified first and then matched with students who have similar interests second—stayed the same.

### **Study Abroad Programme**

In 2003, TVN and MSU officially launched the student study abroad programme. Every year since then, TVN communities have worked closely with MSU lecturers (Jan Hartough, Shari Dann, Diane Doberneck, or Dale Elshoff) and students on community engagement projects. In addition to community projects, TVN communities identify host families who teach students about life in rural Ireland and community mentors who introduce students to local resources for their projects. Working alongside TVN communities, MSU students learn how to put community engagement ideas into practice in a ‘real life’ setting. They also make significant contributions to our communities. To date, they have completed approximately 50 community-based projects, such as amenity guides, tourist signage, child care feasibility studies, community guides, cemetery history projects, youth centre activities, village enhancement proposals, and walks development, to name but a few.

Through these projects, individual TVN communities and the TVN overall have also benefitted from improved relationships with our partners here in Ireland. For example, by serving as resource people on the study projects, individuals from Mayo County Council, LEADER, FAS, RSS, the V.E.C., and other statutory agencies provide technical expertise and resources to communities. Often, the relationships between the partner agencies and the communities last well beyond the student projects.

### **Kettering Foundation Leadership Trainings**

Through our connection with Jan Hartough, MSU Extension Director for Barry Co. (Michigan), the TVN received an invitation to send our community members for leadership training organized by the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio. Since 2004, 12 community leaders have travelled to Ohio to learn about deliberative democracy, facilitation skills, and Kettering's public issues forum process. They have returned to southwest Mayo with new skills to use in their own communities and for the benefit of the network overall. In addition, Jan Hartough worked with the TVN to hold training events in 2004 and 2006 in Mayo to provide further training in facilitation (including roles of moderator, recorder, observer, and participant) to additional TVN community members.

### **The Misuse of Alcohol: Your Community's Opportunity to Respond**

The Kettering Foundation also supported the TVN's development of a resource guide for communities to explore and respond to the growing problem of alcohol misuse. *The Misuse of Alcohol: Your Community's Opportunity to Respond* was based on action research in 10 post-primary schools about students' attitudes and experiences with alcohol. Six community forums, using this resource guide as a framing document for dialogue, were held in TVN communities. As a result of this success, the TVN was funded in 2009 by the Western Region Drug Task Force to develop a similar resource guide and community forum process to address substance misuse more broadly. The TVN's substance misuse project is expected to start in the fall 2009.

### **Study Tours and Learning Exchanges**

With grant aid from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Shari Dann, Scott Loveridge, and Diane Doberneck (MSU) and I organized four study tours or learning exchanges about community and economic development in rural communities in 2006-2008. 'Enhancing agricultural-based economic development in rural communities: a collaborative partnership to internationalise research, Extension, and teaching' brought together community leaders, MSU lecturers, MSU Extension professionals, Teagasc professionals, and others. The study tours focused on topics identified by the study tour participants and included value added agriculture; farmers markets; organic farming; cultural and heritage tourism; walking trail development; youth development, and entrepreneurship.

//////////

## Partnering In The Future

### **Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail**

In March 2009, the TVN launched a 61 km walking trail, named the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail (CPHT) to encourage local people and tourists to experience and appreciate the rugged landscape of southwest Mayo. The trail was also designed to strengthen the local economy through opportunities for entrepreneurs, trail guides, B&B owners, and others through the knock-on effects of rural tourism. In addition, the TVN envisions a series of looped walks in each of the TVN communities to link the communities to the spine of the larger CPHT trail. MSU students and lecturers who contributed to the launch of this trail will undoubtedly play a role in further development of amenities along the trail as well as interpretation materials for those walking it.

### Strategic Business Planning

After 10 years, the TVN is in the process of completing our first strategic business plan, under Brendan Sammon's leadership of the TVN. Because a rural community network such as ours has a dual mandate—helping individual communities and networking resources and learning across them, we needed a customized strategic business planning process. Diane Doberneck, an MSU lecturer familiar with our approach to community engagement, is leading us through a series of community consultations and focused interviews to help us develop our own plan for the next five years. With that plan in place, the TVN will be able to move forward and achieve our vision for the next ten years.

By working together, TVN and MSU have strengthened individuals through leadership training and study tours, enriched individual communities through study abroad programme projects, and supported the overall network through board training, development of the Cr. Patrick Heritage Trail, and strategic business planning. As you can see, the TVN has partnered with MSU to address different priorities, through a number of different arrangements, at different points in time. This flexibility and responsiveness is part of an underlying philosophy that adapts to our changing needs. It is also part of why, I believe, we have created a partnership 'with a difference.'

//////////

### A Partnership—with a Difference

"There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about," writes Margaret Wheatley in *Turning to One Another in Conversation*. Through our partnership with MSU, the TVN works at the grassroots to encourage communities to discover their own power. Both the TVN and MSU support them as they identify their own needs, set their own directions, and achieve goals they have set for themselves. Regardless of the partnership activity (listed in the section above), the TVN-MSU rural community development work is guided by our ideas about authentic community engagement. We believe that it is the following four ways of working together that make the real difference.

#### Community as the driver

First, both TVN and MSU believe in autonomous community development, that is, communities themselves set the priorities and drive the process. Communities take the lead and MSU follows. This is a very different approach than external groups (or even TVN overall) telling rural communities what they should do. Neither is it the same as communities working very hard to find out what the priorities are of an outside group (e.g., a state agency, a third level institution, etc.) and fitting their own goals to the external priorities. In autonomous community development, community leaders work at the grassroots and consciously avoid developing an overreliance or dependency on outside groups for goal-setting and resources (Bradshaw, 1993; Carmen, 1996; Fear et al, 2005; Fraser, 2005; Gilchrist, 2004; McIntosh, 2008; Murdock, 2000; Pigg & Bradshaw, 2003).

In our work together in Co. Mayo, together TVN and MSU place a special emphasis on listening to what communities want to do work on and on following their lead on community development goals. When communities are a bit unsure, we ask focused questions to help them clarify their priorities and goals. We avoid telling them what we think they should do—even when they ask. For example, during a recent community meeting of adult leaders and parents involved in a community youth group, one parent asked the MSU student (on her study abroad placement), "what do you think we should do?" She replied, "It is not my place to tell you what to do. I am here to listen to your ideas, reflect them back to you, and support your efforts to organize activities for your youth I can tell you a bit about my experiences if you would like, but only as something for you to consider as you make up your own minds." While this more facilitative approach may take longer in achieving results, we believe it the only way to ensure communities themselves are the drivers.



### Focusing on people first and then projects

Second, both TVN and MSU believe in a capacity-building approach, implementing processes that strengthen the abilities of people to take collective action towards creating healthy ecosystems, vital economies, and social well being. Capacity may be built at the individual, team, organization, or community levels with sensitivity to context and changing dynamics. For us, capacity-building means making sure our work in communities helps community people to learn new skills and take on new roles. The idea here is to build up skills, so that community members have new learnings to draw upon in their next community activity.

In our work together, capacity-building means TVN and MSU move away from the idea of “doing for” and move toward the idea of “doing with,” genuinely partnering with community members. While it may be easier or more time efficient to just do the work ourselves, TVN and MSU believe that bringing people along with us in the process of community engagement, in the end, leads to even longer-lasting, more sustainable outcomes for communities.

TVN and MSU realize that a capacity building approach differs from those who take a more “bricks-and-mortar” approach to rural community development, where what matters the most is the accumulation of completed facilities and other tangible outcomes (e.g., the achievement of tasks without attention to how they were accomplished). While “bricks and mortar” are important, we believe there is another frequently overlooked dimension to successful rural community development—community capacity. Communities need to gain practice and confidence in the skills needed to make decisions about their community work and the skills to manage what they create into the future. In other words, as community developers who believe in capacity building, we are not only building projects in communities, we are also building up their people (Banks & Orton, 2005; James & Wrigley, 2007; Simpson, Wood, & Daws, 2003).

### From strength to strength

Third, TVN and MSU believe in asset-based community development, working from strength to strength. This approach fosters hope by shifting attention away from “what’s missing in the community” or “what wrong with the community” to “what are we proud of” or “what is going well for us.” It is based on the assumption, that even though there may be problems in a community, sometimes very serious ones, there are also untapped resources (or assets) that can be drawn upon to improve the situation. These assets may be associated with **people** (e.g., human, social, cultural, political, and financial assets) and with **place** (e.g., natural and built assets) (Flora & Flora, 2007; Greene & Haines, 2002; Kretzmann & McKnight, 2003; O’Leary, 2006).

In our work together, TVN and MSU have had to re-think the typical relationships between communities and third level institutions. For example, from an assets-based community development perspective, the third level institution is not the only source of resources to contribute to the community initiatives (in a kind of well-disguised charity mentality). Instead, both communities and third level institutions have things to bring to the community development table. Sometimes, however, communities do not know what they might offer or have the confidence that what they bring to the effort will be good enough. In these instances, it is especially incumbent upon those at the third level institution to be affirming and to draw out potential community resources community members themselves may have overlooked.

### Learning as we go

Finally, TVN and MSU are committed to ‘sense-making,’ a process by which information becomes knowledge that guides action (Smit, 2007: 6). Because individuals have their own unique perspectives on experiences, we believe it is essential to make time to acknowledge these differences and to develop a shared meaning for our joint experiences. Together, TVN and MSU have developed a habit of asking ourselves “what is it we are learning from this experience?” and then using those learnings to inform our subsequent actions. In order to support our commitment to sense-making, TVN and MSU have purposefully learned about deep listening, reflection, dialogue, and inquiry skills to strengthen our partnership. Naturally, we find ourselves balancing between the actual ‘doing’ of our community work and the ‘learning from it’ (Cornwall, 2008; Heron, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 2002). The commitment to reclaim time to think and reflect together is a hallmark of TVN’s partnership with MSU.

While some of our sense-making is an informal kind of reflection on our own practices, TVN and MSU are also committed to more formalized approaches to learning in action. At different moments in our shared history, TVN and MSU have also undertaken ‘action research,’ to identify an issue more formally and undertake research that addresses the issue in practical ways. For example, action research was the basis of the alcohol misuse booklet we developed. With training sponsored by Kettering, TVN and MSU sent teams of TVN community members into local schools to collect data from school students. This information was used to develop the scenarios in the issues booklet, and those scenarios formed the basis of community-wide discussions about alcohol misuse. Another example of action research is the strategic business planning process the TVN is currently undertaking. The TVN-MSU goal is to listen to the 18 communities and to gather their ideas about TVN’s organizational competencies, resources, relationships, and learning, in order to create a plan for the future (Fowler, Goold, and James, 1995).

In our sense-making and action research activities, we have collaborated with our MSU partners in a different way. Instead of expecting them to have “the answers” for us, TVN has learned that the best answers come through sustained action, reflection, and dialogue, where both TVN and MSU are discovering new knowledge and arriving at new understandings together.

//////////

### The Real Rewards

Over the years, TVN and MSU have earned recognition and awards on both sides of the Atlantic for our approach to working together and for working with communities. In Ireland, recognition for the TVN-MSU partnership has been for specific community projects or initiatives, where communities took the lead roles and MSU took a supporting role, including

- Balla Youth Centre, recognized by The Mayo Person of the Year Award in 2005
- Clogher bog walk, recognized by Bord Fáilte in 2005
- Mayo Abbey Pride of Place for Villages under 500, by Cooperation Ireland in 2006
- Islandeady Pride of Place for Integration, by Cooperation Ireland in 2007

In America, our awards have focused on individual leadership and contributions, including:

- Maureen Lally, Distinguished Partner in Study Abroad Programs Award, bestowed by MSU’s College of Agriculture and Natural Resources in 2007
- Diane Doberneck, First Annual Academic Service Learning and Civic Engagement Award, bestowed by MSU’s Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, in 2008

### The spark that lights the fire

While these recognitions are important, they are not the most significant reward for the TVN-MSU partnership work with rural communities. What matters the most to us is knowing that through our partnership, both TVN and MSU have contributed in a small way to the transformation of individuals and communities. Our work has been the spark that lights the fire, but not necessarily the fire itself. Community members themselves fuel the fire. Instead of doing work for communities, TVN and MSU have taken on the role of catalyst, or in the words of a 2005 MSU student, “enthusiastic accelerators.”

This approach to community engagement is not the easiest, because as catalysts, networkers, and connectors, we are must constantly shift between types of work (Glichrist, 2004) and between a focus on the means and the ends of community engagement (Cornwall, 2008). TVN and MSU are also challenged to accommodate the priorities and capacities of 18 rural communities, which differ from one another and, often times, differ from the network overall. Despite this, both TVN and MSU know that our unique approach to working together allows us to open our hearts, minds, and spirits in service to the greater good (McIntosh, 2008; Williams, 2004). This Irish phrase captures our belief: *Is ar scath a cheille a mhaireann na doaine* (it is in the shadow of being together that people live their work).

//////////

### Conclusion

I believe that partnering with MSU has afforded the rural communities of southwest Mayo opportunities to think broadly and deeply about their communities. The partnership approach adopted by TVN and MSU relies on appreciating the assets that already exist in communities and determining ways of investing these to create strategies to help all segments within the community prosper. In working together, TVN and MSU have strengthened the people’s confidence and belief in themselves. The communities have learnt several ways of advancing their community development efforts and achieving their own vision for the future. They have also acquired the skills and knowhow of envisioning and following through with community goals.

It is obvious that learning takes place in many ways; some learn through studies, others through reports, but communities, particularly rural communities, learn through stories. The stories allow them to reach back to their common history and their individual experience for knowledge about truth and directions for the future. Simple conversations, in which TVN, MSU, and the 18 communities share our stories of struggle and success, have helped to energize all of us and to restore hope in our future.

## Bibliography

- Banks, S. & Orton, A. (2005) 'The Grit in the Oyster: Community Development Workers in a Modernizing Local Authority' in *Community Development Journal* 42(1):97-113.
- Bradshaw, T.K. (1993) 'Multicommunity Networks: A Rural Transition' in *American Academy of Political and Social Science Annals* 529:164-175.
- Carmen, R. (1996) *Autonomous Development, Humanizing the Landscape: An Excursion into Radical Thinking*. London: Zed Books.
- Cornwall, A. (2008) Unpacking 'Participation:' Models, Meanings, and Practices' in *Community Development Journal* 43(3):269-283.
- Fear, F.A., Desmond, P. & Hartough, J. (2000) *Locally-led, University-Assisted Rural Development: Affirming Local Control, Energizing Local Initiatives, Enabling Ongoing Action*. Application to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.
- Fear, F.A., Rosean, C., Bawden, R., & Foster-Fishman, P. (2005) *Coming to Critical Engagement: An Auto-Ethnographic Exploration*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Flora, C.B., & Flora, J. L. (2007) *Rural Change: Legacy and Change, 3rd edition*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Folwer, A., Goold, L. & James, R. (1995) *Participatory Self-Assessment of NGO Capacity*. Occasional Paper Series, No. 10. Oxford: INTRAC.
- Fraser, H. (2005) 'Four Different Approaches to Community Participation' in *Community Development Journal* 40(3):286-300.
- Gilchrist, A. (2004) *The Well-Connected Community: A Networking Approach to Community Development*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Green, G.P. & Haines, A. (2002) *Asset-Building and Community Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Heron, J. (1996) *Cooperative Inquiry: Research Into the Human Condition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- James, R. & Wrigley, R. (2007) *Investigating the Mystery of Capacity Building: Learning from the Praxis Programme*. Praxis Paper, No. 18. Oxford: INTRAC. Available at: <http://www.intrac.org/publications.php?id=112>. Downloaded on May 29, 2009.
- Kretzmann, J.P. & McKnight, J. L. (1993) *Building Communities From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing A Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.
- McIntosh, A. (2008) *Rekindling Community: Connecting People, Environment, and Spirituality*. Schumacher Briefing No. 15. Foxhole, Dartington, Totnes, & Devon. Green Books. Ltd.
- Murdock, J. (2000) 'Networks—A New Paradigm of Rural Development?' in *Journal of Rural Studies* 16:407-419.
- O'Leary, T. (2006) *Asset-based Approaches to Rural Community Development: Literature Review and Resources*. Carnegie UK. Trust.
- Pigg, K.E. & Bradshaw, T.K. (2003) 'Catalytic Community Development: A Theory of Practice for Changing Rural Society' in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century* David L. Brown and Alan W. Barton. (eds), pp. 385-396. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University.
- Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (2006) *Handbook of Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schon, D. (1995) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Senge, P. (2006) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday Business.
- Simpson, L., Wood, L., & Daws, L. (2003) 'Community capacity building: Starting with people not projects' in *Community Development Journal* 38(4):277-286.
- Smit, M. (2007). *We're Too Much in 'To Do Mode: Action Research into Supporting International NGOs to Learn*. Praxis Paper, No. 16. Oxford: INTRAC. Available at: <http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisPaper16.html>. Downloaded: May 29, 2009.
- Wheatley, M. (2002). *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope To the Future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Williams, T.T. (2004). *The Open Space of Democracy*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society.

# Section Two

## *Case Studies*

### *Case Study Two*

## Service Learning *in* Nurse Education

*08* *09*



Section Two  
*Case Studies*

*Case Study Two*  
Service Learning  
*in*  
Nurse Education

*08 09*  
▬ ▬

Service Learning:  
Facilitating Cultural  
Awareness  
in  
Undergraduate Nursing Students

08



# Service Learning: Facilitating Cultural Awareness in Undergraduate Nursing Students

**Dympna Casey**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

**Kathy Murphy**

*National University of Ireland, Galway*

//////////

## Introduction

In 2003 a module which would incorporate a service learning component was offered for the first time to the undergraduate Nursing students at NUI Galway. The purpose of the module was twofold: to develop undergraduate nursing students' awareness of cultural diversity and how this can affect health; and to foster social awareness and social responsibility. This module, one of the first of its kind within Irish nursing, required students to undertake a service-learning placement in a culture different to their own. In this chapter the rationale for the development of the module will be presented; the way in which the service learning placement is identified and the assessment strategy used will be described; finally the results of a small descriptive qualitative study examining students' experiences of service learning will be presented.

//////////

## Rationale & Development Of The Module

The service learning module which NUI Galway introduced in undergraduate Nursing is entitled 'International Nursing: Nursing in the Developed and Developing Worlds'. This 6 credit module (ECTS) consists of 30 hours theoretical content, and requires 3-6 weeks service learning placement. The module enables students to explore and develop an awareness of cultural diversity and to develop an understanding of cultural differences and how this can affect health and the delivery of care. During the time in the service learning placement students are supernumerary and participate in basic nursing skills, for example taking vital signs and assisting clients with nutrition and hygiene needs.

A second aim of the module is to develop a reciprocal relationship with the service-learning sites through helping to build their capacity and continuing links by working together to identify areas where assistance could be provided – this could be through the development of an educational programme or through the completion of a useful piece of research with the community.

This module was influenced by research and by personal experience. Murphy and McLeod Clarke in their research found that nurses lacked knowledge to care effectively for ethnic minority patients; that communication was poor; that many nurses were not able to identify problems and that ethnocentrism and stereotyping was evident. These findings are supported by other more recent literature (Ozolins and Hjelm 2003; Cortis 2004). The second and personal stimulus for developing this module derived from the author's experiences of working within different cultures such as Angola, Sudan, Kosovo, and Australia (Casey 1999a, 1999b, Casey 2005). The experience of working within different cultures is challenging but it can contribute to a better understanding of the influence of culture on people's health



beliefs and practices. The beliefs held tend to remain unexamined until different beliefs and perspectives are encountered (McGrath 1998). In the experience of the author, being immersed in different cultures challenged her behaviour, beliefs and values and helped her to better understand different worldviews. The experiences influenced subsequent encounters with people from different cultures particularly in the provision of effective health care and demonstrated that more could be learnt by living within different cultures than from just reading about them. This prompted an investigation into how Irish Nursing students could be given a similar opportunity to develop an awareness of cultural diversity and to recognise "...that our world is one of unity in diversity and intersubjectivity" (Rajan 1995, p454).

//////////

## Identifying & Setting Up Service Learning Placements

In order to ensure that NUI Galway Nursing students are fully prepared for their service learning placements, an information session is held at the start of Year 1 informing students about this elective module, which is offered during the summer of Year 2. The need for students to identify sources of funding and potential placement areas is highlighted at this point. It is possible for students to undertake their placement experience in Ireland but within a different ethnic group and cultural context.

At the beginning of Year 2, following a briefing session outlining the details of the module and the service learning placement, students are given 4 weeks to sign-up for the module. A key-learning outcome for the module is that students demonstrate the ability to initiate, negotiate and obtain a service learning placement in an environment culturally different to their own. While the module team will advise students about suitable placement areas, students are expected to take the initiative in setting up the placement through identifying and contacting the link person within the placement site. The role of the link person is to provide friendly support for the student. Students are required to write letters of introduction, negotiate their own accommodation and provide evidence during the planning process that they have considered and dealt effectively with all important health and safety issues. Students who register for the module are required to:

- inform the module leader of any personal chronic illness
- sign a form which outlines personal responsibility for health and safety during the placement experience
- show proof of liability insurance
- complete a pre and post placement medical examination as appropriate
- show proof of having received any necessary immunisations
- attend a debriefing session on return from the service learning placement.

//////////

## Assessment

The module is assessed by coursework worth 100% in total. Taylor (1994) and Duffy (2001) identify reflection as a key strategy in developing intercultural sensitivity. In light of this, students are required to submit a report that demonstrates critical self-reflection as well as including a description of the planning process, the practice placement environment and an account of the socio-political structure of the health care system operating in that culture. In addition, students are asked on their return to present a 20 minute presentation about their experience to peers and lecturers. The aim of the presentation is threefold: to provide the student with a forum to discuss the experience with lecturers and peers; to educate and inform future students contemplating undertaking this module; to build students presentation skills. In order to write the report students are encouraged to keep a reflective journal for recording experiences with clients and other health care professionals. Students are instructed to include in their diary a record of their feelings, perceptions and experience of living and working

in different cultures. They should also provide a description of how they acquired information about local health, cultural practices and role expectations, as well as noting the impact of the experience on their personal views about the new cultural context where they were living and themselves. Students are informed about the need to maintain confidentiality and anonymity and therefore are instructed to use fictitious names in their reports. In recognition of the amount of hidden work involved in setting up the service placement, students are also awarded some marks (see Table 1) for the logistics associated with this module.

**Table 1: Assessment Strategy**

**This module is assessed by 100% coursework and the marks for are allocated as follows:**

—Submit the following forms fully completed and signed by all required parties:

- |     |                                                                     |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| [A] | Identifying and setting up the service learning placement form (5%) |
| [B] | Pre-departure form (5%)                                             |

**Dates of submission for these forms will be identified by the module leader**

- Submit a 3,000 word written report on the service learning experience (70%)
- Present a brief 20-minute presentation [summary of the key points in your report] to your peers, lecturers and possible future student undertaking this module (15%)
- Submit a copy of your reflective diary with your 3,000 word written report (5%).  
The diary should be referred to within your report.

.....  
//////////

## Evaluations Of The Module

Service learning enables students to make meaningful connections between classroom theory and real life (Callister & Hobbins-Garbett, 2000). It also allows the provision of a needed service to the community while simultaneously students learn and apply concepts learnt in the classroom in the real world (Eyler & Giles 1999). It is appropriate therefore that students evaluate the module both in terms of its theoretical content and its practical aspects and that all stakeholders' perspectives are sought to appraise the module.

Students evaluate the module's theoretical content through the completion of a module evaluation questionnaire at the end of Semester 2. To date 20 students have completed this module and all have evaluated it positively - an average score of 8/10 for enjoyment has been obtained. Comments include:

*'it gave me an increased awareness of the issues related to culture and respect for other cultures...one of the most relevant modules pertaining to the 'new nursing ideal'*

*'...the speakers were really interesting and made me consider doing work in the third world (sic)?'*

*'...I particularly enjoyed hearing people from other countries. Overall it was a great module and I enjoyed it.'*

Students also provide feedback on the practical aspects of their service learning experience and are invited to participate in an on-going qualitative research study, which involves a focus group interview. The aim of the interview is to explore the learning experiences of students undertaking a service placement in a different culture. The findings to date from this study are presented below. Formative and summative feedback is also obtained from participating lecturers. Obtaining the perspective of the service learning community/organisation to ensure that their needs and perspectives are not overlooked is also a key consideration. To date the input of the service learning communities overall has been obtained on an informal basis; however, a process of piloting a formal evaluation questionnaire (Table 2) for the community partners is currently underway. It will seek to obtain their perceptiveness on the service learning process and its impact on their community/organisation, and to build on existing reciprocal relationships.

**Table 2: Evaluation Questionnaire by Community Partner**

The following evaluation provides you with an opportunity to offer feedback to us and the information provided will also be considered in assessing students' service learning performance. Many thanks for taking the time to assist us in this effort!

1—What benefits do you think the service learning students received as a result of their service with your organization? (Greater understanding of surrounding community; greater understanding of socio political factors that influence health etc)

2—Do you think the people who connect with your organisation benefited from their contact with the service learning students? Please tick [ ] as appropriate  
**YES** [ ] **NO** [ ] Please Elaborate

3—Please rate the service learners performance in the following areas by placing a tick [ ] in the appropriate box. In responding, use the average of your experiences with NUI, Galway service learning students.

	Excellent 1	Very good 2	Good 3	Fair 4	Poor 5
Sensitivity toward people with whom s/he worked					
Responsibility for regular attendance and punctuality					
Quality of performance of service activities					
Commitment to completing tasks					
Adaptability to changes (i.e., scheduling, needs)					
Respect for confidentiality					
Awareness of role in the community					
Enthusiasm for service activities					
Interactions with Staff					
Interactions with Clients					
Attitude					
Teamwork/Cooperation					
Openness to Diversity					
Please elaborate on any poor ratings ( i.e. rating of 5)					

4—Please place a tick [ ] in the box that most accurately reflects your agreement with each statement below:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Student involvement helped our organization meet community needs.					
Students were reliable & performed their assigned duties.					
Students understand our organization's mission & goals					
The time needed to schedule & supervise the students was worthwhile					
The students respected the organization's clients & environment.					
There has been adequate communication between our organization & the Department of Nursing & Midwifery NUI, Galway					

5—Please comment on the student's greatest strengths and any areas for improvement. Also, is there anything the service-learner(s) did that was particularly creative or noteworthy?

6—Are you interested in continuing as a service learning partner in the future?

**YES** [ ] **NO** [ ] Please Elaborate  
 [B] If NO, why not?  
 [C] If YES, is there anything you would like done differently in the future?

7—How do you think we as a department/university, can further develop a reciprocal relationship with your organisation?

Please feel free to include any other comments /suggestions regarding your experience Of service learning on an additional page

//////////

## Qualitative Study

This service learning module in Nursing was first delivered in 2003 and since then 20 students have undertaken their placement in various countries including Nepal, Zambia, Belize, and Ghana. In 2004, after the first cohort of students had returned from their service learning placement a longitudinal descriptive qualitative study commenced. This methodology was chosen as 'straight descriptions of phenomena' were desired (Sandelowski, 2000, p339). Each year having completed their service learning placement, students are invited to participate in a focus group interview. An interview guide (Table 3) is used and the interview lasts between 1-1.5hours. All interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim, and anonymity and confidentiality assured. In total three focus group interviews have been completed, one each year since commencement of the module.

**Table 3: Focus Group Interview Guide**

- 
- So what was it like for you arriving in the service learning country and placement site?
  - Did you notice any cultural differences between where you undertook your service learning and Ireland? What were these?
  - What differences did you notice in the health care systems?
  - What did you learn about your own culture in relation to dealing with and caring for people from a different culture?
  - What did you learn from your experience? - About yourself? life? culture?
  - What advice would you give to any other students considering undertaking a service learning placement in the same location?
  - Was the module useful to your learning? In what way?
  - Now that you have completed the module have you any suggestions for improvement or is there anything we can do better?
  - Anything else you want to add or say that I haven't asked

//////////

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Burnard 1991) was used to code and classify the themes emerging from the transcripts. Thematic analysis involves examining the data line-by-line to identify 'key words' within the data. These 'key words' or codes facilitate the breakdown of the transcripts and the identification of tentative categories. These categories are then reviewed and refined and similar categories collapsed into broader categories. The new list of categories is then further refined and updated, until a final category list is created. Each transcript is then re-read and examined in light of this new category list and coded accordingly. To enhance the validity of the findings the two authors of this chapter completed the category lists independently. The findings were then compared and following discussions and review, agreement as to the appropriateness of the final identified categories was reached.

//////////

## Findings

Three main categories were identified. These were developing cultural sensitivity, caring for people in different cultures, and learning/knowing more. The following sections explore the findings in each of these categories.

//////////

## Developing Cultural Sensitivity

This category describes the reality of arriving, living and/or working in a different cultural setting, the experience of culture shock and the process of developing cultural sensitivity in this context.

Despite the fact that students were aware of the potential for culture shock many still experienced this:

*'It was a shock anyway...it was all just land with a few kinds of shacks and all dirt roads and one of those really old buses that we got on straight away. It was kind of like from an old black and white movie and that was a bit of a shock' (FG 1, 2004)*

*'Everything was so different to anything we ever would have seen at home, so I suppose all of your senses were overwhelmed by everything going on there' (FG 2, 2006)*

Many students noted that they felt uncomfortable because there were very few white people and because of this the students, who were white, felt very noticeable. Some commented that this experience gave them a greater awareness of what it was like to be part of a minority ethnic group:

*'...like just being for the first time in my life, such a minority. Like we were the only white people, and it was really strange.'* (FG 2, 2006)

*'...we were big white westerners, do you know...'* (FG 1, 2004)

In the process of confronting their new environment students described how they became more aware of differences and similarities across different cultures. These related to communication, gender, marriage, and social activities.

Many students described people as being very friendly:

*'...the minute you got to the bus station, you'd nothing to worry about, there was nothing to worry about, because they were so friendly....they even got off the bus at the other side, to walk us to the hospice, to show us....and everything, they showed us exactly how to get there.'* (FG 2, 2006)

*'...the way they treated each other was a lot better than the way we would treat each other over here. That was the big thing I thought anyway....They are away ahead of us in terms of life and friendliness and how they go about their life.'* (FG 2, 2004)

However difficulties communicating in terms of language barriers and in interpreting non-verbal behaviours were also encountered:

*'...say you had to give them panadol three times a day for 5 days, and you say it to them, and then ...they'd go like this, like shake their head...[from side to side] Yeah....and they'd shake their head as if to say no...And I'd be like 'do they understand?'... It was the opposite to our no' (FG 2, 2006)*

*'...like I remember one little girl, I'd say she was bout 5 or 6 and the mother had another baby and stuff and we'd be there trying to explain 'do this and do that' but like the mother wouldn't have a clue of English and the child would be...translating for the mother...'* (FG 1, 2004)

Some students commented on the different cultural attitudes toward women. They struggled to understand the nature of male dominated hierarchical cultures and the lack of women's voices in decision making:

*'...Mainly its the guy who made the decisions and that really could be a problem when it comes to health as well... and when maybe the woman of the family comes in to give birth or whatever, the man, is very much there, he is making the decision for her rather than herself' (FG 1, 2004)*

*'if the women were sick, the males would come and they would ask the questions. And you would explain and they'd tell the women. If you tried to explain to the woman the fellow would step in and say-'no. no'"(FG 2, 2006)*

Students described how they were surprised women married young and that their main role was looking after the children. Frequently within marriage or relationships they described how the woman was expected to be monogamous however this did not apply to men:

*'...but he'd still go off and be with other people. He was telling us this and it was just a normal kind of thing, normal behavior' (FG 1, 2004)*

This situation was different however with women who came from wealthier background as described by one student:

*'...the better off, better educated younger women they were very different to women that lived in the poor areas they would expect....their husbands or boyfriends to be faithful. But the women from the poor backgrounds they had a totally different kind of life where their husbands were always unfaithful and always off...' (FG 2, 2006)*

Different cultural attitudes towards alcohol were also described. In many instances the drinking of alcohol was prohibited for religious reasons. In other cultures although people did consume alcohol it was done differently than in Ireland:

*'...I mean people would drink but it wouldn't be like our society, the way young people would go out, and really, really get drunk...you wouldn't see that over there. People would go out just like to dance' (FG 2, 2004)*

All students described the socio-economic differences between their own culture and that of the service-learning placement sites. In addition, some commented on the differences between the 'have' and 'have nots' within the service learning culture itself. The extremes of wealth and poverty evident in close proximity made it particularly difficult for students to accept the status quo:

*'...like you'd see a man fully dressed in a suit, and looking across the road you'd see someone like a really poor person, trying to light a fire, or a woman carrying things on her head, or a baby on her back, just ...I don't know, the diversity...' (FG 2, 2006)*

*'...there was a big class thing as well, there was the very poor and then some Zambians lived in big houses in the city and are very well off but there was like, there was no in between. Like, you were quite well off or you were very very poor...' (FG 1, 2004)*

//////////

## Caring For People In Different Cultures

This theme describes the cultural difference and similarities identified by students in relation to health and health care. These focused on the role of the family, traditional health practices, expression of pain and the organisation of care.

The key role family members played in the delivery of care was highlighted across all cultures.

*'In Zambia their families sat with them day in day out, like often it would be their mother, it was a woman or a sister or a cousin or something like that. And they'd just sit and knit or whatever and they did an awful lot of the caring, giving them their food and helping them in the shower and all that...'*  
(FG 1, 2004)

*'I...like you know the family...one huge thing that made me ...one thing I think about a lot since I went to Africa, like family, and how important it is, and the way they are as a family, and the community. Like they're so close, and family is number one, and they, like, do everything for each other.'*  
(FG 2, 2006)

Students described alternative and traditional health practices as a very strong element of health care cultures and people often attended the herbalist or traditional healer before a medical doctor. Some students described differences in the way people expressed pain. In some cultures people tended to be stoic and not admit to having pain. One student described how even when patients were dying and clearly in pain they remained uncomplaining:

*'...they must have been in terrible pain but they never really complained, like they'd never call you to say, to ask you or anything, you'd just maybe hear them crying or something and you'd go in and say 'are you in pain?' and they'd say 'pain , pain' or something but they'd never call you...even at the very last stages they'd just...they were very uncomplaining, very uncomplaining. That was the main difference I thought...'* (FG 1, 2004)

In contrast others reported that patients were similar to Irish patients and would ask for pain relief:

*'Yeah, like in the Irish context 'oh, I've a headache', or whatever. Or they'd ask you for something'* (FG 2, 2006)

Students described the way in which care was organised, in terms of health care personnel, availability of medicines and diagnostic technology, as being very different from their own culture. In some instances people did not have any official qualification yet they held senior positions such as X-ray technicians. Many students described lack of continuity in care, due to a lack of medical supplies and personnel, as a real problem:

*'a lot of the time care wouldn't be continued- when we did the clinics we could be giving out tablets...just vitamins but it would only last 30 days and the benefits wouldn't really come, because God knows when the next clinic would be around for them to get another batch of vitamins. So it was not very continuous...'* (FG 1, 2004)

*'...with like doctors...obviously they have them every day in the hospital and that but in the hospice the doctor comes once a week, on a Monday morning, that's the only time a patient sees a doctor' (FG 2, 2006)*

However some students acknowledge that although the health care system was different there were some good elements:

*'...considering like it was such a poor place, that the health system wasn't really that awful. Like I mean it was way behind, completely different to Ireland, but there was some really good measurements that the government had put in and that, it was more lack of education with the people, that they weren't coming in, and this new thing had come in, where the government were now...it was like 70 euro, I think maybe less for a whole year, and that's free everything you'll ever need. That was really good, and people just didn't know about it, or they weren't coming in or getting the facilities that were there either.'*(FG 2, 2006)

*'...a lot of the equipment, say for the A &E was old but it was useable, it did help like and yeah they did have a good ultrasound and they did have the equipment, but it was just very old, but a lot of it was well maintained...'* (FG 1, 2004)

Another positive element identified by participants was the way older people were cared for:

*'...they were just like a real big family or something and they were just so different to over here, I just really thought that it was, even just the way the staff treated them, like one day we went on a day trip we put them all on a bus, it was really hard, it was a tough day, like trying to get them up and on the bus and in and out, it was hard, but they all really enjoyed it...'*(FG 1, 2004)

Evidence of students caring for others pervaded their descriptions of practice. Compassion for the suffering of others was evident in their accounts and in their plans to develop more long-term relationships with the service learning sites after the placement had terminated. For example students described how they planned to hold future fund raising events and a few students plan to return to the service learning sites to work as registered nurses.

//////////

## Learning/Knowing More

This theme describes the key areas of learning identified by students in terms of education, skills and the cultural issues that impact on health and health care. Students also commented on the personal growth that had occurred in that they felt they had matured and were more self-confident.

Many students felt that they had learnt a lot about specific diseases for example Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), leprosy and other tropical diseases. Some described how they had an opportunity to practise their nursing skills for example giving intramuscular injections, dispensing medications and using the manual sphygmomanometer. This made them feel more competent:

*'I suppose kind of putting into practice what we've learnt. I'd like to think I'd be a little bit more competent now...'* (FG 1, 2004)



*'...taking blood pressure, obviously there was no machine, you had to do it the manual way, so that was kind of...having to get used to that...to begin with, I was like 'Siobhan, someone needs their blood pressure taken', and passing it off. But then it was like I had to do it, just took a while to get used to it. I'd only ever done it once while we were learning here in first year.'*  
(FG, 2 2006)

Other students commented on the fact that the service learning experience changed their perception on life and they began to appreciate difference and recognise that western approaches to health /nursing care was not necessarily always right, and that 'one policy' of care could not be applied to any one cultural group:

*'It was really useful for nursing because you get to know different cultures and not everybody is the same. Like you think our way is always the right way but they don't ...'* (FG 2, 2006)

*'...each culture is so different, you can't just adopt one policy to everyone you have to go a step further and look into each case individually'*  
(FG 1, 2004)

Other students showed evidence of learning by focusing on similarities rather than the differences between cultures:

*'I think in terms of caring for people you might think it was really different being from different cultures but I didn't think it was really that different... when you are actually caring for people, its kinda similar in terms of you know, you follow the patients lead, and you do what you think is best for the patient and you listen to the patient and it's the same kind of principles of making the patient comfortable and listening and touch and all that kind of thing...its not that different'* (FG1, 2004)

Many students felt that they would now be more 'open-minded' toward different ethnic groups. Others commented that after a short period of time they felt they belonged and 'fitted in' to the cultural context as they became an accepted part of the workforce:

*'...you're more open now when people come into hospital from a different culture, you're not kind of like 'how do you act around them' or 'I can't speak their language', 'I can't go near them' you just kind of, I think I'd be more relaxed'*(FG 1, 2004)

*'...because most volunteers just come in and out and we were actually on a roster, we did night duty, so I think that once they realised that we were there then we were noticed around the place, so even the town people just got normal...and you could actually make proper friends and actually have proper friendships with people rather than 'you're white'...'* (FG 2, 2006)

However it was also evident that some students struggled to understand the viewpoint of other cultures and they described instances where it was clear they continued to adopt an ethnocentric and sometimes stereotypical view of cultural difference. In the following excerpt the student described how the people used water as a cure for scabies, ringworm and open wounds and how they went about telling them to change their practice:

*'(we) told them 'don't do it, clean it gently and use a bit of bethadine and cover it up' whatever, but it took a while, it took a couple of days for her to get used to not scrubbing the wound with water. There was no aseptic technique or anything, it was really really backward compared to here...'* (FG, 2004)

It was clear that they judged the health practices in the service learning culture as primitive in the context of western practices. This is also evident in the following excerpt where the student implies that the rules and regulations concerning health care practices in the west are ignored in the refugee camp; clearly the different cultural context in which she found herself was not fully understood.

*'Like we would be ...not prescribing medicines, but giving them out, like what a pharmacist does here, and no-one would even bat an eyelid, as in it was just...ok, ye'll get the list off the doctor, and ye give them out, whereas here you need a four-year degree, and it's huge...Like in (Ireland) if I went behind the counter and started loading out medications, like you'd be put in jail! But over there, you'll be given the list, and put them in the bag. It's very lacksy daisy over there, when it comes to rules...'* (FG 2, 2006)

Some students described how they felt more mature, confident and able to handle difficult situations in a better way as a result of their service learning experience.

*'...And you do get stronger. I'm not saying you get used to people dying, you never are going to, but I just got better able to deal with it, be part of wrapping the body, and doing things like that, rather than running away. You're just better....I feel like I'm more...what's the word....I don't know, more.... I've learned a lot – like just with that issue of like death, and that kind of thing, to be able to talk about it a lot more...'* (FG 2, 2006)

Most students reported that the service learning experience had prompted them to reflect on their own life trajectory and to value certain aspects of their lives for example the importance of family:

*'...generally the overall experience, not just as part of nursing, but you know in terms of your whole life, it just helps you to take stock of things...'* (FG 1, 2004)

//////////

## Discussion

The findings from the qualitative study revealed the extent to which a service learning placement can contribute to student learning. All students demonstrated enhanced cultural understanding, personal and professional growth. It was clear that living and working in a different culture required students to confront their own cultural beliefs and to judge these in light of their new experiences. While a few students remained ethnocentric in their perspectives most students were open to new learning and were able to articulate the positive and negative aspects of each culture. As noted previously all students were requested to maintain a reflective diary while on placement. Such a diary is important because it enables students to examine their own beliefs and values in the context of experience and literature. There is clear evidence from student's accounts, that they were sensitive to the needs of people and of the personal growth achieved as a result of the experience. A number of students have maintained their relationship with the service learning sites following placement, and have continued to fundraise for activities there. Indeed some students intend to go back again when they complete their nurse education. This commitment to the needs of others and the motivation to help those who are less privileged is central to this service learning placement.

There are clearly risks associated with sending students abroad to undertake a service learning placement. These include personal safety issues, threats to health and the potential that the stress of living in a different culture may be too much for a student. Taking cognisance of these issues which arose from student and lecturers' feedback and experiences, some modifications have been made to the module content since its initial inception. For example a greater emphasis is now placed on personal health and safety issues, culture shock, racism and health and human rights. In addition during the theoretical stage of the module students are required to make a class presentation on their intended service learning country/ community. This helps to focus and prepare students for some of the cultural differences they may encounter in advance of their placement. Students also maintain contact with the Nursing Department now via a virtual learning environment (VLE) whilst on placement.

The use of the internet-based VLE is a new initiative piloted with the current cohort of students. Initial reports indicate that students and lecturers are positive about using this method. Students felt that it was reassuring to be in contact with their home lecturer. Furthermore the VLE allowed them to compare experiences 'on the spot' with students in different locations. This was comforting for students who realised their classmates were having similar concerns and experiences; the sharing of information allowed them to help each other. Lecturers felt that the VLE allowed a quick response to students queries, permitted almost instantaneous encouragement to be given. It had the added benefit of enabling on-going monitoring of students whilst in their service learning site. It was also used as a logistics and communications tool: lecturers could learn electronically from students that they had safely arrived at their destination, had met their link person and were coping in their new environments.

While students have been permitted to go to sites which have not been visited by the module team, a careful appraisal of suitability, the setting up of a link person and a commitment to support students are essential before sites can be approved. Assessing site/placement suitability and ensuring a reciprocal relationship between NUI, Galway and the service learning sites are important considerations. Mindful of this, in 2006 the Centre for Teaching and Learning in NUI, Galway funded a research trip to Africa so that a needs analysis could be undertaken across placement sites in Zambia and Kenya. The students when on placement do work in sites and they bring the money that they raised in Ireland to the site, however it is believed that this is not enough and that the needs of sites rather than those of the students should drive developments. Undertaking a needs analysis in sites allowed key priorities for each site to be identified. These priorities included assistance with pain management in palliative care; although the nurses are very knowledgeable as to the theory of effective pain management few were enacting this in practice. Educational and teaching resources for nurses, in the form of books, and computer technology were also identified as a key priority. Following the visit and discussion with managers and staff it was clear that all priorities were underpinned by capacity building and the central aim was to generate self-sufficiency. It was agreed that having students on service learning placements was a welcome initiative and they were eager for this to continue. Work is continuing at present with the service learning communities to help them to meet their priority needs mentioned above.

