

Focus

CRITICAL HISTORY MATTERS: UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN IRELAND TODAY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PAST

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Abstract: This article argues that adopting a critical historical perspective can enhance our understanding of development education (DE) today. Drawing on a genealogical approach which emphasises power relations, it focuses on discursive and institutional influences which have helped to shape different and contradictory understandings of DE in contemporary Ireland.

Key words: Development Education; Critical History; Ireland; Discourses of Development Education; Global Citizenship Education; Education for Sustainable Development; Human Rights Education; Genealogy; Power.

Introduction

Many of us see history as about the past or something which should be confined to it. Where approaches to writing history of development have often been linear, uni-vocal, predictive or progressive, as any trawl of development theory texts would show, the relevance of critical history for understanding the present is increasingly being recognised, as is the importance of adopting a historical perspective for analysis of DE policy and practice (Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Khoo, 2011; Bourn, 2015; McCloskey, 2016). This article contributes to this historical work, emphasising the discursive and institutional influences on different understandings of DE in Ireland today. While the history of DE in Ireland mirrors many of the trends and influences at a wider European level, the focus here is less on exploring similarities and more on examining the Irish Case. Readers will, no doubt, see both similarities and differences with their own contexts.

When history is critical, it is written to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and power relations which marginalise people. It can see its role as political and the past and the present as inter-related and non-binary. In some cases, critical history identifies silences in the histories of the past, it critiques historiography as white, male, heteronormative and Eurocentric, and it attempts to create histories based on different voices, especially those of the most marginalised, e.g., feminist or post-colonial histories. As the field of critical history is itself diverse, here I attempt to apply just one such approach, based on Foucauldian inspired genealogy.

Genealogy explores ‘the history of the present’ (Foucault, 1979) by investigating discursive, professional and institutional power relations and practices which have helped to shape current thinking and practice. As Tamboukou puts it:

“instead of seeing history as a continuous development of an ideal schema, genealogy is oriented to discontinuities... our present is not theorised as a result of a meaningful development, but rather as an episode, a result of struggle and relations of force and domination” (2003: 9).

Thus, ‘its intent is to problematise the present by revealing the power relations upon which it depends and the contingent processes that have brought it into being’ (Garland, 2014: 372). Garland goes on to explain that a genealogy ‘is motivated not by a historical concern to understand the past... but instead by a critical concern to understand the present’ (ibid: 373).

The starting point for this short critical history of DE in Ireland is the fact that those involved in DE in Ireland understand and talk about DE in different, contradictory and often uncritical terms. This ‘diagnosis’, to use a genealogical term, is based on research undertaken with DE facilitators in Ireland in 2016 which focused on discourses of DE. In the research, discourses are understood as broadly coherent sets of assumptions or patterns of making sense of the world. They are ‘socially organised frameworks of

meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done' (Burman, 1994: 2). 'They form regimes of truth... meaning-resources and sense-making repertoires constitute the discourses' (Ryan, 2011: 3). Despite some common understandings, findings from my research with DE facilitators suggest that understandings of DE in Ireland, at least among those involved in the research, are eclectic, contradictory and often ambiguous. Some people, for example, talk about DE building relationships of solidarity on the one hand while also emphasising accountability on the other. They see DE as creating mindset change, linking it to individualised action, while others emphasise its role in mobilising support for campaigns on poverty in the global South. Some talk about DE as an open-ended process whereas others highlight the need for it to have measurable results.

DE facilitators draw largely on a critical discourse of DE (Andreotti, 2006; 2014) which sees DE as playing an important role in facilitating understanding of global realities for active global citizenship. Rather than seeing the world in North-South terms or development activism as charity-based or individualistic, a critical discourse assumes a role for DE in facilitating understandings of structural power relations and collective approaches to addressing them. While drawing largely on a critical discourse, they also, and often simultaneously, draw on other discourses which are less critical, more individualistic or rooted in Eurocentric or modernist notions about the value of North-South development. In tandem with discursive eclecticism and contradictions, findings suggest discursive ambiguity, with many of the same terms being used by DE facilitators albeit with different meanings and a discursive style which can be characterised as abstract, idealised and apolitical.