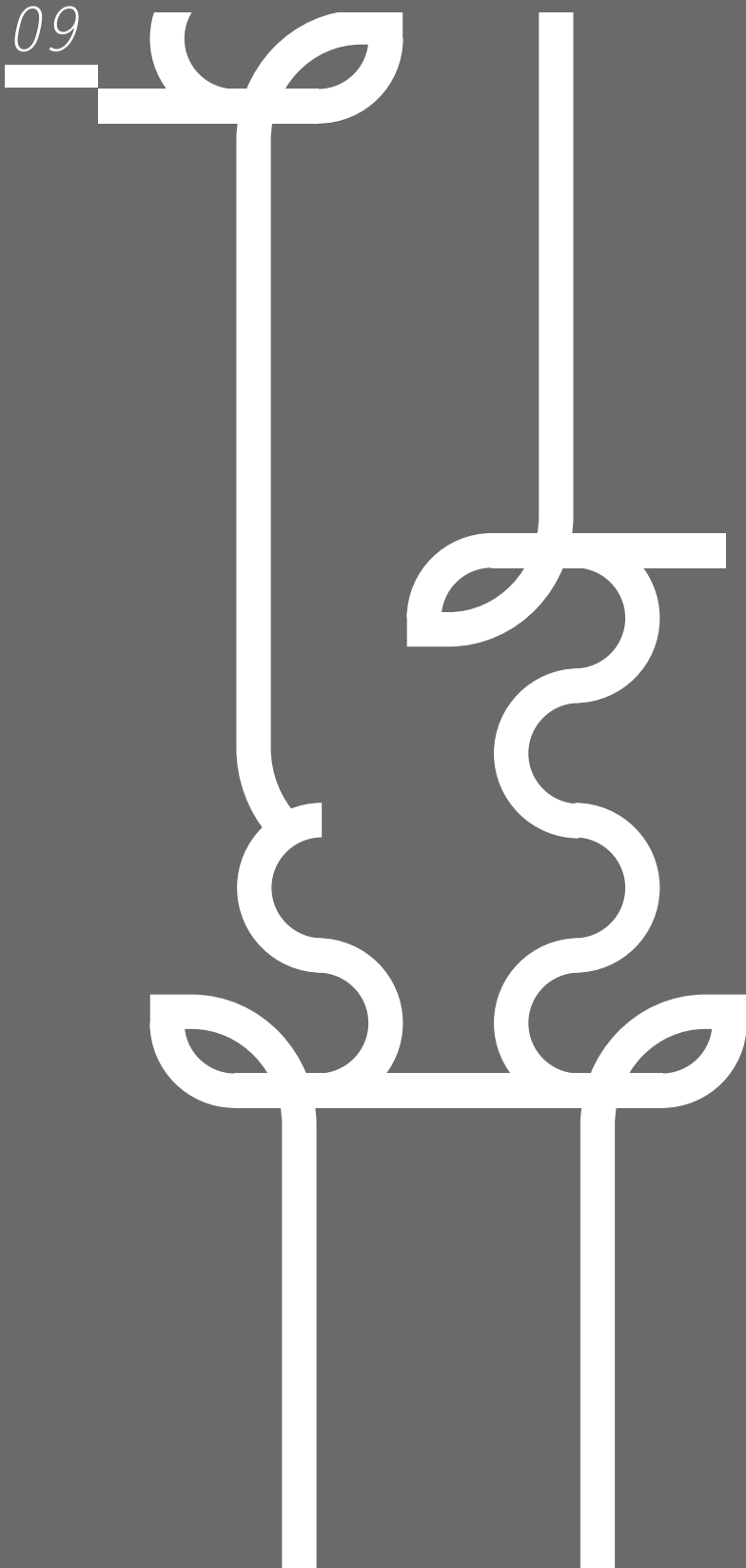
Overall the students who participate in this service learning module experience both personal and professional development and bring back important knowledge, skills and understanding to the Irish Health system. The findings from the research so far demonstrate this clearly. In addition the service learning partners are simultaneously benefiting from the presence of these students who bring not just financial assistance,

but also new ideas and knowledge to the sites. The students help cement existing relationships and create a sustained awareness in the student body in NUI, Galway of the health care issues facing their service learning partners. The indications are that these students are on the way to becoming more responsible citizens of the world. Indeed two of our past student when they qualified returned to work in their service learning sites, one returned to Belize, South America and the second student returned to Zambia. In the next chapter the latter student, Siobhan Lynch gives a detailed account of her experience of undertaking the service learning placement when she was undergraduate nursing student at NUI, Galway.

## Bibliography

- Burnard P., (1991) 'A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research' in *Nurse Education Today*. 11, 6, 461-466.
- Callister, L.C., Hobbins-Garbett, D., (2000) 'Enter to learn, go forth to serve: Service learning in nursing education' in *Journal of Professional Nursing*. 16, 3, 177-183.
- Casey, D., (1999a) 'Community development in the Third World - walking a fine line' in *Development in Practice*. 9, 4, 461-467
- Casey, D. (1999b) 'The Kosovo Crisis: Assessing conditions in Albania' in *Irish Nurse*. 2, 4, 12-16.
- Casey, D., and Murphy, K. (2005) "Developing cultural understanding in nurse education programmes in the Irish context." *Irish Nurse*. 7, 3, 18-21.
- Cortis, J. (2004) 'Meeting the needs of minority ethnic patients' in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 48, 1, 51-58.
- Duffy M.E. (2001) 'A critique of cultural education in nursing' in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 36, 4, 487-495.
- Eyler, J. & Giles, J. (1999) *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Haloburdon, E. and Thompson, A. (1998) 'A comparison of international learning experiences for Baccalaureate Nursing students: Developed and developing countries' in *Journal of Nursing Education*. 37, 1, 13-21.
- McGrath B.B. (1998) 'Illness as a problem of meaning: moving culture from the classroom to the clinic' in *Advances in Nursing Science* 21, 2, 17-29.
- Murphy K, and McLeod Clarke J. (1993) 'Nurses Experiences of caring for ethnic minority clients' in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 18, 3, 442-450
- Ozolins, L. and Hajelm, K. (2003) 'Nurses' experiences of problematic situations with migrants in emergency care in Sweden' in *Clinical effectiveness in nursing*. 7, 84-93.
- Price, K and Cortis, J. (2000) 'The way forward for transcultural nursing' in *Nurse Education Today*. 20, 3, 233-243.
- Rajan, MF. Juneau. (1995) 'Transcultural nursing: a perspective derived from Jean-Paul Sarte' in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 22, 3, 450-455.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000) 'Focus on research methods: Whatever happened to qualitative description?' in *Research in Nursing and Health*. 23, 4, 334-340.
- Taylor E.W. (1994) 'A learning model for becoming interculturally competent' in *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 18, 3, 389-408.

# Student Insights into Service Learning & The Zambian Experience



# Student Insights into Service Learning & The Zambian Experience

**Meabh Sheridan**

*Nursing Graduate of National University of Ireland, Galway*

**Siobhan Lynch**

*Nursing Graduate of National University of Ireland, Galway*

//////////

## Introduction

Every year students enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing Science programme at NUI, Galway are given the option of undertaking an elective service learning module entitled 'International Nursing: Nursing in the Developed and Developing Worlds'. This chapter is about the service learning experience of two nursing students, Siobhan Lynch and Meabh Sheridan who went to Zambia, Africa and is based on their personal reflective accounts.

//////////

## The Beginning

In June 2006 the Department of Nursing & Midwifery NUI, Galway gave us the opportunity to carry out our service learning placement in a hospice caring for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) patients in Zambia. The project sounded dynamic and we were sure it would prove a challenging experience.

//////////

## Expectations & Concerns

The first concern we had was how to raise enough money to cover our own flights and also to raise money for the service learning community. We decided to hold one main fund-raising event; this was done in collaboration with Meabh's parents with whom we organised an art exhibition; over one weekend we raised €6,000. Once this was completed we then received all the necessary vaccinations, organised our health insurance and booked our flights. From the moment I dreamed of becoming a nurse I had always seen myself working in Africa and now I was actually going there!

On the plane flying over northern Africa, making our way down to Zambia we really had no idea what tomorrow would bring; we were both excited and nervous. We had some concerns like what would our house be like? What would the other volunteer from America be like and how would we all get along sharing our accommodation together. We also had the perception that Africa was a dangerous continent a fear learnt from the media. As we sat on the plane surrounded by Zambians we also became very aware of the colour of our own white skin. In Ireland, it is only in recent years that the population of black people has increased, but still there are not that many black people where we live; we would still often find ourselves looking at black people because the colour of their skin makes them more noticeable. We wondered what we would feel like now that we were going to be the ones with the different coloured skin and we were going to 'stand out' and be the ones being looked at. For the first time in our life we realised that we were going to be members of the minority grouping, going to be the 'other', and we wondered how we would cope with this. However, we soon realised that we need not have worried.

//////////

## Background Information

The health system in Zambia consists of 72 district health boards responsible for the direct provision or commissioning of health services. These health systems are provided through a network of health centres and hospitals on a private, public and missioners level. In Kabwe where we were based there were two hospitals: Kabwe General Hospital, which was a public hospital and the Mine Hospital which was private; in the latter, one had to pay for treatment.

The major health crisis facing Zambia at present is the AIDS epidemic: 13.5% –20% of Zambians aged 15-49 years are living with HIV (WHO, 2005). This means that much of the country's potential workforce is either very ill or dead; a population of grandmothers are now left caring for their children's orphans. The struggle to tackle the HIV/AIDS problem is further exacerbated by the presence of poverty, gender inequalities and the lack of education which hinders the growth of sexual health awareness, prevention and treatment. The first government intervention addressing HIV/ AIDS came in the late 1980's when a safe blood scheme was set up and all hospitals were provided with blood transfusion facilities. Subsequently in 2002 the government realised the need for free antiretroviral drugs (ARV) and purchased ARV's for 10,000 people costing US\$ 3 million. In 2004, the government announced that ARV's would be free for all in the public sector and in 2005 the government announced that the entire ARV therapy service package was free i.e. counselling, x-rays, and CD4 count (a blood test that measures the strength of a person's immune system). During our visit we found that these services were available to people however there were problems. The first was of these was the stigma associated with being HIV positive; this meant that many people even after taking the step to be tested, if positive, did not attend treatment. Secondly before commencing ARV drugs a patient must have a chest x-ray, CD4 count and full blood count. This is not difficult for patients who live in the towns where x-ray machines and CD4 count machines are readily available; however, it is a major obstacle for people from rural areas. Where we were based the one CD4 count machine in Kabwe was often broken so people coming in from the countryside, having made the journey, were often turned away; they left discouraged and unlikely to make the trip again. Thirdly, once a patient is started on the ARV's they need to take their medication every day for the rest of their lives; if the medication is to work they need to receive good nutrition. Unfortunately having access to adequate nutrition is a problem for most people in Zambia; many people also do not consistently take their medication. This stopping and starting of ARV treatment therefore can result in the person becoming resistant to the first line drugs.

//////////

## The Hospice

Kabwe is located two hours north of Lusaka. The road linking Lusaka to Kabwe is long and winding. Even though we had missed out on a night's sleep we managed to stay awake for parts of the journey. The landscape that filled our view consisted mainly of very dry earth. Our first impressions were how friendly, open, kind and respectful the people were. When we drove past communities the children on the side of the road in particular would start waving and clapping in excitement. Our accommodation was located in Longwonge just outside the town. It was basic but adequate, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. We shared the house with another volunteer James, who had been working in Kabwe since November.

The next morning we were collected for our first day's work at the Ranchod Hospice. The road leading to the Hospice was covered in dust and was full of potholes. The Hospice was a bungalow-like structure behind security gates. It consisted of a clinical

room where VCT (voluntary counselling testing) and counselling took place. There was also a large unit which held all the medications. There were four wards, two which held five to seven patients and two which had two beds. In Ireland hospices, in our experience, are places where people go to die. We were surprised therefore to find that here, people came not only to spend their last days but also to receive counselling, support, medicine and food, and to improve their overall state of health.

When a person wants to be admitted to the Hospice they contact the Home Based Care Unit located within the community (similar to the role of the public health nurse in Ireland). The patient is then collected from the community and a family member would also come along to help them. When the patient is admitted he or she is weighed and temperature is taken and recorded. Some patients weigh as little as 30kg. The Hospice provides counselling where people can be tested for HIV in confidence. With a HIV test a blood sample is taken and the person is told instantly whether he/she is positive or not. If a person is positive they are given medicine and some nutrition and in most cases they return home. Next to the hospice there is a school for orphaned and vulnerable children aged between four and seven years. Most of the children are double orphaned in that both parents have died of HIV/AIDS. These children were being looked after by grandmothers and other relatives or neighbours called 'The Busy Bees' who also have children of their own.

//////////

## Our Experience

A typical day for us began at 7.30 am. There was a strong catholic ethos in the Hospice and every day before morning report was given the night nurse prayed aloud with everyone. She then escorted us around the wards where she would report on each patient, how they slept, if they had eaten and if there was any changes in their condition. We then made the beds and cleaned the rooms. All rooms were cleaned thoroughly. This chore involved the staff nurses, the caregivers and the family members. At noon each day the drugs rounds took place and this gave us the opportunity to learn more about the medications which are effective in treating the opportunistic infections that regularly arise when a patient has HIV/AIDS. At 1pm lunch was served to the patients. It usually consisted of their staple food nshima (a corn based food), dried fish called kapenta and vegetables. The afternoon was the quieter part of the day and it gave us the opportunity to talk to the patients and to learn more about them and their families. One thing we noticed very early on was that they never complained about pain; it was only when asked that they admitted they were suffering.

Initially during the first week we were treated as different and got special treatment from the staff in the hospice because we were 'white'. For example, the chef cooked different lunches for us because we wouldn't be used to their type of food and we might not eat it. We repeatedly told him that we didn't want any 'special treatment' and soon, once he realised that we were going to be there for 4 weeks and not just passing through like other volunteers (who only came for a few days or a week) he began to give us the same food as everybody else. We were delighted with this as it made us feel part of the place and like everyone else. We placed ourselves on the duty roster which meant that we were looked upon as part of the staff and very shortly we felt that the colour of our skin didn't make any difference; we were being accepted based on who we were rather than how we looked.. We also did one week of night duty. This had its highs and lows but overall it presented the opportunity to learn more and we grew a lot closer to our patients and co-workers developing real friendships that continued long after we returned home to Ireland.

Dying and death was one of the main issues that Meabh and I faced on a daily basis and we both struggled to deal with this and the cultural differences surrounding death. Shortly after we arrived we were in the room when a patient died and the mother of the patient started to cry. I was so unsure of what to do and was very scared of over stepping some cultural



boundaries so I did not approach the mother. Maebh however went over and held, comforted and cried with the mother which was the appropriate thing to do. We realised that some issues are cross-cultural, and being supportive and providing comfort are important irrespective of cultural context. However, later that day when a second patient died the nurses would not let us stay as we had shown 'too much emotion and that this was not appropriate'; in their view, we as nurses we had to 'stay strong and not show emotion'. Maebh noted the following in her reflective diary about this incident:

*'... today two of the patients died. I went to comfort one of the patient's family members and found myself in an emotional state. When the nurse in charge saw my reaction she told me it was a daily occurrence and I would have to learn to face it without becoming emotionally involved. Sometimes it was easier when the patient was prepared to go, but when it was not expected - that I found difficult...I began to realize death will always be a part of my nursing role.'*

Shortly after our arrival we realised how little we knew about HIV/AIDS. Despite the fact that we had been instructed to read up on our intended service learning site, our fundraising efforts and plans meant that we did not focus enough on this aspect of preparation. Having never nursed or been in contact (knowingly) with anyone living with HIV, we were unsure of our role as caregivers. On one of our first days a man stopped to chat to us and he told us that he was HIV positive and asked us what he could do. We were still in the early days and knew little about the health care systems or even HIV. We told him what we could but also realised that we had a lot to learn and we had to learn it fast, which we did. We soon realised that the basic needs of a person with HIV/AIDS, are similar to other patients whom we had cared for in Ireland in terms of providing emotional support, education and promoting self-development.

## ////////// Differences And Similarities

There are many differences between the Zambian health care system and the Irish one. One particular difference is the involvement of the patient's family. In Zambia when a patient is admitted he/she is assisted by a family member or a neighbour called a 'bedsider'. This person plays a major role in caring for the patient, washing them, plaiting their hair, attending to personal hygiene issues and sleeping beside their relatives on the floor every night. They did everything to make their relative as comfortable as possible. Another major difference was the lack of available medicines. At times in Zambia patients suffered from severe oedema in their legs, lungs and abdomen and required medication to alleviate the symptoms. Such drugs are readily available in Ireland but not in Zambia. Other conditions such as diarrhoea are resolved almost instantly in Ireland however in Zambia it is usually a chronic and untreatable condition and ultimately contributes to early mortality. Furthermore there was only one doctor and he visited the Hospice only on Monday mornings; at other times there was no doctor in the Hospice.

English is one of the main languages in Zambia, however 73 other languages are spoken. In Kabwe, Bemba and English are the main languages spoken. There was no difficulty in communicating with patients in the Hospice, indeed we developed a fun and caring friendship with patients through using hand gestures, touch and facial expressions. We did learn a bit of Bemba and we could greet people and we found that people respected us more for trying to communicate in their native tongue, even if it was only a few words. It was a bit more difficult at the Outreach Clinics as we didn't have time to develop long term relationships with individuals and the majority of country people had little or no English; however we were helped by the care-givers who translated for us.

Zambian society is patriarchal in power structure however it is the women who are the bread-winners. Gender inequalities are very evident; for example men are not expected to support the family and it is accepted that they keep any money they earn for themselves. Inequalities are also evident in relationships; women are expected to be completely monogamous and faithful to their husbands however infidelity on behalf of the male is accepted. When a girl hits puberty she is initiated by the older women in the community, and is taught about what it is to be a woman, sexual intercourse and the rearing of children. Some of the caregivers gave us little snippets of the topics covered in the sex education sessions given prior to marriage and they stressed to us that it was very important that the expectant bride had sex education as 'if you are not good at having sex your husband will find another woman'. Coming from a country where sex is not openly discussed and is still a rather taboo subject with the older generation, it was refreshing to see the older women openly discuss such topics. Some women told us that their husbands would not use condoms as 'only prostitutes wear condoms'. Fifty four per cent of Zambians living with HIV are women; in the age group 14 to 19, girls are six times more likely to be living with HIV (WHO, 2005). It is clear that some of the sexual beliefs are therefore having a negative impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS.

During our ten weeks in Zambia we learnt something new every hour of every day. We interacted with people from a different culture, gained confidence in our basic nursing skills, learnt how to care for people living with HIV or dying from AIDS and at times managed a hospice. Caring holistically for a patient means that you ensure they are comfortable in bed, have adequate nutrition and are in a clean environment. It was all new in one sense, yet all very similar too; our experience made us more aware of this and we also realised the importance of the 'little things' in nursing.

In Ireland we had learnt how to give intramuscular injections (IM's) in the clinical skills labs in our university but had never given them to real patients as most medication at home are given orally or intravenously. In Zambia the nurses worked with us and showed us how to give IM's to patients; as a result we are now very confident and competent in this skill. The education however was not just a one way process as the nurses and caregivers also learned from us; e.g. there was a little seven year old girl who we became very close to but sadly she died; afterwards the sister in charge of the Hospice approached us and thanked us for caring for her so well and said that by our actions we had showed them how to provide real care and love for patients.



## Conclusion

It is very difficult to convey the full human and emotional impact of our service learning experience. We now have a better understanding of the complexities of health care delivery in a developing country and the wider socio-political context that influences this care. The main ingredient for a successful learning experience in our view is for students to go to their service learning site with an 'open mind'. This entire experience challenged us at a personal and cultural level, and we developed maturity and independence, adapted to a whole new world and learnt about health/nursing care from another perspective. We cannot recommend this experience highly enough and encourage students to avail of the chance to participate in this dynamic learning opportunity.

## Bibliography

WHO (2005) *World Health Statistics*. World Health Organization, Geneva.  
[http://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/whostat2005\\_coverage\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/whostat2005_coverage_en.pdf) (Accessed October 2006)

# Section Two

## *Case Studies*

### *Case Study Three*

## Models & Modelling Civic Engagement

*10* *11* *12* *13*



Section Two  
*Case Studies*

*Case Study Three*  
Models & Modelling  
Civic Engagement

10   11   12   13

# Learning from Life: The Uaneen Experience in DCU

10



# Learning from Life: The Uaneen Experience in DCU

**Jean Hughes**

*Dublin City University*

**Una Redmond**

*Dublin City University*

//////////

## Introduction

Students at Dublin City University (DCU) in Ireland have a unique opportunity to earn academic credit from engaging in extra-curricular activities. The Uaneen Module enables students, through the submission of a reflective portfolio, to demonstrate learning achieved through involvement in sporting, social, and citizenship activities. This chapter traces the development of the Uaneen Module, from its origins as a stand alone award, to a credit-bearing module available to most final year DCU students. The chapter also discusses the challenges posed in sustaining a module such as this which is not 'owned' by any School or Faculty but available to all.

//////////

## Background

DCU has a strong community and active-citizenship focus with many initiatives in place to ensure it delivers on its civic remit. While many activities have developed in addition to the 'traditional' curriculum, in recent years efforts have been made to integrate related activities into the core curriculum. The Learning Innovation Strategic Plan, 2005-2008, states that: "DCU is a partnership involving all its students and staff in the creation of a uniquely positive learning environment that challenges and informs them and equips students to make an outstanding contribution to civic, cultural and economic well-being".

The university is engaged in a number of initiatives to deliver on this ambitious strategic objective. These include a HEA Strategic Initiatives project to establish a Service Learning Academy and a SIF 1 project addressing a number of initiatives in the Active Citizenship, Service Learning and Community Engagement area. To assist in the integration of community-focussed learning opportunities into core curricular activities, a comprehensive set of guidelines for academic staff was developed in 2008. The guidelines were derived from discussion and consultation with academic staff who had already used service learning as pedagogy. They aim to address issues such as how to assess such learning, how to engage with community partners, how to achieve equivalence of student effort, assessment and learning with other, more classroom-based pedagogies and in particular what worked, what did not, what to expect and what to avoid.

Of all of the DCU activity in the general Service Learning area, the Uaneen Module is perhaps one of the best illustrations of the philosophy espoused above. Students have a unique opportunity to earn academic credit for activities engaged in outside of their formal learning context. The experience of the Uaneen module has provided DCU staff with many learning opportunities and also with many challenges and problems, typical, perhaps, of any initiative which sits outside the 'traditional' academic structure. This chapter will discuss the Uaneen Module, its origins, development, structure and value, as well as the issues regarding resourcing, managing and quality assuring a module which is owned by no one school, but potentially available to all. In the context of the requirements of the Bologna Agreement, increased flexibility of both learning pathways and content and more modular curricula, the challenges posed by the Uaneen Module are brought into even sharper focus.

//////////

## The Uaneen Module

Uaneen Fitzsimons was a DCU alumna, who carved out a successful media career and who died tragically in a car accident in November 2000. The module, which was originally designed to recognise and reward extra curricular activity by DCU students, was in development at the time of her death and was named in her memory. It is now available for academic credit, as well as non-credited recognition of extra curricular activity. The initial aim of this module was to recognise an student's contribution to activities outside the classroom, with a long term view to awarding academic accreditation for the learning derived from such activities. Originally, the main goal was to make visible and recognise the many 'soft' and/or transferrable skills which students acquired by engaging in extra curricular activities, but which were outside of the formal assessment and accreditation processes. While such skills were increasingly seen as necessary graduate attributes, at the time it was still relatively unusual for them to be incorporated formally into programmes of study. The Uaneen Module sought to acknowledge the acquisition of such valuable skills outside of the core curriculum and to provide students with additional recognition for these skills. While originally students were presented with a separate certificate, the Uaneen module grade is now incorporated into a students' overall results transcript. However, a separate Uaneen Awards Ceremony is still held for all those who participate in the module and is still faithfully attended by the parents of Uaneen Fitzsimons.

As the soft skills mentioned above have become more integrated into the 'normal' curriculum and indeed are explicitly required outcomes under the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), the module now focuses more on reflective learning and the personal development of the individual. As well as documenting and describing activities, students are required to reflect on the learning and personal development which has been effected through their extra-curricular activities.

The aims of the module are to:

- recognise the commitment to extra-curricular activity as well as the personal development derived from this activity,
- encourage participation and active involvement in extra- curricular activity so as to achieve that personal development.

//////////

## Development Of The Uaneen Module

The first Extra Curricular Awards were presented in 2001 by the University President, at a ceremony prior to the Graduation Ball. There were over 70 awards presented, classified as follows:

- Award for Participation in, and contribution to, Extra Curricular Activity;
- Award for Excellence in Extra Curricular Activity;
- Award for Outstanding Excellence in Extra Curricular Activity.

In 2002, the awards were presented using the same classification system, but the numbers had dropped to just over 20. In November 2002, following a comprehensive review, a sub committee was established to promote the Awards. It reported in early 2003 and recommended that the awards be re-launched with a new identity and that the administrative duties associated with the scheme, formerly distributed amongst a number of people, be supported by a dedicated post. In April 2003, the Uaneen Awards were launched in the Helix by Maurice Pratt, then President of IBEC and the ceremony was attended by Uaneen Fitzsimons' family. At that time 70 students received Uaneen Awards, using a more streamlined classification system of Gold, Silver and Bronze, reflecting different levels of engagement.

In a significant development, 2004 saw the awards formally approved by DCU's Academic Council, albeit for additional credit only and 46 students successfully gained either 2.5, 5 or 7.5 ECTS credits that year. Another important development that year saw the inclusion of the module results on the student results transcripts and the presentation of the award as part of the Graduation Ceremony. The same situation pertained in 2005, when 71 students received additional credits for their involvement in Extra Curricular activities.

In 2006, following approval by Academic Council, the Uaneen Module was formally approved as an elective module for students in their final year. In effect, this means that any programme which has elective modules in its final year may include the Uaneen Module as one of those electives. In November 2006, 51 students completed the module and this number increased to 73 in 2007.

//////////

## The Uaneen Module In Operation

Care has been taken to avoid limiting the scope of activities which can be incorporated into the Uaneen Module, because it is believed that all extra curricular activity enables the development of a variety of skills which complement those developed through formal learning. Typically, extra-curricular activities include: involvement with University and other clubs and societies; sports; recreation; hobbies; community activities, amongst others. The activities which students have chosen to include in their portfolios are many and varied, but include sports and leisure activities, employment, community engagement, volunteering, organising and charity work. The skills gained from involvement in activities range from simply learning new things, to effectively running and developing a club, fundraising, event management, fulfilling personal and team achievements, and sporting excellence. Typically, students who choose to pursue the Uaneen Module are involved in particular activities to a very deep level, beyond simple membership or participation. In general, such students hold roles such as Chair Person, Co-ordinator, Manager, Captain etc. An alternative grouping tends to be those who have a great range or breadth of involvement, engaging in numerous different activities.

It is often the case that the first task for a student undertaking the module is to decide how many of their many activities should be included in their portfolio, so that there is enough room for reflection as well as description. Another challenge is to focus reflection on how their activities have affected them personally and in the development of their perspectives, skills and competencies which they would not otherwise have gained. As is typical when knowledge is tacit (Polyani, 1983), it can be difficult to draw it out and analyse it and students are provided with training in reflection to assist this process.

### Eligibility

The Uaneen Module is a 5 ECTS<sup>18</sup> module which is currently open to all final year students either at undergraduate or postgraduate level as a non-contributory module. However, students who have an elective module option in the final year of their programme of study can elect to take this module for credit. So, in any cohort of Uaneen participants, there is a mixture of those doing it for core academic credit and those doing it for additional credit.

### Supporting the Module

Each year, the Uaneen Module process is refined to improve the delivery of the module and provide the level of support required to aid students in the preparation of their portfolios. It should also be stated here that each year adaptations are required depending on student numbers and availability of support. In order to support and equip the students with the necessary skills to complete their portfolios, the students are required to attend 3-4 workshops and partake in a mentoring programme.

<sup>18</sup> ECTS - European Credit Transfer System, a European-wide system for equating student work with academic credit. ECTS is becoming the standard system across European Higher Education.



The workshops are delivered in the following areas:

- Introduction to the Uaneen Module.
- Reflective Practice.
- Reflective Writing Skills and Portfolio Preparation.

Until 2007, workshop facilitators were selected based on their expertise and willingness to volunteer their time. In 2007, some funding was received to enable payment to individuals to deliver workshops in reflective practice and this is also the case in 2008.

### **Mentors**

During the academic year 2006/2007, a pilot mentoring scheme was offered to students who wished to avail of a mentor. As a result of the improved quality of writing by those who availed of a mentor and the evaluation of the feedback received from both parties, it was decided to make mentoring compulsory. Training is delivered to mentors and they are provided with a detailed outline of the content and requirements of the module. The mentor is required to manage the relationship and facilitate, observe and encourage rather than instruct, direct or restrict the student. The mentor is not a supervisor and is not required to read or critique a student's portfolio, although some do. The mentor does not contribute to a student's grade for the module.

The mentors have been selected based on their related experience and interest. When the mentor scheme was being piloted staff, who had, or were currently, participating in DCU's Teaching Portfolio Course, which is primarily designed to develop reflective teaching practice, were invited to volunteer as Uaneen Mentors. The role was put forward as a way for staff to further develop their reflective abilities through supporting a reflective student learning process. Mentors currently mentor the students over a six week period. They are required to guide, support, steer and focus the students and facilitate them in reflecting more deeply in their writing. Communication can be in the form of telephone, e-mail or one-to-one meetings or a mixture of these methods. In order to protect the mentor from being overwhelmed, a maximum of 4 meetings is recommended. A mentor determines the number of mentees allocated to them and currently mentoring is a purely voluntary activity.

### **Portfolio**

The student is required to demonstrate, through submission of the portfolio, the learning derived in a significant way from any extra curricular activities/life experiences that have contributed to their growth and development during their period of study at DCU. The portfolio must consist of two sections including a log of activities and a reflection section.

The Uaneen Steering Committee provides strategic direction for the Uaneen Module. Individual members are expected to:

- Act as a liaison person between the Uaneen Module and various departments in the University,
- Provide support and guidance for the Committee based on their area of expertise, e.g. registry procedures, student activities, marketing expertise and careers advice.
- Act as an advocate for the value of extra curricular activities in general and the Uaneen module, in particular, in different areas of the University.

### Assessment and Grading

Uaneen examiners are selected on the basis of their expertise and their direct involvement with the module and comprise the Module Progression and Awards Board (PAB). The number of portfolios to be marked each year is dependent on the number of registered students. Two examiners mark all portfolios and the rest of the examiners each mark half of the total number of portfolios. The external examiner is sent a sample number to mark. All examiners are involved on a voluntary basis.

//////////

### The Value Of The Uaneen Module

The Uaneen Module is a valuable learning experience, providing students with opportunities to acquire transferrable skills in a personal context, skills which will stand to them regardless of their chosen career paths. The value of the module is appreciated by both students and employers and an example of a former student's perspective as well as the view of IBEC (The Irish Business and Employers Confederation) is given below.

"The greatest value for me, of completing the Uaneen Module in my final year at DCU, was as a structured way of reviewing the tremendous personal development I had achieved by participating in extra-curricular life. The Uaneen module helped me to assess how aspects of involvement in clubs and societies had benefited me and how much of a bonus extra-curricular participation had been to my education. I thoroughly recommend completing the Uaneen Module to any student who has been involved in Clubs or Societies. It's an interesting and rewarding reflection on the diversity and value of your accomplishments while at DCU and an insightful review of your own development". *Donal Mulligan, Lecturer in Multi Media DCU, Graduated in 2005 with B.Sc. (hons) in Multi Media and a first class honours Uaneen Module (contributing)*

"With an ever evolving employment market, the development of transferrable skills and competencies within an academic framework is a key strength for Ireland's future workforce. By recognising the importance of extra curricular activities, DCU has shown foresight in ensuring that its graduates are part of a comprehensive educational experience and the university has once again proven itself to be ahead of the curve in recognising the importance of an holistic approach to education. I am delighted to be involved in this initiative and wholeheartedly support the continued success of the Uaneen Module". *Nicola Horgan, Director, IBEC Graduate Placement and Chair, Uaneen Committee, DCU*

//////////

### Sustainability

It should be apparent that the Uaneen Module has been developing and changing since its inception. Initially, change occurred due to its increased profile and value, ultimately resulting in it being formally recognised and approved through traditional academic structures. Change has also occurred in response to higher and lower student number and has been necessitated by shifting circumstances, in particular resourcing and support issues. It is an interesting observation that a module designed to recognise and reward extra curricular student activity, has survived and thrived essentially as an extra curricular activity of a number of interested and committed staff! While some administrative support has been available for the module, the mentors, workshop facilitators, examiners and committee members have mostly given of their time freely and generously. The success of the module can be attributed to this altruistic model of engagement and the value of this should not be under estimated. However, such a model is not without risk, and indeed imposes a number of constraints which need to be addressed in order to ensure the sustainability of the module into the future.

Because the module is not owned by any one programme, it does not have the funding model or flow of resources which support 'traditional' programmes and modules.

The number of students participating, especially for credit (and therefore funded), per School does not tend to represent a critical mass to justify allocating scarce School resources to their support. While the Uaneen Committee and in particular the PAB, bring consistency and rigour to the module, the current model may have inherent problems due to a lack of structure and rigour associated, in particular, with the role of mentors and the issue of consistency of student experience. Some mentors become very actively engaged with students, providing ongoing guidance and feedback, while others play a more detached role. Ideally mentors would act as supervisors, also playing a role in marking the final portfolios, but this is difficult to implement when mentors are essentially volunteers and making the role more structured and demanding, may make it less attractive.

//////////

## Structures

DCU has committed to implementing a more flexible curriculum with increased student choice, in terms of both learning pathways and tailored content. Having been the first university in Ireland to modularise and semesterise (in 1997), it is committed to fully realising the flexible learning benefits of such modularisation, which have been relatively limited to date. An increased focus on modules, flexibility and individual student pathways challenges traditional structures, perhaps none more so than funding models. The challenge of resourcing increased choice, even within existing Schools and programmes, is not trivial, but is particularly problematic when a module is 'standalone'. While the Uaneen Module is the most well-established stand alone, cross-university module in DCU, the university intends to develop and have available more such modules, from General Education modules such as Research and Study Skills, to modules developed through the Academic Themes such as Creativity or Sustainability. Such modules sit outside the normal programme structures, but still require examination, progression and award structures to evaluate achievement and contribution to the core programme of study.

Academic credibility is of paramount importance to any programme of learning, but of particular concern with respect to any offering outside of the 'normal' structures. The lack of a 'supervisor equivalent' for the Uaneen portfolios makes it difficult to insist on the most rigorous academic approaches and could allow for inappropriate variability. For example, it is desirable that all students would submit a short outline and draft of their portfolio early in the process, so that a supervisor could provide timely, formative feedback. This would also have the effect of ensuring that students do not leave the commencement of their portfolio to the last minute - iteration and revision being key to successful reflective writing. As mentioned earlier, a delicate balance has had to be struck between having a willing cohort of suitable mentors and making the process too onerous. To date there are no concerns about rigour and integrity but this is mostly due to the good will and commitment of the relevant individuals. The number of participants and the commitment of the Uaneen Committee have also ensured the integrity of the process. However, risk occurs if student numbers increase significantly or availability of staff volunteers goes down.

//////////

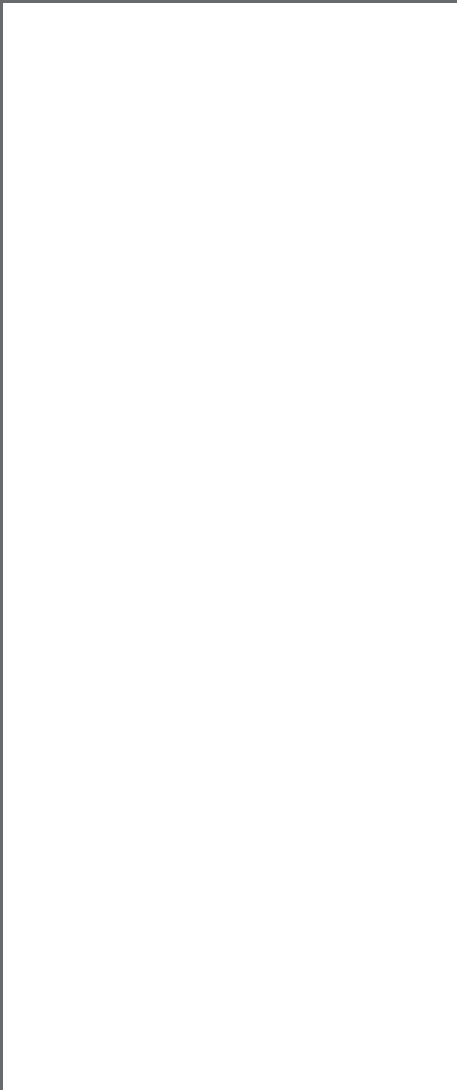
## Going Forward

The way in which the Uaneen Module has developed is perhaps reflective of the intent behind the module, its unique focus on non-academic activity and a holistic perspective of student development. It is arguable that if the module had been established through more formal procedures it may not have been so successful or have developed its particular ethos. However, the very structure that has served it so well could be its undoing, unless it is formalised with appropriate resourcing. It is questionable whether Uaneen could incorporate increased student participation, but there is no doubt that future standalone modules will need an appropriate academic and resourcing model to ensure their viability and success. Currently an Uaneen Fellowship is in place to review the Uaneen Module, with a view to both improving the provision of the module itself and to recommending a more general model for the provision of similar standalone modules. As DCU has led the way in accrediting students for civic, social and sporting engagement, it will also lead the way in ensuring that academic credibility and coherence can be demonstrated outside of traditional academic structures.

# Critical Conversations

*11*

---



# Critical Conversations

**Eilish Rooney**

*University of Ulster*

//////////

## Introduction

This chapter begins a much needed conversation about the current expansion of community development education within the university sector in Ireland (North and South). From a Northern Irish perspective political developments over the last decade have created educational opportunities as well as challenges in this area. The chapter contributes a critical reflection on the development of the BSc Honours Community Development programme at the University of Ulster. It begins with 'Critical Contexts' which maps the political and civic terrain for the conversations called for in the essay. A variety of practical and theoretical topics are discussed in the three sub-sections that follow and the essay ends with a brief conclusion.

The sub-section, 'Northern Background' summarises the political context in which the 1998 Agreement created favourable conditions for developing the degree. Importantly, the formal recognition in the 1998 Agreement of the 'social inclusion' role of community development aided stakeholder advocacy. This part of the essay sketches practical matters relating to institutional context, stakeholder support and the thorny question of resources. Then in 'Parameters for Engagement Education' some wider institutional developments in accreditation in UK universities in the 1990s are considered alongside their direct impact on the University of Ulster's adult education provision. Arguably, the withdrawal of the University's 'open door' adult programme, coupled with an expansion in the local community sector, further galvanized support for the community development degree. The implications of viewing the degree as an example of 'public purpose education' are briefly examined in relation to some of the 'engagement education' debate emanating from the United States. This leads to the final sub-section, 'Engaged Concepts' where the pedagogical practicalities of 'engagement education' are explored through the experience of teaching the degree's 'Globalization Module'. This is the first module taught to students attending the university and it introduces the work of activist academics who argue for the value of critical awareness in community development practice. The module is used as a case-study to illustrate how the concept and practice of social justice is thought about, discussed, taught and 'brought back home', as it were, to the class-room and local place. In conclusion, the essay picks up on a theme that is present throughout – the socially and individually damaging impacts of socio-economic inequalities. A brief overview of current data on the worsening, socio-economic inequalities facing the most disadvantaged people in Northern Ireland leads me to repeat my opening call for more critical conversations about engaged education centering on community development.

//////////

## Critical Contexts

The 1994 ceasefires, followed by the 1998 Agreement, mandated on an all-island basis plus the tentative political accommodation that followed, have enabled critical reflections on the civic and political role of community development in each jurisdiction on the island of Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the current global economic crisis, with severe adverse impacts in impoverished urban and rural districts, provides an imperative to exchange learning from diverse experiences and perspectives in Ireland (north and south). Now, more than ever, those engaged in community development education in different contexts need to exchange hard-won activist and academic lessons. Key questions for this wider conversation include: 'what is really useful community development education?' and 'what is the university's role?' Related

<sup>19</sup> For example, see the special issue of the *Community Development Journal* devoted to Ireland; and in particular McVeigh (2002) and Rooney (2002).

pragmatic questions involve considering the critical learning that has been gained from partnership between government and the ‘third sector’ in the delivery of public services.<sup>20</sup> Critical analysis from those already involved in thinking and writing about these, and related questions, can provide a practical framework for the exchanges called for here (Benjamin, 2009).<sup>21</sup> For instance, analysis of partnership between government and the third sector in Britain is pertinent (ibid.). Of particular interest is the conclusion that ‘insider’ bodies already involved in partnership with government agencies find it particularly difficult to articulate analytical perspectives on these relationships when they are financially dependent on government funding for project survival (Benjamin, ibid.). Benjamin argues that independent, university based evaluation plays a vital role here by providing impartial assessment (ibid.). Benjamin’s report proposes that university’s can play a crucial, educational community development role through impartial, research and critical education. Her analysis interestingly points to a prior question for the conversation proposed in this essay. This involves questioning how an exchange, or conversation, is shaped by those who participate and what their stake is in the discussion. The title, ‘Critical Conversations’ is intended to provoke reflections and questions, not alone about the content of an island wide conversation about community development education but also about how the conversation is shaped by those who participate.

‘Critical Conversations’ is also used as a framing device for exploring the nature of higher education’s role in community development within a ‘divided society’ such as Northern Ireland. The North is widely characterised as a ‘deeply divided’ post-conflict society (Rooney, 2007). The phrase ‘deeply divided’ often works, in relation to Northern Ireland, as a euphemism for a history of institutionalized sectarianism. This remains evident in the ongoing contested status of the state itself which is reflected in the Northern Ireland Assembly’s power-sharing arrangements between those political representatives who uphold the status of the state (unionists) and those who broadly contest its foundation (nationalists).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, ‘division,’ in the form of socio-economic differentials and inequalities, between nationalists and unionists is a structural feature of Northern Irish society (Committee on the Administration of Justice [CAJ], 2006; Noble, et al, 2005).<sup>23</sup> This is born out in people’s everyday lives and reproduced in comprehensive data on political and religious inequalities (ibid.). This data continues to reveal deep-rooted, socio-economic inequalities between predominantly ‘unionist’ and ‘nationalist’ districts. Social class and geographical location are decisive factors. ‘Division’ is evident also in religious and social class segregation of public housing and education as well as in discourses around ‘community relations’ (McVeigh, 2002). Social class inequalities are evident in other modern, highly developed liberal democracies, such as the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, structural inequality is an integral feature and function of modern capitalist economies (Kirby and Murphy, 2008). The Republic of Ireland is structurally ‘deeply divided’ by socio-economic inequalities that are also evident in class segregated public and private housing, in education and employment; also in health outcomes, longevity and life opportunities (ibid.). So, whilst this contribution to thinking about community development education in higher education derives from reflections on Northern Irish experiences, which may be viewed as atypical, these exchanges can be beneficial for other institutionally unequal societies.

As will be discussed more fully later, the term critical conversation also references the pedagogy (teaching practice and principles) employed on the degree. This involves

<sup>20</sup> ‘Third sector’ references the community and voluntary not-for-profit sector which is often referred to in the North as the ‘community sector’. For an overview of the scale of the community and voluntary sector see Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) (2006). This report calculates that the sector comprises approximately 1,000 organisations, over 3,000 employees and an income of 46m. Visit: <http://www.communityni.org/index.cfm/section/State%20of%20the%20Sector/key/SOSIVCommunityDev>

<sup>21</sup> See Benjamin’s (2009) critique of the impact on the ‘third sector’ of a decade of New Labour’s emphasis on partnership in the delivery of public services.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the political significance of state building and nomenclature in Ireland see Rooney (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Northern Ireland’s Fair Employment (1989) legislation has helped to dismantle divisive sectarian employment practices and demonstrates the capacity of strong law to deliver beneficial social and structural change. The Northern Irish workplace is now viewed as one of the most integrated spheres in the society (CAJ, 2006; Rooney, 2007a).

encouraging student-to-student and student-tutor participation in informal, conversational, class-room exchanges as well as formal, prepared debates. Some modules also require students to make in-class presentations that are self and peer-assessed. All of these interactions are viewed as dimensions of critical conversation which is central to student learning on the community development degree. Here, 'community development' is used to refer to organized activities engaged in by people seeking to collectively solve shared social problems. Of course, the term 'community development' calls for a fuller, critical and more nuanced debate. The debate is taken up throughout the essay. My immediate aim is to provide practical information and critical reflection on the Northern Ireland, university based experience of developing, running and teaching this degree.

//////////

## Northern Background

The positive role of 'community development' in 'promoting social inclusion in Northern Ireland is prominently recognized in the 1998 Agreement in the section dealing with 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity.' Here is the wording of the section's first commitment: 'the British Government will pursue broad policies for sustained economic growth and stability in Northern Ireland and for promoting social inclusion, including in particular community development and the advancement of women in public life' (p.23).<sup>24</sup> This is an explicit recognition that 'inclusion' in 'economic growth' and even 'stability' call for additional commitments to ensure the inclusion of people who may otherwise be excluded namely the 'community' and 'women'.<sup>25</sup> In this case 'community' is clearly an implicit reference to socio-economic exclusion experienced through deprivation. Community development activity is concentrated in districts that experience high levels of deprivation.

In 2000, two years after the Agreement was reached, the University of Ulster launched a part-time BSc Honours Community Development programme on the Jordanstown campus (near Belfast). The year 2008 marked the Agreement's tenth anniversary and was the year that the degree was launched on the Magee campus in Derry (close to the border with Donegal). University based community development education in Northern Ireland originated on the Magee campus in the late 1970s. In some senses the launch of the programme at Magee marked a return to university – community education origins. Since the first Jordanstown intake of students in 2000, three cohorts, comprising over 70 students, have obtained the degree. It is now a regular feature of the University's Community Studies provision.<sup>26</sup> Plans to develop cross-border co-operation are at an early, hopeful stage.

//////////

## Developing the Degree

The initial proposal to develop the degree was supported by a 'stakeholder group' comprising representatives from the community sector.<sup>27</sup> From the outset, the programme was offered as an element of mainstream Community Studies provision in the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies. Unlike the other 'applied' programmes in the School, however (social work and youth work), community development has neither professional body status nor a statutory remit linked to government funding.<sup>28</sup> For instance, someone planning a career in social work or in youth work is required to obtain the requisite professionally approved university qualification. In turn, statutory support is available for programmes and students where students gain professional qualifications in social work and youth work. These programmes are often over-subscribed. The case for community development is different.

<sup>24</sup> The Agreement Reached in Multi-Party Negotiations, April 10, 1998; available online: <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> I have written elsewhere about the consequences of women in Northern Irish politics and public life; see Rooney, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> The Community Studies unit offers full-time under-graduate and post-graduate Youth Work courses, the community development part-time programme and, until recently, a European funded women's opportunities programme. It is based in the University's School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences.

<sup>27</sup> This group made the case to the University that there was local demand for the degree. They included the Northern Council for Voluntary Action, the Worker's Educational Association, and the Ulster People's College. The list is available in the Course Document (2000) (on file with the author).

<sup>28</sup> For instance, someone planning a career in social work or in youth work is required to obtain the requisite professionally approved university qualification or they are unable to practice in their chosen career. Given professional regulation these career-oriented programmes are often bursary-funded and over-subscribed. Community development is without professional body status. People planning a career in the field are not required to obtain the degree. Implications for recruitment are fairly obvious.



Community development is not a statutory provision. Students taking the community development degree have to fund themselves. Staff costs are funded via the University's block grant. The recognition accorded to community development in the 1998 Agreement led neither to a statutory commitment to community development provision nor to government funding for professional qualification. The degree is not funded by external funding (such as European Social Fund or 'peace money').<sup>29</sup> On the plus side, this means that the programme is not exposed to the insecurities of fixed-term, project-based funding. However, without external support the course operates on very limited resources.<sup>30</sup> It is annually vulnerable in its reliance on the ability of prospective students to gain support from their employing organisations through fee payment and the provision of day release attendance. Added to all of this, the programme requires a challenging level of personal commitment.<sup>31</sup> The limited resources (of the students, the sector and the University) are a constant cause of concern for the course team. Whilst the fiscal complexities of running a part-time community development university based programme are not the main focus of this essay, there is no doubt that resources are core to what can happen in higher education as much as in the community sector.

### Limitations of Positive Change

As already noted, the ceasefires, that precipitated the peace process, and the Agreement that followed, have made immeasurable and affirmative differences to people's lives in the North of Ireland. However, not all changes have been positive. Recent statistics reveal that despite an economic upturn the poorest Protestant (mainly unionist) areas are experiencing deepening levels of poverty (CAJ, 2006). Current statistics indicate a reduction in religious and political inequalities amongst the poorest people in Northern Ireland not because things are improving for the Catholic (mainly nationalist) poor but because the poorest Protestants are closing the gap (ibid.). There is a levelling downwards. Additionally, research shows correlations between deprivation and districts that suffered most in the course of the conflict (Hillyard, et al., 2005). Some of the most impoverished nationalist districts posed the greatest threat to the state following the militarization of civil disturbance,<sup>32</sup> and some of the most impoverished unionist areas have posed the most serious threat to political accommodation since the 1998 Agreement.<sup>33</sup> It appears that the benefits of 'peace', like the costs of 'war' are unevenly distributed. The most marginalized people pay the highest price in either case (Rooney, 2006). The community development degree affords students an opportunity to examine these issues in the context of Northern Ireland's equality legislation.<sup>34</sup>

The reflections in this essay may be beneficial for thinking about engagement education in stable democracies as well as in violently conflicted societies. As already noted, when the distribution of wealth and poverty in a given society is taken as one measure of 'deep division' then critical conversations about the public role of higher education, in places such as Northern Ireland, can also illuminate debate in economically advanced, western liberal democracies that are currently experiencing economic melt-down. Social class divisions, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere intersect with other social identities, such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion and so on. As an economically advanced liberal democracy and a society in transition, Northern Ireland is uniquely positioned to contribute understanding of these complex issues for thinking about the role of engagement education in the promotion of equality, social justice and social inclusion.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Such as the European Peace Fund, for example.

<sup>30</sup> This includes two academic staff at Jordanstown and a recent appointment at Magee.

<sup>31</sup> The university cost to students is approximately £850 per year over three years.

<sup>32</sup> On this see an important study of the Falls Curfew in Campbell and Connolly (2002).

<sup>33</sup> For instance the Holy Cross blockade (Cadwallader, 2004); and protests in reaction to rerouted Orange Order marches. For an in-depth analysis of sectarian housing problems in North Belfast see Rooney (2005). Recent killings of two British Army soldiers (Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey) and a Police Service of Northern Ireland constable (Stephen Carroll) claimed by anti-Agreement republican militants do not appear to have destabilized political accommodation.

<sup>34</sup> The Section 75 equality legislation instituted by the Agreement requires public authorities in carrying out their functions, 'to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation' (Belfast Agreement, p.16).

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of the institutional failures in Northern Ireland as a state see Campbell, Ní Aoláin and Harvey (2003).

//////////

## Parameters For Engagement Education

Universities in the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland have undergone related but very different historical and institutional developments. Regional universities have evolved diverse civic relationships and local participation. In the 1990s, in line with the introduction of a national qualification and accreditation framework in England and Wales, the University of Ulster introduced a modularised accreditation system.<sup>36</sup> The Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) is linked to European wide developments designed to facilitate student transferability between higher education institutions and to widen access in order to meet the workforce requirements of the European economy. This system of accreditation has profoundly influenced higher education and community based adult education in the North. The University of Ulster's non-accredited adult education programme was withdrawn. 'Open-door' courses accessible to adults without formal qualifications, such as the access programme and women's opportunities, were either franchised to local colleges of further education or they became externally funded. The Department of Adult and Continuing Education, that offered these programmes, was closed.

Subsequent government targets to widen access led to formal procedures for university collaboration with the colleges in the provision of university accredited programmes using the CATS framework. Some colleges in turn adapted their links with community organizations in order to offer accredited, collaborative courses in local centres. Virtually all community based adult education programmes in Northern Ireland, covering everything from group skills to digital photography, are now accredited in a framework that pegs funding and cost to the accreditation system.<sup>37</sup> The University of Ulster's BSc Honours Community Development provides a direct-entry route to degree studies through this complex 'credit maze' for people with extensive community sector experience. The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) adapts the CATS framework to enable students to gain university credits for community experience.<sup>38</sup> This enables direct entry to degree study.

This 'pen picture' of accreditation developments in Northern Ireland is suggestive of what Harry C. Boyte (2000) observed in higher education colleges in the United States. Institutional restructuring, he argues, removed the sector away from civic engagement towards 'professionalized credentialism' (ibid.). When faculty in colleges across the United States were asked about these new, 'contemporary patterns of professional education', they verified higher education's increasing civic 'disengagement' via credentialism (ibid.). Boyte detects in this withdrawal from public engagement evidence of, 'a silent civic disease' becoming legitimized in a language of 'clientalism' and 'service delivery'. This disengaged approach is also reflected, Boyte avers, in a discourse of 'government "interventions"' in the form of short-term funding to 'fix social problems' (ibid.). The once pervasive language and pedagogy of civic engagement in higher education in the United States has, he claims, been lost.

### Downside of Bureaucracy

There are clear echoes between Boyte's United States based observations and what has occurred in British higher education where economic and institutional pressures to 'widen access' through accreditation have driven developments. It bears repeating that in Northern

<sup>36</sup> Scotland operates the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

<sup>37</sup> For example, The Open College Network manages the accreditation mechanism for voluntary sector programmes; visit: <http://www.nocn.org.uk/>.

<sup>38</sup> Dr Rosemary Moreland discusses the APEL in Chapter 14.

Ireland all further and higher education and community based programmes are routinely accredited within the national qualification framework.<sup>39</sup> The impact of this credit system on adult and community education has not been debated locally nor is it the subject of research. What the benefits or drawbacks have been for 'non-traditional' or 'second chance' students is unknown.<sup>40</sup> From my own experience, what appears to have happened is that the bureaucracy of the accreditation mechanism becomes a central concern for organisers and tutors whilst those individually affirmative aspects of student educational experience, such as personal motivation in learning, is secondary or not considered at all. Bekhradnia's (2004) critical overview of CATS is useful here. The immensely and increasingly bureaucratic structure of CATS, he argues, has undermined the enterprise of flexibility and transferability in higher education and been fundamentally counter-productive (*ibid.*).<sup>41</sup> To what extent and whether or not European governments have followed the United States model are important questions but beyond the scope of this essay. Research is needed into the cost-benefit impacts of the accreditation model on community education in Northern Ireland.

Whilst Boyte's analysis is more nuanced than the brief reference above denotes, the phenomenon of disengagement he identifies, as an outworking of the influence of 'logical positivism' in higher education, is evidence of the global dominance of neo-liberalism that is also analysed in other contexts and discourses.<sup>42</sup> Evidently, any discussion concerning community development education in Northern Ireland needs to take into account both institutional structures and theoretical debates about the public role of the university. Political developments and educational links in Ireland, North and South, in the post-Agreement period, and particularly since the reconstitution of the Northern Ireland Assembly, may afford cross-border opportunities for research and learning from our diverse experiences of university adult education and community based programmes.

### University Engagement through the Community Development Degree

Bearing in mind these briefly outlined institutional and theoretical parameters, the community development degree can still be viewed as a form of university 'engagement education'. Much of the terminology related to engagement education in the United States, however, derives from advocacy networks and publications that assert the centrality of university-community engagement as: 'a core element of higher education's role in society'.<sup>43</sup> The United States based Higher Education Network for Community Engagement (HENCE, 2008) broadly defines 'engagement education' as 'connecting academic work to public purposes through extensive partnerships that involve faculty, staff, and students in active collaboration with communities' (*ibid.*). The part-time community development degree programme in the University of Ulster is neither 'a core element' of university provision nor of higher education's role in Northern Ireland. Rather, on a year by year basis, it can be viewed as a small-scale engagement between the University, mainly in the form of human resources (staff), and some self-selecting, mainly working class students who tackle the on-the-ground challenges of the change process initiated by the Agreement in a context of deepening inequalities. Within the wider frame of Northern Ireland's transitional process, the degree programme endorses the 1998 Agreement's recognition that community development has a role to play in promoting social inclusion. It is no substitute for the redistribution of public resources that is urgently required to reverse patterns of inequality.

<sup>39</sup> The National Open College Network provides a national qualification and accreditation framework in England, Wales and NI. See <http://www.nocn.org.uk/>. All courses offered by the leading voluntary provider of adult education, the Worker's Educational Association, are accredited. Visit <http://www.wea-ni.com/>.

<sup>40</sup> These are students over 21 who do not satisfy normal university entrance qualification requirements (3 A' Levels).

<sup>41</sup> For instance, see the critiques of neo-liberalism by Massey (1997) and Ledwith (2001). For a critique of post-modernism and liberal education theories pertaining to the public role of the university see Spencer (2004).

<sup>42</sup> See the website for the Higher Education Network for Community Engagement: <http://henceonline.org/about>

The 'public purpose' dimension of engagement education, referred to by HENCE, is formally articulated in the community development degree's aim, 'to contribute to conflict resolution through ... the promotion of socially progressive learning'.<sup>44</sup> In this context, 'socially progressive learning', involves participants in critical reflection and research on global and local issues of social justice. Generally, there is broad agreement amongst students about global and environmental issues. However, diverse perspectives on local social justice matters often reflect the immediate circumstances and political realities faced by different people working with scarce resources in unionist and nationalist working class districts. Views on how to tackle social class poverty and gender equality, for instance, are diverse. Students dispute the causes and outworking of institutionalized sectarianism and use the available data to do so. The curriculum makes no claim to change student perspectives or impose uniformity of perspective. Nor does it assert, as the 1998 Agreement suggests, that community development necessarily promotes 'social inclusion' although it may do that. In critical conversation we have to be willing to take on difficult issues that are otherwise often avoided and be willing too to recognize when to set aside a dispute that is debilitating and about which there can be no meeting of minds. In the willing-to-exchange environment of the community development degree the students readily participate in and even enjoy the university environment as a safe space for risky exchanges.

The graduates and students of the community development degree are the type of student targeted by the government's widening access strategy. They are non-traditional, mature students who live and work in some of the most socially and economically deprived unionist and nationalist neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland. Higher education take-up in the most deprived areas, such as those in North and West Belfast, is traditionally low (Rooney, 2002a). People in these areas engage with complex problems of social justice in their everyday lives. On the degree these issues are examined in the context of global developments, theoretical analyses, data on deprivation and the Northern Ireland equality legislation. The programme comprises skills based modules centering on reflective practice that includes a placement element, with some modules that focus on critical thinking. On a pragmatic level, most students are strongly motivated to gain the (more) secure salaried employment (or promotion) that a degree qualification can enable.

In their academic work students are expected to produce evidence-based, reasoned, arguments substantiating their perspectives. This does not lead to agreement amongst the students or between students and tutors. It leads to clarity and sometimes strong debate over conflicting interpretations of evidence and the validity of perspectives. Often, it is the silences in these critical conversations that communicate dissent and sometimes heart-felt disagreement. Students contribute their 'last word', as it were, in their assignments where they select what is of interest to them in order to make arguments out of the material of their lives and their scholarship. It has to be said that the university has the final word in the form of assessment procedures. Student assignments undergo academic assessment requiring evidence of understanding concepts, an ability to apply theory and/or empirical results, and skill in critical reflection. The programme provides practice in using conceptual and analytical tools and their practical application. The curriculum is objective but it is not neutral on either writing proficiency or social justice. Students are provided with opportunities to acquire the skills to achieve the former and introduced to the 'principles of skeptical enquiry' throughout the curriculum to investigate the values asserted by the latter.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> From the original Course Document (2000) on file with author.

<sup>45</sup> See Bradney (2003: 4) who argues that the principles of skeptical enquiry and individual responsibility are inherent in the moral values of a liberal education, 'although these must not be communicated in a prescriptive way'. He contends that university teachers, 'have a moral mission to generate an understanding among their students "that all actions are politically and ethically charged,"' Bradney (2003: 43) cited Spencer (2004).



## Engaged Concepts

Teaching on the community development degree programme begins with conversations about how ‘frameworks of understanding’ have concrete implications. The way we conceptualise the world and understand our experiences of it shapes how struggles for social justice are understood and engaged and furthermore how collective community development endeavours can benefit the most marginalized people. A straightforward example of this occurs at the start of the programme in, ‘Globalisation and Community’. Students are asked to prepare for in-class conversations about the influence of context on what constitutes everyday ‘knowledge’. There is considerable experience in Northern Ireland of government supported multi-national companies (MNCs) deciding to redeploy their operations to countries with cheaper labour costs. Students are familiar with the debilitating impacts these financial decisions have on local communities.

Beginning with this local experience, students examine taken-for-granted assumptions about ‘community’ and ‘globalization’. Questions such as, ‘what do we already know about “globalisation” from experience?’ are followed by others exploring the epistemic role of context and standpoint in the construction of knowledge. For instance, the following questions develop conversations around assumptions about knowledge and context: ‘how would the curriculum change if the subject of globalisation was being studied by students in [a country in the developing world]?’ or ‘in the board-room of a [MNC]?’ Similarly, ‘what difference would it make if a South African township was the location for the community development degree – rather than the University of Ulster’s Jordanstown campus?’; and ‘how might the curriculum change if students were a. blacks and whites or b. one racial group or c. a single social class or d. women or men only?’ These questions generate critical thinking about how context, standpoint and stereotyping have concrete implications for how ‘globalization’ is learned about, comprehended, taught and tackled in the degree.

In the globalisation module these questions are approached initially by enabling connections to be made between global developments that have local impacts. Students critically examine taken-for-granted, everyday knowledge about community and globalisation. They test knowledge and assumptions in the context of debate in the literature on how commonly used concepts operate with material effects in different discourses. For example, Craig et al (2000) discuss the recent resurgence of multiple references to ‘community’ in public discourse in Britain. The authors critically analyse references to ‘community care’ or ‘community policing’ in different circumstances. They illustrate how these concepts are deployed sometimes for specific, strategic and political purposes. These theoretical analyses are examined (usually enthusiastically) for local significance, for example, particularly in relation to local policing partnerships and how they are viewed in various nationalist and unionist districts.

On the ubiquity of the term ‘globalisation’, Doreen Massey (1997) argues that its ‘everywhereness’ makes the contemporary form of market-led, ‘globalization’ appear inevitable and irresistible. This ‘inevitability’ she claims, is a function of its ubiquity. Globalisation, as we know it, is quite specific in its economic priorities and neo-liberal, political formulations (ibid.). Massey examines competing, interpretative evidence from highly influential international sources (the United Nations and World Bank) to see how current forms of globalisation generate deepening levels of inequality across the globe as well as within advanced liberal democracies. Students discuss the real-world impacts of Massey’s analysis, where possible drawing upon local experience and

data, as well as testing these arguments against the, 'case for globalisation' made by The Economist (2001) that is cited in the module handbook.<sup>46</sup> A core insight of each article is the need for clarity about concepts, context and meaning.

These 'global' class-based conversations, informed by the literature, enable students to develop common and distinct interests and concerns and to advance arguments based upon reasoning and research. Not everyone does this with the same enthusiasm or capacity. However, everyone is involved in examining examples of concept usage in different contexts and in finding ways to understand local impacts of globalisation. Globalisation assignments have featured: football, AIDS in South Africa, the armaments industry, and the pressures of consumerism on every day family life. The module is arguably an instance of 'critical pedagogy' in action. Mayo (1999) defines this as pedagogy, 'which is concerned with issues [of] *social difference, social justice, and social transformation*' (Mayo, 1999: 58, author's emphasis). Intellectual and pragmatic engagements of linking global and local matters of social justice are central to the module and to teaching in practice. This means critically examining the 'shape shifting' dimension of concept usage in both class conversations and in different discourses with their real world impacts. This prepares the way for studying Margaret Ledwith's research into the role of discourse in changing values and attitudes in Manchester in the 1980s. Ledwith's (2001) article provides students with a model of situated research and reflective practice that has contemporary, local relevance.

This chapter draws on empirical research from a time of profound social and political transition in 1980's Britain. This period marked a dramatic alteration from post-World War II discourse on social welfare as primarily a state responsibility and a moral right. By the 1980s, social welfare began to be referred to in the popular British media as a burden upon the tax payer and a source of rich pickings for 'scroungers'. This change, or 'transformation', as Ledwith calls it, had its immediate origins in the global recession of the 1970s that resulted in escalating unemployment. The emergence of global consumerism with its compelling focus on choice and individualism compounded the impact of this transformation. Discourses of individualism were widely absorbed and became reflected, Ledwith argues, in changed attitudes between people in the area where she was a community worker. During these changes, she claims that community work in Britain became 'bewildered' (Ledwith, 2001, p.172). They lacked the critical analytical tools to understand what was happening.

//////////

## Perspectives Of Globalisation & Neoliberalism

Ledwith recounts witnessing 'a profound change in values' amongst people in the Hattersley area of Manchester. She observed at close quarters how consumer culture influenced how people lived and how those in need came to be categorised into the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. She maintains that a discourse of individualism replaced one of mutual responsibility. Furthermore, she argues, the impact of the 'Thatcher revolution', and the ideological persuasion of 'New Right' or neo-liberal rhetoric, 'seduced people [by] cleverly identifying and appealing to that element of self-interest that lurks beneath the surface,' in all of us (ibid.). From a turn-of-the-century perspective Ledwith looks back and concludes that:

The 'Thatcher revolution', fuelled by social, political and economic change, was committed to dismantling the protective elements of state welfare, to breaking the power of the organised labour movement and to a reaffirmation of market forces that would bring poverty and unemployment to unprecedented levels (ibid. citing Novak, 1988: 176).

<sup>46</sup> These centre on globalisation being used as a scapegoat for everything that goes wrong - by unlikely bedfellows that include governments, businesses and the anti-globalisation lobby.

The local transformation of Hattersley illustrates the dominance of neo-liberalism in Britain of the late 20c. (ibid.). It was also during this period that, 'globalization as a phenomenon took hold and has resulted in oppression and exploitation on a grander and more complex scale' (Ledwith, 2001: 173). When studying globalization, students are exposed to arguments that during this period, and to the present day, countries such as China and India have benefited massively from capitalist market expansions. Overall fewer people in the world are in poverty (Economist, 2001). But, the situation is complex. The gap in wealth *between* rich and poor countries *and within* rich countries continues to widen (Massey, 1997). This is currently the case in Northern Ireland as well as in the Republic of Ireland and Britain. As class conversations make clear, students have different views as to what all of this means locally in practice for government social policy. Political standpoint and neighbourhood context come into play – just as they did in Hattersley.

//////////

### 'Context' As A Site For Analysis

'Context' is viewed in the article as a key concept that merits deconstruction. For instance, Ledwith (2001) sets out the context of the article within which she explores the ideas of Freire and Gramsci (as per her title). This context comprises three dimensions: the geographical location (where the people of the working class area of Hattersley lived and worked in 1980s Britain); the second, less visible 'context', is that of community work as a field of practice (which is promoted in the *Community Development Journal* where the article is published); thirdly, the critical framework of analytical tools debated in the article, and argued by Ledwith as necessary in order to understand and act to bring about social justice.

Ledwith examines the approaches in community work that developed in response to the dominance of 'New Right' thinking and the 'hijacking of a language of liberation' that occurred in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s (Ledwith, 2001: 171). The language of 'community', 'empowerment', 'participation' and 'active citizenship' were used, she asserts, to dilute an existing radical tradition of community action. Little is learned in the article about Hattersley other than that it typified an area of multi-dimensional deprivation. Ledwith is faced with a choice in a short article. By going into detail in relation to Hattersley, she risks taking up valuable space given to understanding the wider ideological challenges facing 'bewildered' community workers at the time. Still, the missing detail and data on socio-economic deprivation may provide some answers as to how and why this particular community absorbed the dominant 'New Right' neo-liberal ideology in the way that she witnesses. On this she observes:

As a community worker in the area of Hattersley in the north of England during the 1980s, I witnessed a profound change in values. Voices that had previously united in working-class solidarity began to speak the language of *horizontal violence* (Freire, 1972): 'These girls are getting pregnant to get rehoused before me, and me a pensioner!' ... as the Thatcher years progressed ... The language became 'You just take care of number one in this life' and petty crime started to turn in on its own community ... Working-class solidarity went to the wall (Ledwith, 2001: 172-3).

Ledwith's observation, on a reversal of solidarity, occurred during a time when there was a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in Britain as the number of people in poverty increased by almost 50 per cent (Gordon and Pantzis, 1997). At this time one in three children in Britain was growing up in poverty.<sup>47</sup> Added to the transfer of wealth from poor to rich, Ledwith comments, the period was characterised by increased social divisiveness. It is these social divisions and how they intersect with deep-rooted poverty and social identities (political/ethnic/racial/national/religious/gender) in already disadvantaged areas that is of particular interest for community development students in Northern Ireland.

Experiences of and ideas about 'difference' (centring on 'race', 'ethnicity', 'gender' and so on) powerfully underpin anxieties related to resource scarcity.<sup>48</sup> For instance, racism and sexism, in connected ways, are articulated in stereotypes, anxieties and prejudices. Social categories of race, ethnicity, and sect and so on also give rise to legitimizing discourses that can positively emphasise affirmative aspects of belonging for people who share experiences of exclusion from access to resources and power. It would be valuable to know about the racial mix of the population in Hattersley at this time. The information is not provided in the article. However, Ledwith acknowledges the importance of understanding how social categories intersect, in time and place, with social class deprivation to expose, 'the most complex and convoluted intermeshing of oppressions, and in doing so [to locate] potential sites of resistance' (Ledwith, 2001: 180).

The period examined by Ledwith was also a time of profound social change in Ireland North and South. Northern Ireland was involved in a violent, political conflict that was to continue for over another decade. The peace process coincided with a period of accelerated economic growth in the Republic of Ireland. This growth involved a range of social, cultural and economic changes. There are parallels and differences between areas of deprivation in the North and South of Ireland and Hattersley, where Ledwith gained her critical community work experience during a time of change. Ledwith's 'discovery' that common experiences of deprivation do not necessarily generate shared political perspectives and strategies is common knowledge amongst community development students in the North.

Whilst it can seem that Northern Ireland is a place apart that was sealed off from global developments (economic and ideological) in the course of the conflict, this is not entirely so. The dynamic between local and global political developments, for instance, is illustrated by the fact that the 1998 Agreement is one of 65 peace treaties entered into in the decade following the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) and the collapse of Soviet communism that it signified. More than 80 peace treaties have been agreed since the end of the cold-war.<sup>49</sup> The interplay of global events, academic analyses, and local activism and critical conversations provide material for engagement throughout the degree.

<sup>47</sup> Reduction in child poverty levels was targeted by Gordon Brown as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour government. It is also targeted for reduction in Northern Ireland's Programme for Government, visit <http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/special/2000/niprogramme.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> See Hill-Collins (2004) on this anxiety framed by intersectionality theory in the United States.

<sup>49</sup> For a fuller analysis see Bell (2006) also Rooney (2007): <http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/2007/issue5/rooney5.html>



//////////

## Preliminary Conclusions

The community development students and the neighbourhoods they come from face social and political challenges now as well as in the years ahead. Those who live in the most disadvantaged 'interface areas' may face the greatest challenges in terms of the distribution of benefits from 'peace'. These public housing areas comprise adjacent disadvantaged unionist and nationalist neighbourhoods. People living in these areas cope with some of the highest levels of deprivation in Western Europe (Hamilton and Fisher, 2002). As noted at the start of this essay, the situation is worsening for the poorest. Recently reported data on social need, that comparatively ranks electoral wards, indicates that in West Belfast, the most deprived constituency in Northern Ireland, the majority of wards increased their deprivation rank in the first five years of the 21st century (Noble, et al, 2005).<sup>50</sup> The equality legislation and the social policy tools to tackle these inequalities already exist. Leading advocacy organisations in the voluntary sector monitor the data and lobby for government action.<sup>51</sup> Local organisations produce research highlighting where public bodies are failing in their duties to implement the existing legislation.<sup>52</sup> The community development degree enables students to engage critically with these debates globally and locally. It provides an opportunity to examine academic analyses and explanations and to contribute local reflections and critique.

This 'engagement' will not resolve the problems facing the community sector in the years ahead but it affords those most affected the time to hone skills and engage in critical exchanges. More conversations are necessary – between those involved in the community sector, higher education and government in order to inform thinking and policy; and to harness learning from hard won experience. This essay offers an example of engagement education. As such it is a beginning.

<sup>50</sup> Seven of this constituency's 18 electoral wards, which include the well-known Shankill and Falls roads, have child poverty levels of over 80 per cent (Hamilton and Fisher, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.communityni.org/index.cfm/section/article/page/Equality%20Coalition>

<sup>52</sup> See Rooney, 2005.

## Bibliography

- Bekhradnia, Bahram (2004) *Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and the Bologna Process: an Overview*, Higher Education Policy Institute, online: [www.hepi.ac.uk/downloads/13CAT-ExecSummary.pdf](http://www.hepi.ac.uk/downloads/13CAT-ExecSummary.pdf)
- Bell, Christine (2006) *Peace Agreements and Human Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Benjamin, Alison (2009) 'The times they are not really changing' in *The Guardian: Society Guardian*, 25 February, 2009: 4, online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2009/feb/25/public-sector-voluntary-sector/print>
- Boyte, Harry C. (2000) 'The Struggle Against Positivism' in *ACADEME*, 1-8, online: <http://www.aaup.org/publications/Academe/2000/00ja/JA00Boyt.htm>
- Cadwallader, Ann (2004) *Holy Cross: The Untold Story*, Brehon Press.
- Campbell, Colm and Connolly, Ita (2003) 'A Model for the "War on Terrorism?" Military Intervention in Northern Ireland and the Falls Curfew' in *Journal of Law and Society*, 30/3: 341-75.
- Campbell, Colm, Ní Aoláin, Fionnuala and Harvey, Colin (2003) 'The Frontiers of Legal Analysis: Reframing the Transition in Northern Ireland' in *Modern Law Review*, 66/3: 317-45.
- Committee on the Administration of Justice, *Equality in Northern Ireland: the rhetoric and the reality*, Belfast: Shanways, 2006.
- Craig, Gary, Mayo, Marjorie and Taylor, Marilyn (2000) 'Globalization from below: implications for the Community Development Journal' in *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 4: 323-335.
- Economist, The, *Globalisation: Making sense of an integrating world*, London: Profile Books, 2001.
- Gordon D., and Pantzis, C. (1997) 'Breadline Britain in the 1990s: the full report of a major national survey on poverty' in *Poverty: Journal of the Child Poverty Action Group*, 98, 21-22.
- Hamilton, D. and Fisher, C. (eds) (2002) *Mapping West Belfast: A Statistical Overview of Socio-economic Disadvantage*, Belfast: West Belfast Economic Forum.
- Hill-Collins, Patricia (2004) 'Some Group Matters: Intersectionality, Situated Standpoints, and Black Feminist Thought' in *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, reprinted in Richardson, L, Taylor, V and Whittier, N (eds) *Feminist Frontiers*, 6th edn, Boston: McGraw-Hill, 66-84.
- Kirby, Peadar, and Murphy, Mary (2008) *A Better Ireland is Possible: Towards an Alternative Vision for Ireland*, Community Platform.
- Ledwith, Margaret (2001) 'Community work as critical pedagogy: re-envisioning Freire and Gramsci' in *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 171-182.
- Mayo, Peter (1999) *Gramsci, Freire & Adult Education: Possibilities for Transformative Action*, Zed, London.
- McVeigh, Robbie (2002) 'Between reconciliation and pacification: the British state and community relations in the north of Ireland' in *Community Development Journal: An International Forum: Ireland, Corporatism & Community Development: Special Issue*, Vol. 37, 1, 47-59.
- Noble, Michael, et al. (2005) *Measures of Deprivation in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency.
- Novak, T. (1988) *Poverty and the State*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.
- Rooney, Eilish (2002) 'Community Development in Times of Trouble: Reflections on the "Community Women's Sector" in the North of Ireland' in *Community Development Journal: An International Forum: Ireland, Corporatism & Community Development: Special Issue*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 33-46.
- Rooney, Eilish (2002a) 'Education' in *Mapping West Belfast: A Statistical Overview of Socio-economic Disadvantage*, D. Hamilton and C. Fisher (eds), Belfast: West Belfast Economic Forum, 34-45.
- Rooney, Eilish (2007) 'Intersectionality in Transition: Lessons from Northern Ireland', *Web Journal of Current Legal Issues*, No. 5, 1-20, online: <http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/2007/issue5/rooney5.html>
- Rooney, Eilish (2007a) 'Engendering transitional justice: questions of absence and silence' in *International Journal of Law in Context*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 93-107.
- Rooney, Eilish (2008) 'Forum: The influence of theory on understanding: reflections from Twentieth century fiction by Irish women: nation and gender by Heather Ingman' in *Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 365-69.
- Rooney, Eoin (2005) *Waiting for Equality: the North Belfast Waiting List – an Analysis of the Housing Executive's Strategy*, Belfast: St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's Housing Committee; copy on file with author.
- Spencer, Maureen, (2004) 'E-Learning and Ideology – a post modern paradigm or liberal education reborn?' in *Web Journal of Current Legal Issues*, No. 4, 1-17, online: <http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/2004/issue4/spencer4.html>

Community Learning  
in Action:  
*Lessons from the Finglas for  
Diversity Research Project*  
with  
Dublin City University  
*From a Community Perspective*

12

---



# Community Learning in Action: *Lessons from the Finglas for Diversity Research Project* with Dublin City University *From a Community Perspective*

**Kerry Lawless**

*Finglas for Diversity, Dublin City University*

**Jean Hughes**

*Dublin City University*

//////////

## Reflections on Finglas for Diversity

The Finglas for Diversity project was a pioneering engagement in community-based learning for DCU, involving three Schools, and a significant number of students and staff. The project involved the use of a number of pedagogies, from entirely experiential-learning approaches (through the Uaneen Module and INTRA work placement) to student involvement in more 'traditional' lecture-based modules. The project resulted in significant learning for students, with some even sacrificing higher grades through more traditional assignments, for the valuable life experience gained through their involvement. DCU lecturers embraced the opportunity to engage in more challenging pedagogic approaches in a multi-disciplinary, multi-partner context, taking student learning out of the formal curricular context and attempting to assist in meeting real community needs.

The F4D project produced some remarkable artefacts and resources, in particular the materials for children which can be seen at [www.f4d.ie](http://www.f4d.ie). Significant student learning was also enabled, with students gaining real life experience from involvement in projects addressing community needs and requirements and managing their learning in a complex, real world setting, outside of the formal university context. For DCU many challenges and opportunities arose during the course of the project. DCU staff are subject to timetabled teaching hours, administrative duties and demands of research activity. This is compounded when staff are members of different Schools and Faculties, making their availability to meet with each other, and with community partners, more problematic. Engagement in this project was done as part of a normal teaching load, so staff were not 'bought out' or 'freed up' despite the significantly greater demands posed over and above more traditional lecture-based learning approaches. A huge amount of goodwill, energy and enthusiasm characterised their input.

Engagement in service learning pedagogies poses challenges and opportunities for students, academics and organisations, which are not routinely presented by more traditional approaches. Issues arise such as appropriate assessment, minimum and maximum levels of student engagement, running service learning approaches alongside traditional approaches, (especially if different forms of assessment are used for the same module), as well as practical issues such as responsibility for student insurance, funding for travel etc. DCU recognised that there was a need to capture the experience of participants in the F4D project and similar community-based learning activities, identify good practice and potential pitfalls, and disseminate this for others who might wish to undertake similar activities. Integration of

service-learning into the curriculum requires support and guidance and much of this is derived from learning from prior experience. In 2007, the Learning Innovation Unit and The Theme Leader's Office engaged a Project Officer to address these needs. Through significant consultation with staff members already actively engaged in service learning approaches, she drew up a comprehensive document entitled 'A Guiding Framework for Community Based Learning in DCU'. The document provides both a rationale for, and encouragement to engage in, community-based learning through the core curriculum, as well as a serving as a handbook for those wishing to use this pedagogy. It provides practical advice on issues such as academic credit, assessment, resourcing, insurance and communication. To achieve more consistency across the university, sample templates for intellectual property, health and safety and community-university partnership agreements are also provided.

The value of community-based learning projects such as F4D cannot be underestimated. For students they provide real world, applied disciplinary learning opportunities in addition to the learning derived from community engagement and active citizenship. As a university committed to engaging at all levels with our community partners, DCU is continuously learning from such projects and using the experience to inform its institutional policies and strategies so as to embed such activity across and within the university.

//////////

## Introduction

The following chapter offers an account of what occurred when a local community network approached a higher education institution to develop a series of research activities from the perspective of a community. The Finglas for Diversity research project involving Dublin City University (DCU) ran for eighteen months (2005 and 2007), and involved forty five university students, from three different DCU Schools working with a total of thirty five local groups through a series of community based activities. The project outcomes ranged from the production of tangible, community-directed resources (such as the development of the Finglas for Diversity website, needs analysis of local teachers, and a volunteer tutor training programme) to more fluid research pieces and activities that produced discernable outcomes for student learning but did not, on their own, make any real impact as community resources. The experience gained in the process is evidence, if evidence is needed, of the success of work and collaborations of this kind. It is also a clear illustration of the challenges that can and do arise in community university partnerships and points to key issues communities need to consider when becoming involved in research projects of this kind. This account draws on the Finglas for Diversity experience of participation in the project and details the community perspective of the project's success, challenges and failures. It is written from a community development perspective, reflecting the ethos and values of community-based groups in the Finglas area. The Finglas for Diversity research project is just one example of how community agencies and higher education institutions can learn from each other. We hope this experience can add to and benefit understanding and knowledge of community-based learning in the sector as a whole. The success of the project rests with a range of people within the Finglas community and DCU, not least the DCU students who gave so willingly of their time, energy and creativity to the project.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A full account of the initiative and project report detailing the learning outcomes for higher education is available from [www.finglas4diversity.dcu.ie](http://www.finglas4diversity.dcu.ie)

//////////

## Understandings Of Community-Based/ Service Learning

Most institutions of higher education espouse a civic purpose through their mission statements and strategies. Community-based or service learning is seen very much as part of the wider strategy of community or civic engagement that educational institutions seek to develop. Community-based learning can be understood as an experiential learning and teaching approach aimed at meeting the needs of a community and providing university students with real world experience, which is accredited and fully integrated in the academic programme (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2007). Students undertake service in a not-for-profit organisation and perform academically valued activities (McIlrath & Maclaren, 2007). DCU has adopted this pedagogical approach and seeks to enable students to become active citizens who contribute productively to society, in addition to developing disciplinary knowledge and competency. DCU's civic engagement strategy views the institution as part of a wider community 'whose strength it draws on and to which it seeks to contribute to the full extent of its capabilities' (DCU, 2006). The strategy outlines that DCU has 'a civic responsibility to this wider community in the pursuit of social, economic and cultural development and a shared commitment to civil society empowerment' (DCU, 2006) and as such locates community learning as an integral element in the research and learning innovation strategies of the university.

//////////

## Realities Of Community Engagement

The formalisation of community-based learning in universities is in the early stages in Ireland and significant gaps remain in our local knowledge about how universities actually embed the values and ethos of civic engagement into their structures, policies and practice (MacLabhrainn, 2007). Central to this debate is the question of how higher education engages with communities. According to Ernest Boyer (1996) the scholarship of engagement is a 'means of creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously'. Holland (2001) describes an engaged institution as being 'committed to direct interaction with external constituencies and communities through the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, expertise, and information'. The focus on mutually beneficial exchange is key. Without this additional commitment any initiative runs the risk that community engagement or community-based learning might, as Fear and Avila (2005) suggest, be 'valued more for its instrumental value and extrinsic merit—for the funding and publicity it brings—than for its relevance in performing a mission-related responsibility, that is, serving society'.

It is clear that further reflection and critical analysis is needed to explore the community experience of engagement in university community-based learning projects in Ireland. We need to consider:

- how the process of community-based learning works,
- benefits and challenges involved,
- who benefits most from the engagement,
- what actual benefits these initiatives bring to communities,
- how long term, sustainable community-learning partnerships emerge.

//////////

## Locating The Dcu Finglas For Diversity Research Project Within Community-Based Learning

The DCU Finglas for Diversity project original remit was to develop an ethnographic research project that would investigate the diversity that has made Finglas the place it is today in terms of social, cultural, historical and geographic influences (Finglas for Diversity, 2005). One of the project's core values was to expand the concept of university learning out into the community, helping to break down any perceived and real barriers for local people to engage with DCU. It was also designed to encourage DCU students to apply relevant aspects of their studies to intercultural and community work within the local community, and in doing so, to develop a raised awareness of social issues. It was hoped that this information, adapted into a variety of written, visual, oral or audio-visual forms, should subsequently be used to share and promote the benefits of diversity in Finglas. For the community partners the ability of the project to generate data and information on contemporary and historical cultural diversity in the area was a key factor in their involvement. While the initiative began by interpreting engagement as using the Finglas for Diversity research projects as a means of starting a conversation between the Finglas community and the university community in DCU, it quickly became evident that the learning and practice being developed could provide a valuable insight into how best to develop community-based learning within the DCU Community Engagement Strategy and elsewhere.

The Finglas for Diversity network formed in July 2004 in response to a number of racist incidents locally and the rise in racist graffiti. The network<sup>2</sup> represents a broad cross section of community organisations, voluntary and statutory agencies working in the area. After its formation, the group went on to hold a number of fund-raising and community-awareness events to promote its aims and objectives. However, by 2005 it was clear that in order to grow and progress its ambitious work plan, the group needed to tap into wider resources and expertise.

Finglas for Diversity explored how best to move the project forward and DCU was quickly identified as a possible source of support and expertise. A number of the Finglas for Diversity members had studied there and knew that the institution had the relevant expertise. As the main focus of the original research project was to gather base-line data on cultural diversity within the Finglas area and to promote an appreciation of the benefits of interculturalism, the community believed that the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) could provide the best available expertise and support to the project. In addition, the network was keen to see how the University's resources, particularly within the School of Communications, could be fully utilised in a community setting. Finglas for Diversity met with a very positive response from the individual staff approached. DCU saw great scope for a range of opportunities for collaborative work and, as discussions continued, the idea developed into a joint project.

//////////

## Community Expectations

The community had many and varied expectations through the collaboration with DCU. It was a means of tapping into skills and resources among the student and staff body and, as such, as a means of delivering the Finglas for Diversity research, training and communications strategies.

<sup>2</sup> Finglas for Diversity is made up of representatives from Project West and the Finglas South Community Development Project, the Finglas Cabra Partnership, Dublin City Council, the Health Service Executive, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Visiting Teacher for Travellers, Finglas Youth Service, Parents Alone Support Service, the Fingal Centre, Finglas Childcare Service, Barnardo's, and Pavee Point.

The idea was that DCU students working on the project would gather and document evidence to challenge common assumptions within Finglas about the perceived cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the area. It was also hoped that the work would enable local people to examine the concept of community identity with regard to what it means to be from Finglas. In addition, the community saw the project providing a solid research and evidence base to their work. It was envisaged that there would be a range of project outputs from oral history projects to photographic exhibitions and art competitions, all of which would highlight the benefits of a culturally diverse community. DCU involvement was also seen as a means to deliver more small-scale projects such as an inter-schools competition to encourage pupils to examine their family history and name and/or a local history project to explore local experience of emigration and the treatment of Finglas people working abroad. The collaboration with DCU from the community perspective was as a way to develop local, tailor-made intercultural education and training materials to complement the training and development strategy of the group and to shape their anti-racism work.

//////////

## Project Design And Set Up

After a six month planning and exploration phase, it was agreed to employ a part-time Research Coordinator jointly funded by the university and community. The three DCU School Coordinators were to act as a focal point within DCU. They were responsible for identifying and supporting students and promoting the project within the faculty. Given their considerable knowledge of programme content, staff and structures, the school co-ordinators were key in the project's integration and coordination within and across the University. Finglas for Diversity was to provide the links within the Finglas community, identifying possible research partners, schools and community groups that would be open to participation and other means of embedding the project within the community.

A Management and a Joint Advisory Committee were formed which included the interests of both the community and University. In November 2005, the Research Coordinator was appointed with the cost for the post and project made up from funds offered by a number of agencies (community and University) with core funding coming from the Finglas Cabra Partnership. DCU's three participating Schools also provided funding together with the DCU Theme Leader for Internationalisation, Interculturalism and Social Development, the President's Office, and the Learning and Innovation Unit. The funds provided by the DCU Learning and Innovation Unit enabled the development of workshops for DCU students to help them to develop the research and other skills required for this type of client-led, community-based research and to promote cross-disciplinary work. Additional funds were sourced by the Research Coordinator during the life time of the project from a number of bodies including the European Year for Citizenship 2005, Dublin City Council, Dublin Bus and the City of Dublin VEC. It allowed key aspects of the project's work to develop and meant that elements of the student work produced could become meaningful community resources.

//////////

## Student Engagement, Contributions And Learning

As previously mentioned, over forty DCU students were involved in the project. The length and depth of student engagement varied considerably with some taking part in one off community events and others being actively involved in a range of activities over the whole project period. Each student made a lasting impression on the project with just two students failing to complete the work. Student ability to work within a loosely structured, community-based and, more importantly, community-led project varied greatly. Some students were able to adapt, learn and contribute greatly to the project while others struggled with the concept of producing work to client specifications and needs. The quality of work produced by students who participated in the project was inconsistent, ranging from excellent in many



instances to disappointing in others. The value of the final products to the community was also diverse, ranging from highly innovative and useful outputs to others that were lacking in practical application. All students required a high level of support and interaction from the Research Coordinator and all would have benefited from additional support and training. The initiative produced a number of concrete resources and artefacts, which will continue to be of practical use to the community, long after the project's lifetime. These include multi media products, training and educational resources, research for community resources and models for successful outreach and community development.

Student responses gathered during the project were overwhelmingly positive with just one group expressing dissatisfaction with its experience. The more involved students were, the more likely they were to provide positive feedback and to cite long-term benefits. Students cited a number of benefits;

- sense of being part of something larger than university,
- new opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge,
- valuable “real life” experience of working to deadlines and with outside bodies,
- opportunity to get to know students from other schools and degree programmes.

### ////////// Project Successes From A Community Perspective

The findings from the community consultations, as part of the project's on-going evaluation, provided some interesting learning for the project. Overall the community derived most benefit from the multi media and training aspects of the project. These activities provided clear and tangible outcomes and helped to develop resources that would not have been possible without DCU involvement. It is important to note that the involvement of DCU staff was also seen as a major benefit of the project. For example, a lecturer in SALIS and independent training consultant facilitated a number of developmental sessions with members of the Finglas for Diversity network. This input was highly valued and seen as a key success of the project. It enabled the group to go on to develop a range of tailor-made intercultural training materials and to increase their capacity and confidence in delivering training of this kind. The community also valued the outreach work carried out by students as part of the project and the inter-agency work that the project facilitated among local groups, schools and service providers. The role of the research coordinator was seen as key to the success of much of the work, and the community believed they benefited greatly from the creation of the role. Having a designated staff member, albeit part-time, gave the work a coherence and structure that would otherwise have been missing. The project itself facilitated a space or forum for a range of intercultural activities and for leveraging in project funding that will lead to a number of community resources beyond the life span of the project itself.

The outputs from the research projects were felt to be less beneficial. In part that was due to their more fluid nature but also reflected the differing levels of quality of the work produced. With the exception of one or two research pieces, it was felt that the research was produced for university course work without due regard to community needs and specifications. This is not uncommon in projects of this kind. However, there was a strong sense that the community may have been better using professional or more experienced researchers in the work as the level of support provided (and the cost involved in providing that support) was not, for the most part, justified by the research output generated. There was also a very real sense of disappointment that the project failed to deliver the key base line data identified at the outset. It is true that

expectations on all sides were over ambitious however the community was understandably frustrated that the project did not provide solid research and evidence-based outputs on the range of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity with Finglas. The Finglas for Diversity network also worked with students in further education, particularly those studying youth and community studies and those on internships. These collaborations proved to be very successful. It is believed that the community development background and/or aspiration of the particular students and the greater flexibility in further education made a better 'fit' with the community expectations for the project. More work is needed to better match student interest, ability and capacity with community identified research projects. Many of the links developed with the university may not be sustainable without a project of this kind.