Here, I argue that a critical look at the history of DE in Ireland helps to understand why there are so many different, and often uncritical, understandings of DE and the power relations which have helped to shape them. I agree with Bourn (2015: 24) who argues, with reference to Mesa's generational account of DE, that the trends in DE are 'from linear'. Thus, rather than presenting an evolutionary account of the past, critical history, at

least as influenced by a genealogical perspective as this one is, analyses the past with a view to understanding its many and sometimes competing influences on the present. In this sense, understanding the past as imbricated in the present, and framings of the past as shaped by the present, turns the history of DE into a critical and dynamic exploration which is essential for understanding the complexities of DE today.

I structure the discussion below in relation to organisational and discursive influences and struggles over three phases – informal beginnings in the 1970s and 1980s; the formalisation and institutionalisation of DE in the 1990s to mid-2000s; and the fallout from the financial crisis and new professionalism of DE from 2008 to the present.

Informal beginnings – 1970s and 1980s

In the early years of DE, what became understood as DE in Ireland was significantly influenced by missionary and non-government development organisation (NGDO) (especially Concern Worldwide and Trócaire) involvement in DE, with shared but different emphases when it came to the type of DE they promoted. Early on, DE in Ireland shared some similarities with its origins in the UK, other European countries and North America (Bourn, 2014), where it began by focusing on the delivery of ‘content’. At the same time, at its establishment in 1973, Trócaire emphasised DE’s broader role in contributing to awareness raising and structural change (Trócaire, 2012). Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken argue that in the 1970s both Trócaire and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP), as well as Comhlámh, played significant roles in establishing DE as a core dimension of development cooperation in Ireland. Ireland’s membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 was also influential as it required the Irish government to establish a programme of development cooperation or overseas development assistance (ODA).

Making the case for DE as an important aspect of development cooperation was a significant challenge at the outset and one of the first priorities ‘was to promote DE within the NGOs themselves and among the

public at large’ (Dóchas, 2004: 7), as ‘DE was treated with a measure of scepticism by some of the NGOs’ (ibid). For Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken (2011), the 1970s brought an ‘opening up of the agenda’ and in 1978 the government – in response to both internal and external pressures and recommendations – introduced a dedicated budget line for funding DE initiatives. Despite threats to ODA funding in the 1980s, due at least in part to the recession at the time, in 1981 the first Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with special responsibility for development cooperation was appointed, followed in 1985 by Ireland’s membership of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken, 2011), an extremely influential body promoting professionalised development cooperation.

In the 1980s there was growing civil society activity in DE in Ireland. Kirby (1992) highlights the influence of liberation theology and returning missionaries from Latin America on the establishment of solidarity groups. Comhlámh ran its popular, nation-wide debates (Hanan, 1996) and it established a branch in Cork in 1979. Trócaire appointed its first DE officer in 1983 and a resource centre was opened in Dublin. Throughout this period, also, the focus of DE on formal education was firmly established with Trócaire’s work on the development of resources and support for teachers and Concern’s focus on its Concern debates. CONGOOD’s (now Dóchas) DE Commission, or working group, was also involved in the development of publications including the first ‘75:25 Ireland in an Unequal World’ in 1984 (Dóchas, 2004) – its seventh edition (now titled ‘80:20: Development in an Unequal World’) was published in 2016 by 80:20. Partnerships were established between people and places in Ireland and in the countries of the South, e.g., the Waterford Kitui partnership, and local development education centres (DECs) were established. Thus, DE became the framing for education and awareness raising which involved public debate on development issues, campaigns, solidarity, workshops, courses and curriculum development. Despite overlaps, differences in approach were also evident.