//////////

### Lasting Benefits From A Community Perspective

Many of the key successes of the project, from a community perspective, were based on work done outside the formal curriculum where students became involved purely as a means of service learning. For example, the Finglas for Diversity website was designed by two third-year BSc in Multimedia students, one of whom was on an INTRA<sup>3</sup> work placement and the other working as part of the Uaneen module<sup>4</sup>, as described in great detail in Chapter 21. This option has obvious benefits as the students are not restricted by module credits and the relationship is more professional. It has produced the clearer benefits from a community perspective and has been the most cost effective of the student collaborations.

A second example of a lasting community benefit created by the project is the development of the Volunteer English Language Tutor training programme. Six DCU students, together with six community members, took part in a pilot community-based training programme for volunteer ESOL<sup>5</sup> tutors. The course was developed with the support of the DCU Language Services and delivered through the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) in cooperation with Finglas for Diversity. It is a good example of how staff expertise within DCU can be best harnessed for community benefits and how the project's existence, in of itself, allowed for further development work well beyond what Finglas for Diversity could have achieved in isolation. It also provided DCU students with the opportunity to develop real and practical skills through community-based learning. A number of the trainees have continued as volunteer tutors as part of the Finglas Adult Literacy Service.

From our experience the success of the project, and the positive outcomes for both students and community members, depends on a number of factors:

#### **Commonly Agreed Expectations and Roles**

The importance of having a clearly defined and accepted set of aims and objectives cannot be over stated. During the initial stages of the project development there were a number of meetings and discussions as to how best advance the project idea. In hindsight, it is clear that too much time was spent on project outcomes and too little time on developing the process itself. There were also different sets of expectations as to how to reach a successful outcome. This was particularly challenging if the student project migrated significantly from the original agreement without due notice or regard to client specifications leaving community partners with unmet expectations or incomplete work. It is essential in projects of this kind that community, lecturer and student expectations are better managed. For example, as the project developed, it became clear that many of the suggested student research projects, in particular the base line data survey and outreach projects, could not have been achieved, irrespective of how much work had gone into the process development. Community partners

<sup>3</sup> INTRA – INdustrial TRAIning Programme which most DCU students participate in as a mandatory part of their programme of study.

<sup>4</sup> The Uaneen module in DCU recognises the valuable work that students do outside the formal learning environment and has become a model for both extra-curricular and credit bearing student learning in Ireland. It is named for Uaneen Fitzsimmons who played an active role in university and campus life in DCU as well as being a successful broadcaster and entertainer before her untimely death in 2000. For more information, see <http://www.dcu.ie/uaneen/>

<sup>5</sup> English as a Second Language

are not for the most part, fully aware of how universities operate, for example, the timetabling restrictions students are under and the level of work that can be carried out for any given module or assignment. It is important that community expectations are properly managed from the outset and that universities take the lead in creating clarity and awareness about the type of work best suited to community based projects.

### **Student Skills and Capacities**

The Finglas for Diversity project has clearly demonstrated that students are willing and able to get involved in research collaboration and are motivated by the opportunity to do “hands-on” work in a community setting. There was excellent feedback generated on the specially designed research workshops with good attendance from participating students. Being able to provide more workshops and tutorials on applied research skills, and to have run them throughout the project, would have enhanced student involvement, particularly as so few had experience of applied research and many students reported that they struggled with the realities of community-based research.

Student-led research can be a very different experience to community designed and local area research. In community-based research of this kind the parameters are agreed at community level with set specifications. In the experience of the DCU Finglas for Diversity project it was found that students are best supported to work on delivering aspects of the fieldwork or desk research only and can not be expected to take a role in designing or developing the overall research project. With scaffolded support students had more opportunities to make a positive contribution and to develop their own learning. However, University stakeholders still need to have a clearer sense of the possible skills gap between student research practice and the requirements of community-based research. The overestimation of student ability to work independently and to community standards can only serve to compound the inherent challenges of working on a client lead, community-based project.

### **Institutional Change to Support Community-based Learning**

The project highlighted the very different organisational structures within higher education and community-based groups. Finglas for Diversity, coming as it does, from a community development perspective found it easy to incorporate the work of the DCU project into both its collective and individual member work plans. Meetings and development work within DCU on the other hand, were by their very nature, difficult to organise with School Coordinators finding it challenging to attend all meetings as all involved have quite different schedules. This resulted in an inadequate number of meetings among the DCU stakeholders and at times poor communication, both within the university and with Finglas for Diversity, exacerbated by an over reliance on email.

The community had expected much more direct engagement with university staff than, overall, the project could deliver. Community partners put great stock in developing personal contacts and relationships as part of the process of advancing and implementing projects of this kind. It is important to be clear about the level of contact that will ensue at the outset of the collaboration.

## Cultural Change and Community-based Learning

There was also a sense that work of this nature was done in or for communities with little understanding of the institutional and policy changes required if research is to be done in partnership with community-based organisations. For example, a number of practical concerns arose in relation to issues of copyright, intellectual property and the funding of students and the project had to develop policies in response to these matters as they arose without, at times, adequate support. While the eclectic and dynamic nature of such projects may limit the practicality of adopting completely standard procedures, there is a need to instigate discussion and debate within the university about how community-led projects that are externally funded from a variety of sources can best be managed.

## Conclusion

Finglas for Diversity benefited greatly from its involvement with DCU on the research project. It developed skills and capacities within the network and wider community, contributed greatly to its research and development work and left the group with a range of tangible and practical resources for future and further community use. However, its experience does show that we cannot take assumptions of the community benefits of university-led community-based learning initiatives on face value. Any community engaging in a process of community-based learning with higher education institutions needs to very clear how much time, energy and resources they can put in and if this contribution is justified by the outputs. It is clear that any successfully embedded community-based learning needs to be supported by the political climate of the educational institute, an ideal that Boyer (1996) describes as requiring engaging as peers meaning that 'power is distributed equitably; respect is accorded consistently; and listening is practised constantly'.

A full report on the DCU Finglas for Diversity research project is available from the Finglas for Diversity website <http://www.finglas4diversity.dcu.ie>

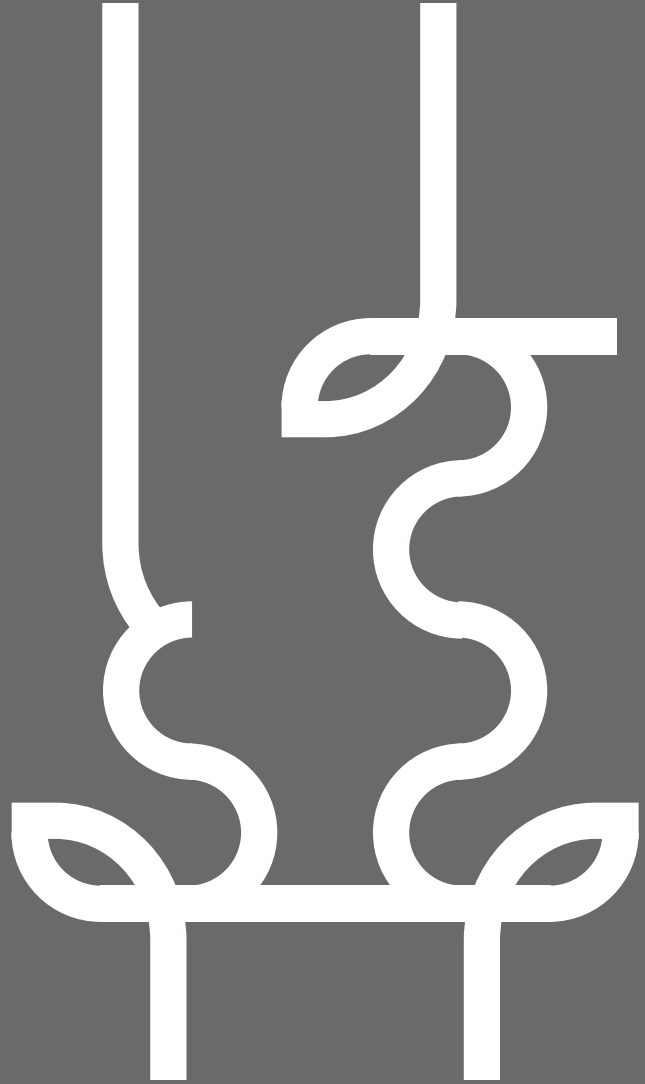
## Bibliography

- Boyer, E. (1996) 'The scholarship of engagement' in *The Journal of Public Service and Outreach* 1, 1, 11-20.
- Dublin City University (2007) *Citizenship & Community Engagement Strategy 2006-2008* DCU, Dublin.
- Dublin Institute of Technology (2007) *Community-based Learning, Connecting Curriculum and Community: A new challenge for Irish Education*. Seminar notes, Tuesday May 22 2007, Dublin Castle.
- Fear, F.A and Avila, M. (2005) 'Frames and Discourses: Exploring the meaning of engagement' in *Perspectives on Community Development, Vol 2, 2005*.
- Finglas for Diversity (2005) *Project outline*, minutes of a meeting with DCU, April 6th 2005, The Helix..
- Holland, B. (2001) *Exploring the challenge of documenting and measuring civic engagement endeavors of colleges and universities*. Paper given at the Campus Compact Advanced Institute on Classifications for Civic Engagement. Accessed when? <http://www.compact.org/advancedtoolkit/measuring.html>
- McIlrath, L and MacLabhrainn, I (2007) *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: An International Perspective*. England: Ashgate .
- MacLabhrainn, I. (2007) *Reinvigorating the Civic Mission of the University*. Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, National University of Ireland, Galway.

# To Be or Not To Be Altruistic: *Students' Reactions, Reflections & Resistance* To Service Learning

13

---



# To Be or Not To Be Altruistic: *Students' Reactions, Reflections & Resistance* To Service Learning

**Hannah Barton**

*Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology*

**Jean Hughes**

*Dublin City University*

//////////

## Introduction

*"Only those who attempt the absurd, achieve the impossible"* (M.S. Escher 2001, p5).

This chapter describes a project undertaken by third year applied psychology students in IADT Dun Laoghaire, that uses a service-learning initiative to assist students to better understand the concept of altruism. It also highlights the reactions of the students and staff to the challenge of using a non-traditional pedagogy within the context of higher education. The chapter will conclude with reflections on some benefits and issues relating to the use of service learning in this context. Central to the chapter is an interview with Hannah Barton by Jean Hughes, the two authors. Jean was Hannah's Head of Department when she introduced the Altruism Project originally and she had concerns at the time. They now revisit it when Jean has moved to DCU and Hannah has established the project as a core pedagogy for her module.

//////////

## Background To The Altruism Project

The altruism project is the main assessment instrument in the third year Social Psychology Module of the BSc in Applied Psychology. The aim of the project is to develop civic and social responsibility through relevant experience and reflection. Originally, the assessment attempted to link the concrete experience of volunteerism with the psychological theories of altruism. Volunteerism had just been adopted as a research theme in the areas of altruism and prosocial behaviour (Bierhoff, 2002), and as these are core elements of the module, it was logical that some element of volunteerism should be used in the learning process. The majority of the relevant psychological research on volunteerism has focused on the motives and personalities of volunteers. For example, Eisenberg, Miller, Schaller, Fabes and Fultz (1989), looked at the motives of volunteers in terms of social responsibility and Cialdini (1976) examined the satisfying of volunteers own needs through feeling good about themselves. The question of the existence of an "altruistic personality", defined by Penner and Finkelstein (1998 as cited in Bierhoff 2002, p526) as "an enduring tendency to think about the welfare and rights of other people, to feel concern and empathy for them and to act in a way that benefits them", has been debated.

The Altruism Project was created to give students the opportunity to answer for themselves questions surrounding altruism. It was envisaged to combine learning with doing work in the community using service learning which '... attempts to bolster the importance of volunteerism in the community by formalizing the learning experience in college curriculum' (Bordelon and Philips, 2006, p143). Service Learning, as a pedagogic tool, provides an experiential learning opportunity while maintaining academic integrity and often makes use of the tools of reflection. Reflective learning journals and blogs are often used by the students to sort out and analyse feelings and knowledge about the experience of the activity.

Reflective techniques are used for assessment within the Altruism Project and students are given questions to structure their reflections and keep track of events, as well as recording the students' own reactions to these events. These records help to generate data for reflection and facilitate insight into the students' own behaviours as well as developing a critical awareness of social issues. The thrust of the project is to challenge students to investigate whether altruism really exists and in what context. Class readings, discussions, presentations and small group reflections are developed through a blog and a learning journal system.

Below is a detailed interview and conversation between the two authors, Hannah Barton and Jean Hughes, whereby they explore the dimensions of this work:

**JH**—*Can we start by you defining what is meant by 'Altruism'?*

**HB**—Altruism can be defined as behaviour or helping with no apparent gain or benefit to the helper. It's different from pro-social behaviour because with pro-social behaviour there may be some benefit to the helper, but in altruism there is no intended gain in any shape or form to the helper.

**JH**—*Tell me a little bit about this particular project. What was the purpose of doing your assessment in this particular way?*

**HB**—In the first year I ran the project, I started out just basically asking students to look theoretically at altruism in the real world and go and find evidence, if there was any, of altruistic personalities. This involved students interviewing people who volunteered, doing observations and writing this up in a very academic report. Then it evolved into a more experiential, service learning project, based on feedback from the students who felt that they actually wanted to become involved and have more hands on learning experiences. In response to that I started incorporating a requirement that, instead of passively observing volunteering as altruism, they have to actually experience it for themselves. About 4 years ago the reflective or meta-cognitive element of the project came about through the use of learning journals. I felt this gave the students the chance to actually reflect and link in what they were experiencing, their reactions to it and to link it in some way into the changes they may or may not have been experiencing for themselves.

**JH**—*Why did you see service learning as an appropriate way of doing this?*

**HB**—I didn't choose service learning per se as the pedagogical approach, it more or less found me. When I was trying to link in the experiences of the students, the reflective element and also link it into the academic learning content of the social psychology module, i.e. link what they were learning in social psychology about attitudes, about groups, group dynamics, persuasion etc and to apply those theories into the real world context, service learning seemed to fulfil all of these criteria.

**JH**—*So, other than the original project that you did, you didn't try other alternatives, service learning was the one you felt most suited?*

**HB**—The origins of the project are very academic, very traditional and very passive, where students record data in a scientific way and then they write up an objective report about the experiences and assess the evidence for whether or not altruism exists as we know it in the real world. The students then started becoming involved in the project, wanting to experience and try out. When I did a little bit of reading around service learning, the first book I picked up was Eyer and Giles 'Where's the Learning in Service Learning?', which is a fantastic tool book for anyone who wants to find out about service learning. I found that all the positive elements they mentioned, the raising awareness of the social dimension, the interpersonal skills, transferable skills and also the linking of academic content into an experiential or a personal way in a real world context for students, all of those dimensions fitted what I was trying to

do in my altruism project. So that is why I formally incorporated what we now know to be service learning into the altruism project.

**JH**—*Can you describe what activities the students became engaged in as part of the project, what kind of things do they do?*

**HB**—Well, over the past 5 or 6 years, I have managed to establish some very good working relationships with certain community partners and that has been completely due to the great work that has been done by the students and most of these community partners. For example, in the Intel Clubhouse, the students act as mentors to children and due to the positive experience they have had, and the great work done by the students, these community partners keep coming back year after year looking for more students. Another great partner has been the National Rehabilitation Hospital, where my students, over the past 2 – 3 years, have been working in the occupational therapy department, working with assistive technologies and training patients to use computers and/or to become independent through the use of technology. They have also worked with patients in the brain injuries ward and have been helping with the internet café in the hospital. Other projects that have come about have been with the Dublin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals - I send about 3 or 4 of my students in there every year; Childline, which is a new one, and Copping Out, which is a Department of Justice initiative. What I have found is that if the students are interested in a particular area of psychology, or in a particular area of society, then they will go out and they will find the community partner that suits them. Childline was actually contacted by a particular student and they have come on board this year.

What I have noticed in the past 2-3 years is that there has been a trend to move away from direct service or hands-on work, and towards fundraising. The students have done fundraising for the National Children's Hospital in Tallaght, for Barnardos, a fundraising concert for Simon and also online altruism activities in terms of designing websites for charity groups. So, in the last few years, I'm not sure if that is a reflection of the growing digital audience, or the fact that students are becoming more comfortable in a digital environment and/or less comfortable with hands-on activities. but there is a trend to moving towards those indirect activities.

**JH**—*If a student doesn't come up with a particular idea, do you point them towards a particular area or do you let them choose? Do you find that any of your students are reluctant to engage in this project?*

**HB**—The students are prepared about it in advance at the end of their second year. They are told that this is going to come in third year, so they are given enough time over the summer to prepare and to get themselves into a frame of mind for where they want to do their project. Also, when they come back in third year, in September/October, I invite in previous students who have completed the altruism project to come and give a 10-15 minute honest evaluation and assessment of where they worked, saying the pros and cons of a particular placement. For example, students have come in and talked about working with an autistic boy, they have talked about CASA, the Caring and Sharing Association. So the students are given as much information as possible and as many different opportunities as possible to make contact with relevant organisations. The initial response of most of the students is quite good. I have run this project in its current form for the past 6 years and in all of that time about 100 students have gone through and only one has failed to complete the project. In that case the student was given a traditional academic assignment, an essay.

The project runs from September to March/April depending on when Easter is, and there is a progress presentation in November. This assesses the students' presentation skills, but also gives me a chance to see where these projects are going, who's going where etc. By November most of them will either have found a placement or be in training. So at that time I have a good idea who has found what placement and who's gone into which placement.



When it does happen that one or two students, by November, have not started or have been slow, I would steer them, have an interview with them and talk to them and find out where they would like to go and I would try and steer them towards one of the well established community partners. Otherwise, I try to find one that suits them.

This is a very demanding project compared to a traditional academic assignment and it's also very interesting as a gauge to how students will cope with unpredictable and unstructured environments. If they don't do well and are challenged and de-motivated by this particular project, it may indicate potential problems in completing their 4th year dissertation, which is also a self-directed piece of work. So it may indicate in advance difficulties they could have in their fourth year.

**JH**—*If a student proposes a project area to you, do you have any kind of evaluation that you would conduct to see if it is suitable?*

**HB**—In November, when I have the progress presentations and I see where the student is going and what they are proposing to do, I also have the possibility at that point to veto a project. I use that power of veto especially on health and safety issues. Also, just before, and as part of their training and introduction to this, they are given seminars on professional practice and ethics, especially the whole area of Garda (Police) clearance. So they are made aware that there are ethical issues. In all of the years I have only turned down one project and that was on the grounds of health and safety.

**JH**—*Is there any necessity to ensure there is equivalence between projects - for example, if one student is working directly with patients in the National Rehabilitation Hospital and another is fundraising or designing a website, they are quite different types of activity and different kinds of engagement. Is there any necessity to have some sort of equivalence or does that not really matter in terms of the kind of assessment or the kind of things you are assessing?*

**HB**—In terms of comparing and contrasting the different projects, the projects are assessed by their portfolios and by the progress reports and an academic paper. In terms of comparing hands-on learning activities and hands off indirect learning activities, I don't equate them. The goal of the project is for the students to experience service learning in a structured, meta-cognitive way and it is up to the student to decide whether direct service is for them or not. I don't say it has to be direct as I've noticed that some students are not comfortable in a hands-on situation.

**JH**—*Could this be considered 'compulsory volunteering' which is a bit of a contradiction?*

**HB**—The students call it enforced altruism!

**JH**—*You mentioned that they are given training in ethics and professional practice. Is that the main training they will receive?*

**HB**—Before they start, yes. Because in this Applied Psychology degree there is very strong emphasis on transferable skills, the students will be familiar with learning journals and reflective writing since first year and also with portfolio preparation. They are given an refresher seminar on reflective writing, so they will have some recent training on reflective writing and on portfolios. A lot of the organisations now do their own training, so a lot of the students actually get very valuable, onsite, training by the community partners.

**JH**—*Is there 'traditional' learning associated with the module in terms of giving them a background in altruism?*

**HB**—Altruism as a theoretical concept is formally introduced in the module. This module is Social Psychology, and with respect to theoretical concepts we look at the

different theories of altruism and when it is more likely for people to be altruistic. We do all the theoretical research, papers, all of the theory within the module. The whole purpose of this particular assessment is to try and take what we know from the academic theory and see and evaluate the evidence of whether or not it exists in a real world context. So, the purpose is to see if altruism does exist, with the by-product that the project became less theoretical, less academic and more hands-on, more experiential and the students start learning about themselves and about whether or not they are altruistic or whether they are comfortable working within particular environments. Because it is a novel strategy, they are put into a non-routine environment and they very often have to deal with problems and solutions in a novel way. So they learn about themselves, their own critical thinking abilities, they learn about their interpersonal skills and they learn about themselves as people and whether or not they are altruistic. I had one student actually say to me, that basically this project taught him he wasn't altruistic and he wouldn't have found that out had he not engaged in this.

**JH**—*In terms of the actual module, you have formal engagement with them throughout the module, so this doesn't replace the 'traditional' learning, it complements it?*

**HB**—Yes it complements it. Per week they have 3 hours traditional and one hour timetabled time for this project. So they come into the classroom on Thursday for their traditional social psychology and then Thursday afternoon they go to their community placement.

**JH**—*And there's room within the normal week for them to do that as opposed to them doing it in their own time?*

**HB**—Time is probably one of the greatest factors that the students raised and felt under pressure about in the early years. Trying to manage, juggling paid work, family life, assessment, student life and also the extra demands of this project, so being aware of that and taking that in account, we timetabled this way.

**JH**—*So there is room made for it in their timetable?*

**HB**—There's room made for it, but it also recognises that this is a demanding/challenging project, in terms of things like transport to their community partner, the initial contact with the community partner, the process of the Garda vetting, all of these require time and also as well as writing, they have to write weekly reflections in their learning journals, so its quite demanding.

**JH**—*And this is a module that runs over a full academic year rather than a semester?*

**HB**—It runs over the full year, but what seems to be happening is that I've noticed in the past year or 2, a lot of students are coming to me earlier in second year looking to get into places and also some of the fourth years have remained involved with their community partners.

**JH**—*Have there been any negatives, for example have the students compared this with a traditional project? Have they complained at all, or do they feel that it's fair? Can they see the value in it?*

**HB**—The majority of students would feel that it has been a fairly positive learning experience. There have been negative evaluations of it, as one student pointed out correctly to me that it wasn't my job to make them altruistic. But I would argue that the purpose of this project is not to make anyone altruistic, it is to facilitate learning by providing a variety of different learning experiences. This is a challenging one so yes, there has been resistance to it, but most of the resistance is about time management issues. It would also be in terms of doubts about their skills and ability and what they are learning. Some students are not what we would call 'people-friendly' and they have learned that they are not comfortable working with other people from this project. But even so, these students will still remark that they would not have learned those facts about themselves if they hadn't undergone the process, if they hadn't actually done the service learning project. Time management is the big issue and from feedback from the students we have been trying to incorporate it in a more cohesive way with the other projects and with the other modules in the degree.

**JH**—*Finally, is there any kind of contradiction in almost forcing people to experience altruism as a way of understanding it? Does it contradict the definition you gave at the beginning, of altruism as something done purely for the benefit for other people? Here you are expecting students to do it to benefit their own learning.*

**HB**—Yes there is a definite contradiction in terms that the project itself. It is a risky pedagogical strategy which, when compared to a traditional routine pedagogical strategy, is more time demanding and is more challenging. Yet, at the same time, it probably provides a more meaningful learning experience for a lot of the students. As a teacher, I notice a trend for a lot of students to become very savvy about continuous assessment work and it is very difficult for them to actually do any piece of work unless it's valued in terms of credit. So, if you want to get them to experience any particular learning experience, you have to try to make it intrinsically motivating, but also you may have to award credit for it. So, for example, if I was to make this elective, I would imagine that it might be seen as too challenging for some students. But by making it compulsory and tying it in to assessment marks, yes it is somewhat of a contradiction!

//////////

## Student Commitment

Student commitment in hours has varied, with some students contributing 20 – 25 hours and others contributing up to 90 hours. This disparity can be due to a number of factors such as personal beliefs or time constraints. The altruism project connects practical engagement through service learning to the academic subject matter of social psychology. The increasing self knowledge and insight gained through reflection allowed some students to articulate their misgivings and resistance to the project. The Altruism Project has built a bridge between the participating organisations, local community and the Institute, with the students being the driving force in the forging of these relationships. This has created a challenge to the students as they learn about the needs of the community, reflect upon them and work towards solving social and community needs.

One concern to the students is dealing with time commitments that this project requires. A particular student summed up the initial difficulties by saying that “it is hard to find an organisation that did not require a long term commitment“. Another comments that “It was hard to get a suitable time to volunteer, difficult to fit the work around college work“. Another student found the biggest problem was “time management in the organization” that she went to. She complained of a “Lack of staff resources and availability in the organisation to help with certain project requirements like filling out questionnaires.” Another student commented on the time issue from the perspective of the community partner in terms of gaining insight into how they operate, “From doing the project, I have gained a great deal of respect and appreciation for altruistic organizations and the work they do. I have learned how time consuming it can be to conduct interviews and analyse information about clients”. Weinreich, 2003 found that service learning challenges students to use time effectively, access resources and try to solve problems.

The often ill-defined nature of the problems and situations encountered was also a source of anxiety for many students, as well as a simple fear of the unknown. “My initial feelings to the altruism project were thoughts of negativity, dreading the prospects of the months ahead of research and work in an unknown place“. Another commented that “on my way there, I honestly did not know what to expect. I went there with an open mind.” Yet another student wrote “Looking back to when I first started, I realise just how nervous I was about starting the voluntary work, but I definitely feel happier about doing it now. My biggest fear about this project was that I wouldn't be able to help the kids“. However, some students relished the challenge, with one who chose

to work with people with spinal injuries saying, “Working and helping people with really serious physical and cognitive problems seems to me to be a difficult task, but this is the reason why I want to work there, not because it is going to be easy but because it is going to be challenging”.

Most students experience time poverty, juggling paid employment, academic work, social and family commitments. Anything extra will put them under pressure and so this project, which can run for six months from start to submission of the portfolios, does arouse anxiety and dread. This is why time management by both staff and students is very important.

//////////

## The Role Of Reflection

Some students were surprised that the project could be enjoyable, with one student commenting that “I enjoyed the volunteer work more than I thought I would, it wasn't as much of a drag as I thought it would be. I also learned you need a lot of patience and motivation when dealing with kids”. This indicated finding a sense of self-satisfaction and being surprised at the realisation that it could be “fun” helping others. The impact of engagement with social justice issues was also noted, albeit in a basic way - “I have found that the act of helping others really does make you feel good, that you have done something worthwhile, it has instilled an awareness of others. I have been exposed to hardship and poverty through the project and I feel I am lucky to have the life I have”. For some students, their reflections indicated that it was the discovery of skills and strengths, through completing the altruism project, that brought about self-understanding. This was a key feature of the project that was emphasized through the learning journals. This empowered the students to take control over their lives and goals, with one commenting about a difficult situation that arose, “I handled it alone, it was just me and her. I felt happy afterwards as I realized that I could diffuse situations that I didn't think I could. I felt happy and relaxed”.

Some students found themselves reflecting and making links between the service engagement and the wider social context. One student, reflecting on why many children drop out of school, wrote “I can see how it would be difficult to attribute any value to things such as education if your environment does not encourage it or looks down on it. I think more of these homework clubs need to be set up in these areas”. Such a reflection indicates that the student is starting to think of social action and possibly social justice. This is important, as many people never reflect on their position of relative privilege.

//////////

## Resistance To Service Learning

Service learning as a pedagogical strategy is full of risk but also of promise. It is a learning experience that allows for meaningful exchange between all parties. Freire (1994) perceived teachers and students as co-learners or co-workers, striving to tackle mutual goals of social justice and personal transformation. Such a non-traditional approach will meet with suspicion, apprehension and even resistance. Psychological research has indicated that there are individual differences in prosocial behaviour. Many students discover that they are not easily motivated to engage fully in service learning. This is often due to personality factors relating to cognitive, motivational factors and perceived threat to self-concept. Self – concept is a construct that is used to give meaning and a pattern to thinking, emotions and behaviour. It is the picture that we have of ourselves and anything that contradicts that self-concept threatens our self esteem.

Not everyone is a “helpful” or altruistic person. Some believe in the norm of self-sufficiency i.e. that everyone should look after him- or herself. Others believe in the norm of social responsibility, that we should help those who need it. Some students believe that it is not the place of education to teach helpfulness or altruism. As one student pointed out quite emphatically “.... it was not your job to teach me to be altruistic”. Bordelon and Philips

(2006) found similar reservations in relation to teaching what was regarded as more appropriate in a religious or spiritual context. A particular observation is that initially students do not see service learning as appropriate to their academic studies. Application is the degree to which students can link what they are doing in the classroom to what they are experiencing in the community and vice versa. Eyler and Giles (1999) point out that in order to build application into a service learning experience, it is important "To create connections between the subject matter of the class and issues raised by the service, and connections between the tasks the student does and the goals of the class" (p10). Unless the student can make the link between the academic learning outcomes of the course and the service learning project, they will not accept it as a meaningful, valid experience. The learning outcomes for the Social Psychology module include: Having an awareness of the three different levels of analysis - personal, interpersonal and societal. The last one which is an important one is to be able to provide a critical account of the core concepts in social psychology, in this case altruism and pro-social behaviour.

The fact that the service learning was compulsory provoked resistance by a few students. One student in particular did not wish to put in the hours due to potential clashes with his paid employment and just wanted to donate an agreed sum of money to a charity instead. He had particular issues with the concept of having no choice in doing the service learning and did not see it as an equivalent pedagogy to conducting experiments or writing essays, which were also compulsory. The value of service learning to his personal and interpersonal development were not perceived and he was indignant at being "forced" to do the project. Most of the students do express initial hostility and resistance to the project, mainly due to the time requirements.

//////////

## Final Reflections

The Altruism Project is challenging to the students in so many ways, it presents them with disorienting dilemmas and novel situations which can force them to rethink stereotypes and previous ways of problemsolving. Structured reflection through learning journals / blogs can aid in the application of academic content to real world situations and experiences. Social issues can be viewed through a new lens. Students can develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills through service learning. But in order to achieve these outcomes, it requires a lot of planning and personal resources in terms of flexibility, openness to new experiences and patience. The altruism project started off as an experimental pedagogy but evolved, mainly due to the commitment, enthusiasm and honest feedback of the students. Another important feature is to recognise the individuality of the students who have different learning styles and cognitive development. The next step is to try to quantify the benefits to the students' longterm career and personal development. A quantitative and qualitative study into the long term affects of participating in the altruism project is just commencing. It is an attempt to see if the altruism project has had some influence on career paths chosen by the students and, on reflection, if it had some personal impact on the formation of their adult personality. Some will never be altruistic, but the fact they can experience it just once and reflect on that, means it is not a wasted experience.

## Bibliography

- Bierhoff, H.W. (2002) *Prosocial Behaviour*. Hove, East Sussex: Psychology Press.
- Bordelon, T.D. & Philips, I. (2006) 'Service –Learning; what students have to say' in *Active learning in higher education*, vol 7,(2), 143-153.
- Butin, D. (Ed.). (2005) *Service Learning in Higher Education*. Palgrave: N.York.
- Cialdini, R.B. & Kennech, D.J. (1976) 'Altruism as hedonism: A social development perspective on the relationship of negative mood states and helping' in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34, 907-914.
- Escher M.S. (2001). *M. S. Escher – the graphic work*. Germany: Taschen Publishers.
- Eisenberg, N., Miller, P.A., Schaller, M., Fabes, R.A. & Fultz, J. (1989) 'The role of sympathy and altruistic personality traits in helping: A re-examination' in *Journal of Personality*, 57, 41-67.
- Eyler, J. & Giles, D. E. (1999) *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Weinreich, D. (2003) 'Service-learning at the Edge of Chaos' in *Educational Gerontology* 29: 181–95.

# Section Two

## *Case Studies*

### *Case Study Four*

#### University & Community- Defining Experience

*14* *15* *16* *17*



Section Two  
*Case Studies*

*Case Study Four*  
University &  
Community-  
Defining Experience

14   15   16   17



Pilot Project at the  
*Centre for NonProfit*  
*Management,*  
T.C.D.:  
Some Unexpected  
Consequences

14

---



# Pilot Project at the Centre for NonProfit Management, T.C.D.: Some Unexpected Consequences

**Catherine Breathnach**

*Trinity College, Dublin*

//////////

## Abstract

The work of the Centre for Nonprofit Management (CNM) at the School of Business Trinity College Dublin is structured in three programmes: Research, Education and Dialogue. In 2002, an action-research project was initiated to explore how the Dialogue Programme might operate. Two pilot initiatives were undertaken in conjunction with the research and education programmes respectively. This paper looks at the experience of the latter which utilised a service learning approach, and which resulted in unanticipated innovation and additional productivity within the CNM. The exercise in service learning sought to provide value to the nonprofit organisations involved, in addition to grounding and enabling the students' learning. Building on this initial engagement with these organisations, the pilot initiative focused on further developments resulting from these relationships including the establishment of the Visiting Practitioner Scheme at the CNM. In turn, this has stimulated the desire to develop a more broadly based 'learning community' of nonprofit practitioners linked to the CNM. The project highlights challenges to the established role of Irish universities, and the nature of their relationships with the broader community. In turn, these challenges raise questions regarding the range of outputs and outcomes expected of and within these institutions, and how their resources are expended.

//////////

## Introduction

*During the 1990s, a variety of civil society related projects were undertaken at the School of Business at Trinity College Dublin. Ultimately these resulted in a proposal to establish a centre focusing on this area (CNM, 2000), and noted the significant role in enabling society and the State played by the 'third sector' in Ireland. The proposal also observed the challenges being faced by the sector given the rapid and substantial economic, structural, demographic, cultural and value changes being experienced in Ireland. The centre was envisioned as a conceptual and physical space that would facilitate the development of knowledge about nonprofit organisations, and that it would do this by creating and supporting relationships across disciplines and sectors. Its mission was outlined as:*

- to contribute to the understanding of nonprofit organisations, their emergence, management and impact on society through research and its dissemination;
- to contribute to the development of managerial capacity and organisational leadership in nonprofit organisations through education provision; and
- to contribute to and facilitate discussion about ideas related to the sector, and sector organisation management, through a 'dialogue' process with and among third sector stakeholders in Ireland including universities.

The Centre for Nonprofit Management (CNM) was founded in 2000, supported by a substantial establishment grant from Atlantic Philanthropies.

//////////

## The Evolution Of The Dialogue Programme At The CNM

In the original Centre proposal document (CNM 2000), the Dialogue Programme was described in terms of 'dissemination'. This was defined as a mode of dialogue with audiences, rather than as a simple 'output' process. Two audiences were identified in particular: the Irish third sector and those associated with it, and the international academic community.

In the period prior to the establishment of the CNM, the experience at the School of Business had been that there was a dissonance of information, language and conceptualization between groups that hindered the development of knowledge about the third sector, and that hindered the capacity of these constituents to inform each other (CNM 2000). These complexities resulted from the variety of background experiences, cultures and assumptions of individual 'participants. For a meaningful dialogue to occur, these complexities and differences required overt acknowledgement (CNM 2000, Coghlan and Brannick 2001, Issacs 1999, Du Toit 1998, Gilchrist 1998).

In early 2002 the concept underlying, and the development of, the Dialogue Programme were further explored within the CNM. The discussion observed that 'dialogue' suggested a number of conditions or characteristics. It implied communication that enabled mutual understanding amongst those involved, and the evolution of a shared definition of the concern under discussion. The tasks included speaking, listening, joint reflection and analysis, the drawing of shared conclusions and theorizing (Kolb 1984, Dixon 1994, Breathnach 2006a, 2006c, 2006f). The process implied shared learning and development. It suggested that 'dialogue' could facilitate joint strategy development and action. As a process, it seemed to have integrative functions, and could be considered as a core process in strategic learning and change management within systems – whether systems of relationships, understandings, functions or tasks. It was apparent to the CNM that successful dialogue required mutual respect, parity of esteem and equality amongst those involved. All participants could undertake a variety of roles within a dialogue process: as actors, consumers and reflectors. These roles, in turn, seemed to relate to the set of interdependent tasks inherent in learning whether at an individual level (Kolb 1984) or at a system level (Dixon 1994, Wenger 1998).

These commonly-held roles mark 'dialogue' out from other forms of communication - including traditional forms of teaching and research - in which power differentiation is institutionalised in the roles and relationships of the participants involved (Du Toit 1998, Gilchrist 1998, Issacs 1999). 'Dialogue' requires the adoption of a distinctly alternative approach to that of the limited division of roles between producer/provider and consumer.

As a result, 'dialogue' at the CNM began to be understood as a potentially innovative approach that could enable greater, broader, cross-boundary and shared learning to occur. The Dialogue Programme could allow the CNM to be at the nexus of a system of cross-boundary learning relationships, providing reflective space to enable these to be maximized as a set of resources to the learning and development of all those involved. As such the programme could function as an innovative and effective means through which the CNM could 'listen' to (Senge *et al* 2004), and communicate with,

its broader environment. It was felt that this could enable the CNM to be at the cutting edge of knowledge creation in its field, and, in achieving this, to generate the greatest value as a centre of learning for its stakeholders – students, academics, nonprofit practitioners, funders and policy-makers. The new knowledge generated through this approach could have a particular value to government and policymakers due to the sense of authenticity resulting from its grounded nature and shared authorship.

As such, the Dialogue Programme could enrich the research and education programmes at the CNM by situating them in the learning cycle inherent in this system of inter-relationships. It could do this by increasing the opportunities for active and ongoing engagement with the wider community. In doing this there could be consequent increased possibilities for the identification of new areas for consideration, the increased impact of work undertaken, increased access to wider sources of expertise, and review and feedback enabling further responsive developments. As such it could increase the usefulness of university work to that of communities, and to the effectiveness of the activities of these communities.

//////////

### The Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project 2002-06

This discussion at the CNM provided the basis for the establishment of the Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project (2002-2006) there (Breathnach 2006a, 2006f). The project sought to explore how a university centre might support civil society organisations in Ireland, and the development of related academic study. At the outset, it was anticipated that the project would involve a number of stages as follows:

- Stage 1—The development of the project's conceptual framework and brief;
- Stage 2—The design and implementation of two pilot initiatives in association with the education and research programmes;
- Stage 3—The development and implementation of pilot IT and communication strategies;
- Stage 4—The identification, design and implementation of 'learning infrastructure and community development' approaches; and
- Stage 5—The final production of working papers and the final project research report (Breathnach 2006a-f).

The phases of the project overlapped due to the necessity to initiate action in response to needs arising in one phase, before the completion of that phase. As such, the process resulted in the development of an integrated system of action and reflection, and the development of supportive infrastructure based on the emerging capacity to engage in 'future sensing' (Scharmer 2001). This confirmed the suitability of adopting an action-research approach as it enabled learning and responsive development as the project unfolded.

//////////

### The Dialogue - Education Pilot Initiative

This initiative entailed the involvement of the Dialogue Programme in the delivery of the final year undergraduate course "Managing Nonprofit Organisations" (MNO) 2002-2003. This was an established course delivered by the Academic Director of the CNM. Strategic review projects of nonprofit organisations, undertaken by groups of students, were a core element of the course. It was designed as an exercise in service learning – providing value to the organisations involved and grounding and enabling students' learning. Building on this initial engagement with the nonprofit organisations, the pilot initiative focused on further developments that might result from these relationships.

//////////

## Process And Outcomes

In summer 2002, personnel from the education and dialogue programmes agreed to invite ten nonprofit organisations to participate in the student strategic review projects during the following autumn–winter period. The process involved meeting with the senior personnel in each organisation. All agreed to participate. The student project-work started in November. This involved students in a number of visits to the organisations, interviews with senior staff and/or volunteers, documentary research and mentoring meetings with CNM staff. The draft project reports were submitted to the organisations by the students for comment. The reports were then finalised. Copies were given to the organisations for their use, and were submitted for student examination purposes in April 2003. Following completion of the projects, students were asked for feedback regarding their experiences and recommended alterations to the operation of the strategic review project in subsequent years of the “Managing Nonprofit Organisations” course. Follow-up interviews were undertaken with nine of the ten participating organisations. The organisations were also invited to a review workshop. This feedback was collated and fed into the “Managing Nonprofit Organisations” course review in June 2003. This resulted in modifications to the course in 2003-04. It also contributed to the CNM annual review and planning processes, in addition to the development of the Dialogue-Education Programme pilot initiative itself.

In terms of this paper, the feedback from the participating organisations is of particular interest in regard to the unanticipated outcomes that subsequently resulted. The organisational respondents were asked what kind of opportunities the CNM might provide in responding to issues of concern to organisations such as their own. The extent and nature of current engagements between those organisations and universities were also explored. The response can be categorised as follows: the nature of the ‘space’ provided by the CNM; the focus of the activity of the CNM; and, the approach and process adopted by the CNM.

//////////

## Focus Of Activity

The desired type of ‘space’ that the CNM might provide was described in terms of ‘neutral’, ‘inclusive’ and therefore ‘welcoming’, and ‘thinking’ space. It was felt that this would enable: the development of practitioner interaction and types of interaction with other organisations; intersectoral contact and partnerships which would reduce cross-sectoral barriers and facilitate shared strategic analysis; and networking which would encourage learning through access to a broader range of experiences, reflection, ‘best practice’, expertise, information and analysis. Respondents identified the need for ‘consultancy’, ‘thinking partnerships’ and ‘sounding board relationships’ to enable development within specific organisational settings. ‘Non-commercially driven’, ‘grounded in the Irish and third sector experience’ were characteristics regarded as essential to such ‘mentoring’ relationships. Contextualising this relational ‘space’ within the wider European experience was considered important. This was in terms of: ensuring an appropriate strategic or ‘big picture’ context enabling environmental scanning and future sensing; enabling a less competitive culture between organisations than currently existed in the third sector in Ireland; and, encouraging a focus on ‘functional’ rather than domain specific responses (for example, organisational management rather than environmental/ health/sporting related concerns).

The desired type of CNM work-focus identified by the nonprofit practitioners included: policy and politics (the role and operation of civil society, policy development, policy

influence, relationships with political parties/the political system, the role and relationship of politics and civil society); strategic development (strategic evaluation, planning and strategy implementation); and, functional, structural and operational concerns (fundraising, marketing, governance, the operation of small-scale organisations, the support/development/relationships with 'local' action, multitask managers/management). The need for facilitation of student access to third sector studies and career opportunities at secondary school, undergraduate and graduate levels also arose.

In terms of the approaches and working methods to be adopted by the CNM, there was an emphasis in the practitioner feedback on the development of ongoing and long-term developmental/learning relationships. It was stated that this would be facilitated by an 'informal' approach. The concepts of networking and workshops, events and the utilisation of information technology were mentioned particularly – although the latter, in isolation from a broader range of interactions, was seen to be an inadequate approach. Access to 'literature', library, 'best practice', inter-organisational placement opportunities, new and existing research, joint research projects, educational resources including 'text' books and case studies, and modular management courses leading to certification were all identified as needed and useful.

The level of engagement between the participating organisations and universities to date appeared to be limited. Where the organisations had been involved, the focus was on research with respect to the domains of involvement of the organisation, not the organisational or managerial issues or roles of the third sector.

In addition to innovation within the "Managing Nonprofit Organisations" course itself in 2003-04, the practitioner engagement stimulated a number of other developments at the CNM. These included the establishment of the Visiting Practitioner Scheme at the CNM (Breathnach 2006f), and the publication of the resource pack "Valuing Relationships as a Strategic Resource" (Lumsden and Breathnach 2006). The inaugural CNM Summer School, held in 2006, was also a development in the same vein. The remainder of this paper will focus on the Visiting Practitionership Scheme.

//////////

## The Visiting Practitionership Scheme

This scheme was piloted by the CNM in the autumn of 2003 in response to the needs identified by third sector practitioners and outlined above. It was mainstreamed in 2004. Participation on the scheme is limited to six practitioners at any one time, due to constraints regarding library access and the available CNM staff resources. To date, thirteen practitioners have utilised the scheme. It aims to provide nonprofit practitioners with the opportunity to develop a 'thinking partnership' with a CNM staff member around a topic of concern to the practitioner over the course of circa an academic year. As such, it provides the practitioner with reflective space, access to the TCD Library, and access to the expertise available through the CNM. The Visiting Practitionership is a voluntary relationship and does not constitute a formal course of study or employment with the CNM.

On completion of their projects, practitioners are asked to prepare a paper which is published on the CNM website, and/or to participate in a relevant CNM event. In addition to this, the scheme has provided some practitioners with the opportunity to consider if they wish to undertake a course of postgraduate study. To date, two practitioners have undertaken doctoral studies. Another used it to support the establishment of a social enterprise.

The scheme allows the CNM to have close working relationships with those involved in the third sector that in turn enables greater access to the expertise and knowledge there. This is in addition to facilitating initial seed research in emerging areas of concern. It might be

suggested that to date, the work of the visiting practitioners has related to two general themes: nonprofit governance and enabling innovation in nonprofit organisations. Together with a number of papers resulting from practitioner participation in CNM events, a collection of nonprofit practitioner papers on the governance theme has been published on the CNM web site. There are both English and Irish language versions available. The latter was facilitated by a partnership with Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge (the coordinating body of nonprofit Irish language focused organisations in the Republic of Ireland) that developed through the pilot initiative undertaken with the CNM Research Programme – part of the Dialogue Programme Action Research Project 2002-2006 (Breathnach 2006f).

//////////

## Review And Feedback

The Pilot Visiting Practitionership Scheme was reviewed in 2004 before it was mainstreamed (Breathnach 2006e, 2006f). The scheme was reviewed again in 2006. Feedback from both visiting practitioners and their thinking partners was sought. Nine of the ten visiting practitioners who had availed of the scheme at that time responded, as did four of the five CNM thinking partners. They were asked if the scheme had or had not been useful and the reasons for this. They were also asked how the scheme might be made more useful. In general terms, the response was extremely positive although development needs were identified. The main points made are summarised below.

**Space** - It appears that the Visiting Practitionership Scheme can be understood as an innovative space that enables the creation of new knowledge, rather than simply the management or dissemination of existing knowledge. The scheme enables academic-practitioner relationship building based on two-way engagement, communication and exchange. The relationship recognizes the equality among the diverse participants, and a sense of mutually beneficial partnership. Implied in this is the deepening of relationships over time, which requires extended time frames to fully develop. Because of the nature of 'diversity', no two practitionerships are the same.

**Innovation** - The scheme is a generator of additional resources and an enabler of innovation. So far, for example, it has resulted in seed research, access to wider sources of expertise, published papers on emerging concerns, agenda setting in research and education activity, additional postgraduate study being undertaken and the establishment of a social enterprise.

**Enabling Connection** - The scheme has a role in enabling broader community interaction, and connection, between the CNM and the wider third sector domain. It also has a role in providing enabling 'space' for those involved in the broader environment to raise, reflect on and consider emerging issues. As a result, such issues may be formalised sufficiently to become the subject of work within the CNM programme of activity over time. This provides the grounding for potential innovation within the three CNM programme areas. The experience also suggests that a scheme such as this can play a role in increasing the level of environment and future sensing carried out by nonprofit practitioners. As such, the scheme is a valuable opportunity both for the visiting practitioner and the CNM. It is a mutually-beneficial partnership. It is an exercise in organisational, or system, learning.

//////////

## Future Considerations

The visiting practitioners and thinking partners identified a number of development needs in relation to the scheme. These included that consideration might be given to the identification of particular areas of interest to the CNM (focal topics), and areas of expertise within the CNM. This was with a view to specifying a number of places on the scheme that would relate to these focal topics. It was suggested that this would allow the useful development of discussion in these particular areas. Respondents also felt that consideration might be given to increasing publicity for the scheme. This, however, has resourcing implications, particularly in terms of staff time and library access. Suggestions were made for the increased outputs possible from the practitioner papers, for example, the publication of hardcopy thematic collections of papers. This again has resourcing implications, and would require the development of both specific financing and marketing strategies. A need for more geographically dispersed 'thinking partners' was identified to enable nonprofit practitioners from a wider range of locations to more easily participate on the scheme. Equally, a similar point could be made in relation to areas of expertise and interest. These considerations suggest the need for a nationwide network.

The visiting practitioners also indicated a desire for further contact with the CNM on completion of the visiting practitionership through peer community building, increased links to events, and other work undertaken there. In particular, this focused on the desire for the continued opportunity to develop ideas and make a contribution to agenda setting at the CNM. This highlights the value and role of 'community' as an enabler of reflection and critical thinking. It also relates to the concept and requirement for cross-sectoral learning communities in the creation of effective learning systems, and policy-making, implementation and evaluation<sup>53</sup>.

The suggestions outlined support the existing strategic objectives of the CNM, but again have resourcing implications. These implications have a particular significance as they concern work areas and outputs not yet generally valued within the established academic framework of Irish universities.

---

<sup>53</sup> This is further considered in a complementary paper to this one. In it a former visiting practitioner reflects on the value of 'community' in enabling his reflection and future action: "To the Dark Side and Back: A Conversation with a Visiting Practitioner at the Centre for Nonprofit Management, TCD" by Frank Smith and Catherine Breathnach ([www.cnm.tcd.ie](http://www.cnm.tcd.ie)).



//////////

## Conclusion

The experience of this project suggests that university-based cross-sectoral dialogue initiatives enable the generation of significant resources. These support new knowledge creation and dissemination, not only within the science, medicine and technology domains, but also within those of the wider community. In this instance, this relates to the third sector in particular.

“Dialogue’ as an approach moves beyond the established operation of many Irish third level educational institutions and related academic communities. The focus of ‘dialogue’ in this paper is the development of a knowledge society located within an effective democracy dependent on a vibrant, broadly conceived learning community. In this context, educational institutions can be understood as vital, resource generating, ‘reflective spaces’. Key to this innovative capacity is the application of dialogical methodologies that enable effective, broader community connections and long-term relationship building across sectors. The project described demonstrates that this activity requires long-term commitment and investment to allow its development and fruition, as Maurrasse (2002) has already indicated. Resourcing, however, was shown to be a constraint in the further development of sustainable, cross-sectoral learning relationship building opportunities, as relationship building and maintenance are resource intensive. This places serious restrictions on academic staff who are attempting to pursue this work. The experience appears to echo that elsewhere (Fear et al 2006, Fontaine 2006). The situation suggests that there is a need for a more fundamental review of the mission of Irish third level education than that which has taken place to date.

The conclusion must be, therefore, that if these community-grounded learning relationships or partnerships are to become a key component of the work of universities and other similar institutions, the approach will be dependent on the design and implementation of specific development and resourcing strategies. Part of the required investment is the identification, recognition and development of dialogical competencies among the partners involved. The success of these dialogical approaches also implies that non-traditional outputs in academic terms become recognised and valued as mainstream productive activity. This, in turn, relates to the current and future mission of educational institutions in Ireland.

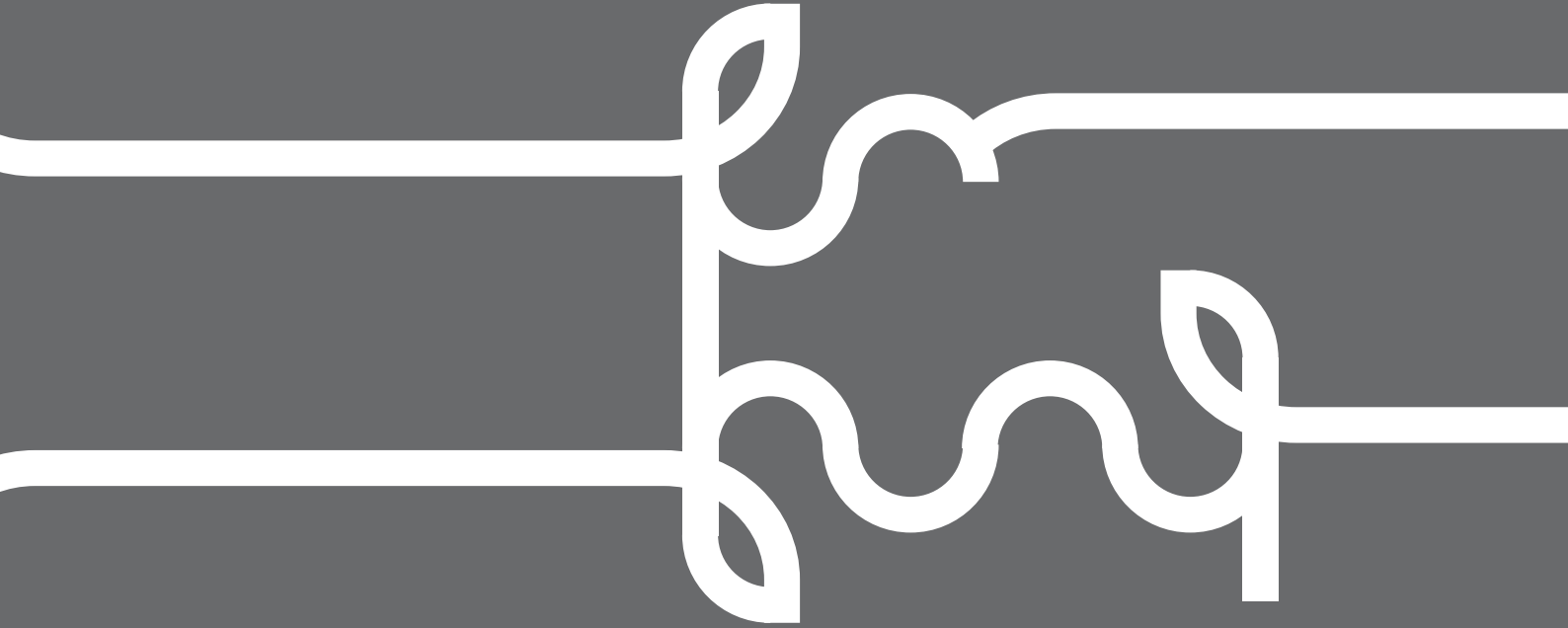
## Bibliography

- Breathnach, C. (2006) *CNM Visiting Practitionership Scheme Review 2003-06*. Review No. 2 (2004006) Dublin: Centre for Nonprofit Management. (Unpublished)
- Breathnach, C. (2006a) *University-Practitioner Praxis: Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project at the Centre for Nonprofit Management, Working Paper 1 The Evolution of the Dialogue Programme*, Dublin: CNM, Trinity College Dublin <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/>
- Breathnach, C. (2006b) *University-Practitioner Praxis: Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project at the Centre for Nonprofit Management, Working Paper 2 Social Change and the Challenges This Poses to the University* Dublin: CNM, Trinity College Dublin <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/>
- Breathnach, C. (2006c) *University-Practitioner Praxis: Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project at the Centre for Nonprofit Management, Working Paper 3 Knowledge-Creation. Communal learning and the Creation of Sustainable Community*, Dublin: CNM, Trinity College Dublin <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/>
- Breathnach, C. (2006d) *University-Practitioner Praxis: Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project at the Centre for Nonprofit Management, Working Paper 4 Pilot Initiatives 2002-2006*, Dublin: CNM, Trinity College Dublin <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/>
- Breathnach, C. (2006e) *University-Practitioner Praxis: Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project at the Centre for Nonprofit Management, Working Paper 5 Some Tentative Observations and Conclusions*, Dublin: CNM, Trinity College Dublin <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/>
- Breathnach, C. (2006f) *University-Practitioner Praxis: The Dialogue Programme Action-Research Project 2002-2006 at the Centre for Nonprofit Management. Final Report*. Dublin: Centre for Nonprofit Management, Trinity College Dublin. <http://www.cnm.tcd.ie/dialogue/>
- Centre for Nonprofit Management (2000) *Centre Proposal Document Dublin: Centre for Nonprofit Management*, Dublin: School of Business, Trinity College Dublin (Unpublished).
- Coghlan, D. and T. Brannick (2001) *Doing Action-Research in Your Own Organisation*. London: Sage Publications.
- Dixon, N. (1994) *The Organisational Learning Cycle: How We Can Learn Collectively*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill
- Du Toit, A. (1998) 'Building Cultural Synergy and Peace in South Africa' in *Community Development Journal*. 33, 2, 80-90.
- Fear F., Rosaen, C.L., Bawden, R.J. and Foster-Fishman, P.G. (2006) *Coming to Critical Engagement: An Autoethnographic Exploration*. Maryland: University Press of America
- Fontaine, S.J. 'Integrating Community-Based Participatory Research into the Curriculum' in *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. 11, 2, 45-56.
- Gilchrist, A. (1998) 'A More excellent Way: Developing Coalitions and Consensus through Informal Networking' in *Community Development Journal*. 33, 2, 100-108
- Isaacs, W. (1999) *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. London: Currency Doubleday
- Kolb, D.A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Lumsden, L. and Breathnach, C. (2006) *Valuing Relationships as a Strategic Resource – Resource Pack*. Dublin: Centre for Nonprofit Management, Trinity College Dublin.
- Maurrausse, D.J. (2002) 'Higher Education-Community Partnerships: Assessing Progress in the Field' in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. 31, 1, 131-139.
- Scharmer, C.O. (2001) 'Self-transcending Knowledge: Sensing and Organising around Emerging Opportunities' in *Journal of Knowledge Management*. 5, 2, 137-150.
- Senge, P, Scharmer, C.O., Jaworsky, J. and Flowers, B.S. (2004) *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* Boston: Society for Organisational Learning.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Active Citizenship:  
*An Opportunity for Committed  
Engagement & Innovation*  
Within  
the Third Level Sector

15

---



# Active Citizenship: An Opportunity for Committed Engagement & Innovation Within the Third Level Sector

**Séamus Lillis**

*Community Consultant Ireland*

“One challenge we face is growing public frustration with what is seen to be our unresponsiveness. At the root of the criticism is a perception that we are out of touch and out of date. Another part of the issue is that although society has problems, our institutions have “disciplines”. In the end, what these complaints add up to is a perception that, despite the resources and expertise available on our campuses, our institutions are not well organized to bring them to bear on local problems in a coherent way.” (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities 1999: 9).

//////////

## Introduction

In this publication, the first case study documented in Section Two highlights an ‘engaged’ university, Michigan State University, which for several years has sent its students on service learning experiences to the Tóchar Valley Network in County Mayo. These chapters provide accounts of that experience from the perspectives of the community, the university and the students. Together they constitute an interpretation by each sector’s author(s) of what it has meant to be a participant in university – community ‘engagement’. The contribution offered by Maria Avila in Chapter 19 advocates the use of community organising tools and techniques whereby a model of academic civic engagement can be created which is rooted in deep reciprocity and mutuality, based on conversations that bring all stakeholders’ interests, resources, and skills to the table; she also calls on universities to hire community organisers to this purpose. Drawing from these insights this chapter attempts to describe the rationale and benefits of this North American form of engagement, to contextualise its potential within Irish conditions, which for many communities, particularly disadvantaged communities tend to be dominated by State intervention and to point to what might need to be put in place so as to encourage parallel developments here. The Irish conditions surrounding community development are singularly different in the particular form of the State’s intrusion.

Key factors in the effectiveness of the Michigan State University’s experience are its commitment to critical theoretic approaches for its research in community development and its practice of ‘engagement’ with communities, where it honours communities’ right to lead the process. That ‘engagement’ provides a context for a richer experience by all participants of service learning, as both critical theoretic methodology and engagement are underdeveloped in Ireland.

//////////

## Describing Community Development

A working description of community development is one that sees it involving ‘intricate networks of purposeful conversations about the matters that concern us’ (Lillis 2006: 130). A matter of concern to a community becomes the subject of ‘purposeful conversations’, implying that determined, focused action will follow and the matter of concern will be

addressed through the community's 'intricate networks'. These networks are the accessible combined personal skills, experiences, indigenous learning, wisdom, shared values, connections, concern, affection, privileged local knowledge, assets and inventiveness of the members of a given concerned community together with the benefits of the natural geographic and man-made resources in that community's locality. In combination, they are a defining and fundamental resource for all communities and determine the nature and effectiveness of their purposeful activities. Unfortunately they tend to be ignored by the State.

//////////

## Expressive Acts

An unacknowledged attraction of community development is its potential to engage in 'expressive acts'. Bureaucracies, when relating to external influences, tend to confine themselves to mechanistic or 'instrumental acts'. Palmer explains:

'Our capacity to take risks and learn from them depends heavily on whether we understand action as *instrumental* or *expressive*. The instrumental image, which dominates Western culture, portrays action as a means to predetermined ends, as an instrument or tool of our intentions. The only possible measure of such action is whether it achieves the ends at which it is aimed. Instrumental action is governed by the logic of success and failure; it discourages us from risk-taking because it values success over learning, and it abhors failure whether we learn from it or not. (Palmer 1990, 23) In contrast an expressive act is: '...one that I take not to achieve a goal outside myself but to express a conviction, a leading, a truth that is within me. An expressive act is one taken because if I did not take it, I would be denying my own insight, gift, nature. By taking an expressive act, an act not obsessed with outcomes, I come closer to making the contribution that is mine to make in the scheme of things.' (Palmer, 1990, 24). My contention is that communities through their 'intricate networks of purposeful conversations' have the potential to express 'a conviction, a leading, a truth' in ways that often lead to expressive acts. These acts in turn enrich society and democracy and enhance it with a vein of transformation, creativity, concern, public leadership, compassion, service and entrepreneurial activity that otherwise might not occur.

Expressive acts contrast with the predictability of instrumental activity. It is important to realise that communities generate these singular resources through their 'purposeful conversations'. Inspiring expressive acts entice volunteers to membership and to collaborative action. Harnessing this resource is often attractive for Governments' programmes, albeit not in all circumstances, for it remains part of the honourable remit of communities to offer critique and praise to Government. Renowned international examples include the civil rights movement in America, the independence movement in India, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, L'Arche originally in France. Irish and less flamboyant examples include: the Anne Sullivan Centre for the Deafblind, Community Futures, Community Timebank (Glounthane, County Cork), the Centre for Non-profit Management in Trinity College Dublin, Corrymeela in Northern Ireland, Tóchar Valley Network, County Mayo and the Vincent de Paul Society.

Palmer states that: 'Instrumental action always wants to win, but win or lose, it inhibits our learning. If we win, we think we know it all and have nothing more to learn. If we lose, we feel so defeated that learning is a hollow consolation. Instrumental action traps us in a system of praise or blame, credit or shame, a system that gives primacy to goals and external evaluations, devalues the gift of self knowledge, and diminishes our capacity to take the risks that may yield growth.' (Palmer 1990, 23) Instrumental acts are fostered by positivism, are of the empirical worldview and are characterised

by devoted adherence to measurable outcomes only and by predictable implementation. The implication is that in expressive acts there is an opportunity for a different way of learning and of access to secreted human resourcefulness. They are found outside the narrower confines of positivism.

//////////

## Profile Of Effective Communities

Effective communities are characterised by deliberate encouragement of personal development and interpersonal skills and by competent and efficient decision-making among their members. Members are consciously aware of their resources, networks and assets (Hope et al, 1995; Freire: 1974). They put in place organisational structures that assist them accomplish their goals. Their leadership is concerned with both learning and the development of their members (Fear: 1997). This learning is generated and sustained by conversation, by reflective practice and by critical theoretic research approaches. Recurrent themes of this learning include enriching understanding of the process of community development itself; continuing enquiry into how that process might be improved within the particular context of concerns of each individual community and persistent discovery of how the outputs of a community might be enhanced. Their preferred perspective on community is as an interdependent and interrelated system, rather than a fractioned, compartmentalised entity of the positivist tradition (Bawden: 2005). They engage in research on their practice. All of the foregoing characteristics are mediated through conversational learning; this contrasts with third level institutions' conventional means of acquiring knowledge (Bohm, 1996). A community in contrast to State bodies is not normally a hierarchical organisation. It tends to diffuse power among its participants, though the 'control freak' is not unknown. An effective community values its independence and interdependence in all its characteristics and functions.

//////////

## Potential Impact Of Community Development

The political authorities of this island rely on community development to promote and sustain peace. They also depend on it to address poverty, particularly in communities deemed to be disadvantaged. Sustaining peace and addressing poverty rank highly as objectives of Governments' policies. (National Development Plan 2007 – 2013). Community development has been assigned very significant responsibilities for realising and sustaining the future welfare of our citizens. Because of his concerns about the perceived decline of community development and of volunteering, the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) set up a task force, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship in April 2006. (Report of Taskforce on Active Citizenship, March 2007). Its remit was, *inter alia*, to examine the condition and effectiveness of community development. The report was remarkable because of the limited input from third level institutions.

In October 2006 the Saint Andrew's Agreement renewed and provided for comprehensive expression of the commitments first reached in the 1998 Good Friday Belfast Agreement. One clause in the Belfast Agreement provided for a North South Independent Consultative Forum. It was envisaged that this consultative forum would bring together representatives of civil society in both jurisdictions to discuss matters of mutual interest and promote cross-border cooperation (Strand Two Paragraph 19). The implementation of that clause is now imminent. Furthermore the Common Chapter of the National Development Plan 2007-2013 requires both jurisdictions to prepare a report on collaboration in their respective areas on advancing social inclusion, to "include the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in promoting north/south inclusion, equality and reconciliation." (Chapter 5 pp 107 – 8). Community development is fundamental to the North South Independent Consultative Forum and to the aspirations of the Common Chapter of the National Development Plan. Yet the Irish experience of the processes and centrality of community development activity in individual communities have largely escaped the attentions of our third level institutions.

//////////

## Significance Of Understanding And Improving Process Of Community Development

The success of these Government plans is dependent on an enlightened understanding of the effectiveness of the process underpinning community development. Strengthening that process is a logical means of enhancing endeavours to sustain peace and of improving the conditions of disadvantaged communities. Yet a significant scholarship – with honourable exceptions - targeting insight into the nature and process of community development so as to improve its effectiveness, hardly exists at third level in Ireland. This neglect suggests that an important means of reaching critical national goals may well be at risk. Given that we rely on community development approaches to copper-fasten peace on this island and that we also rely on it to diminish violence it is unnecessarily precarious to rely on community development without supporting scholarship.

//////////

## Government Involvement With Community Development - An Assessment

Community development from the perspective of the State (and as endorsed by the European Union through its preconditions for qualifying for its financial support) has become an accountable channel for dispersing funding on the basis of demonstrated need. In this practice the State confined the process of community development to communities that qualified on the grounds of discernible disadvantage and virtually no other justification. At first sight this policy, with its laudable preferential option for the disadvantaged, seems commendable if not economically astute. It prioritises the principle of targeting scarce resources to areas of perceived greatest need.

However this policy has a number of disadvantages that were perhaps unforeseen at the time this approach was first conceived. In the absence of an overall strategic review of the policy – in itself remarkable – anecdotal evidence suggests that:

1—The State, through several departments and agencies gradually took charge of community agendas / concerns and – as a result of this approach - failed to foster an independent community development approach.

2—Training around community development – to a significant degree – was externally sourced by the State; community conversational learning – Palmer's 'self knowledge' (op. cit 1990:23) or wisdom was neglected.

3—Official community development became deeply linked with disadvantaged communities; more affluent communities did not participate. There is real difficulty in referencing middle class sustained activity in communities.

4—Programmes of work were dependent on a redundant needs basis approach; communities' own assets were hardly considered. McKnight (1989) has highlighted the futility of this approach when he demonstrated that agencies pursuing a needs approach create an interdependency between such agencies and their community clients; both need each other to survive and coincidentally highlight the relevance of a review of this approach through research.

5—As a consequence, the networks and assets of impoverished communities remained predictably mediocre.

6—The independence of these marginalised communities was gravely compromised by State agencies that abrogated to themselves the functions of evaluation, setting communities' agendas, controlling levels of both finances and staffing, (including suspending both intermittently) and insisting on a uni-directional bottom up accountability to the State agencies.

In short it might be said that the State acted 'instrumentally' and failed to take account of the inherent nature of community development and of the prerequisite of its autonomy. It must be borne in mind that there was very little experience of community approaches within Government and even less scholarship on the topic before this policy was first promulgated through the Area Development Management agency in 1992 (Varley: 1991).

Fear et al (2006: 28 -29) offer detached criticism of this Irish policy approach. From a long-term experience of collaboration between Michigan State University and the Tóchar Valley Network in County Mayo, extending over a decade and a half, and recounted elsewhere in this book, they offer the following assessment of their experiences of our community development policy:

"...We write funding proposals, describing objectives and procedures in great detail, fooling ourselves into believing that we can predict, if not control, the future. Only the critical eye sees this for what it really is — an epistemology — a way of thinking about development that is inherently mechanistic with emphasis on pulling levers of change. In this worldview, community becomes an object — an "it" to be changed — and development becomes an instrument, a "thing" to make "it" happen.

This Irish-American collaboration represents an alternative. It is also an antidote for poison — the hegemony of development — with people in high places determining what is best for others and, then, using "carrots and sticks" to get their way. Hegemony comes in many and new forms, including what used to be a sacred place — participatory development. Cooke and Kothari (2001?) elaborate the challenge, when agencies use participatory approaches to co-opt local people into accepting agency-defined goals, approaches, or outcomes. When this happens, the consequences are insidious, with local people trapped in a web of deceit.

There are examples all around, if we only take the time to see. There is a reason why it exists. Participation is alluring with magnetic quality, a fundamental feature of the human experience. But the intent can be turned inside out, upside down. Kieran Allen expresses how: "by combining elements in people's experience and reconfiguring them in ways that suits ruling groups." Rosie Meade and Orla O'Donovan (2002) speak plainly about the matter as it hits home. "Social partnership" is a common way community development organisations in Ireland interact with the government." How is it working?

A recurring argument made by the critics of Irish social partnership is that it is a form of corporatism. In this context, the concept of corporatism is used pejoratively to refer to anti-democratic arrangements that foster consensualism, and ensure that policy-making is dominated by the privileged and powerful.

Participation constrained and directed by elites for partisan purposes is an 'immoral' practice (Fear 1997). More than that acting with arrogant intent — believing that one knows best — forecloses openness to learning. The all-knowing live a burdened life, believing, as they do, that they have arrived at a pinnacle of understanding. As Tobin Hart (2001) suggests, they rely on will to get their way. There is much to be said about will; its exercise moves mountains. But will is about right and righteousness, sufficient to begin but not sustain transformation. Will needs a companion, Hart suggests, and he calls it willingness. If will is about agency and the power of intention, willingness lives as submission. Will is what the "I" wants to make happen; willingness connects to something larger than self, the "we". When merged, will and willingness offer a generative opportunity — agency and communion, together."

This criticism presages a bleak future for current approaches that Fear et al. predict will not be sustainable. This colonisation by the State of the community development process means that community development's un-explored potential here runs the risk of never being



fully realised. It also indicates that community development will become a process that can never realise sustained independence through commitment to community resource building. A commitment to foster the independence and sense of 'being in charge' of their own affairs that thriving communities should be able to display is impossible under current practices. Current practices on the part of the State perpetuate an underdeveloped community sector and ensure that we never have the capacity within communities to exercise parity of partnership, when appropriate to do so, with a State that is to act as a partner held in equal esteem. Harvey (2004) makes a similar observation.

//////////

### An Alternative Progression - The American Experience

"This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision making. We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship".

Campus Compact 'Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education (1999)

The earliest American universities, founded around the time of the American Revolution, were the colonial colleges, modelled on the universities of Oxford and Cambridge -- institutions such as Harvard, Princeton and Yale. Their earliest students were destined for religious ministry and the leading professions. Their curricula, because of this, focused on the moral and intellectual development of their students. When virgin lands were first farmed in the mid-west, the land-grant universities were founded, facilitated by the Morrill Act of 1863 in the Lincoln Presidency. They contributed to public higher education within the colleges and through their outreach and extension services they educated potentially all citizens of each individual state. The concepts of 'outreach and 'service' were added to universities' role. Land-grant universities initially specialised in agriculture. Faculties of engineering, medicine and law, congruent disciplines, were added to their service / outreach mission. The land-grant university worked to develop all aspects of rural and urban life through a combination of applied research and learning. Essentially the universities' agents were disseminating expertise; universities at the time were seen as sole repositories of knowledge and the extension or outreach process brought that knowledge to the States' citizenry. Community development featured strongly in their programmes. Land grant universities' contribution as a response to the needs of the times is impressive.

For much of the last century, research came to dominate the mission of virtually all American universities; teaching and outreach were secondary. World War II brought significant contributions from university scientists and engineers to the war effort and initiated the primacy of research. Research predominated – as it currently does in Irish third level institutions – and proved to be the determinant of promotion within academia. Research in the positivist tradition was lodged in the domain of the academic and the pressing prospect for communities to enquire into matters of concern to their members - in contrast to matters of concern to researchers - remained difficult to realise until the last twenty years. Consciousness of context therefore appears to be the key.

In 1990, Ernest Boyer, head of the 'Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching' in America, wrote a seminal treatise entitled 'Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities for the Professoriate'. This had significant repercussions for American

universities. He questioned the dominance of research as the touchstone of academic merit and advocated the adoption of four principles of academic life viz. (1) Scholarly Discovery, (2) Scholarly Integration, (3) Scholarly Application and (4) Scholarly Teaching.

His rationale was that the mission of universities should expand, engage with and take account of a changing world with new social, environmental and ethical issues. Traditional empiricist research had too narrow a focus to encompass the dilemmas of the emerging social order. His '*Scholarly Discovery*' as a first aspect of academic life was an invitation to reach out beyond the scope and methodology of the then conventional research enquiry. Within a decade his thinking had liberated academics from the confines of positivism. He promoted '*Scholarly Integration*' or inter-disciplinary explorations and encouraged systems thinking, to acknowledge and explain the connectedness of things. He held that crossing the traditional boundaries of disciplines would be a rich source of discovery. His '*Scholarly Application*' foreshadowed ensuring the relevance of research to the real world, to consequential problems, making sure that discoveries were checked for relevance to both individuals and institutions. '*Scholarly Teaching*' would be transformed through its connectedness to the scholarships of discovery, integration and application in arenas that would be both intra and extra-mural and would transcend the lecturing practices of the traditional university. Through teaching, universities' discoveries become relevant in the extra-mural world in so far as they are understood by others. Service learning deliberately provided for within this context would be a richer experience for students, staff and communities than heretofore.

'Engagement' entered the lexicon of the university some six years later when Boyer coined the phrase in a second seminal article written shortly before his death. (Boyer, E. 1996.) Fear et al (2006: 58) – who are all academics enquiring into their experiences and shared practice of community outreach - describe 'engagement' as being, "... about sharing knowledge and learning with those who struggle for social justice; and collaborating with them respectfully and responsibly for the purpose of improving life." 'Engagement', as described by Fear et al is a rich resource; Fear's 'collaborating' as he and his team have practised it in County Mayo over a ten year period has few counterparts in the Irish academic experience.

A number of points arise:

- Fear's description incorporates a two-way learning and 'discovery' dependant on there being a parity of esteem between academics and community.
- It incorporates a different and new stance / relationship between community and academia, an equality of status in contrast to the more common expert / amateur relationship.
- This two-way learning and knowledge creation is dependent on reflective conversations and potentially constitutes a new scholarship.
- This kind of engagement created by a higher education institution provides a context where service learning carries the prospect of a richer meaning for the participant and a greater understanding of the role of citizenship.

The dominant impression of third level interventions in current affairs is mediated on the presumption that the academic is an expert on the topic under discussion. This is not suited to 'purposeful conversations' with communities that are - each and everyone - characterised by being idiosyncratic. Two quotes from the same source illustrate my point:

1] Kahane<sup>54</sup> (2004:53):

'Being an expert is a severe impediment to listening and learning.'

In other words the expert finds it difficult to engage in conversation and fails to utilise this earliest means of learning.

2] Kahane (ibid p47) amplifies this inhibiting quality:

“The root of not listening is knowing. If I already know the answer, why do I need to listen to you? Perhaps out of politeness or guile, I should pretend to listen, but what I really need to do is to tell you what I know, and if you don’t listen, to tell you again, more forcefully.”

My personal view is that this deficiency is made more intractable by academics’ lack of experience of conversational learning. A change in practice, or perhaps more accurately, of stance and worldview, would have wonderful repercussions, as has been demonstrated in County Mayo and would lead to a new scholarship of engagement.

Students from an engaged university who participate in service learning do so in contexts that are enhanced by the commitments of both the community and the university and in a milieu marked by parity of esteem and deep reflective conversations. Service learning bereft of this context, tends towards the transactional, can be administratively focused and tends to become a disconnected activity. Non-contextual, free-standing service learning does not make for active citizenship.

//////////

## An Alternative View Of Community

Another seminal American influence is Harry Boyte’s writing on community development. He holds that the true home of community development is politics. As such community development should be acknowledged, owned and directed by the community participants and not predominantly or solely by the professionals, government agencies or party members. For him politics is a civic activity that ultimately brings self-interest to work constructively, contributing to communities and to the well-being of society.

Boyte (2004) criticizes citizens who are primarily compassionate volunteers and who see themselves as being of service but who neglect to learn:

‘...about root causes and power relationships, fail to stress productive impact, ignore politics and downplay the strengths and talents of those being served.’ (2004: 12).

He has little time for the concept of service as the dominant perspective for community development, complaining (*pace* Fear et al 2006 *op. cit.*) that the promotion of service is the paradigmatic stance of external, unengaged experts, who disempower the community workers and divert them to a programme of their own purposes.

Instead Boyte emphasises ‘Organising’, which is about understanding transformation, the reworking of ourselves and our contexts, in fact the process of community development itself, facilitating in my view Palmer’s ‘expressive acts’.

He contrasts the – for him - redundant ‘service’ approach to his preferred ‘organising’ method:

- The goal of service is fixing problems or people; the goal of organising is to build democratic power.
- For him citizenship means public work; for adherents of service, it means volunteering.

- For service the motive is altruism, for organising it is self interest.
- The key method of service is programmes, for organising it is the development of public leadership.
- The outcomes of the service approach are proposals and reports; for organising they are culture change and human transformation.

Boyte's stance opens a vista for community development of an order never seriously considered or practised here. And yet paradoxically Boyte and Freire (1974) are at one in that they press for a better social order and advocate closely related methodologies. Were service learning to occur in a Boyte / Freire milieu, fostered by an engaged university, active citizenship would be truly facilitated.

I think Boyte's position is very radical and probably from our experience quite avant-garde, if not threatening. Unfortunately Boyte presents his thesis in an uncompromising 'either or' mode, decrying service in favour of organising. The contribution of service to society is still a worthy one and should be interpreted as being a phase in an evolutionary continuum.

Boyer, Fear et al and Boyte have respectively made outstanding contributions to university renewal and to the scholarship of community development in America. So also has the Kellogg Commission, when reacting to Boyer, through its recommendations on the future of the State and Land Grant Universities (February 1999). Furthermore there is a symbiotic relationship between their contributions in that within the new concept of engagement, their thinking has opened up new and interrelating vistas for both the community and the university, presaging new discoveries and new learning with rich application to both. The boundary between universities and communities in America has been breached and explored. The engaged university provides a richer milieu for all participants and, as mentioned earlier, for students' service learning. Service learning students of an engaged university are a university resource that can be commissioned to contribute meaningfully to communities along the lines of the account of Michigan State University's engagement with the Tóchar Valley Network, described elsewhere. Furthermore these students can be the bridge between the community and the university ensuring the renewal of the latter

Parallel contributions are awaited here. Engagement by third level institutions with communities in Ireland would have huge impact on the welfare, emancipation, independence and development of individual communities here and to the innovation within and relevance of universities themselves. So too would academic critique of current Government policy.

//////////

## The Irish University And Community Development

"There are laws of sustainability which are natural laws, just as the law of gravity is a natural law. In our science in past centuries, we have learned a lot about the law of gravity and similar laws of physics, but we have not learned very much about the laws of sustainability. If you go up to a high cliff and step off it, disregarding the laws of gravity, you will surely die. If we live in a community, disregarding the laws of sustainability, as a community we will just as surely die in the long run. These laws are just as stringent as the laws of physics, but until recently they have not been studied." (Fritjof Capra, 1997)

The contribution of Ireland's third level institutions to 'discovering' the processes of community development has been diffident, despite the urging of the Skilbeck Report (2002:149) that challenged universities to realise their civic mission through building "local and regional partnerships with industry and the community". There are a number of courses on community development being taught where a predetermined curriculum is followed. The opportunity to collaboratively devise and locate a meaningful curriculum on community development with the participants whose 'intricate networks' and 'purposeful conversations' - the means

through which communities themselves universally learn - is neglected. So too is any parallel association to Boyer's connecting the scholarships of discovery and teaching. Instead a somewhat redundant approach, where pertinent knowledge is presumed to be even now solely located in the university, is maintained. Since the Internet this stance is even more unsustainable. The knowledge, learning and the wisdom of communities that are already disregarded by the State, are ignored as a focus worthy of scholarly curiosity, research and discovery.

## Conclusion

Recognising all the desiderata in terms of peace and prosperity that in Ireland depend on the efficacy of community development's process and keen to improve its practice and outcomes, third level institutions face a substantial challenge. Service learning carried out in a university that engages with its neighbouring communities and seeking jointly to contribute effectively to social justice and peace, is a richer experience than that conducted where the concerns of local communities are sidelined by the third level institution.

Implicit in this paper is the argument that we need to ask questions of ourselves regarding our understanding of the role and value we accord to the community development process, and the degree we wish to undertake it in a meaningful manner. As part of this, I seek a review of Government Policy on Community Development in this island as a basis that would restore and invigorate community development for participating communities. It would also liberate the resources and processes of communities for the benefit of society as a whole. I also seek ongoing scholarship on the process and advancement of effectiveness in community development. Peace and prosperity have been assigned in large part to community development; they are far too important treasures for our society to be neglected as focal points of research and scholarship.

It goes without saying that such a review has to be consultative in its approach, particularly with communities but also with State agencies so that we begin to promote a shared appreciation of the full potential benefits for our society of community development.

The full potential of community development has many components to hold our attention. This paper enters a plea that we look again at how academia relates to researching and teaching community development. Is it not necessary to reflect on our vision of an ideal Irish society and the role of third level institutions in creating such a society? Alternatively –or perhaps more correctly, additionally - community development might be viewed as engaging with the following dimensions of concept, vision, plan, purposeful conversation, activity, accumulated wisdom, creative and transformative energies and as a political movement; each of these perspectives gives rise to opportunities for engagement or for 'purposeful conversations about matters of concern' to us.

There is an urgency about engaging third level institutions in teaching and in researching community development. If third level does not connect meaningfully with communities, from whom can communities seek for the means of their emancipation?

This can be a wonderful adventure.

## Bibliography

- Allen, K. 2000. *The Celtic Tiger: the myth of social partnership in Ireland*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, p. 184.
- Bawden, Richard (2005) 'A Systemic Perspective on Community Development: Participation, Learning and the Essence of Wholeness' in *Perspectives on Community Development in Ireland*, Vol. 1, No. 1., Lillis, S. (ed.), Dublin, IE: The Liffey Press.
- Bohm David (1996) *On Dialogue* Routledge. London.
- Boyer E., (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. New Jersey.
- Boyer, E. (1996). 'The Scholarship of Engagement' in *The Journal of Public Service and Outreach* 1(1):11-20.
- Boyte Harry C. (2004) *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
- Capra Fritjof, (1997) *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* Flamingo. London.
- Campus Compact (1999) *Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education* accessed 17/09/2007 at: <http://www.compact.org/resources/declaration/>
- Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (eds.). 2001. *Participation: the new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
- Fear, Frank A. (1997). *Life After Senge: Observations about the Learning Organization in the Late 1990's* Prepared for LeadNet, the leadership development network of Michigan State University Extension.
- Fear, Frank, Cheryl Rosaen, Richard Bawden, and Pennie Foster-Fishman (2006): *Coming to Critical Engagement: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Engaged Faculty Lives*. Lanham, Maryland: The University Press of America.
- Freire Paulo, (1974) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York. Continuum.
- Hart, T. (2001). *From information to transformation: education for the evolution of consciousness*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Harvey, Brian (2004) 'Implementing the White Paper: Supporting Voluntary Activity' Report for the CV12 Group; accessed 17/09/2007 at: <http://www.wheel.ie/user/content/download/2923/10500/file/Brian+Harvey%27s+Report+on+Implementing+the+White+Paper.pdf>
- Hope A. and Timmel S.,(1995) *Training for Transformation - A Handbook for Community Workers* Vols. 1, 2 & 3. Mambo Press.
- Kahane, Adam, (2004) *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening and Creating New Realities* Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., San Francisco.
- Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities (1999). *Returning to our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.
- Lillis, Séamus (2006) 'Learning from the Seminar' in *Engagement – Transforming Learning Third Level and Community – Seminar Report*, Lillis, S. (ed) Cross Border Centre for Community Development: Dundalk Institute of Technology.
- Mc Knight John L. (1989) 'Regenerating Community' in *Kettering Review* Kettering Foundation. Fall.
- Meade, R. & O'Donovan, O. (2002) 'Corporatism and the ongoing debate about the relationship between the state and community development' in *Community Development Journal* 37, 1-9.
- Palmer Parker J.(1999) *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring*. Jossey - Bass Publishers. San Francisco.
- Skilbeck, M. (2002) *The university challenged: a review of international trends and issues with particular reference to Ireland* (Dublin, Higher Education Authority [HEA] and Conference of Heads of Irish universities [CHUI]).
- Varley Tony (1991) 'Power to the People? Community Groups and Rural Revival in Ireland' in *Rural Development Policy What Future for Ireland?* Healy, Séan and Reynolds Bridget, Conference of Major Religious Superiors, Ireland.

# Engaging *Learning Communities:* Valuing Experience

16



# Engaging *Learning Communities:* Valuing Experience

**Rosemary Moreland, Community Development Unit**

*University of Ulster*

//////////

## Abstract

The concept of 'engaged learning' is particularly apt for the field of community education and community development. It shares the basic premises of adult and community education, in using participants' experiences and knowledge as the starting point for learning; viewing learning as a dialogical process and encouraging the participant to take responsibility for their learning. However, the terminology of 'engagement' with regard to higher education is not one that has gained wide acceptance. A much older tradition of 'outreach' is still held to be the most common and acceptable way in which educational institutions relate to their constituent communities.

This paper seeks to address the situation in Ireland of the relationship between higher education institutions and their surrounding communities, by valuing the experiences that they bring to education and using them as a basis for awarding university credits for demonstrable learning achievements. The focus of this paper is an innovative Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning Programme, which has successfully enabled non-traditional adult students to commence higher education study and gain recognition for formal and informal learning. This Programme enables those with significant experience in community or voluntary work the opportunity to gain advanced standing onto the BSc. (Hons) Community Development. The paper will conclude by suggesting what lessons can be learnt from these experiences and outlining some of the difficulties involved in transforming learning in and with higher education institutions.

//////////

## Introduction

The terms 'engagement' and 'engaged institutions' are not commonly used in Ireland, at least, not with reference to higher education's relationship with its surrounding communities and society. Fear and Avila (2005) suggest that outreach is one of the most common ways in which higher education responds to its surrounding communities and this aptly describes the situation of many higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland. Whilst they acknowledge that this practice has contributed to the movement for engagement in higher education, the problem that they perceive with this model is its one-way stance, whereby the higher education institution holds the expertise and resources that the community requires and in order to make themselves more amenable to the local community, the institution agrees to sell its wares in a more customer-friendly site. If it is shrewd enough about its targeted clientele, it will ensure that the commodity is also delivered in a user-friendly package.

Instead Fear and Avila (2005) propose an alternative model, which is about higher education putting its resources and expertise at the disposal of communities; working alongside community activists and change-makers to develop collective intelligence, that will tackle the issues and problems faced by communities. They coin the term 'engaged learning' to describe the type of learning that occurs when people come together to tackle the immediate issues and problems facing their communities or specific communities of interest. This paper focuses on an examination of 'engaged learning' as a feature of community development practice and outlines how higher education institutions can attempt to engage with those tackling the issues and problems facing marginalized and disadvantaged communities.



//////////

## Learning In The Community

Fear and Avila (2005) describe engaged learning a process and activity that takes place in a group setting, defining it as “grassroots activities... [whereby people are] mobilized around issues of shared public concern. Through [these activities] people with a limited voice and perhaps insignificant influence create opportunities to gain both” (Fear & Avila, 2005:29). Furthermore, they suggest that this can lead to three main benefits: firstly, those engaged in public work learn important personal and social skills; secondly, they obtain tangible outcomes and thirdly, “they gain confidence in their ability to make a difference”. At the very least, they view public work as a vehicle for social reform; at its best, it is a vehicle for transformation, both for those involved and the community as a whole.

Lovett et al.'s (1983) discourse on community action and community development, suggested a four-fold model of community organization/education; community development/education; community action/education and social action/education that bears a strong resemblance to the description of the engaged learner. His model outlines the various ways in which institutions have attempted to provide learning opportunities for those involved in working for social change. However, the earth has shifted somewhat and this model bears does not take into account the current discourse of partnership and collaboration, which is lauded as the only viable and indeed morally defensible way of working. Whilst the Third Sector, a vehicle through which the voice of those who are marginalized and powerless in society can be heard, initially welcomed this approach, it has fallen far short of expectations. Avila (2005) alludes to this when she acknowledges that partnerships are not always equal, with regard to university's holding the greater share of power than the community in any partnership. This experience has been echoed in the myriad of partnerships that have arisen in recent years between community and statutory bodies in both the North and South of Ireland. Powell and Geoghegan (2004:239) study into community workers' views of such partnerships reveals very mixed opinions as to the benefits accrued to the poor and socially excluded from such partnerships. Although the majority of those surveyed held a benign view of social partnerships, only half viewed social partnerships as positive overall, with approximately the same portion believing that the community and voluntary sector did not have ‘a real say in decision-making in the partnership process’.

O'Brien and O'Faithaigh's (2007) recent study of learning partnerships in Ireland similarly berates the notion that anything with ‘partnership’ in the title must necessarily be for the benefit of those who are socially excluded. They highlight the importance of unpicking the core values and ideological framework underpinning agencies' understanding of the partnership model, in order to develop collaborative working relationships that genuinely enable the most marginalized sections of society to engage in learning that is meaningful to them. Thus they ensure that collective learning is given due consideration, along with individual learning.

//////////

## Lifelong Learning In The Community

Fear and Avila (2005:30) assert that public work is collaborative, deliberative and an outcome of self-directed learning. Much has been written on the notion of self-directed learning, in relation to adult education (for example Brookfield, 1983; Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1979). Some of this literature focuses on the individual, although Brookfield (1983) in particular has acknowledged the importance of this activity in the collective sense. Elsdon, Reynolds & Stewart's (1995) more recent study of learning in voluntary organizations focuses on the relationship between individual and collective learning

and its impact on citizenship. Their findings suggest that there is a strong link between the two and they argue that all voluntary organizations are potential “training grounds for active citizenship” (Elsdon, Reynolds & Stewart, 1995:148). In recent years government policies in the North and South of Ireland have pushed a lifelong learning agenda, as a means of ensuring a well-trained workforce and adaptive adult population, in the face of rapid technological change (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 1999; Department for Education and Employment, 1998; Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1999; Further Education Funding Council, 1999; National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, 1997; Department of Education and Science, 2000; Department for Education Training and Employment, 2002). Lifelong learning is not a new concept and was in fact proposed by the UNESCO Institute for Education as “...the master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries” (UNESCO, 1972:182). Although its meaning has long been debated, with regard to what is included in lifelong learning, recent and current literature generally restricts its interpretation to that of adult learning, in formal, non-formal and informal settings. In my study of adult and community-based education in the North of Ireland, carried out in the early 1990s, I suggested a typology of lifelong learning, indicating the relationship between formal, non-formal and informal adult learning opportunities (Moreland, 1993) (Fig 1).