Organisationally and discursively, the 1970s set the tone for the DE which would follow in Ireland. Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken (2011) argue that there were three broad discursive strands associated with the DE work of NGOs and other civil society organisations. The first is a value-based DE, which is based on global justice and equality and influenced by liberation theology, structuralist analysis of global North-South inequalities and the transformative education work of Paulo Freire (1970). This approach was advanced initially by Trócaire and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP). Invoking United Nations (UN) resolutions on the need for DE, through publications like ‘Dialogue for Development’, Trócaire helped to define understandings of DE in the Irish context including various attitudes, knowledge and skills involved and different components of DE such as action outcomes (Trócaire, 1984). Trócaire’s involvement in Latin America, e.g., through the publicity surrounding Bishop Eamon Casey’s attendance at the funeral of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador in 1980, and protests over President Ronald Regan’s visit to Ireland in 1984, also helped to bring a ‘solidarity’ hue to some DE activity in Ireland.

A ‘solidarity’ discursive strand was exemplified in solidarity movements as well as in the DE approach of Comhlámh, through its membership groups, debates and campaigns. Established to enable returned development workers to ‘bear their own particular experience in order to further international development cooperation’, one of the objectives of Comhlámh at its outset was to promote ‘awareness and knowledge among Irish Government and people and public education’ (Hanan, 1996: 14-15). A third discursive strand was also in evidence in the 1970s and ’80s, which Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken (2011: 23) call a ‘development-as-charity perspective’. Focused on humanitarian concerns and economic development (largely understood in modernisation terms) or ‘underdevelopment’ in the countries of the global South and drawing its influence from Irish missionary and non-governmental development organisation (NGDO) development work in Africa and Asia, this perspective involved promoting awareness and understanding for fundraising purposes especially in schools. At the time there were also the beginnings of a state discourse on DE, i.e. the framing of

DE within development cooperation with emphasis on individual action through overseas development work; working in partnership with voluntary agencies.

Thus, from the outset, though all were labelled DE or associated with it, there were different emphases among different organisations and groups, with some promoting value-based education for justice, others emphasising awareness raising and solidarity, some promoting awareness raising to support development efforts and others focused on individual action and volunteering. Each of these emphases are still evident in DE in Ireland today, albeit with modifications and nuance which has emerged over time, as is the debate about the relative value attached to DE as an element of state development cooperation and the work of NGDOs.

The formalisation and institutionalisation of DE – 1990s to mid-2000s

In the 1990s, the role of DE in development cooperation became more formally established. With the development of government strategic plans, an emphasis was placed on mainstreaming DE in curricula (Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken, 2011) and on capacity building among development educators. Discursively, DE was opened up with the introduction of emphases on related ‘adjectival educations’.

In terms of curriculum development in the late 1980s and 1990s, two development education support centres (DESC) were set up in Dublin and Limerick by the Department of Foreign Affairs, with the aim of supporting professionals working in DE. In addition, Trócaire continued to forge partnerships and projects with organisations such as the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and in relation to citizenship education, with the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee Curriculum Development Unit (CDVEC CDU), and Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) was introduced to the Junior Cycle curriculum in 1997 (Dillon, 2009). Though the introduction of CSPE brought with it a lot of hope for the inclusion of DE perspectives and content into the formal second-level curriculum, there were

significant challenges in its implementation (Jeffers, 2008; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Doorly, 2015). DE activity also began to expand at higher education level with the start of links between DE organisations and initial teacher education.

In terms of civil society DE, Hanan (1996) refers to two Comhlámh projects, ‘Bringing it All Back Home’ (BIABH) (1987 – 1990), which tried to harness the interest of returning volunteers in DE in Ireland, and ‘Network Outreach for DE’ (NODE) (1991 – 1998). These consolidated the DE work of Comhlámh and other DE groups in Ireland, especially One World Centres – there were 12 in existence by 2002 (Kenny and O’Malley, 2002). Other notable civil society DE initiatives active in the 1990s were 80:20, which published many important resources, including the book of the same name; the Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS) DE training with community activists; Development Education for Youth (DEFY), a youth DE project run by the National Youth Council of Ireland and funded by Irish Aid; and Banúlacht, a feminist DE organisation primarily engaged in DE with community women’s groups.