## ////////// Typology Of Adult Learning Opportunities

**Figure 1: (Adapted from Moreland, 1993, p293).**

	<b>Formal</b>	<b>Non-Informal</b>	<b>Informal</b>
<b>Structure</b>	Statutory Top-down	Voluntary More democratic	Mainly voluntary Bottom-up approach
<b>Ideology</b>	Monopoly Competitive Individual	Life-wide Co-operative Individual & Collective	Life-wide Co-operative Individual & Collective
<b>Objectives</b>	Market-led Professional Dev. Training for Unemployed	Value-led Focus on disadvantaged	Issue-based Focus on disadvantaged
<b>Educational</b>	‘Chalk & talk’ Tutor-led	Two-way process Participant-led	Teacher as expert Tutor-led

Formal adult learning opportunities are provided by educational institutions focusing mainly on continuing professional development and training for the unemployed. This type of learning is deliberate, stressing individual development and utilises the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ educational practice. In relation to engaging with communities, their approach is largely that of outreach and widening access to educational institutions. Non-formal adult learning opportunities are provided by a small number of organizations whose main role is raising awareness of issues and problems and supporting community-based organizations to engage in issue-based education, through both individual and collective development. This type of learning opportunity can often be a stepping-stone to more formal adult education, although this approach encourages community leaders to pay attention to the collective development of their communities, alongside their individual development. Finally, informal learning opportunities are of the types described by Fear and Avila (2005) in their description of people engaged in “grassroots activities ... mobilized around issues of shared public concern”. This is the issue-based learning, focusing on disadvantaged and marginalized groups, which uses the learners’ experiences as the starting point for learning. Organisations included in this category are community and voluntary organisations. Significantly, the

findings from this study indicated that the vast majority (84% and 87% respectively) perceived education to be an important aspect of their organization. This correlates closely with Elsdon, Reynolds & Stewart's (1995) findings that collective learning is an important feature of voluntary organizations.

//////////

## Engaging Institutions - Within And Without

It would appear therefore that there is evidence of engaged learning in the form of community-based action and learning taking place throughout Ireland and Britain. Whilst the terminology is new, the phenomena is not, since we can trace the origins of community development work in the 1960s being defined as "a process of involving people in experiences from which they will learn ways of enhancing their capacity for self-directed activity" (Biddle, 1968). Jackson (1970:157) outlined the learning component of community development in the following way:

"...methods of instruction and subject material to be learned rarely fit the pre-defined categories of teachers and course administrators. Groups of 'students' develop at their own pace, in unpredictable directions which cannot be pre-defined by the teacher or administrator of formal courses".

The typology of adult learning opportunities outlined above indicates broad categories to highlight differences between providers of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities. However case studies carried out at this time in each of these settings also indicated the degree of overlap between these. Formal adult institutions provide traditional programmes in both non-formal and informal settings. Several factors have more recently blurred the boundaries between these categories further. Increasing pressure from funders to fund only accredited education and training in both the North and South of Ireland and the introduction of the National Qualifications Frameworks in both jurisdictions have added a more formal dimension to much of the community-based learning. On the other hand, increasing accreditation has also contributed to the need for greater transparency around the accreditation and qualification process and for a more flexible system that encourages learner progression through a variety of pathways. One of the ways in which this can be nurtured is through accreditation of prior learning.

//////////

## Credit Where Credit Is Due

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is based on principles of lifelong and life-wide education, which recognises that people learn in a variety of ways, in formal, non-formal and informal settings throughout their lifetimes and that credits should be awarded for learning that is demonstrated as relevant and appropriate. Challis (2000) has suggested that APL is a natural extension of adult education since both recognize the value of experience, self-direction and the importance of problem-solving in the learning process. Over the last two decades, APL is becoming increasingly recognised and accepted by formal educational institutions. A survey carried out in Britain in 1996 found that forty-six out of the seventy-one Higher Education Initiatives that responded had formal policies and procedures in place for APL. It is interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of these were 'new' universities or specialist colleges (Challis, 2000).

The Forward to the Quality Assurance Association (2004) document that sets out guidelines on APL contends that British government policies on lifelong learning, social inclusion, widening participation of under-represented groups in further and higher education, employability and partnership working have all impacted significantly

on higher education. This in turn has led to a wider recognition by Higher Education Institutions of the learning that takes place in a wide range of contexts. These guidelines set out five approaches typically identified by providers of higher education:

- Accreditation of prior learning (APL);
- Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL);
- Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL);
- Accreditation of prior certificated and/or experiential learning (AP[E/C]L);
- Accreditation of prior learning and achievement (APL&A).

They are designed to cover learning and achievement that has occurred:

- And has been previously assessed and certificated;
- In a work/community-based or related setting, but is not a formal part of that experience;
- At some time, prior to the formal HE programme on which an applicant is about to embark;
- Concurrent with participation in a HE programme, but is not a formal part of that experience;
- Through experience and critical reflection, but was not a part of a formal learning programme (QAA, 2004:2).

The QAA guidelines offer a template for Higher Education Institutions wanting to develop policies and procedures for implementing APL. The University of Ulster developed its Guiding Principles and Policy for the Accreditation of Prior Learning in 2006. Whilst the working out of this is still in its infancy and many departments are grappling with fully embracing and implementing these Guidelines, the University of Ulster is a new university, which has a strong history of adult and community education and community outreach. The University Of Ulster supported the development of the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, leading to a single credit framework across Further Education, Higher Education and other providers of post-16 education and training (NICATS Office, 2002). It also pioneered, a four-year APL project, funded by the Department of Education Northern Ireland, which led to the development of an educational model for the accreditation of prior learning within the School of Education (O'Hagan, 2003).

### **For what it's worth – valuing community development learning**

Whilst it is not restricted to community development education and training, APL can make an important contribution to community development education and training as it is firmly rooted in Freirian principles of 'starting where the learner is' and 'recognising and valuing learners' experiences'. It can significantly enhance reflective practice (another community development practice principle), through encouraging participants to reflect on their practice and the learning that they have gained through it. For many community development workers, it has potential to short-circuit the meandering and often circular paths of training and education, by using knowledge that they have gained through experience or other courses, to gain credits towards or exemption from all or part of a current course. The emphasis is on the learner to produce evidence of learning that is relevant and appropriate to the level at which they are currently studying. However, course tutors, formal education providers and awarding bodies need to ensure that policies and practices of their organisations allow for and indeed encourage applicants to make APL claims. Accreditation for Certificated, Non-Certificated and Experiential Learning will depend upon the relevance of the topic to the course against which accreditation is sought. Applicants for a course will need to demonstrate that their learning is at a level similar to that of the course against which they are seeking to make an APL claim. It is appropriate for any accredited course, but is restricted to those who have already gained some experience in the area.

//////////

## Engaged Learning In Practice

In order to highlight some of the opportunities as well as issues and tensions surrounding the notion of engagement in higher education, the following section describes an innovative Accreditation for Prior Certificated and/or Experiential Learning (AP[C/E]L) Programme, designed to enable community practitioners and activists to access relevant third level education and training.

The BSc(Hons) Community Development is a part-time degree programme, targeting activists and volunteers in the community/voluntary sectors as well as paid community workers. The programme also operates a partnership arrangement with several Institutes of Further and Higher Education, who have franchised out the Level 1 of this programme. Thus students who have completed the Certificate of Higher Education in Community Development may gain direct access to Level 2 of the degree programme. However, in recognition of the huge amount of experience often gained by activists and workers in the community sector, tutors in the Community Development Unit, at the University Of Ulster designed an AP(E)L route which enables experienced practitioners to gain direct entry to Level 2 of the programme. Applicants must demonstrate knowledge and understanding equivalent to that of the Certificate of Higher Education in Community Development, by means of a portfolio. They are supported to do this, by means of a taught AP(C/E)L short course, which enables them to gain the skills and knowledge to build a portfolio for this purpose.

The AP(C/E)L short course for community practitioners enables participants to develop an understanding of how to build a portfolio, how to critically reflect on their learning experiences in the community and voluntary sector and how their previously acquired certificated learning can contribute towards their portfolio. The course has been run over ten weeks (one evening per week) as well as an intensive one week full-time programme. Both modes have been successful, each creating their own dynamics. As every participant has a very individualised profile, space is made within the programme for one-to-one advice with tutors.

All participants must demonstrate that they have met the core learning outcomes of the Level One Programme, either through certificated or experiential learning. In addition, participants must demonstrate learning in three other areas of community development education and training. The National Occupational Standards in Community Development Work (at NVQ Level Four) are taken as guidelines for participants to detail their experiential learning in this field.

Since the introduction of the AP(C/E)L Route for Community Development in September 2005, over seventy participants have successfully completed the short course and portfolio and thirty-five participants have entered the BSc (Hons) Community Development through this route. As already mentioned above, all of the participants on the BSc(Hons) Community Development are adult students. Whilst some may have gained qualifications in other areas, the vast majority have left school with few if any qualifications. They have often taken part in many of the myriad of community-based programmes that exist in the community sector. However, most never dreamt that they would be capable of completing a university degree.

//////////

## Discussion

One of the main success factors in this programme lies in its underlying ethos of 'starting where people are', a practice based on the renowned South American adult educator, Freire's (1972) theory of conscientisation and his participatory model of education for freedom. Students on the programme are encouraged to reflect on their experience, to learn from each other's experience, as well as critically reflecting on new models and ways of working. They are encouraged to challenge hidden assumptions, both within the community sector practice, as well as theories and models that are presented within the areas of study. The course therefore is also premised upon Brookfield's (1997) notion of the reflective practitioner, which encourages self-awareness and an ability to examine one's practice critically, with a view to improving it. The course attempts therefore to build students' capacity not only to manage community organisations, but to lead and challenge the community and voluntary sector, as well as contributing to policy in this area. The AP(C/E)L Route for Community Development at the University of Ulster is an example of 'community development learning', whereby participants are encouraged to apply models and theories to real-life situations and indeed to test the usefulness and reliability of such models and theories, in the light of their experience.

In terms of the institution, this programme is highly commended for its success in attracting students who would not normally enter higher education and for its high rates of retention and successful completion. To obtain these results places high demands on tutors and the esteem of the university does not readily translate into further resources. As is so often the case for community work, community development education within the institution, can also appear to be 'the poor cousin' (Newman, 1979). Avila's (2005) description of turning around one institution, where the dynamic of 'engagement' is a two-way dialogue between the institution and community, is not one that is necessarily reflected throughout the institution. Many students entering the AP(C/E)L and BSc(Hons) Community Development may have faced great difficulties in coming into the university, in terms of physical, social, cultural and psychological barriers. They can easily drop away when faced with personal or work difficulties and a bureaucratic system that they do not fully understand and which appears to be uncompromising. There is a huge responsibility on the tutor therefore to ensure that these students can navigate this system successfully. Thus engaging with communities to widen access to participation in higher education is not just about increasing student numbers in order to increase profit. Engaging with these learners entails ensuring that when the door is opened, it is not slammed in their faces; nor should what awaits people on the other side of the door be so scary, uninviting or unwelcoming that they run straight out again. Instead it is about enabling them to claim their space within the institution and gain confidence not only in being there, but in also challenging the systems that make it difficult for non-traditional learners to be there, to stay there and to leave with a successful outcome.

Fear and Avila's paper (2005) explores various meanings of the term 'engagement' and suggest that there is a movement in higher education towards promoting the engaged institution, which they characterize as having numerous collaborative relationships between academic and non-academic partners; as valuing engagement and looking for ways to increase and improve engagement and finally, as creating an engagement-friendly atmosphere. The term 'engaged institution' is not one which is in common use in Ireland at the moment, nor indeed are the characteristics outlined above very readily observed in our educational institutions. In the variety of discourses on engagement described by Fear and Avila (2005), the most common approach appears to be that of a partnership approach, in which the educational institution is keen to collaborate with others, whether it is industry, government or communities, where there is viable economic gain and prestige. Partnerships between universities and government bodies or industry are more likely to be equal, based on mutual gain, where each partner has a valuable asset to bring to the table. On the other

hand, collaboration between universities and communities, particularly where those communities are perceived to be disadvantaged or marginalized are more difficult to negotiate on an equal footing. The perception often for both parties, is that the university has resources, which it could use for the benefit of disadvantaged communities.

One area where some transformation may be taking place lies in the notion of 'engaged learning', which I have argued is broadly similar to community development learning. The links between this type of informal learning and formal learning have grown steadily since my research in the early 1990s. In particular, structures currently being put in place to accredit learning gained through experience give real value and not just lip service to community development learning. The example above from the University of Ulster indicates perhaps one way in which educational institutions can respect and value the vast amount of learning that does not take place either in or under the auspices of educational institutions.

//////////

## Conclusion

Those wishing to transform society and the institutions may view the models of engagement as utopian. The difficulties and problems appear overwhelming and the fear is that engagement becomes 'digested' by the institutions rather than it transforming them. Fear & Avila (2005:1) claim "engagement is a values-based stance-an ethos". Although the rhetoric of institutions appears to applaud this kind of work, the reality for those engaged in doing it (and I use the word 'engaged' deliberately), is that we often feel like the 'poor cousin'. Institutions are largely rooted in a service model of education provision and in the current economic climate, will become more sharply focused on efficiency savings, which may well translate into larger class sizes and a narrower focus on job-training. However the model outlined above is one sign that there is increasing recognition that adult students increasingly form a large percentage of the student profile. A recent Distinguished Teaching Fellowship awarded to the Community Development Team, based on the AP[C/E]L model outlined above is one indication that such innovative practice is welcomed within institutions of higher education. Fear & Avila (2005) challenge institutions and those working within them, to critically reflect on the nature of the relationships between formal and informal learning opportunities. This paper has attempted to show that individuals within institutions can make a difference and can play an important part in enabling higher education institutions to develop genuinely collaborative working partnerships with their constituent communities.

## Bibliography

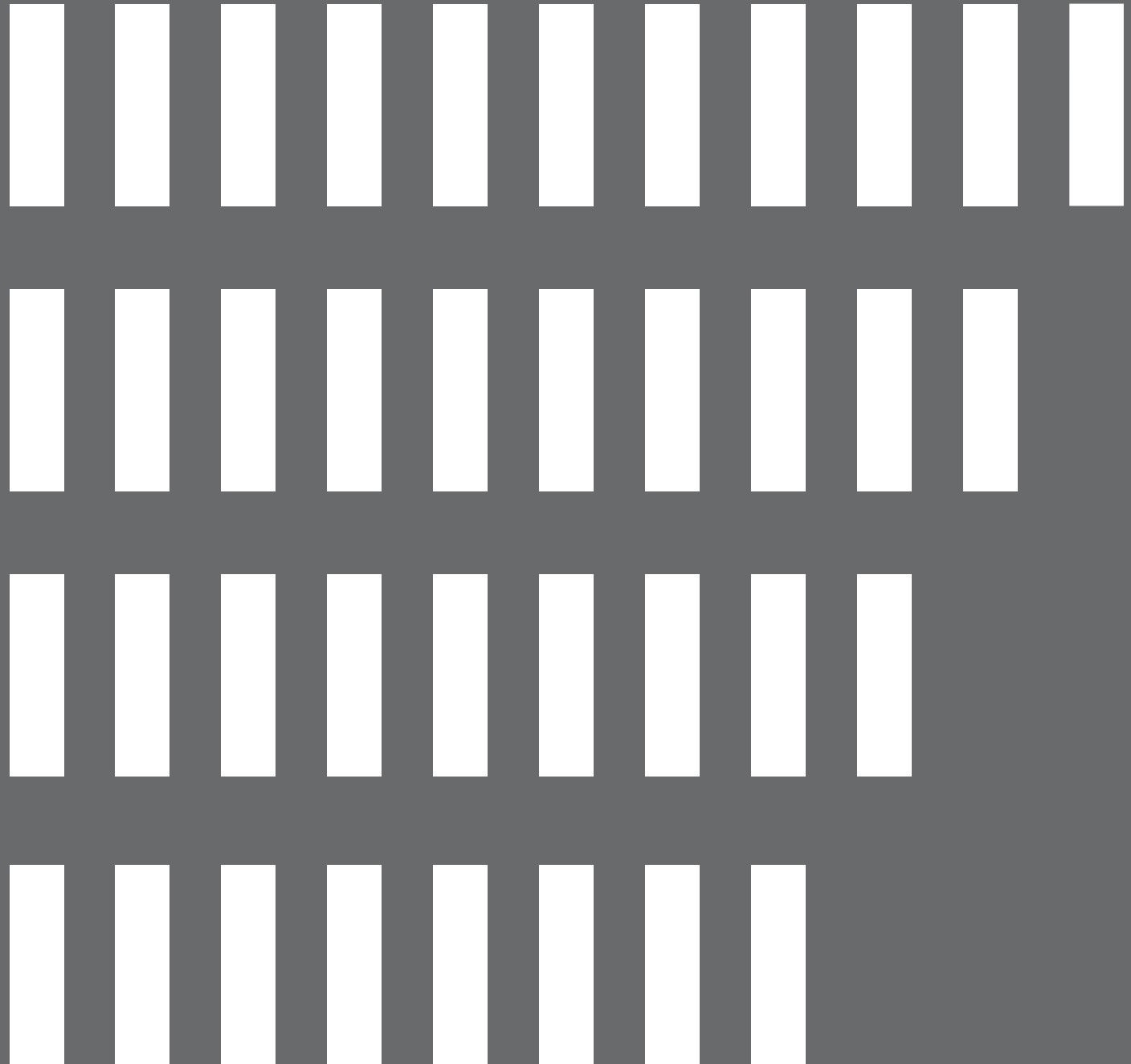
- Avila, M. (2005) *Transforming Society by Transforming Academic Culture*, Paper given at conference on Engagement: Transforming Learning 3rd Level and Community, Dundalk Institute of Technology, 20th-21st October 2005.
- Baillie, S. & O'Hagan, C. (2000) *APEL and Lifelong Learning*, Northern Ireland: University Of Ulster.
- Biddle, W. (1968) 'Deflating the community developer' in *Community Development Journal*, 3(4), 191-194.
- Brookfield, S. (1983) *Adult Learners, Adult Education and the Community*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Brookfield, S. (1997) *Developing Critical Thinkers*, (1st pub. 1987), Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Department of Education Northern Ireland (1999) *A New Learning Culture for All*, Belfast: DENI
- Department for Education and Science (2000) *Learning for Life. White Paper on Adult Education*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Education Training and Employment (2002) *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning*, Dublin: Stationery Office.
- Department of Education and Employment (1998) *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain*, London: The Stationery Office.
- Elsdon, K T, Reynolds, J. & Stewart, S. (1995) *Voluntary Organisations. Citizenship, Learning and Change*, Leicester: NIACE.
- Fear, F. & Avila, M. (2005) *Frames and Discourses: Exploring the Meaning of Engagement*, Paper given at conference on Engagement: Transforming Learning 3rd Level and Community, Dundalk Institute of Technology, 20th-21st October 2005.
- Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Hammondsworth: Penguin.
- Further Education Funding Council (1997) *Learning Works. Widening Participation in Further Education*, London: FEFC.
- Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1999) *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*, London: The Stationery Office.
- Jackson, K. (1970) 'Adult education and community development' in *Studies in Adult Education*, 2(2), 156-179.
- Knowles, M. S. (1975) *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*, Chicago: Association Press.
- Lovett, T., Clarke, C. & Kilmurray, A. (1983) *Adult Education and Community Action*, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd.
- Moreland, R. (1993) *Towards a Learning Society: A Study of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Adult Learning Opportunities*, Vols. 1 & 2, D.Phil. Thesis, University of Ulster.
- National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (1997) *Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, London: Department of Education and Skills, [www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/nagcell/index.htm](http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/nagcell/index.htm)
- NICATS Office (2002) *A Report on the NICATS Initiative 1999-2002*, Belfast: NICATS Office, University of Ulster.
- O'Brien, S. & O'Faithaigh, M. (2007) *Learning Partnerships for Social Inclusion. Exploring lifelong contexts, issues and approaches*, Cork, Ireland: Oak Tree Press.
- O'Hagan, C. (2003) *The Nature and Extent of the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning within Northern Ireland: Transfine Project: Informal, Nonformal and Formal Education*, European Partnership Project, January 2002 – February 2003 (phase 1), Socrates, Leonardo and Youth (EUCEN, EAEA, FIEEA, AEFP and SEFI, [www.ulster.ac.uk/ill/researchcentre/publications/word/transfinereport3.doc](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/ill/researchcentre/publications/word/transfinereport3.doc), pp47-55.
- Tough, A. M. (1979) *The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning*, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- UNESCO (1972) *General Conference, 19th Session Report*, Nairobi: UNESCO.



# Service-Learning

*So What?*

## 17



# Service-Learning

## *So What?*

**Brian Ó Donnchadha**

*PhD Student, National University of Ireland, Galway*

//////////

### Preamble: A Personal Learning Experience

“This part of San Francisco was nicknamed the Tenderloin decades ago because the police, who were paid poorly by the city, allegedly took bribes from local businesses and hence the officers were able to afford the most expensive cuts of meat. Though it has not always been the poorest area of the city, it has been underprivileged for nearly a century and the poverty is contained in a ‘manageable’ 20 blocks but it is surrounded by some of the most expensive real estate in the country. The problems of mental health, homelessness, poverty and addiction are played out in the public sphere two blocks from the sumptuous City Hall. When a TV reporter door-stepped the mayor with filmed evidence of drug activity, public urination and the homeless sleeping on park benches two blocks from his office, the mayor had the benches removed over-night. We opened our dining room here in 1950 because this is where help was needed, and even though there is poverty here, it also has a strong feeling of community, and you have the opportunity to contribute to that community.”

That was how the service-learning coordinator at the St. Anthony Foundation Food Programme welcomed a group of students who had come to work for the day in the public dining room. The students were all in their late teens and from a near-by high school. They were given a detailed orientation in the morning, and following their service were led through a reflection session. I too had gone along to serve in the dining room that day. I was surprised to see a familiar face in the queue for a meal. The person I took to be a man was well dressed, in his early sixties, with shoulder-length, thinning blond hair and a haggard face. He walked with a cane and when he smiled revealed his missing teeth. I had seen him earlier in the week at the end-of-term presentation by a group of students at the University of San Francisco, which had collected the oral histories of people experiencing poverty, as part of a sociology class in the B.Sc. in American Studies. The information was published on a website to raise awareness about issues resulting from poverty. At the presentation, he identified himself as transgender and made a speech that began with the words, “Hi, my name is Jacinta<sup>55</sup>, and I’m messed up. After I returned from Vietnam, my boyfriend was killed in a car accident – following that, I lost everything to alcohol. I’ve been receiving handouts since then, so I wanted to give back to these students by telling them my story”. Back in the dining hall, I introduced myself and said that I had heard the presentation a few days earlier. We would have chatted for much longer but I had to return to my meal-serving post, “go right ahead, because once you get this old queen talking there’s no shutting me up” was the reply.

In a city 6,000 miles from home I hadn’t expected to recognise any face in a queue for one of the 2,600 meals we would serve that lunchtime. Then Alice arrived. She had also shared her story in a speech at the same presentation.

“This is an MRI photograph of my brain, and this is a picture of a normal brain. See the difference? The severe head trauma I received as a child was never treated, and wasn’t even diagnosed till ten years ago. Although I look normal on the outside, I’ve got severe learning disabilities- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder. I never knew why I was the way I was, until they did this MRI scan. Because of the disability, I’ve never been

<sup>55</sup> The names of the guests and the students have been changed to ensure anonymity.

able to hold down a job and so I have no health insurance. I get my meals at St. Anthony's every day. So the next time you tell a homeless person to 'get a job' they have probably spent the last twenty years trying to do so, just like me."

I wanted to say hello to Alice too but I was on the food serving line, spooning chicken onto a never-ending line of trays. Each spoonful represented another 'guest', as they are referred to at St. Anthony's, and I had already dished out what seemed like a mountain of food. That makes two people I know here, I thought. In the past, I never imagined that I would recognise anyone in a *soup kitchen*, as I would have referred to it before.

All the servers were invited to eat our lunch in the dining room with the guests. I ate with Dennis, a former trombone player from Maine, who told me that nobody here in San Francisco ever understood his wry, East Coast sense of humour. Later, as I was collecting empty trays I saw yet another familiar face. It was the man I pass on my way into the supermarket near my house. I'd often observed him as he walked his wheelchair down the street and then sat in it outside the supermarket door with his cardboard 'Help' sign. Once, I paid for an extra sandwich in the café across the street and asked the waitress to give it to him the next time she saw him outside. As I was watching him in the dining room, talking to himself, I knew that if I spoke to him here, as I had with Jacinta and Dennis, I would never be able to ignore him on the street again. I looked away and went back to my work.

Even though I knew the most hurtful thing you can do is ignore someone begging on the street. I was ignoring someone now, in the very place I was supposed to be helping. Encountering this man here was bringing the issue of homelessness and my attitude to homeless people, very close to MY home. I went back to speak to him but he had already left. One of the reasons I was at St. Anthony's in the first place was to understand the theory of service-learning. I wanted to see it from the perspective of a student doing service and feel what it is like to be pushed out of my comfort zone. Seeing the 'man with the wheelchair' was the moment I 'got it', the moment the theory became 'real'. This was transformational learning – understanding the theory in practice and changing my behaviour as a result.

Can you prepare fully for an uncomfortable experience during orientation prior to service-learning participation? Would students not be aware of issues such as poverty, and, having studied the issues, be able to recognise them and not be shocked? "Before going on the Alternative Spring Break to New Orleans, we talked about the destruction caused by hurricane Katrina. I even showed my students Spike Lee's upsetting documentary. They were enthusiastic about helping to rebuild houses. But we were still stunned into silence when we got there, and saw it for ourselves. That evening, I got them to write about their experience, so they could get it all out. I thought I was ready for what I saw in New Orleans, but even I had re-entry problems when I returned to my normal life back on campus."

This story of an experienced academic who uses service-learning, shows that it's not always possible to predict how a service-learning experience will turn out. Likewise, it is not possible to foresee how individuals will interpret a shared experience; depending on one's point of view, the glass could be seen to be half full or half empty, and its contents could seem to taste bitter or sweet. Though there may be no definitive answers, there are many productive questions arising from a service-learning experience. Depending on the desired learning outcomes, the context or the reflection

model, examples of the questions arising from a service-learning experience could be: 'how does this experience relate to the task you are fulfilling?', 'how does this experience inform your ideas about how you learn?', 'how does this experience connect with the context in which learning and activity are addressed', 'how does this experience contribute to your academic, personal and civic development?' T.S. Eliot, in the poems 'Four Quartets' speaks of the elusiveness of true learning in the line: "We had the experience but missed the meaning". As I will discuss later, the process of reflection is a vital part of service-learning: it draws meaning from the experience and adds to holistic development.

Gutting a house that was flooded and serving food to the homeless are visceral experiences. They are far removed from the concept of 'increasing social capital', unless meaning is drawn from the experience through reflection. Service-learning<sup>56</sup> is a new and developing concept in Irish higher education. I wish to connect the theory with real examples I observed during my two years researching service-learning in American higher education.

//////////

## What? The Field Of Service-Learning Defined

*Service-learning* has been described as:

...a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service-learning. (Jacoby, 1996, p. 5)

[Service-learning is] ...a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222)

Service-learning involves the university teaching staff, students and a community organisation co-operating in a reciprocal partnership to address a need in the community. The varied priorities of each partner are given equal importance during the formation of effective partnerships. The agenda must be inclusive and function as a mutually beneficial joint venture. What distinguishes service-learning from other forms of experiential learning such as internships or field education is that the service addresses a civic need, and the focus of the service is as beneficial for the recipient as the provider (Furco, 1996). The university contributes to community development by providing resources and a structure in which students can participate in the community while they learn. These resources could be students' direct service, access to campus facilities or the results of participatory action research that students conduct in association with a community organisation. In return, the university is able to facilitate an effective learning experience for its students. The community partner gains access to university resources in the form of the student's work, and it also contributes to the student's development by being a co-educator with the university. The student has the opportunity to put classroom theory into practice while providing a service needed in the community. The partnership is reciprocal because each participant contributes and benefits something of value.

According to Stanton (1999), service-learning joins the concept of community action with the effort to learn from that action, and connect what is learned to existing knowledge. A service-learning programme has classes in which a student's course content is analysed in terms of how it relates to the community. On that basis, students then engage in work in the community

<sup>56</sup> Though the preferred term in Ireland is community based learning, I will use service-learning, the term most commonly used in the US literature.

to address a need that exists there; this could be tutoring in a school or assisting in community arts projects. Through personal and group reflection in class, experiences in the community are examined so as to demonstrate how the theories on the curriculum work in practice, in the community. The following is one example of service-learning. Teaching staff at the Information Technology Department of Clemson University, in South Carolina, responded to a request from senior citizens at a local retirement home who wanted to learn basic computer skills. A service-learning project was agreed upon, by which students teach the computer skills they learn in class to the seniors, who visit the campus once a week. For the students to tutor effectively they must have a good understanding of the subject matter. The students' service is integrated into their course and they get academic credit for their learning as shown in continuous and end of term assessment. It is not volunteer work, because it is an integral element of their programme of study.

The second example is that of community-based participatory action research involving chemistry students at San Francisco State University. They analysed the paint used in a public housing estate and found that the lead content was at an unhealthy level. This information helped in the lobbying of the city authorities to have the buildings re-painted using safe materials. The students connected their technical classroom learning to a real world situation, enhancing their own practice and gaining an understanding of that practice. Through this interaction with the tenants of public housing, they gained an insight into the problems of a segment of society that they would not have encountered otherwise, as part of a science degree. Not only did they gain an understanding of cultural diversity, they also saw their potential as agents of change within the community.

In discussing what service-learning is, it is useful to outline what it is not. According to Shumer (in Stanton, 1999), the service is not charity by the privileged taking pity on the under-privileged. He maintains that service-learning should be used in educational institutions because it is a good teaching and learning strategy. Service-learning is not volunteering; mandatory volunteerism is an oxymoron (Sobus, 1995). Service is a compulsory part of the programme, like exams, laboratory work or readings. Morton (in Jacoby, 1996) suggests that the service activity is as valuable as a text book, and, is a learning activity as important as reading. A short-term service project that has no instructional objectives is not service-learning, nor is a practicum focused purely on skills acquisition. However, an internship that is reciprocal in nature with student and community partner as both teacher and learner, can be referred to as service-learning (Welch, 2006).

*Reflection has been described as:*

'... a process specifically structured to help examine the frameworks we use to interpret experience: critical reflection pushes us to step outside of the old and familiar and to reframe our questions and our conclusions in innovative and more effective terms.' (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996, p. 13)

Reflection is taken to mean a 'deliberate process during which the candidate takes time, within the course of their work, to focus on their performance and think carefully about the thinking that led to particular actions, what happened and what they are learning from the experience, in order to inform what they might do in the future'. (King, 2002, p. 2)

Of the four stages of Kolb's learning cycle, reflection clearly plays a pivotal role (Maudsley & Strivens, 2000). There is consensus throughout the literature that effective service-learning programmes provide structured opportunities for students to reflect critically on their service experience. Mezirow (1997, p. 7) believes that 'self-reflection

can lead to significant personal transformation'. Below I will give examples of how reflection, as part of service-learning, is seen to be central to transformational learning.

If students use reflection to 'prepare for, to succeed in, and to learn from the service experience', it will help them to see the broader context in which the service occurs (Toole & Toole, 1995). For example, rather than focusing on the story of one man who begs on the street, the bigger picture shows the issues of homelessness, poverty and inequality as social problems. Silcock (1994) sees reflection as a means for linking social and knowledge contexts, and for translating one sort of experience (academic) into another (practical). He sees reflection as a way of connecting the 'unknowing to the knowing': once you are aware of a social problem you cannot return to being unaware of it. It may be possible to ignore the issue, but not to be ignorant of it. Though students may have an 'a-ha moment' of realisation, the experience needs to be given time and due consideration so as to gain the full benefit from it. Students must make their own meaning of all the possible interpretations within an experience (Toole & Toole, 1995). Reflection is central to service-learning so that the meaning in the experience is not missed.

Reflection may be conducted in many ways: written, verbal, solo or in groups and creatively and imaginatively or descriptively and functionally. It typically follows the approach of 'What? So what? Now what?' – an objective description of an event, followed by an analysis of the significance of the event and its implication for future situations or behaviour. A vital part of service-learning is reflecting on the situations encountered, with fellow students and teaching staff in order to analyse theory in respect of practical situations, to examine alternative points of view, and to make informed choices for future situations (Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, & Zlotkowski, 1999). Biggs (1999) describes the process of reflection as an example of abstract higher order learning. It is vital for the learner to have a full understanding of critical reflection in order to draw the most benefit from a service experience. Toole and Toole (1995) take what is almost a Buddhist perspective when they suggest that thoughtfulness should permeate the whole service experience. As well as being an effective learning tool, reflection is also a mechanism by which students can show what they have learned and how they have done so. The assessment of content and process can be combined in a reflective essay by which a student can display an understanding of theory and how it was practically applied during the service experience.

//////////

## So What? The Significance Of Reflection

### Reflection in Action

The Latin *reflectare* means 'to bend back', as in a mirror (Reed & Koliba, 1995). This implies looking from a different perspective and interpreting what one observes. The depth to which one examines any given situation depends on the context in which the service takes place, and the desired learning outcomes. It could be a brief presentation or a long detailed and multilayered analysis of a learning experience. There are many models of reflection but most of them require looking at an experience in a way that moves from description to analysis to synthesis: *What? So what? Now what?* To apply this model very simply to my own experience at the St. Anthony's Foundation: I went to work at a dining room for the poor and I met a particular man I had regularly ignored on the street. My immediate reaction was to ignore him again. This is '*what*' happened. When I asked myself the question '*so what?*' I realised my behaviour was self-centred and without compassion. Finally, I accepted that I needed to change my behaviour in future – the '*now what?*' stage. The next time I was serving in the dining room I saw him again and this time I approached him with a cheerful greeting. He barely looked up and continued eating his meal. This time, I was the one being ignored, perhaps because he was in a hurry, or preoccupied or simply didn't care to talk. Perhaps he did recognise me and was reciprocating in kind, or was simply embarrassed to be seen there.

Clayton and Ash (2006) present a model of reflection that is more elaborate than *What? So what? Now what?* It requires the student to follow Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956) and move from lower order to higher order cognitive thinking. After a service experience is described in simple terms of what happened, the student examines the experience from the perspectives of the student's own personal, academic and civic development. Finally, the student evaluates the information stating why the experience was significant and then outlines how it will change the student's behaviour in the future. Again, to apply this particular model to my own example, I came to recognise that homeless people are invisible, voiceless and disregarded because they are experiencing poverty. They are being ignored by those who walk past them, as well as by policy-makers. I got an insight into my privilege as a member of the educated middle-class, and into the plight of marginalised people who are in a different position and how they are treated by society. I 'knew' that research with homeless people showed that being ignored on the street was hurtful to them. I was aware of that fact but had never thought about it in a critical manner or in terms of how that related to me. I then understood on a personal level what it was like to be invisible, insignificant and disregarded. This was an insight into what happens to this man on a daily basis. I felt ashamed at my first reaction. I experienced discomfort in a service experience that connected the issues of homelessness and privilege to my life in a real way. The research on the treatment of homeless people became real to me, what had been something academic and abstract in terms of my life, was now related to my own experience.

I was doing the service at St. Anthony's to learn from it and understand how the pedagogy of service-learning works. My experience was an example of Dewey's situation of 'uncertainty and conflict'. Both Green (2001) and Tatum (1992) discuss feeling uncomfortable while doing service, particularly when confronting prejudice. I was pushed out of my comfort zone and forced to address my own lack of understanding. The realisations I came to arose from having repeated the service experience, proving the academic premise that service-learning is more effective when there is frequent contact with service beneficiaries (Mabry, 1998) as opposed to once off service projects.

In terms of how my experience will affect my thinking in future regarding service-learning, I believe I now have a better understanding of what students face on their service and I will be able to assist students from a position of experience rather than only from an academic perspective. I will be more aware of the issues of privilege and poverty and how society addresses them. At a personal level, I will also try to act with more awareness and compassion in my interactions with people who are homeless. Reflecting on the experience led to more than a mere description of the events but to development on academic, civic and personal levels.

Cowan (1998) acknowledges that using reflective learning requires more time and resources than, for example, a mass instructional lecture or a closed-book exam, but maintains that the learning outcome is likely to be more successful. This has been echoed by many of the academics and students I have interviewed, who believe that service-learning leads to deeper, more active learning than lectures. Eyler et al. (1996) state that 'reflection leads to a better understanding of social problems *and* to the quest for better solutions'. Reflection can also lead to improving the transfer of knowledge from one context to another, so that theory learned in class can be applied in the field or in other classes (Silcock, 1994). Reflection is an integral element of service-learning and it is only a matter of the coordinator's choice as to which model is implemented on any given service-learning programme. Single-day 'service immersion projects' introduce students to the idea of service. However, if the experience is not teased out with reflection there is the risk of solidifying preconceptions

and prejudices. There is also a danger that short, once-off service programmes do not foster the development of a relationship between the student and the client. Another pitfall is that the student may see their service as charity, rather than a learning experience where everyone gains. An absence of reflection will lead to having the experience but missing the meaning.

### **Service and Transformation**

There is a wide variety of teaching and learning strategies used in Irish and US higher education. The lecture is used as a method of course content delivery, problem-based learning is appropriate for instruction in process, and work placements are used for practical application of theory in a work environment. These methods are just a few examples, and they have been tried and tested and have their value. It was the opinion of many US academics I spoke to, that these strategies are useful within the academic context but do not give the student the same opportunities to develop in a more holistic sense. Students themselves and teaching staff described the change they experienced in their thinking and behaviour as a result of service-learning. These changes went beyond academic learning to incorporate personal development and social awareness.

Molly, a third-year chemical engineering student, went for the week's service trip to New Orleans, to help refurbish houses damaged by Hurricane Katrina. She reflected on her experience in a variety of ways: writing in a journal and discussing what she saw with the students and lecturers who were with her. In light of the social problems caused by the disaster and how it was managed, she began to question the relevance to society of her degree topic. She considered leaving chemical engineering and studying to become a social worker. On further reflection, she decided not to change her field of study but to try to 'change the system from the inside' by being an advocate for social awareness among her peers on campus and in the work place following graduation.

Mark, an environmental science student, observed his fellow students living habits in the on-campus residences. He conducted an audit of waste management on the campus as his service project. He had studied the concepts of sustainability in class but those ideas became real when he collected mountains of recyclable waste that had in the past been put into landfill. Based on his research, the university authorities changed campus policy regarding waste management so as to facilitate recycling as much as possible. Within the wider student body, his research raised awareness regarding the amount of waste generated by the use of bottled water. Matt reported that a noticeable number of students began refilling their water bottles from the public drinking fountains.

I spoke to Tamara, who was studying social work and international affairs, during her ten-week service internship at a residence for women-in-need (also run by the St. Anthony's Foundation). She talked about the sheltered upbringing that she had had in her exclusively white suburban community. The work at St. Anthony's brought her into contact with a racial diversity that she was not used to. She had to address her prejudices and preconceptions about race as well as her feelings of guilt regarding her privileged background. She said that since starting the internship she had grown more at ease in dealing with people of a different race. She also learned to listen more and not to express her shock at the stories the women in the residence would tell her about their lives. Whereas in the past she might have offered advice, now she just listened as she felt that showing she cared would be of more value than her advice.

Almost all of the students to whom I spoke, voiced their approval of the pedagogy of service-learning. When I probed deeper into the negative experiences of a communications student, she revealed that she did not have a good experience because there had been very little faculty support for the students on her service-learning programme. They had been left, for the most part, to their own devices in terms of establishing partnerships with the community and reflecting on their experiences.



Over a period of two years, I visited more than a dozen US universities and talked with service-learning students about their studies. I was struck by their awareness of social issues and their passion for their service-learning courses. They were examples of the so-called Joshua Generation (Little, 2008) who, inspired by Barack Obama's call for change, see civic engagement as a part of their role as change agents.

President Obama spent the day prior to being sworn in, doing community service in Washington DC. This was Martin Luther King Day, the holiday that the Corporation for National and Community Service promotes as a day of service grounded in King's teachings on social justice; referring to it as 'a day on, not a day off'. It was no coincidence that this day of service was included as part of the presidential inauguration celebrations.

Irish higher education could benefit greatly by harnessing the kind of enthusiasm seen among students who are interested in civic engagement. Learning and teaching would improve, and at the same time, there would be a benefit to the community.

## ////////// Now What? Implementing Service-Learning In Ireland

### Dimensions of Institutionalisation

In the first two sections I examined what service-learning is, and indicated why, in my opinion, it is a teaching and learning strategy with great potential. The question of the future development of service-learning in Irish higher education warrants many more chapters. That discussion could begin with Furco's (2002) *Rubric for the Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, which outlines the steps needed to embed service-learning so that it has a critical mass that is sustainable and of high quality.

In addition to that, there are a number of points that deserve further consideration regarding reflection. The role of reflective practice is central to good service-learning, not just for students conducting service but for all partners involved. Many academics interviewed, stated that to have authenticity as academics they needed to be reflective in their practice, both in the field and in the classroom.

In its 2007 report, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship highlighted the central role that Irish higher education institutions have in developing civic engagement. The establishment of Campus Engage shows that there is considerable interest in a number of these institutions in developing service-learning as a strand of civic engagement because of its potential to improve students' learning, develop the role of universities and colleges in society and to contribute to the community.

I recently attended an end of year presentation of a service-learning project that saw student teachers providing academic support at a homework club for Traveller teenagers. It was striking the degree to which the student teachers and the teenagers expressed their gratitude to the university for the opportunity to participate in the project<sup>57</sup>. It seemed to me that these student teachers had had a much deeper learning experience than I had when I did my teaching practice. Likewise, their pupils seemed a lot more eager to learn than mine had been. Was that due to my being a poor student teacher or to how I was trying to teach? The personal testimonies given

<sup>57</sup> *Learning to Teach for Social Justice* was a service-learning project as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education in the School of Education at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

at that presentation demonstrated the potential of teachers and learners when they are passionate about education. One way of igniting passion is through this kind of campus community partnerships because participants see their potential as agents of change.

In addition to this volume, there is a need for further scholarship of engagement in Irish higher education. Much can be learned from what has been tried in other countries and active discourse about the form, focus and future will provide a context for the voices of all the partners to make a valuable contribution. Adopting service learning and adapting it to the context of Irish higher education will contribute to long term positive change for student, university and community.

## Bibliography

- Biggs, J. (1999) 'Teaching for Quality Learning at University' in *Higher Education*, 40(3), 374-376.
- Bloom, B., S. (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*. New York: Longman.
- Bringle, R., G., & Hatcher, J., A. (1996) 'Implementing Service-Learning in Higher Education' in *The Journal of Higher Education*, 67 (2), 221-239.
- Eyler, J., Giles, D. E., Jr., & Schmiede, A. (1996) *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning: Student Voices and Reflections*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University.
- Furco, A. (1996) 'Service-Learning: A Balanced Approach to Experiential Education' in *Expanding Boundaries: Service and Learning*, 2(6).
- Furco, A. (2002) *Self-Assessment Rubric for the Institutionalization of Service-Learning in Higher Education*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.
- Green, A., E. (2001) ' "But You Aren't White." Racial Perceptions and Service-Learning' in *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 8(1), 18-26.
- Jacoby, B. (Ed.). (1996) *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- King, T. (2002) *Development of Student Skills in Reflective Writing*. Paper presented at the 4th World Conference of the International Consortium for Educational Development in Higher Education, Perth, Australia.
- Little, M. (2008) *The New America*. Dublin: New Island.
- Mabry, J. B. (1998) 'Pedagogical Variations in Service-Learning and Student Outcomes: How Time, Contact, and Reflection Matter' in *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 5(1), 32-47.
- Maudsley, G., & Strivens, J. (2000) 'Promoting Professional Knowledge, Experiential Learning and Critical Thinking for Medical Students' in *Medical Education*, 34(7), 535-544.
- Mezirow, J. (1997) 'Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice' in *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1997(74), 5-12.
- Rama, D., V., Ravenscroft, S., Wolcott, S., K., & Zlotkowski, E. (1999) *Service-Learning: Enhancing Student Learning Through Reflection* (Unpublished)
- Reed, J., & Koliba, C. (1995) *Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Leaders and Educators* (Publication. Retrieved 5 July 2007, from College of Education and Social Services, University of Vermont: [http://www.uvm.edu/%7Edewey/reflection\\_manual/](http://www.uvm.edu/%7Edewey/reflection_manual/) )
- Shumer, R., D. (1987) *Learning in the Workplace: An Ethnographic Study of the Relationships Between Schools and Experience-Based Educational Programs* Unpublished Doctorial Dissertation. School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Silcock, P. (1994) 'The Process of Reflective Teaching' in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42(3), 273-285.
- Sobus, M., S. (1995) 'Mandating Community Service: Psychological Implications of Requiring Pro-social Behaviour' in *Law and Psychology Review*, 19, 153-182.
- Stanton, T. (1999) *Service-Learning: A Movement's Pioneers Reflect on its Origins, Practice, and Future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tatum, B., D. (1992) 'Talking About Race, Learning about Racism: The Application of Racial Identity Development Theory in the Classroom' in *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 1-24.
- Toole, J., & Toole, P. (1995) 'Reflection as a Tool for Turning Service Experiences into Learning Experiences' in *Enriching the Curriculum Through Service Learning*, C. W. Kinsley & K. McPherson (eds.), Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Welch, M. (2006) *Service-Learning as Deeper Education*. Paper presented at the Service-Learning Academy, 31st March 2006, Athlone, Ireland.

# Section Two

## *Case Studies*

### *Case Study Five*

#### Theory to Practice- *Perspectives from* The US & India

18   19

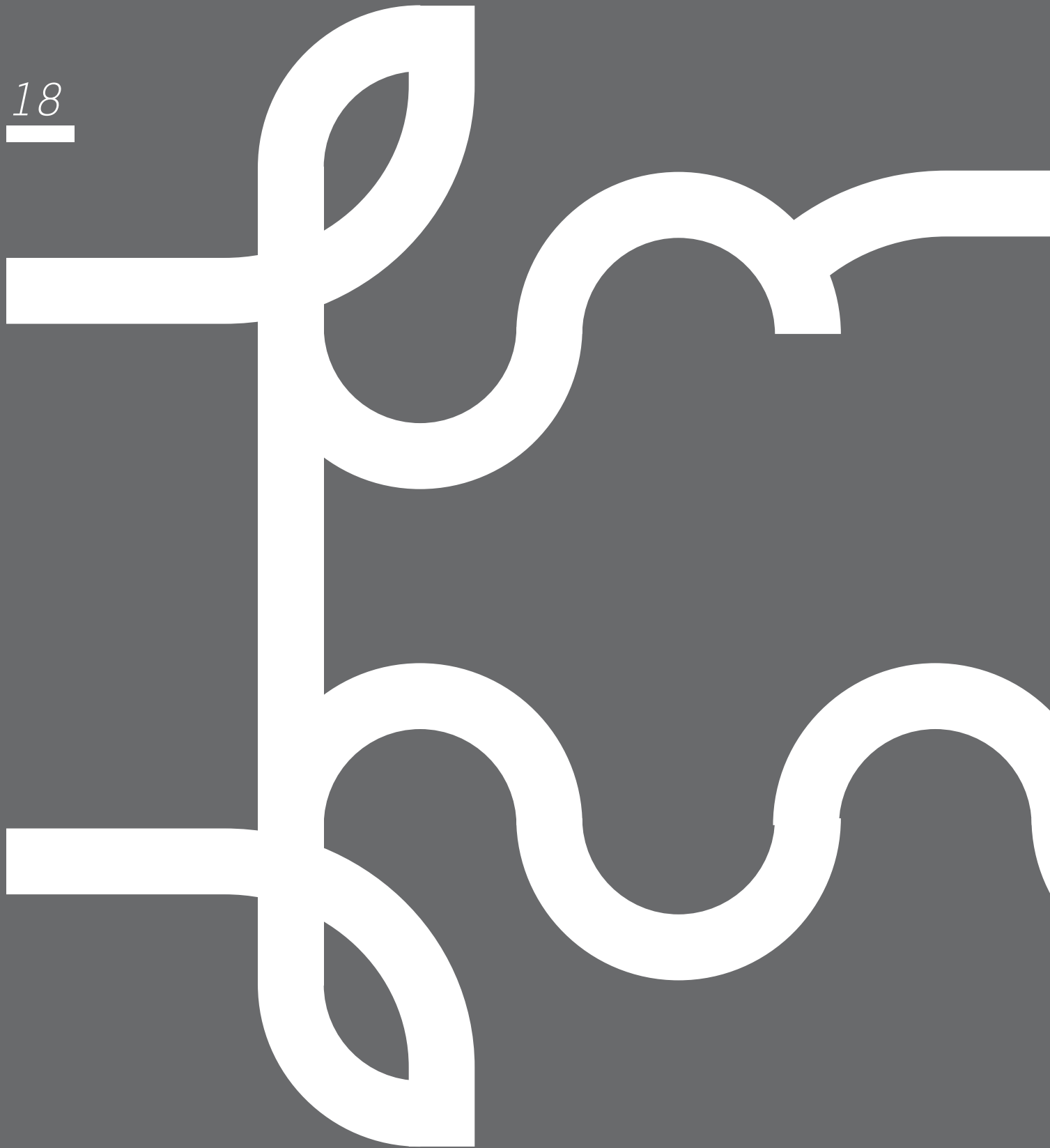
Section Two  
*Case Studies*

*Case Study Five*  
Theory to Practice-  
*Perspectives from*  
The US & India

*18* *19*  
▬ ▬

# Letter *Home*

18



# Letter *Home*

**Surya Kalra**

*Former Student at Occidental College, USA*

Comment from

**Richard Bawden**

*Former Professor at the  
University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury*

//////////

January 20, 2007

Dear all,

I write you from Rajgurunagar, Maharashtra. In writing these letters, I hope I am not merely packaging an abroad experience for consumption, nor simply creating an imaginary audience for myself to follow me in my daily exploits. I write because what I am seeing and experiencing now is worth thinking twice about. I am volunteering this year with Indicorps, an organisation run by and for non-resident Indians that partners people of the Indian diaspora with grassroots NGOs in rural India. My partner organisation is Chaitanya, a pioneer in micro-credit and lending, helping thousands of women improve their own lives. My particular task while here is to start a volunteer wing for local youth to participate in developing the well-being of their own communities. But I've spent the last few months riding the waves of a lot of accomplishments and disasters, and all-but missing the larger framework or vision I need to communicate my purpose here, to either myself or others.

However, now, I think the pieces are finally coming together. I closed my last letter in October with the following quote from Baba Amte, a revolutionary man of great wisdom who I aim to meet before this year is over. He once said:

I pray daily for success and defeat. I crave for both equally because the ebb and flow make you scale new heights...You have to strip yourself of your vanity, your pride and the blistering ulcers of dishonesty. It requires great courage to face one's own self, but in all these things honesty and courage are twins.<sup>58</sup>

I don't think I am ready to honestly say that I crave failure, but I certainly think I am getting much better at learning from it. And I'm not getting as carried away by small wins as I was in the beginning of the project. But thinking over the experiences I have been having, I think my successes and failures can be further broken down into three types: honest, accidental and inevitable. Clarification and examples:

1. Honest success/failure: You've given it your all, put forth your best efforts, asked for feedback from an assortment of people, researched, discussed, strategised, organised. You either see the fruits of your labour pay off in a success, or you don't.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted from Neesha Mirchandani's Autobiography of Baba Amte, "Wisdom Song."

2. Accidental success/failure: An opportunity falls from the sky into your lap, and depending largely on other peoples' timetables, whether there is electricity or not, and your own state of health, you either fail or succeed. Another word for this is "gamble".
3. Inevitable success/failure: You have begun to create relationships with people in your environment who are achieving a high level of ownership of what you are doing. Depending on whether these relationships are of a constructive or destructive nature, the course of events will karmic-ally evolve into a failure of monstrous proportions, or into some beautiful movement, some vision larger than you and your preliminary efforts.

I think to frame what I have been going through in the last few months, it is useful for me to share an example of the inevitable - a particularly learning-rich failure, the subsequent hairy monster I turned into, and the wonderful events that have been bounding out of this experience, after the demons subsided and I returned to "Constructive Surya" mode. I think Baba Amte was wrong about one thing - it requires more than courage and honesty to face "one's own self"- a barf bag may also be required.

In November, I was faced with the challenge of creating a leadership conference by and for youth. But with students facing time restraints and final exam pressures, I wasn't able to pull it together. As an alternative, my supervisor advised me to aid the local chapter of the college's "National Service Scheme" (NSS) in organising their annual village stay, which normally involves community service activities, like clean-ups, and hosts a variety of public servants as guest speakers. The agenda of the camp and the NSS is indubitably formulaic, social service activities often reduced to mere ritual. Regardless, I saw an opportunity to engage and motivate students to work from their real interests, to use their creativity for a higher social good.

After a little bit of prodding and guidance from a local health worker, a group of students scripted a street play about HIV/AIDS and began ardent rehearsals during their free time at the camp, meaning to perform in villages in the area as part of an awareness campaign. It seemed like a good idea to me in the beginning—I could see the urgency of the issue, and I knew that rural Indian women were a very vulnerable population, especially considering that adultery and unprotected sex were not uncommon practices among their husbands. Also, I thought it would be a good opportunity for students to try something more on the side of social change rather than the service activities to which they were accustomed.

But bad seeds were planted in our relationship from the start. During NSS camp, though the students were enthusiastic about the play, I was frustrated with their relaxed attitude about the whole affair. When they began performing during the first week of December they had some great moments: they performed in a few locations around Rajgurunagar during the tail end of AIDS Awareness Week in December and began to get invitations to perform at other NSS camps and at local schools. However, quickly their happiness at their initial successes morphed into over-confidence and bad planning - the latter manifesting itself in the constructing of a performance schedule in schools and cities—not at all the rural target population they had been trying to reach.

I started getting more and more angry at the situation. I actually was scared of myself - shocked at the monster that was emerging - I didn't know I had it in me, at least in this context. But what was significantly different about this anger was that it was the rage that builds from being out of control of a situation, ignored and devalued when you know you are trying to be a catalytic force for yourself and others.

The last straw, and the day I knew that it was the end, started when I got a call that the group was going to be performing in 10 minutes at the Mahatma Gandhi school—the biggest and most reputable school in Rajgurunagar. I was in the bus coming back from a village. I rushed to the school, to see the group performing in front of the entire school ... AND NO ONE WAS WATCHING THEM. All the elementary students were eating their lunch, and the electricity had gone out a few minutes into the performance, so they couldn't hear them anyhow. The feedback I was getting from teachers was on point: they were aghast at the poor planning...one even said, "what a waste", looking over the heads of countless students eating and chattering to the stage where the group was performing in what looked like pantomime. It was like a bad dream, but I felt somehow detached from it all. It was the ultimate example of not caring about your effect or your audience, and just performing for the sake of performing.

That same afternoon, the group performed in front of an NSS camp from Pune University in a nearby village. People from the village gathered on the left side, college students from the camp on the right. As soon as the street play was done, instead of even acknowledging their audience, the group ran up to see a local temple. I stayed back and started asking students and villagers about the performance. After we broke through the initial politeness, "Oh it was great" etc, I got to their real feedback. Some of the villagers said that the performance was at the wrong time of day—they should have done it at night or in the morning when women could see it—women, more organised in self-help groups for savings and upholders of the community activities, were much better poised to receive this message. Another criticism was that it was less of a street play as it was a play—the performers were visually and emotionally distant from the audience. There was no audience interaction.

When the group came back from seeing the temple they had no interest in listening to the feedback from the audience and simply piled into the van and headed for home. Later when I got a ride back on a motorcycle from one of the villagers, I ate dinner, went to my room, and cried.

I think this is the point in the story where I'm supposed to transition into what I learned, what I did wrong, how I picked myself up and pushed forward. I learned, I did, and I will talk about it. But first, I just feel like stomping my foot and saying, gah!!!

And if you're not bored of reading, then the rest of this email is actually about my learning and the wonderful things that began happening in the weeks thereafter. I promise. I mean right after I contracted amoebic dysentery. (Don't be lazy, folks. Always boil your water).

Luckily, even if I'm not as wise as I'd like to be, I've been smart enough since a young age, to find mentors who can guide me. In the US, my guides have been people like Maria Avila, Aisha Peters, Jeff Tobin and Professor Mindry, my grandmother, parents and siblings. In India I have found my supervisor—Dr. Sudha Kothari, the founder of Chaitanya, to be a person of immense strength



and insight-wise enough to let me learn things the hard way, but ready with a smile and a “Plan B” for me when I’m about to give up. I’ll gush on about her in a later email. But both she and my Indicorps staff support—Dev—have been incredibly supportive.

While my project was disintegrating before my eyes, and I felt like I could do nothing but let it, they reminded me, that hey, wasn’t I supposed to be working for youth empowerment? Hadn’t I been trying to organise a leadership conference? Didn’t I already have a list of students whose potential I was excited about? Why not figure out a way to support them? Why not try a different approach? Why was I putting my energy in the wrong places?

And suddenly, all the papers I had written (senior thesis included), all the lessons that people had taught me about organising, participant observation, participatory methodology, all the principles that I confidently but mostly only theoretically espoused in college, hit me like a ton of bricks. And I felt like an idiot. For the past four months I have been chasing people with pre-conceived projects, no matter how noble, instead of finding out their real interests, what makes them angry, what makes them tick, and why. I can see Maria asking me, “Why didn’t you do a power analysis first of the college and Chaitanya? Why aren’t you doing one-to-ones with students?”

It is a beautifully stupefying thing when you finally start to practice what you preach, when you stop just studying organisers and try to be one. It’s like one, long, embarrassing “aha” moment.

While creating a series of destructive relationships with a group of students and incompetent authority figures, I was luckily, also simultaneously getting to know a lot of solid students. So when I switched gears and started trying to finally organise a conference for them to bring in the New Year on the right foot, I already had a small group of energetic students to work with.

The planning stages of the conference were eye-opening. The students and I learned, in less than three weeks, the basics of local fund-raising, mini-grant writing, creating a three day curriculum for the conference, hour-by-hour, and organising all of the resources and contacts we would need to pull it off. And because my supervisor pushed me to see how I could make students equal partners with me every step of the way, by the time we opened the conference on the 29th of December, there was such a high level of ownership and enthusiasm that we had to create a waiting list for attendees.

We held the conference at a Gandhian farm just outside a nearby village. The founder of this farm is a doctor who left his big house and practice about eight years ago to convert 100 acres of barren land into a bio-diverse farming community and water reserve for the surrounding villages in the valley. Walking into the farm is like finding paradise. After living in hot, dusty villages or towns for most of their lives, students were dumbstruck by the care and forethought put into every plant and tree in the area, the array of fruit trees and flowering plants growing there, and the shade and fresh air of the place. The founder, Dr. Katariya, often says that he is “a doctor in search of health”, that after 40 years of practicing, his patients’ health was only getting worse, mostly due

to unsafe water or inadequate nutrition. And all of his doctor friends were suffering from diabetes and heart disease. So he decided that he had to start pouring his energy into the root causes of ill-health—pollution, deforestation, inadequate water and nutrition. His farm is slowly becoming a resource and training center for local farmers, and he is even experimenting with a juice-factory and eco-tourism to make it financially self-sufficient.

What was wonderful about hosting the conference here was that Dr. Katariya wanted to participate in the activities as a student. The students, used to a strict hierarchy of authority, were hungry for contact with someone like Dr. Katariya—a bouncy, eccentric man who could be both their role model and come to their level. He would stand up and applaud them, shaking his head, pronouncing all of their ideas for social projects, “Fantastic!” What was most important about his contribution, though, was that he was a living and breathing example for the students of someone who has the courage to be crazy, to disregard the doubts of his family and friends, and who ran, head first, off the beaten track into an uncertain vision of immense proportions.

I coordinated closely with Dev, my Indicorps staff support who, excited about the conference, volunteered himself and two of his friends to come down and help me facilitate it. Between yoga, environment and mental health sessions with doctor K, the four of us did the bulk of the work, running sessions to have students define their “geography” and the issues in it that they care about. I think in Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organising, the style of organizing popularised in the United States by IAF founder Saul Alinsky, this is called “claiming your turf”, as a way to root your actions in your lived experiences, in an environment you are invested in and will be able to change. It’s funny that I wasn’t really conscious about what we were doing until after the conference, but we were really getting at students’ “self-interest”, to borrow another organising term, in explosive ways.

No one had ever in their lives, sat them down and asked them about themselves, about their villages, about the problems they see there, and then told them they were capable, here and now, of working on those problems. By the third day, our goal was to have them present their action plan, for the next two months, of how they were going to address the issue they had identified. The process of getting to this stage was rough, as it was difficult to bring the students down from their unleashed passion into realistic goal-setting and workable short term plans. The biggest danger was when, somewhere in the middle of day 2, so energised by the feeling of being in a group, their plan was a massive, one-day campaign to clean up all the plastic litter at a famous festival that was to take place in the middle of February. Although we had been working from their own proclaimed geographies and issues all along, they forgot all about it in the excitement of seeing a project that would make them stars in the local papers. Bringing them out of this required morphing into a taskmaster, busting their bubbles a little bit and chastising them for getting behind on the drafts of their own individual action plans. We lost some of the insincere students along the way. But by the time we ended the conference, I had 14 students signed up with me for individual meetings to work on their individual projects.

In the past two weeks, I have had the delight of watching students take off. One team of students is working with a village school in developing the children’s confidence and creating a street play with them to perform in self-help groups around the area. Another boy is enlisting his friends in villages to do a survey of the Neem trees, an anti-septic, highly medicinal tree that

is strangely dying out in the area. The boy said to me the other day, "If the Neem trees, the trees we use to build our immunity are dying, then imagine what must be happening to us!" Another girl is trying to tackle deforestation in her village, a tribal area, holding a rally and working on an interactive lesson plan for children on how to preserve their environment.

I could go on and on, but you get the idea. And I think I'm finally on the right track now because instead of chasing students, they are chasing me, trying to get materials and contacts for their projects, to get me to come to their villages with them, to help them in their weekly group meetings. My biggest fear now is that they will burn out in trying to over-achieve, so I have been working carefully with them in individual meetings to make time tables and balance their project with their school work and home responsibilities. I've also been doing something called a "SWOT" analysis with them in individual meetings, going over what they have deemed as their personal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They usually come up with a long list of weaknesses, so I try to help them turn them into "opportunities" for personal growth, as well as chime in with the strengths I think they missed. I also have been asking them all, at the end of the meeting, to give me their perspective on what they think my strengths/weaknesses, etc. are.

One student, Sunil, a very humble but straightforward student summed me up with shocking accuracy. He said, "Surya tai, your strength is you got us all together and excited. But your weakness is you aren't thinking about how to keep us going. Your opportunity is to make this last. And your biggest threat is that there will be no one to continue your efforts once you have gone."

The group has called itself "Chaitanya Bharati" with no prompting from me. Chaitanya, the name of my organisation is a word that is close to Freire's concept of "conscientisation," or the process of tapping critical awareness. And "Bharati" means Indian. Therefore, the students have basically set the stage for what could become a growing movement of socially conscious, self-driven students in the area. And my job now is to give that a house, a mentor, and a forum to grow. My efforts, over the last 6 months of this project, will be going towards building a library and organising space for the students within my organisation, finding long-term funding and also a youth organiser to follow me, and publicising them and their work to all the people who could support them. I have hopes that the next youth organizer could even be one of the graduating students I am working with now. Simultaneously, I have to keep working with these students in individual meetings and as a group, and plan a "summer phase" for them and a growing number of their peers. I envision it as a month long, intense phase of their project plans, preceded by a week of orientation and training and followed by a three-day debrief and documentation camp, with field visits and support throughout.

It is strange to see the months unfolding in front of me with activities that can actually be accomplished. A youth centre, a "Chaitanya Bharati" newsletter, an intensive social project summer camp ... ongoing conferences and training modules for students throughout the year ... I don't know if I'm dreaming too big or too small. But when you are starting almost from scratch, then anything, even just being there for students on a one-to-one basis, is a big deal. I am glad that I am young and idealistic enough to want big things for these students. And I am glad that this idealism has also been sobered by trying to work with the established Indian "system" and crashing and burning. As a challenge, my supervisor is trying to get me to see how "Chaitanya Bharati" can one day be integrated into rural college curriculums across the state, so I guess a personal goal for the next six months will also be to work on anger management and not burning all of my bridges.

My God this email is longer than most papers I ever wrote in college. I hope you are all well. Perhaps you'll think of me fondly next time you find yourself running head first into a door without trying the knob. Or next time you have chronic diarrhoea. Either way. Think of me fondly.

With love,  
Surya

//////////

Dear Surya.

You don't know me, but after reading your letters, in response to a request from Seamus Lillis, I feel that there is much that I know about you - thanks in large part to the remarkably self-effacing and indeed self-illuminating style with which you write. Seamus asked me if I would write, for an Irish publication, some sort of third party commentary on your experiences and the key lessons that could be drawn from your reflections on them. I have decided however that I would much prefer to write directly to you, and offer this response to him as a much more personally engaged narrative.

Let me start by stating that I am in awe of your skills as a critical observer of the life you are experiencing and of your power to so effectively communicate what you are seeing, thinking and feeling. These are rare talents: In your eloquent letter, how well you personify the Baba Amte insight that you quote, of the characteristics of "honesty and courage" as twin prerequisites for facing one's own self in dealing with the inherently dialectical "ebb and flow" of a life in service - and how clearly you have grasped the significance of such tension-laden distinctions as the source for creative responses to the "messes of everyday life". And how well you also illustrate those traits as you describe your experiences, for instance, with the HIV/AIDS street play group and all of the inter-personal tensions and your own personal angst that was so clearly associated with your passionate involvement with that endeavour.

I resonate very strongly with much of what you are experiencing with community life in India and with your reflections on interventions in it in the name of "betterment". While, unlike you, I can claim no cultural heritage with that vastly complex, polyglot nation, I have worked on development projects there, in close collaboration with colleagues from Indian agricultural universities, on and off for more than two decades now. Indeed as I write, I am just back from a "flying visit" to Bangalore to attend a workshop at which academics from six different US universities and three Indian agricultural universities were collectively reflecting critically on a number of such projects that have been funded by the US government under the rubric of "21st century challenges to sustainable agri-food systems". Just as with similar events that I have attended over the years in the more than two dozen other countries in which I have had the profound privilege of working in "development projects", the Bangalore experience contained both good and not-so-good news about the quality, effectiveness, sustainability, and indeed ethical defensibility of the wide range of interventions that have been pursued in the quest for sustainable development for rural people in India.

As you yourself have most certainly now come to appreciate, such are the typical dynamics of true community engagement within a context of "collectively seeking betterment". I am oft reminded of the counsel that

I received those eons ago when I first started to work internationally in the field of rural development. There are, a wise old man told me at that time, drawing on ideas from the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant, three crucial primary questions upon which one should always focus one's mind in any "development project activity": (a) In any particular, problematic circumstance, who gets to decide what constitutes desirable and feasible improvement? (b) What criteria are used in coming to consensus about that matter? And (c) what processes of judgment are employed in the process? As I was later to discover, these three questions are really six, as each of the three needs to be asked in two different modes - the "is" mode and the "ought" mode - what is currently being done (or planned), and what should be done, in the name of empowerment and inclusiveness. The difference in the answers that one gathers from these two different modal sets of questions in any "development situation" frequently provide salutary lessons not just with respect to how one should proceed with responsible planning and acting, but also with regard to the role that one's own assumptions play in decisions about the "right and proper thing to do". And this has enormously important significance for the way we live our lives and for what we do in and to the world about us: As many philosophers have long maintained, the way that we 'see' the world about us - the inter-connected assumptions and beliefs and values that we hold that circumscribe the view of the world that frames our understanding of it - determines in very large part, what we "do" in it. The huge difficulty of course, is that different stakeholders have different views of "betterment", hold different assumptions about what needs to be done in the name of improvement, and have different ideas about what criteria will be used to measure success!

In your rich narrative about your own experiences in India, while you have not explicitly employed a formal theoretical or philosophical framework to explore distinctions between "is" and "ought", you do clearly appreciate their significance just as you do the importance of the further dialectic tension between 'self' and 'others'. I very much like the way by which you translate the dialectic between success and failure to which Baba Amte has introduced you, as a powerful focus for self-exploration. The distinctions that you make between honest, accidental and inevitable expressions of tensional differences between success and failure are as creatively novel as they are clearly useful to you.

As your critical reflections on your experiences in India are revealing so transparently, you have already grasped what surely must be (or at least ought to be) the fundamental foundation of service - the Socratic imperative of "first know thyself". At the core of this lies an appeal that echoes a basic concern for "how we should live our lives" as autonomous human beings with assumed responsibilities both for others and for the rest of nature. Socrates believed that the life truly worth living was what he referred to as "the considered life": A life which is well-informed, is characterised by goals that are virtuous and worthwhile, and is lived in a manner that allows each of us to personally flourish while responding to the needs of others (which in this ecologically aware world, must certainly now include not just future generations of our own species but species other than our own as well).

There are, as you are assuredly discovering, many different routes to self-discovery, just as there are many facets of one's own character that one can use as the focus of such attention. Once again a formal framework for such an analysis, that also has its origins with the insights of Immanuel Kant, springs to mind: And once again, what, at first glance are three questions, are best seen as six!

Kant was much taken by the notion of happiness as the central theme of living where “happiness is the satisfaction of all of our desires” and in this context he believed that the pursuit of answers to three particular questions were crucial in this regard:

What can I know? What ought I to do? and For what may I hope?

The temptation here, in addressing these questions, is to put the emphasis on the second part of each expression and just catalogue what, at any given moment we have come to know, what we characteristically do, and the visions that we hold as our hope for the future. While it is without doubt very valuable for each of us to elaborate and reflect on these three matters - to continually review what we know, what we do, and that for which we hope as the focus for our own motivations in seeking happiness - shifting the emphasis to the first part of each question, provides us with even greater challenges and a very potent tool for self-reflection.

What is it that I can know? In other words, what are the absolute limits to my knowledge? What sort of knowledge do I value and how do I gain it? Do I typically confine myself to the search for objective, rational, scientifically verifiable facts in my pursuit of understanding situations, or am I much more catholic in my ideas of knowledge and about what can be known? What role does intuition play in the way I come to know things, or my spiritual beliefs? What has experience told me that I cannot put into words, and yet is something that I really “know”? These are questions that address what philosophers refer to as our epistemological beliefs: The assumptions that we hold, usually tacitly and uncritically, about knowing and knowledge.

With respect to the second question, when we shift our attention to the should part rather than the do part, we turn our attention from the technical or the instrumental, to the ethical - the expression of our assumptions about what it is that we believe is the “right and proper thing to do” rather than the sum of all the things that we can do! How do we take account of the potential consequences of our actions? What do we understand as our obligations to others? What does it mean to be virtuous? What do we understand by autonomy, integrity, dignity, honor, respect, and so on? And how do all of these concerns play out in the way we go about doing what we do everyday - whether it involves service to others or simply living out the daily challenges and opportunities of our own lives.

And finally there is the grossly under-addressed issue of hope. We have an awful tendency to take for granted not just the visions and dreams and aspirations that we have as the goals for our lives, but the boundaries of those visions and dreams and aspirations. What is the full range of that for which we can hope? How often do we confuse the practicalities of expectations with the almost unlimited spectrum of possibilities? It is hope that springs eternal, not expectation.

The point of all this Surya, is that in committing ourselves to being of service to others, it seems to me, each of us has two fundamental responsibilities beyond “coming to know ourselves”: The first is to facilitate circumstances where these six questions can be safely addressed by all with whom we collaborate in whatever development context with which we critically engage. This is far easier said than done of course. The second responsibility, which is typically even more difficult and onerous, is to facilitate access to those resources that are essential to allow those with whom we engage in development situations, to find expression for their beliefs and values and hopes in sustainable actions that allow them to pursue the search for their own happiness.

If knowing thyself is the foundational step to transformation, then the second surely has to be to assist others to do the same.

In sincerely applauding all that you are doing and the manner by which you are both conducting yourself and reflecting and reporting on those experiences, I send you my warmest best wishes for a life that is even more considered than that which you have already led.

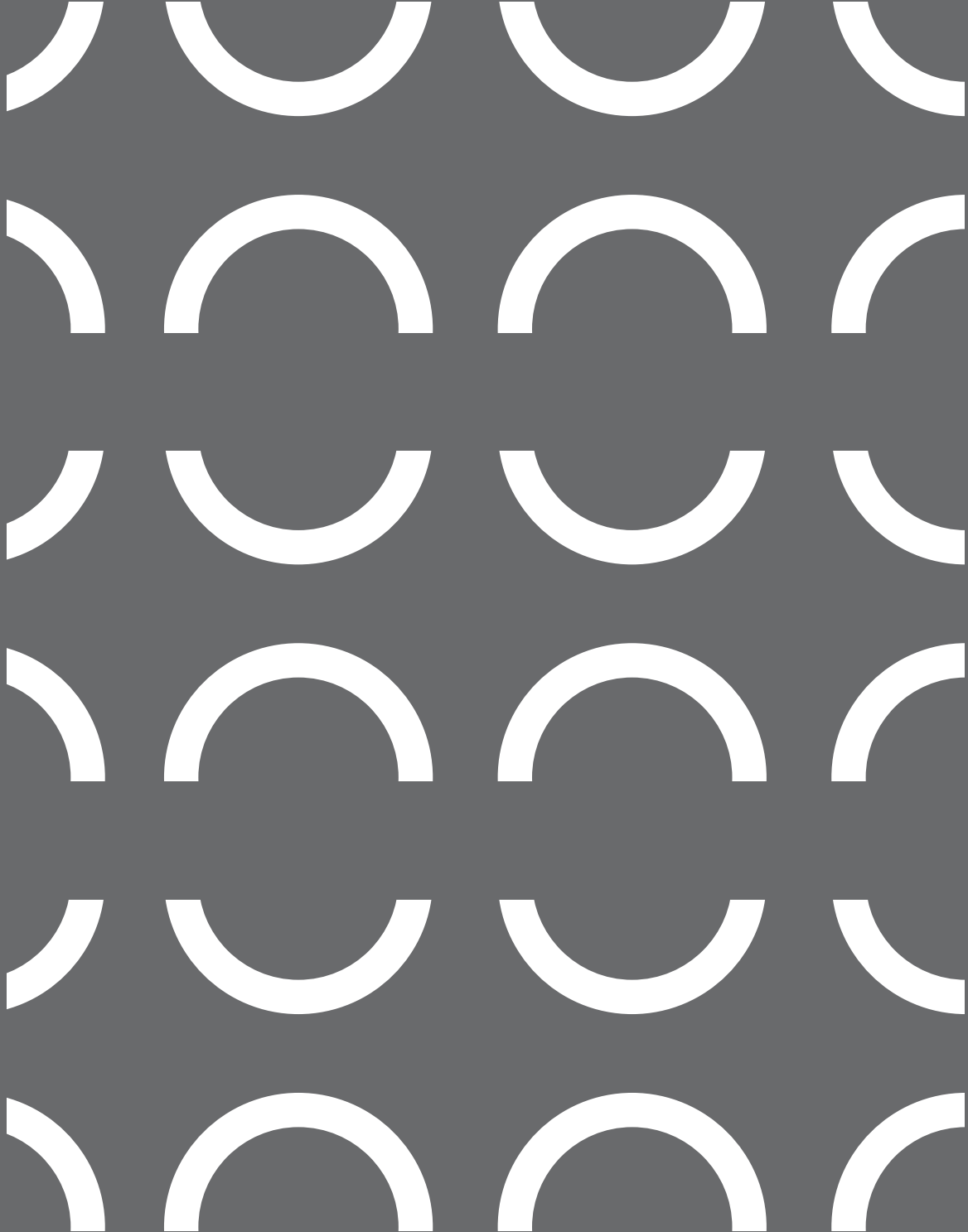
Richard Bawden



Civic Engagement,  
Community Development  
& Implications  
for the Academy: *From  
Los Angeles to Ireland*

19

---



# Civic Engagement, Community Development & Implications for the Academy: *From Los Angeles to Ireland*

**Maria Avila**

*Occidental College, USA*

//////////

## Introduction

What is civic engagement? Is civic engagement part of the mission of academia? Should it be? Civic engagement for whose benefit? What is the role of community as a partner in reciprocal engagement? Even after decades of academic engagement with community, these questions are still relevant for many involved in the civic engagement movement in the United States and internationally. I know this from conversations with many of those involved in this movement for the past 30 years.<sup>59</sup>

Asking these questions from the beginning of our curriculum based civic engagement efforts at Occidental College has been tremendously helpful to me and my colleagues on and off campus. The questions were influential as we embarked on the process of creating and institutionalizing a model of civic engagement that would work for, and would be owned by, the College and the surrounding community. This model is the Community Organising Approach to Institutionalize Academic Civic Engagement, and it is based on community organising practices.

Since the 1980s, Service Learning is the term most commonly used in reference to connecting academic institutions with the larger community. Notwithstanding this fact, however, many other terms are often used interchangeably, including community outreach, field work, volunteerism, and internships (Campus Compact, 2003). For the sake of this paper, I am using civic engagement to signify all efforts connecting academia and community, but focusing on the specific model created at Occidental College.

//////////

## My Irish Connection

In the Fall of 2005 and in the Spring of 2006, I had the good fortune of visiting Ireland, specifically Dundalk and Athlone, respectively. I was a keynote speaker at a seminar organized by the Cross Border Centre for Community Development at the Dundalk Institute of Technology in Dundalk, Ireland in October, 2005. During my visit to Athlone, I was a presenter at the Service Learning Academy.<sup>60</sup> These two visits originated from a series of email and phone communications with Dr. Seamus Lillis; and personal conversations when Dr. Lillis visited Occidental College in August 2005. At the time our communications began, Dr. Lillis worked at the Dundalk Institute of Technology. Through my visits to Ireland I learned about Ireland's new and beginning efforts to connect academia with community.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Frank Fear at Michigan State, Dick Cone who recently retired from USC, Nadine Cruz, who until a few years, was director of the Haas Center at Stanford University, Barbara Holland, Director of the Service Learning Exchange, Amy Driscoll, Associate Fellow Scholar with The Carnegie Foundation, and Harry Boyte, Co-director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, amongst others.

<sup>60</sup> The title of the seminar was "Engagement – Transforming Learning, 3rd Level and Community." The title of my talk and paper was: Transforming Culture by Transforming the Academy: A community Organizing approach to civic engagement. (Avila, 2005, unpublished). My second visit took place in March, 2006, where I participated in the Service Learning Academy: A collaborative project between the National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Dublin City University (DCU) and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Athlone, Ireland. I, along with two Occidental students, Surya

Based on this general understanding, and in response to Dr. Lillis request, I am writing this chapter with a focus on how the Community Organising Approach to Institutionalize Academic Civic Engagement has evolved at Occidental College. Readers are welcome to reflect on potential applicability of aspects of this model, for Ireland.

Following is a section describing the model. I include here specific examples from a student, a faculty member, and a community partner perspectives (see appendix). These examples illustrate the relationship between personal story –specifically self-interest - and involvement in academic civic engagement. The stories also illustrate the use of community organising tools and techniques, as they built leadership and collective ownership within their various projects. The following description of Occidental College is meant to provide a geographical context for the model.

### **The Occidental College Context**

Occidental College is a small, residential, Liberal Arts college in the North East area of Los Angeles, California. The College is surrounded by a number of communities, including Eagle Rock, Highland Park and Cypress Park, all of which are dealing with various issues of poverty. The surrounding communities are an ethnic mix of Latinos, Asians, Anglos and a small number of African-Americans. As US President Obama testifies in his book *Dreams From My Father*<sup>61</sup> (2004:105), Occidental has had a long and strong tradition of engaging its students in community service, and students have long connected local, national and international politics to their academic learning. This, however, was done without an institutional strategy to connect social responsibility to curriculum. This changed in 2001, when the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL) was founded.

Prior to the CCBL, there was the Center for Volunteerism and Community Service (CVCS). CVCS served as a clearinghouse for students, community organizations and schools interested in volunteerism, but without any connection to curriculum. The focus was on providing students with opportunities to do good in the community, and not yet on connecting community service to curriculum. CCBL replaced CVCS, with the goal of creating a culture of academically connected community engagement. Thus, CCBL's main purpose is to provide guidance and resources to faculty, students and community partners engaged in Community Based Learning (CBL) courses and Community Based Research (CBR). The CCBL still hosts many co-curricular student-run community projects. Students running these projects are now aware of the importance of creating and sustaining community partnerships with understanding, interest and benefits for all involved. These students have also integrated guided reflection with their community projects, to help them better integrate the connection between their interest in serving, and their long-term roles as engaged members of society.

At this point, there are signs of a continuum of community engagement emerging on campus. This applies to students and faculty, in relationship to the depth and complexity of the community engagement. Namely, the continuum allows students to engage with community whether through a one-day community service event, a semester-long community project, through service oriented student clubs and Greek organizations, Community Based Learning classes or Community Based Research.

---

Kaira and Lorena Nunez, gave a presentation at the National University Ireland, Maynooth, and at the Service Learning Academy.

<sup>61</sup> President Obama attended Occidental College for his first two years of college, until 1983. He states this in his book *Dreams From My Father*, for example. On page 105, he talks about an event in which he played a role regarding awareness of divesting in South Africa. Articles highlighting Obama's connection to Occidental include: *Boston Globe*, Aug. 25, 2008, *U.S. News*, Aug. 22, 2008, *Times of India*, Aug. 19, 2008, *Chicago Sun-Times*, Aug. 18, 2008, *Daily Times*, Aug. 16, 2008, *Bloomberg*, June 7, 2008, *USA Today*, June 3, 2008

Similarly, faculty can choose to enter the continuum by connecting their classes with the community with a field trip but with no engagement with a community partner, by jointly with a specific community partner defining the syllabus for the class as well as the community project, or by responding to a community need for specific research, for example.<sup>62</sup>

In November 2001, I was hired by a group of faculty and Occidental's former President Ted Mitchell, to create a curriculum connected civic engagement program. Their goals were to ensure a strong voice from the community. From the beginning, the goal was to change the culture of mostly charity oriented service, and to create awareness of a more political and transformational approach so students and faculty could have more choices. Carnegie Senior Scholar Tom Ehrlich points out that although 'Political participation is necessary for democracy to survive and flourish,' in the United States we have seen that 'political participation by young people, including college students 'is distressingly low.' ([www.carnegiefoundation.org](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org), *California Campus Compact and Carnegie Select Faculty for Political Engagement Effort*)

Occidental's approach aims at creating the space for students and faculty to work at addressing the roots of the social issues about which many of them care. Hearing from colleagues around the country that there was a certain disappointment with Service Learning often neglecting to teach students the policy and political implications of their community projects, reinforced my efforts for providing an avenue for this to be part of Occidental's model. In addition, I also learned from my colleagues and from the community projects and classes at Occidental at the time, that reciprocity between university and community was not always clear or intentional. The Carnegie Foundation for Advancement of Teaching stresses the importance of mutual benefit:

"Carnegie defines Community Engagement as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." (<http://www.compact.org>).

The Community Organising Approach at Occidental College has attempted to address some of the concerns expressed above regarding partnerships where there is a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources; where whether through curriculum or co-curriculum connected community service students integrate guided reflection; and where there is a awareness of long-term change. Although Occidental is a private college, its mission clearly points to a commitment to providing an education that engages students in public life.

The mission of Occidental College is to provide a gifted and diverse group of students with a total educational experience of the highest quality – one that prepares them for leadership in an increasingly complex, interdependent and pluralistic world. The distinctive interdisciplinary and multicultural focus of the college's academic program seeks to foster both the fulfillment of individual aspirations and a deeply rooted commitment to the public good. (bold italics added for emphasis).

The mission is anchored by four cornerstones: excellence, equity, community and service. These building blocks, in one form or another, have long been the basis for the college's commitment to providing responsible leaders and citizens for our democratic society (bold italics added for emphasis). Choosing them to support the future helps to ensure that the college remains true to its mission while adapting to a changing world. <http://www.oxy.edu/x2990.xml>

<sup>62</sup> For examples of various levels of curriculum connected community engagement, see <http://departments.oxy.edu/ccbl/>

In addition to the recent example of the student given in the appendix, another example is given in a different chapter of this book, with a letter from Surya Kalra regarding an experience as a student in India. Below is a description of how this model evolved at Occidental College, starting with a brief description of community organising.

//////////

## Community Organising

Let me start with a brief explanation about the reasons behind using community organising practices for this model. Starting as a student of social work in Juarez, Mexico in the 1970s, I developed an interest in figuring out ways to guide residents of Juarez' rural communities how to organize and educate themselves to bring improvements to their areas, especially in the form of public education, electricity and water. Fast-forwarding to the 1980s, when I immigrated to the US, I picked up with my interest to be involved in contributing to community improvements by working mostly with non-for profit educational and social service organizations. Toward the end of 1990, I found my way back into community organising in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I was assisting residents organize around ground water contamination.

This is also when I found out about the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), an organising network in the U.S, founded in Chicago in the 1940s, and with chapters in twenty states and affiliates in England (For more on IAF, see Osterman 2002, Gecan 2002, Shirley 1997, Boyte 2003, and Chambers 2003). My IAF training and experience of nine years in New Mexico and California, combined with my continued interest to find ways to contribute to a better society is what guided the decision to, and the steps in using what I knew best in creating CCBL: community organising.

Community organising is used here somewhat similarly to community development in Ireland, based on my understanding from conversation with several of my Irish colleagues. Dr. Lillis uses the following definition of community development: 'intricate networks of purposeful conversations about the issues that matter most to people' (2006). For the purpose of the specific approach used at Occidental, I would add to this definition of community development that these conversations are meant to build long-term networks of relational, bilateral, shared power to take action toward solving those issues. The approach used at Occidental, thus, focuses on tools that can help bring about long-term social as well as cultural transformation from a foundation based on many conversations through which interests, knowledge and resources are clarified for all stakeholders involved in the partnerships. The purpose is for the networks formed in this process to move into action toward issues affecting all involved. Examples of these actions include creating community based learning classes and community based research projects together, as well as actions involving college and government elected officials invested in creating cultural and social change.

A contemporary example of how community organising practices can play a role in creating and sustaining an engaged citizenry, is President Obama's now widely known use of community organising practices in his campaign, (see Wellstone Action!, May 16, 2008, for a list of articles addressing the role of community organising in Obama's presidential campaign), and his open acknowledgment of the role that community organising played in his development as a public official. (See Moberg in *The Nation*, April 3, 2007).

The following section describes the three main community organising practices used in our academic civic engagement model, and the ways in which they are used: 1. The first step in this model is learning about the institution, its history, its leaders and its culture through *relational one-to-one meetings*; 2. The purpose of these meetings is to help us learn about people's self interest and *to create collective, shared leadership*; 3. Based on what is learned from these meetings a strategy is designed and implemented based on an *analysis of institutional and community power* points and power dynamics. Following is a more detailed description of how these organising practices have worked at Occidental.

### **1. One-to-one, relational meetings**

I began my work at Occidental by getting to know key faculty first, then community partners and students. I did this through a series of one-to-one meetings with people who are seen as established and respected leaders on and off campus. The nature of these meetings was relational as opposed to one-sided interviews. From my experience as an organizer I have learned that these types of meetings are the foundation and the on-going glue for all effective, long-lasting and deep organising.

During these meetings, I asked questions about the culture of the college, who was who, their thoughts, experiences and feelings about community based learning and engaging with community in general. I asked questions to find out about the things that people really cared about, which in organising language is called "self-interest." In the process of doing these meetings, I shared the things I care about, and information about the purpose of my position and the CCBL. I tried not to define how the program would work in detail because I wanted to engage others in the process of defining the details of the programmatic aspects collectively. This process included all stakeholders, as well as colleagues from around the country whom, as mentioned earlier, I met at conferences and while visiting their institutions.

### **2. Building Collective, Shared Leadership**

The purpose of paying attention to what people really care about is to find out what is important enough for them to want to get deeply involved in, over a long period of time. Knowing people's self-interest helped me determine what roles people could play in CCBL's efforts. Through this process, I identified a group of faculty first, then added community partners and students, who became my co-thinking and co-visioning team. In my experience of over 20 years as a community organizer I learned that successfully community organising is based on deep, well informed, collective ownership. Therefore, my main role has been to find those whose passion is related to creating change through their respective fields and occupations, and to bring them together to jointly lead the process of change with me.

A different and more familiar way to create and sustain programs is to come up with the details of the program and then try to convince others to be part of it. This often results in mostly the "choir" participating, while the bulk of the program is carried out by only a few people. With what I learn through relational meetings about their self-interest, I invite people only to what they are likely to be interested in, or find useful for their own work. The first year, for instance, we offered CBL related workshops and lunch gatherings in response to what I had found out through my relational meetings. The second year we took the proposal to the faculty assembly to create a CCBL Faculty Committee that would be officially connected to faculty governance. The proposal was passed unanimously. The third year, as President Mitchell led the college into a process of defining key goals for the following five to seven

years, the college as a community decided that connecting the campus with Los Angeles should be one of the main three priorities. All these were major steps in, and results of, creating a model owned and lead by a leadership team, and based on hundreds of relational, one-to-one meetings. We had built momentum and the timing gelled with the moment to decide institutional priorities.

### 3. Power Analysis

Power is a concept that often symbolizes corruption and abuse. Partly because of this, many of us are not comfortable with being associated with having or wanting power. However, in community organising, power dynamics are addressed and discussed openly. Community leaders and organizers recognize that power does not have to equal corruption or abuse. Osterman (2002) quotes IAF organizer Ernesto Cortes while giving a talk:

Organising means understanding that power comes in two forms: unilateral, top-down, expert-driven power from organized money...But power also comes from organized people with their institutions. Power can also be not just unilateral but also relational. Relational means when two or more people get together and have a plan and begin to act on that plan. When you put together a house meeting, you are building power. When we build power across our region, then we can have the kinds of initiatives, the kinds of programs we want. We have to remember our mantra 'power before program.' 'Power before program.' Got that?

(Pages 3-4)

The faculty with whom I consulted, envisioned and created the CCBL, included some faculty who were well respected amongst the administration and amongst their peers. They had a certain kind and amount of power based on recognition and respect from their peers, and they were familiar with the power structure of the institution. They became my leadership team.

Let me share here my observations about power dynamics regarding academic-community engagement? With the faculty leadership team, and through my relational meetings with administrators and students in addition to faculty and community partners, I learned early on that the power to create something long-term and collectively owned at Occidental lay primarily with professors. This makes sense especially because CCBL is curriculum based, but also because professors, at least at Occidental, once tenured tend to stay until retirement. On the other hand, administrators and students stay for limited periods of time. I also learned that administrators and professors tend to distrust each other. A few of the professors I met with early on, told me that they were tired of administrative initiatives in which they were expected to participate without additional rewards, which added duties on top of what they already were expected to do. Therefore, this particular professor was choosing not to participate with CCBL.

On the other hand, throughout my years at Occidental and in my observations of other academic institutions, I have learned that high level administrators often feel compelled to do what faculty members request of them, with the implication that if they don't they may have to face a dissatisfied faculty body. An academic institution may function with administrative high turn-over, as has been the case at Occidental for close to five years now (2009). But students enroll in college to learn from professors, hence the institution cannot function without a strong, qualified, stable body of faculty. I have also seen students organize around issues that affect them. They often succeed in their efforts, but only temporarily; after all, they will be graduating in a few years. Students' parents have power too, but again, only during the years that their sons and daughters are enrolled in the institution. Further, I have seen cases where certain

alumni may have a high level of influence regarding certain institutional issues and decisions, but they are not around enough to monitor daily operations. The Board of Trustees is the body that oversees policy and financial decisions for the campus, and they make hiring and firing decisions regarding college presidents, but they can only use their power with buy-in from at least some high-level administration and faculty.

Community partners have a certain amount of power, however isolated community organizations and schools rarely have enough power or resources to influence the operations of the college. One of the unique features of the Occidental model of civic engagement is the organization of a regional network, which is further explained in the next section. The overall purpose of creating this network was to create an entity that the college and other people and institutions with power in the region can respect. Once this group becomes a strong player in the region, working toward creating long-term change can be a real possibility. Having a community entity that has a significant role in the regional power structure can be good for stronger and solid academic-community partnerships. It can ensure that academic institutions recognize community's interest, knowledge and resources, and it can protect and support the college if faced with public pressure for its engagement with community.

//////////

## Regional Partnership For Long-Term Change

In 2003, I began organising a regional cluster in partnership with a number of schools and community organizations in North East Los Angeles. The purpose of this network, the Northeast Education Strategy Group (NESG), is to create a long-term partnership for change around education related issues. The stories of Ref and Alan<sup>63</sup> (See appendix) tell stories of how this network has influenced their work, and their professional development.

The group began with an interest in trying to create a partnership that would evolve through a relational process, through sharing each other's stories and interests regarding education; learning together about the power structure, demographics, and literature about education reform efforts locally and elsewhere. The NESG has grown in a gradual, relational, and strategic way, and it currently fluctuates between twelve to fifteen schools and community organizations, represented by principals, teachers, students and parents.

In 2005, the group concluded that the issue clearly connecting all participating schools and organizations was college access. This has become the focus of its work. Many CBL classes and Community Based Research projects have resulted from this partnership, contributing to building a collective of leadership and expertise to enhance college access opportunities.

In 2006-07, NESG engaged in a series of sessions and discussions about the concept of individual, institutional, and collective power. In 2007-08, NESG was engaged in meetings with people of power, including, at that time Occidental President Susan Prager and the elected official for the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education. An important element of NESG is on-going, political education. Most members of NESG have attended community organising training held by the IAF's local affiliate organization, One LA. Most schools and NESG organizations are members of One LA. This gives the group on-going access to all aspects of community organising training, and to an organization that has the power and resources to impact locally, regionally and nationally.

<sup>63</sup> These three stories are fully narrated in an unpublished paper Ref Rodriguez, Emily Rasmussen and Alan Knoerr wrote with me and shared as part of a pre-conference session in San Jose California, on April 12, 2007, entitled: How Community Organizing Can Build Deep, Long-Term, Sustainable Academic Civic Engagement: Using the Occidental College Model as an Example



//////////

## Overall Results At Occidental

As we approach CCBL's eight anniversary, a culture of civic engagement and civic discourse is evident and growing, interwoven throughout the institution, and throughout several disciplines and departments. In 2007, 13 departments offered CBL classes, (38% of all departments); 33 faculty members taught CBL classes (21% of the faculty body); and 800 students, or 44%, enrolled in CBL courses. The number of community connected courses offered annually has increased from 15, to an average of 40. The number of community partners who are interweaving this culture of engagement throughout their institutions and in partnership with others is also significantly growing. We have access to a network of about 150 community organizations and schools, and many of them attend our annual faculty workshops and other events throughout the year. There is a showing of the beginnings of social transformation, especially by the increase of social capital through the participating institutions, the number of parents organized around education, and the increasing role NESG is playing within the power structure of North East Los Angeles. It is evident that the model is owned by all stakeholders involved because this social transformation is progressing in spite of several leadership transitions<sup>64</sup> on and off campus, as well as financial challenges in CCBL's staffing and resources. If the program were led primarily by the CCBL's staff, any one of these challenges could have led to the closing of the office, or to a more service oriented model.

Other results include:

- 1—Our civic engagement model has been recognized for a third consecutive year by the President's Honor Role for community engagement. Nearly 900 Occidental students (roughly 50% of the student population) contributed 5,800 hours of community service.
- 2—We were selected in December 2008 as a community engaged institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, becoming one of a handful of liberal arts colleges to be so designated for its commitment to mutually beneficial collaboration with its surrounding communities.
- 3—Five years of assessing students opinions about CBL classes show that CBL classes enhance students' critical writing and thinking skills, their understanding of academic subjects and their understanding of their role in society.
- 4—The model has won national and international recognition, and its has been featured in various articles and books, including Harry Boyte's *Everyday Politics* (2004), and *Democracy and Civic Engagement: A Guide for Higher Education* (2004).
- 5—Candidates for new faculty positions are introduced to CBL during their interviewing visits, thus making it easier for CCBL staff and faculty committee to invite them to workshops and other events.
- 6—The faculty committee in charge of reviewing faculty for tenure and promotion has begun to discuss ways to evaluate community based learning and community based research.
- 7—Students created a new project called Education In Action, which is currently training students to assist professors teaching community based learning, particularly with logistics, community partnerships and leadership development.
- 8—CCBL has received over \$300,000 in grants from California Campus Compact, Project Pericles, and from the Mellon Foundation to support the institutionalization of Community Based Learning and Community Based Research.
- 9—Occidental has invested in CCBL by providing the salaries for two full time staff, budget to hire about 12 student staff per year, and a fund that provides stipends for community partners to participate as community scholars, class and event speakers.

<sup>64</sup> Occidental has gone through three years of interim Deans of the College (equivalent to Provost), a year of interim College President, and a year of transition for the new president, all between 2003 and 2007. One of the founders of the NEESG, the High-School principal mentioned above, transferred to a school in a different area of the city. This brought a new principal to our partnering school, who after three years, has only marginally participated in the partnership. Also Ref Rodriguez moved up as co-CEO of his new organization PUC, and the new leaders he developed in his organization are still figuring out how to best integrate themselves in the partnership

## Conclusion

In my work, as a community organiser, I focused on the distribution of power and resources as the organising goal for creating more equitable social conditions. My IAF training, as Ernesto Cortes' earlier quote states, taught me that the main sources of power are organized people and organized money. My work in academia has taught me, however, that there can be no justice and equity, nor fully engaged citizens, without including academic power and resources as an additional source of power. Our society functions to a great extent on the foundation of the knowledge and skills gained in academic settings. I called this organized, established, patented knowledge. It behoves academic institutions to stay relevant with the changing times we are experiencing, for their own survival, for their effectiveness in educating successful future leaders, and for new creative ways of benefiting themselves and their surrounding communities, as responsible, reciprocal neighbours.

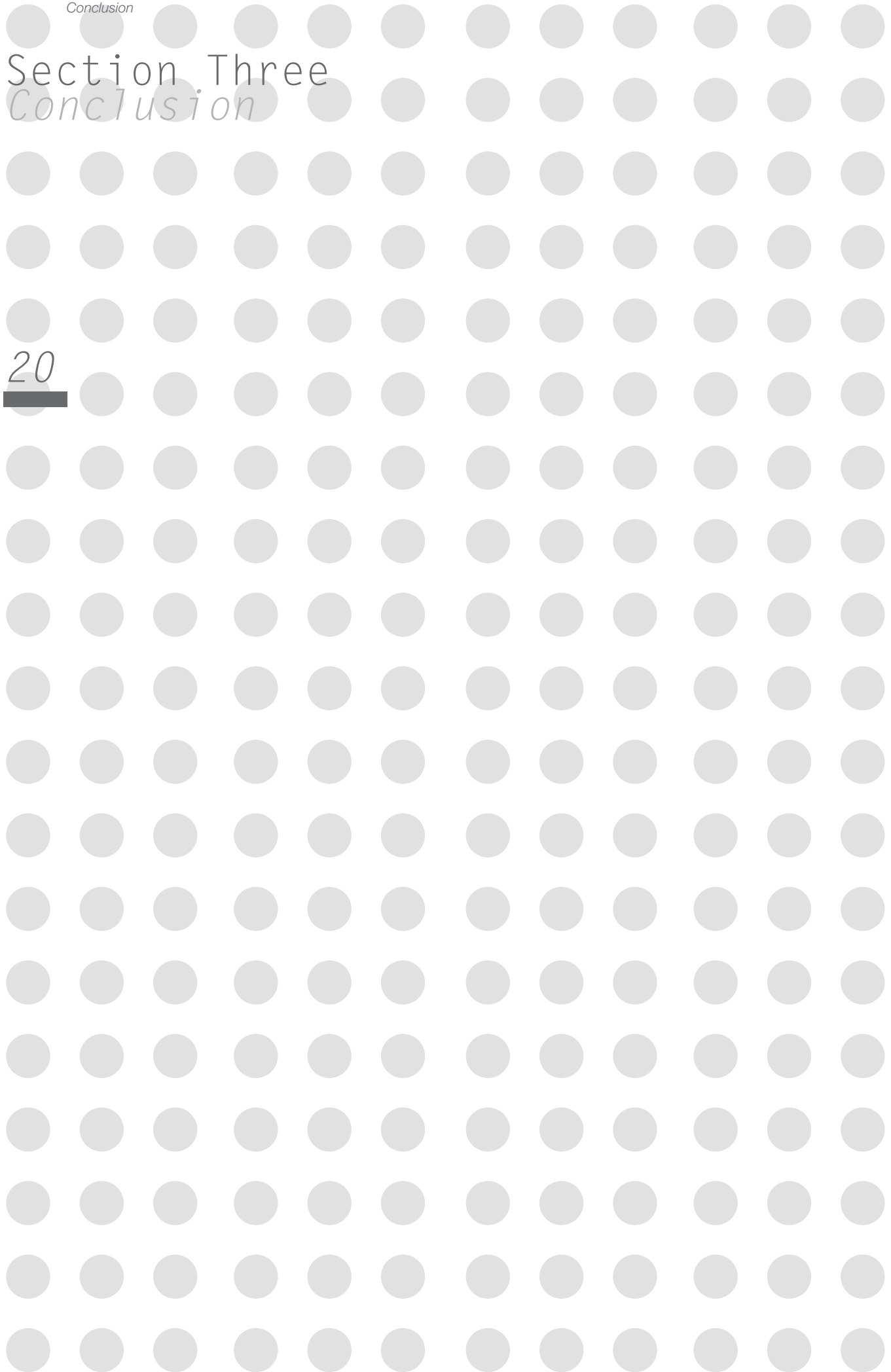
### Bibliography

- Avila, M. (2005) *Transforming Culture by Transforming the Academy: A community Organizing approach to civic engagement*. Unpublished manuscript, Occidental College.
- Avila, M., Knoerr, A., Rasmussen, E., Rodriguez, R. (2007) *How Community Organizing Can Build Deep, Long-Term, Sustainable Academic Civic Engagement: Using the Occidental College Model as an Example*. Paper given as a Pre-conference session at the Western Region Campus Compact Consortium's Tenth Annual Continuums of Service Conference Catching Waves: Using Engagement to Address Critical Issues. April 12-14, 2007. San Jose, California.
- Boyte, H. (2004) *Everyday Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- California Campus Compact (2003) *Introduction to service-learning toolkit*. Providence: Brown University.
- Chambers, E. T. (2003) *Roots for radicals: Organizing for power, action, and justice*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd.
- Gecan, M. (2002) *Going public*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Harkavy, I. (1996) *Service Learning as a Vehicle for Revitalization of Education Institutions and Urban Communities*. Paper presented to the Education Directorate Miniconvention on Urban Initiatives: In Partnership with Education. American Psychological Association Annual Meeting, Toronto.
- Lillis, S. 2006. 'Learning from the seminar' in Lillis, S. (ed) *Engagement – Transforming Learning Third Level and Community – Seminar Report*. Cross Border Center for Community Development: Dundalk Institute of Technology.
- Moberg, D. (2007) 'Obama's Community Organizing Roots' in *The Nation*, April 3, 2007.
- Obama, B. (2004) *Dreams from my father: a story of race and inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Occidental's mission <http://www.oxy.edu/x2990.xml>
- Osterman, P. (2002) *Gathering power: The future of progressive politics in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ryan, A. and Walsh, T. (2004) *Unsettling the horses: Interrogating Adult Education Perspectives*. Maynooth. National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
- Scott, J. C. (1998) *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. Binghamton: Yale University.
- Shirley, D. (1997) *Community organizing for urban school reform*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

# Section Three

*Conclusion*

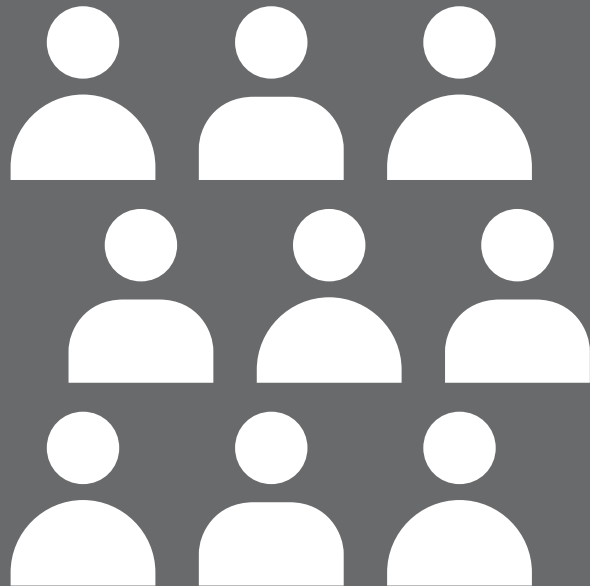
20



# Section Three

## *Conclusion*

20



# Reflections *on* Civic Engagement

20

---



# Reflections on Civic Engagement

**Saranne Magennis**

*National University of Ireland Maynooth*

The task of reflecting in this chapter on the work that is documented in *Mapping Civic Engagement within Higher Education in Ireland*, is both a privilege and an honour. Neither theorist nor practitioner in the field of civic engagement, if I am anything in this context, it is a listener who, in keeping with the entire ethos of the volume, has been given an opportunity to engage in the dialogue. Dialogue is at the heart of the book and of the endeavours that it documents. I thank the authors and the editorial team for all that I have learned from their work.

The meaning of the term “civic engagement” is contested territory, residing as it does within the vocabulary of citizenship, community, democracy, civil society and the public purposes of higher education. Any one of these words admits of many meanings and each holds within its folds a history of usage by the proponents of many ideologies and beliefs. Part of the value of this volume is that it makes explicit its usage of the term in a variety of contexts and so does justice to the riches that two words can hold. The contexts include geographic and practical, rural and urban, social and epistemological, student, academic and community organization, and the treatment of these contexts ranges across the theoretical, operational and the passionate. What the many analyses and descriptions have in common is a commitment to the value of the relationship between the university and society – a relationship upon which the very being of the university is dependent.

The volume opens with a paper by McIlrath and Lyons, outlining the development of civic engagement in Ireland and situating it within national and international theory and practice, while keeping the focus on what is uniquely Irish (Chapter 1). It demonstrates a deepening of the understanding and practice of civic engagement in Irish higher education, illustrating how a complex set of drivers, local, national, European and international, has facilitated the development of civic engagement policies in Ireland, stimulated debate and enabled practice. One of the most interesting aspects of this paper is, perhaps, the progress outlined in the development of civic engagement in Ireland. The work flows from the same core network of practitioners who organised a seminal conference in NUI Galway in June 2005, which considered civic engagement from a variety of international perspectives, leading to the publication of *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives*, edited by Lorraine McIlrath and Iain Mac Labhrainn in 2007 (McIlrath 2007). The 2007 volume focuses on conceptual issues, international considerations, policies and practices in a range of contexts. The intervening years have seen a blossoming of civic engagement initiatives in Ireland and, as a consequence, the current volume is able to reflect Irish, international and collaborative projects, and to frame these in the context of a debate on theory, policy and practice firmly within the landscape of Irish higher education.

The framing of this task is made simpler in the light of the clear support of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the statutory planning, funding and development body for higher education and research in Ireland, and of the National Qualifications Agency of Ireland (NQAI). In a thoughtful and informative chapter Cairtriona Ryan of the HEA and Deirdre Stritch of NQAI note that “... dialogue between academic and civic cultures is vital to the progress of an advanced and self-aware society, capable of identifying and addressing emergent social, cultural and economic challenges”(Chapter 2).

As the HEA has wide advisory powers throughout the entire higher education sector in Ireland this acknowledgement is a firm basis on which that dialogue and the initiatives that proceed from it can stand. The knowledge that it is "... an objective of the HEA to facilitate and support active citizenship in higher education" is an important and supportive driver for those who seek to further a civic engagement agenda in the Irish higher education sector. That the objective has been implemented through a diversity of funding initiatives on the part of the HEA is also clear from this same chapter. Moreover, the discussion is set in the context of mainstream objectives and policies for higher education such as access and equality. The centrality of partnership is clearly acknowledged and the authors indicate that, in their view, partnership is developing in Ireland as "higher education institutions foster active links with a range of community, voluntary, regeneration and development agencies".

Within this supportive framework an element can flourish that brings success to initiatives in civic engagement like no other, and that element is passion. Throughout the chapters of this volume the reader will find evidence of the passionate commitment of the participants in the work of civic engagement and in the documenting and sharing of that work. And passion brings an energy that is unmistakable, and usually unstoppable. The energy that can be detected in numerous voices in this volume, and nowhere more clearly than in that of Professor Gerald Quinn, former Dean of Law, and present Director of the Centre for Disability Law and Policy at NUI Galway, whose speech delivered in 2001, at an event to launch and celebrate the introduction of the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) at NUI Galway is reproduced in Chapter 3.

At a time when the Celtic Tiger was at the height of its powers and the consequent 'social deficits' were far from Irish minds, this address reminded us that "while we live in market economies we are not necessarily fated to live in market societies." It argued that civic virtue and community values were important elements of a democratic society that should be protected, not simply because they underpinned our economy but as good in themselves, and as essential to the continued health of our democratic ideals. In the closing paragraphs of his address Professor Quinn reminded his audience, as he now reminds us, his readers, of two important dimensions of the relationship between higher education and the communities in which it exists and which it serves.

Referring specifically to the CKI, NUI Galway's major civic engagement project, he commented that

"This Initiative marks yet another step in achieving one of the core missions of any university which involves harnessing knowledge for the benefit of humanity. In pioneering the democratisation of knowledge we aim to play our part as a corporate citizen in the regeneration of community. We owe this to the community from which we spring. It may well be that we are also re-situating our University life within the democratic life of the nation. To me, this represents the University at its best."

But civic engagement is not limited to specific projects or individual initiatives, however comprehensive:

"We should consciously see our students as agents of change and equip them to take some responsibility for the 'way things are' and to motivate them to participate in the public life of the nation to help make things 'what they ought to be'."

As such the entire teaching mission of higher education is situated in the territory of civic engagement and service to the community.

The third level research agenda also has a role to play, and this is explored by Finbarr Bradley in his chapter entitled *Defining Innovation in the Engaged University*. He suggests that the university can offer communities a window on the world, channelling and creating knowledge to its communities. In adapting knowledge, whatever its source, to local conditions, and aligning its own contribution to the realities of the place in which it is situated the university can “help unlock and redirect knowledge that is already present within communities located in that region but not as yet put to productive use.” (Chapter 4)

Bradley suggests that in shifting focus to “value creation” rather than “knowledge”, as a guiding principle and assisting students to understand, “through engagement and practice, the value of resources, whether financial, human, social, cultural, technological or natural” universities can make a significant contribution to the development of a sustainable culture of innovation. And it is a culture of creativity and innovation, he believes, that is needed for a sustainable, learning society. He says:

“The heart of an innovative culture is really a frame of mind or way of thinking rather than the discovery of new knowledge. The best way to create a powerful educational environment is through active learning activities that help students understand how to create, exchange, share and sustain value.”

The active learning approaches described throughout the present volume offer what might well be characterized as “an apprenticeship form of education” which Bradley believes particularly suited to the type of learning he proposed. In addition, the testimony of tutors and students alike in the case studies presented here demonstrates that mutual learning networks of academics, students and community members are both possible and productive.

In a thoughtful and thought provoking essay, constructed around the BSc Honours Community Development offered by the University of Ulster, Ellis Rooney shows how the world of the academy interacts at a multiplicity of levels with the socio-political, economic and historical context (Chapter 11). Her context is Northern Ireland in the post-agreement period (1998 onwards). She paints an illuminating pen picture of Northern Ireland in all its complexity and outlines the motivation, development and benefits of the degree programme, the initial proposal for which was supported by a ‘stakeholder group’ composed of representatives from the community sector. The students who take up the programme are typically non-traditional, mature students who live and work in some of the most socially and economically deprived communities (Unionist and Nationalist) in Northern Ireland, and indeed in Western Europe.

Although these students would rank highly among Government target groups for increased access to higher education, public policy can encompass threats as well as benefits. European policies, on worker mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications, carry risks for locally grounded and community based programmes. Arrangements for credit transfer that are designed to facilitate flexibility and easy movement across national systems can become a bureaucracy of credentialism. Though avenues can be negotiated through APEL and the like, there is a danger, inherent in bureaucracy, of what Boyte has characterised as, ‘a silent civic disease’, a disengagement of the university in its language and pedagogy from its commitment to, and practice of civic engagement.

Rooney notes that “whilst this contribution to thinking about community development education in higher education derives from reflections on Northern Irish experiences, which may be viewed as atypical, these exchanges can be beneficial for other institutionally unequal societies.” There is much to learn from her essay, which combines scholarly reflection, practical experience and a deep commitment to the betterment of society and the lives of its citizens.



The concept of engagement is investigated from a slightly different perspective by Rosemary Moreland in her chapter entitled *Engaging Learning Communities: Valuing Experience*. (Chapter 16) Outlining the shared premises of adult education and community education, namely that of using students' experiences and knowledge as the starting point for learning and understanding learning as a dialogical process in which students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, Moreland notes that the concept of 'engagement' has not gained the widespread acceptance in higher education that one might have hoped and the tradition of 'outreach' still holds sway in many of the relationships between institutions and their communities. The chapter focuses on an Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning Programme, that has enabled non-traditional adult students to commence higher education study and gain recognition for formal and informal learning, and specifically has facilitated community development practitioners to gain access to the B.Sc in Community Development, the programme referred to by Eilish Rooney in Chapter 11. Once again the chapter demonstrates a commitment to and passion for societal transformation. Although aware of the difficulties faced by those who espouse an engaged model – which is essentially values based - especially as institutions retrench in a time of financial stringency, the author reiterates the challenge to institutions to reflect on the nature of learning, formal and informal, to develop genuinely collaborative working partnerships with their constituent communities.

Seamus Lillis provides an essay that is passionate in its commitment to the theoretical and the practical in relation to civic engagement (Chapter 15). Commenting on the work of Michigan State University in the area he notes that

“Key factors in the effectiveness of the Michigan State University's experience are its commitment to critical theoretic approaches for its research in community development and its practice of 'engagement' with communities, where it honours communities' right to lead the process.”

The concept of 'engagement' is particularly fruitful. It offers a context where respect and mutuality can flourish; thereby providing a richer experience for all participants in whatever practical endeavour is undertaken together. It is interesting that the concept of “community engagement” has served universities and communities globally, including Australia, in the development of programmes with Aboriginal communities and other groups that have traditionally been marginalised in higher education.

Throughout the essay, Lillis offers instructive insights into the language of civic engagement and service learning, and in an area where language is contested he serves us well in doing so. His discussion, for example, of the contrast between “expressive” and “instrumental” acts is illuminating. He characterises the dominant Western mode of thought as instrumental, portraying action “as a means to predetermined ends, as an instrument or tool of our intentions. The only possible measure of such action is whether it achieves the ends at which it is aimed.” Expressive acts, on the other hand, lack the predictability of instrumental activity and are open to unexpected consequences and unforeseen learning, to a much more creative world of discovery. When applied in the realm of service learning, this analysis allows us to move away from the expert/amateur relationship that can characterise university/community interaction, to a two-way journey of learning and knowledge creation, dependent on reflective dialogue. Potentially, this “constitutes a new scholarship”, bringing rich rewards to the academy. With rewards come responsibilities. Reminding the academy of its civic responsibility and privilege Lillis asks “If third level does not connect meaningfully with communities, from whom can communities seek for the means of their emancipation?”

When a university accepts this responsibility and embeds civic engagement in the structure of the institution, the benefits are palpable. This is well illustrated by the declared mission of Occidental College. Maria Avila tells us that the College is committed to providing an education that prepares its students for leadership in “an increasingly complex, interdependent and pluralistic world” (Chapter 19). Through an interdisciplinary and multicultural academic programme it supports the fulfilment of individual aspirations and fosters a deep commitment to the public good.

“The mission is anchored by four cornerstones: excellence, equity, community and service. These building blocks, in one form or another, have long been the basis for the college’s *commitment to providing responsible leaders and citizens for our democratic society.*”

The experiences related by a graduate of Occidental College illustrate how this mission has been fulfilled.

In the work of Surya Karla, volunteering in India, the reader will find passion and commitment in a different voice. Chapter 18, written in the form of a letter home, begins with a remarkable sense of immediacy in the words “I write you from Rajgurunagar, Maharashtra”. Surya, an Occidental College graduate, documents and reflects upon her year of volunteering in India with Indicorps. In a deceptively simple narrative style, she describes, situates and interrogates her experience of working in partnership with a local community organisation in India, a pioneer in micro-credit and lending. The organisation has helped many women improve their own lives and Surya’s task is “to start a volunteer wing for local youth to participate in developing the well-being of their own communities.” It proves to be a challenging task, not as easy as may have been envisaged and one that has led to months of “riding the waves of a lot of accomplishments and disasters”.

The letter is partnered by a response from Richard Bawden of the University of Western Sydney at Hawkesbury. Invited to write a third party commentary on the experiences narrated in the letter and on the key lessons that could be drawn from the author’s reflections, he responded instead by writing directly to the author. The editors were happy to accept this response as entirely appropriate to the personally engaged narrative which Surya Karla had written. Commending the exchange to the reader, and wholeheartedly acknowledging its impact, both intellectual and emotional, a difficulty arises, similar to that which faces the film or literary critic: to say too much is to risk interfering with the direct and personal impact of the work itself. To avoid this possibility, it is perhaps best to end this reflection with just two statements: a brief quotation from the response that is the second part of the chapter and a single comment of my own. Richard Bawden wrote:

Let me start by stating that I am in awe of your skills as a critical observer of the life you are experiencing and of your power to so effectively communicate what you are seeing, thinking and feeling.

I too am in awe of these skills, and equally in awe of the unmistakable energy, commitment and passion in this letter home: may it indeed prove to be unstoppable.

The geographical scope of the work is impressive: Karla and Bawden bridge the Indian Ocean and two continents, while Diane Doberneck, and two MSU students, Cook and Pitera bridge the Atlantic Ocean to link Ireland and Michigan. Michigan State University, a research-intensive, land-grant university, with a mission of advancing knowledge and transforming lives, boasts of over 200 study abroad programmes across all continents. Among these is collaboration with the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network, a limited partnership company, established in 1998 to help rural communities to help themselves. TVN is comprised of 17 villages in southwest County Mayo, spanning from Balla in the east to Murrisk in the west. (Chapter 5)

Diane Doberneck asks us to reflect on the role of the university and (quoting Schon, 1987, p.3.) whether it is proper to remain on “the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solutions through the application of research-based theory and technique” or to descend into “the swampy lowland, (where) messy, confusing problems defy technical solution”. Whichever choice we make we confront the irony of the situation “that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to the individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern” (Schon, 1987, p.3).

While the tension between the high, hard ground of the academy and the swampy lowland of the practitioner continues, civic and community engagement take place in a “dynamic, evolving, co-constructed space—a collaborative community of inquiry—where partners work together with an activist orientation to seek transformative ends for both the community and the academy” (Rosean, Foster-Fishman, & Fear 2001, p10). “The engagement interface” in Doberneck’s words “is the swampy lowland.”

Ryan Cook and Scott Pitera, two MSU students, spent part of a semester in Tóchar Valley in Co. Mayo working on a community engagement strategy organised by Michigan State University and the Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network. Chapter 6 captures the voice of the two students, highlighting their academic and personal journey as they faced the challenges of engaging with Mayo Abbey residents. In their own words:

“For almost six weeks, we collaborated with community leaders and community members to prepare materials for the ‘Pride of Place’ competition for the rural village of Mayo Abbey, Co. Mayo, Ireland. In the chapter, we will describe our background and expectations, the challenges we faced and how we overcame them, key learning from our experience, and how the experience changed us personally and professionally.”

In closing their chapter the students comment that reflection on their experience is a key element of the programme, so that they understand the lessons learned and identify “key learnings.” And their list of those key learning points is both precise and comprehensive. Their understanding of community came to include the knowledge that “place” is fluid, that history influences the future and that everyone is connected.

In terms of process they came to understand the importance of:

- recognising and involving youth;
- including stakeholders early and often;
- acknowledging the power of volunteers;
- managing communications clearly;
- remembering that ‘there are many ways forward’;
- expecting the unexpected.

Every teacher would rejoice in the success of a programme that in six weeks generated learning of this quality and breadth in her students. That these outcomes should be achieved while facilitating significant benefits with and for a rural community thousands of miles from the student’s home land makes it all the more significant.

Diane Doberneck uses the concept of community engagement, also acknowledged by Seamus Lillis in Chapter 15, to explain the processes that are involved in the exchange between MSU and the Tóchar Valley Network. This is a powerful concept, possibly the most powerful in the language of interactions between the academy and civil society. “In community engagement the flow of knowledge is multi-directional; that is communities inform universities and universities inform communities in a generative, iterative exchange.” (Chapter 5) This delineation of the territory is important

because it recognises and values the social capital of each partner. It is the language of equals. Doberneck tells us that “in community engagement settings, new understandings, meanings, knowledge and practices are often co-generated from the interactions between community partners and members of the third level institution.” It is a collaborative community of inquiry with the potential to transform both partners, “in other words, the engagement interface is the swampy lowland”. In a chapter that encompasses the theoretical and the practical, integrated and mutually supportive, the reader is educated in the possibilities, pitfalls and mutual benefits that can be found when the university, its students and its academic staff, truly engage with a community.

Sr Maureen Lally, with Diane Doberneck, Seamus Lillis, and Brendan Sammon of the Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (Mayo) outline this fruitful collaboration from the perspective of the community leaders in a chapter entitled: *A Partnership Between the Tochar Valley Rural Community Network (Mayo) and Michigan State University: A Community Perspective*. They tell the story of the development of their partnership with Michigan State University, a unique transatlantic relationship that has evolved in the ten years since its inception, and led to numerous successful community development activities. In giving the perspective of the community leaders, the chapter explains the philosophical position embedded in the process. It is a community-led strengths-focussed process and has proved successful on a wide range of indicators. As the authors conclude, “the partnership approach adopted by TVN and MSU relies on appreciating the assets that already exist in communities and determining ways of investing these to create strategies to help all segments within the community prosper” (Chapter 7).

In the voices of students in case studies throughout this volume, the profound nature of the possibilities and the benefits of this type of education can be found. The learning achievements reported in Chapter 6, by Scott and Pitera are impressive, as are those of Karla in Chapter 18. In a different context, Meadhb Sheridan and Siobhan Lynch in Chapter 9, NUI Galway students, comment on their service learning experience, telling us that they “cannot recommend this experience highly enough and encourage students to avail of the chance to participate in this dynamic learning opportunity”. This is the module described by Casey and Murphy (Chapter 8), designed to meet the identified need among student nurses of developing the skills to understand and treat patients from ethnic minorities. If the enthusiasm of the students were insufficient to convince the reader of the success of the module, their articulate and insightful analysis of what they learned would certainly make good any deficit.

They acknowledge that they find it difficult to convey “the full human and emotional impact of our service learning experience.” These two student nurses undertook their project in Zambia. They identify key learning outcomes such as:

- a better understanding of the complexities of health care delivery in a developing country;
- the wider socio-political context that influences such care;
- the importance of an open mind for a successful learning experience.

Their assessment of the experience is holistic, expressed in terms of the impact on their personal and professional development. They felt challenged by the experience at a personal and cultural level, and comment that they developed maturity and independence as they adapted to a very different world of health/nursing care (Chapter 9). The depth and transformational nature of the learning is a point that is also reflected in O’Donnachda’s chapter, outlining experiences in the US. He comments that the changes he and his colleagues experienced “went beyond academic learning to incorporate personal development and social awareness” (Chapter 17).

Not all civic engagement activities discussed in this volume take place at such a distance from the students' home campus. The Centre for Nonprofit Management (CNM) at the School of Business Trinity College Dublin utilised a service learning approach to provide value to the nonprofit organisations and enable student learning through, among other activities, the establishment of the Visiting Practitioner Scheme at the CNM. The Centre had identified dialogue as one of its primary ways of engaging with its partners as documented in Chapter 14. Through various activities and stages of engagement with its Non-Profit Organisation partners CNM concluded that "Part of the required investment is the identification, recognition and development of dialogical competencies among the partners involved." As in many of the projects discussed in this volume, dialogue is once again identified as at the heart of engagement and the skills of dialogue, which include respect and listening as well as speaking, are identified as an area where investment is essential. Once again, reflecting the findings of colleagues across the globe, the paper concludes with the recognition that service learning and civic engagement are not uni-directional processes: the academy too must change. "The success of these dialogical approaches also implies that non-traditional outputs in academic terms become recognised and valued as mainstream productive activity."(Chapter 14)

On Dublin's north side, Dublin City University (DCU) is the focus for a variety of innovative projects that support and accredit student engagement at a local community level too. The University recognises that it has 'a civic responsibility to this wider community in the pursuit of social, economic and cultural development and a shared commitment to civil society empowerment' (DCU, 2007). A range of activities and partnerships in the area of service learning and civic engagement contribute to the achievement of this responsibility and are integrated into the core innovation strategies of the University.

Particularly interesting as a way of accrediting students for civic, social and sporting engagement, is the Uaneen Module, named for Uaneen Fitzsimons a DCU graduate and successful media personality who died tragically in a car accident in November 2000. The module was in development at the time of her death and was named in her memory. It was designed to recognise and reward extra curricular activity by DCU students and, although it has changed over time, it is now available for academic credit, or as non-credited recognition of extra curricular activity, through which students gain many 'soft' and transferable skills traditionally outside the formal assessment and accreditation processes. The range of activity is broad and can include involvement in a diversity of volunteering and sporting activities. Students are required to document and describe the activities in which they have participated, and to reflect on the learning and personal development which they have achieved through these activities. In a particularly poignant recognition of the bonds of community that persist over time the Uaneen Awards Ceremony, held for all those who participate in the module, is faithfully attended by the parents of Uaneen Fitzsimons. (Chapter 10)

Another example of a "closer to home" community engagement activity is represented by the activities undertaken by DCU students through the University's partnership with Finglas for Diversity, an organisation consisting of a wide range of locally and community based groups. Examples of the activities include the development of the Finglas for Diversity website, designed by two third-year BSc in Multimedia students and the development of the Volunteer English Language Tutor training programme in which six DCU students, together with six community members, took part in a pilot community-based training programme for volunteer English as a Second Language tutors.

The benefits reported include:

- development of skills and capacities within the network and wider community;
- effective contribution to the research and development work of the network;
- a range of practical resources for future and further community use.

In addition there were a number of key learning points around the following:

- the need not to make assumptions of the community benefits of university-led community-based learning initiatives;
- the importance of clarity about how much time, energy and resources the community organization can contribute;
- an evaluation of whether the contribution is justified by the outputs,
- an acknowledgement that respect, equality in terms of power and an attitude of mutual listening are essential if the projects are to succeed in being mutually beneficial.

The developments in DCU have been designed to demonstrate that academic credibility and coherence can be achieved outside of traditional academic structures, if the will and the flexibility to allow this are present in the University. As Lawless indicates, this is a challenging process, requiring commitment and a willingness to change: “It is clear that any successfully embedded community-based learning needs to be supported by the political climate of the educational institute, an ideal that Boyer (1996) describes as requiring engaging as peers meaning that ‘power is distributed equitably; respect is accorded consistently; and listening is practised constantly’”.

A programme in IADT is a further example of using non-traditional methods in the context of higher education. Hannah Barton and Jean Hughes describe a project, entitled the Altruism Project, undertaken by third year applied psychology students in IADT Dun Laoghaire, in which a service-learning initiative is used to assist students to understand the concept of altruism. The chapter offers interesting insights into the varied reactions of the students and staff to the use of non-traditional pedagogy in higher education. The project required a significant level of personal engagement from the students. The format of the chapter is that of an interview between the authors through which the programme is outlined and discussed. (Chapter 13)

Part of the challenge of the programme lay in the need for the student to make a link between the academic learning outcomes of their course (in Social Psychology) and the service learning project. It is this link that validates the experience as meaningful and valid. The module outcomes in Social Psychology include a requirement that students have an awareness of three levels of analysis - personal, interpersonal and societal. The societal level entails that they be able to provide a critical account of key social psychology concepts such as altruism and pro-social behaviour. Resistance from students is recorded for a number of reasons: that the programme, which is time intensive, is compulsory. In addition, it is not always viewed as equivalent to experimental work. One of the most interesting comments on contemporary culture comes in the form of a the statement that “one student ... did not wish to put in the hours due to potential clashes with ... paid employment and just wanted to donate an agreed sum of money to a charity instead.”

The Altruism Project described in this chapter is a challenging experience, offering them “disorienting dilemmas and novel situations which can force them to rethink stereotypes and previous ways of problemsolving. Structured reflection through learning journals / blogs can aid in the application of academic content to real world situations and experiences. Social issues can be viewed through a new lens.”

The opportunities for skills development through service learning are clear. It is also clear that the time commitment and personal investment in planning, flexibility, openness to new experiences and patience are significant. The authors indicate a next step: to quantify the

benefits to the students' longterm career and personal development. We may lookforward to the study into the long term affects of participating in the altruism project which is commencing as we go to press.

Diane Doberneck reflects at the close of her chapter on the impact that embracing civic engagement is likely to have on institutional structure, noting that "If institutions of higher education choose to help communities address issues, confront challenges, and solve problems, they will need to revise institutional expectations of lecturers and realign institutional structures to reward their work at the engagement interface". The quality and breadth of learning demonstrated in the case studies in this volume as an outcome of engagement projects provides compelling evidence of the benefits of embracing that change.


The territory covered in this volume includes the urban and rural, local to Ireland and its universities, and international, including four continents. The communities include those impoverished in monetary, developmental and health care terms and those with knowledge and skills deficits but equally with commitment, history and energy from which individuals and institutions can learn. The language used ranges over the contested language of academic analysis and discussion, the diverse languages of communities engaged with the academy and the direct words of students, community representatives and academic staff.

A common cause has been made in these diverse locations: where initiatives have succeeded authentic dialogue has been achieved between universities and colleges and their local or international community partners and the benefits have been mutual. Where students have succeeded in engaging with the community to which they have gone out (or been sent) authentic learning has been achieved and they have changed as a result.

If there is a commonality across the projects reflected in this volume, whether in Ireland, India or the United States, it is that authentic engagement facilitates change in all those involved. Communities, students and universities change for the better through civic and community engagement and the fabric of society is strengthened and enriched thereby.

If there is a deficit identified, it is possibly at the level of system, though this is not easy territory to navigate. There is clearly strong support from the HEA for the initiatives, collaborative ventures and innovative strategies outlined in this volume. There is not, however, a clear definition or national policy on higher education civic engagement. Equality, quality and appropriate planning are enshrined in primary legislation and are subject to evaluation in one form or another. There are clear lines of communication and responsibility set out between policy and practice at a national level, at an institutional leadership level and at the level of implementation within institutions.

Many new beginnings in higher education and in society more generally, commence as tightly defined projects, limited geographically and designed to meet local needs. If the project proves worthwhile, it may be replicated, and the landscape may evolve to contain pockets of endeavour in a variety of locations. The work documented in this volume would seem to indicate that the development of civic engagement in Irish higher education has moved to, or possibly beyond this stage. Initiatives are becoming part of the mainstream. There are indications of some structural changes in institutions to accommodate a new understanding of learning and the routes students can take to it. This leads us to the question of whether it is time to establish a clearly defined policy on civic engagement in higher education.



Such a move would not be without its critics. Institutions, however committed to civic engagement, could read such a move as an encroachment on legally guaranteed autonomy. Practitioners might well view it as an unwelcome attempt to channel their activities into less than creative avenues. Communities might feel that this was an unwarranted incursion and an undermining of their ownership of their projects. On the other hand, for demonstrable systemic change to happen, an agreed national framework could offer authoritative scaffolding in which to create a powerful and sustainable transformative process to the betterment of our institutions, our communities and Irish society as a whole.

When society has for decades been reduced to economy in the minds and lives of citizens of the developed world, and now facing a time when that economy has collapsed into global crisis, the questions raised in this book, and the answers built through collaborative, community based dialogue and action, speak to the very future of society, in its many communities and the universities that serve it. Civic engagement is not an added extra, an unnecessary bonus in that relationship. The *Glion Declaration*, reflecting on the exact nature of the relationship between the university and society emphasises the need to challenge the university “to play a transforming role in society, and thus to transform itself.”

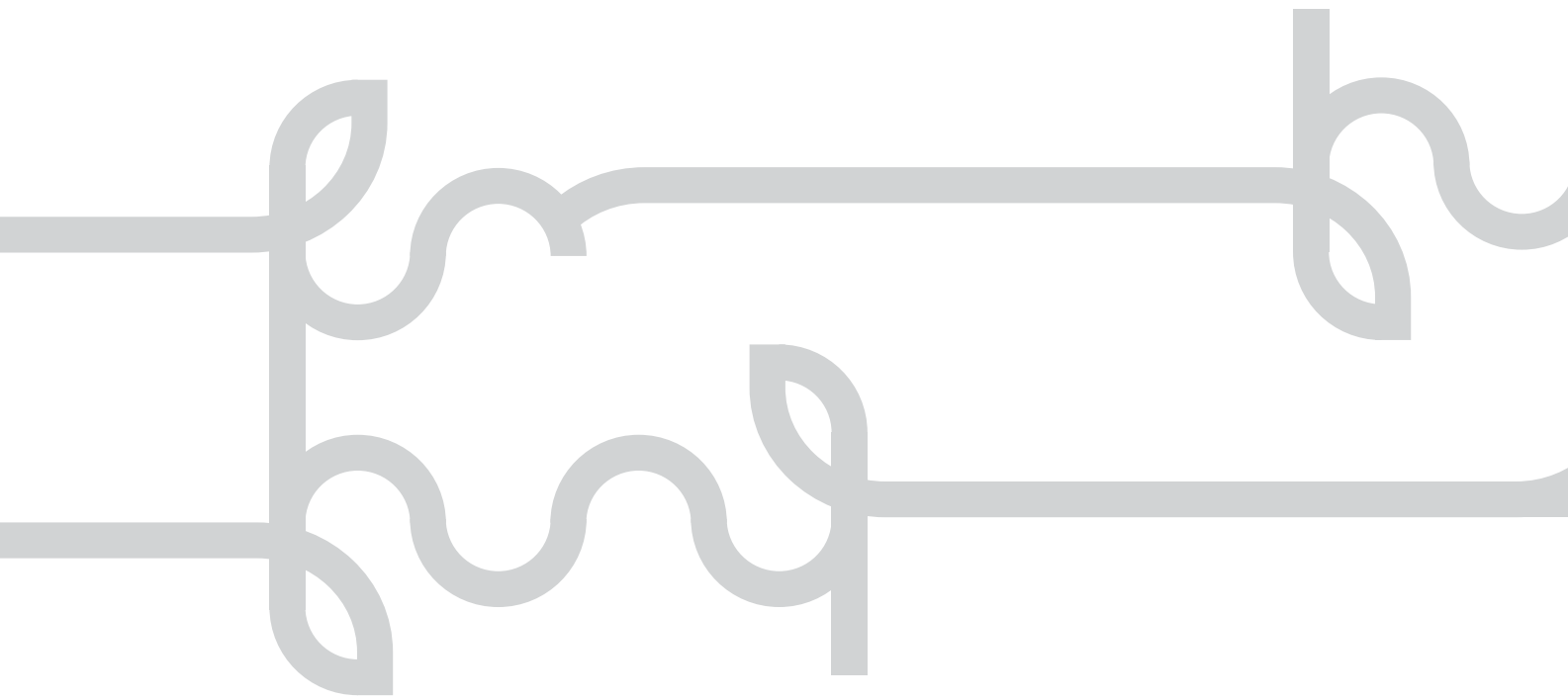
## Bibliography

Dublin City University (2007) *Citizenship & Community Engagement Strategy 2006-2008*.

Hirsch, W. and Luc, W. (1998) *The Glion Declaration*.

McIlrath, L. and McLabhrainn, I. (2007) *Higher Education and Civic Engagement: International Perspectives*. Aldershot, Ashgate.





ISBN 978-0-9550134-4-7



9 780955 013447