Institutionally, in the 1990s, DE also became more integral to Irish official development cooperation. This was influenced by the growing recognition for the need for DE and human rights education at an international level, for example, through the Convention on the Rights of the Child, by the emphasis on human rights by the Labour Party in government and by a growth in professionalism in the Irish DE sector which promoted DE as integral to development cooperation and to formal education curricula. Various bodies were established by the government to promote DE, e.g., The National Development Education Grants Committee in 1990 followed by the National Committee for Development Education (NCDE) in 1993. State funding for DE also grew throughout the 1990s, albeit with a percentage reduction in funding by comparison to overall overseas development aid (ODA) by the end of the 1990s (from 1.14 per cent of ODA in 1992 to 0.55 per cent in 1999). Throughout this period there were a number of important reviews, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Review in 1999 which influenced a time of broader re-structuring within state development cooperation, and by extension, DE in Ireland. This was exemplified in the Review of Ireland Aid (2002), which reviewed the structures, organisation and funding of Ireland Aid and its activities. Research was also commissioned by Dóchas into DE in Ireland (Kenny and O'Malley, 2002). Their report argued that there was:

“urgent work to be done. The definition of DE is still unclear and is being interpreted diversely... there is a need for a structure to support DE activists, paid and unpaid, on an on-going basis” (ibid: 8).

They highlight the need for ‘instituting a model of “best practice” that promotes the highest standards in all aspects of DE work’ (ibid: 8).

The disbandment of the NCDE, recommended by the Report of the Ireland Aid Review Committee, centralised DE provision through the establishment of the Development Education Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2002. This signalled a move away from more active participation by civil society development educators in the strategic direction of DE. The first government strategic plan for DE was developed in 2003. Its mission was that:

“every person in Ireland will have access to educational opportunities to be aware of and understand their rights and responsibilities as global citizens and their potential to effect change for a more just and equal world” (2003: 11).

Such high, and potentially radical, ideals for DE were promoted through mainstreaming which, paradoxically, presented challenges for criticality. Highlighting ‘the mainstreaming of DE within education in Ireland’ as a key aim (ibid: 12), institutions were put in place to facilitate the mainstreaming of DE, e.g., with the Development and Intercultural Education project (DICE)

and through NYCI. On the one hand, McCloskey argues that ‘the DE sector was therefore becoming integrated into official development policy having previously languished in the 1970s and 1980s on the margins of education policy and practice’ (2014: 10). On the other, with growing professionalisation of DE came concerns over civil society engagement in the direction of DE and questions about whether or not a growing emphasis on mainstreaming led to the de-radicalisation of DE (Khoo, 2011). McCloskey goes on to argue that the increased support on the part of Irish Aid contributed to:

“reduced support for DE from within the non-governmental development sector which prioritised other areas of activity such as campaigns, fundraising and overseas aid ... this left the sector more dependent on government resources and vulnerable to changes in policy” (2014: 11).

The Irish Aid DE strategic plan (2003) also focused on supporting capacity building within civil society organisations. From 2004, civil society promotion of DE was channelled through the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA), which was established at the behest of Irish Aid as a network of support. Through IDEA, capacity development, representation of the sector and advocacy, which were outlined as weaknesses in the Kenny and O’Malley report (2002), were advanced and membership grew rapidly. The establishment of IDEA streamlined Irish Aid’s engagement with and support of civil society involvement in DE, placing emphasis on professionalism and working in partnership.

A significant feature of policy discourses of DE in the 1990s and 2000s was the rise of ‘adjectival educations’ and challenges to the unitary framing of global critical education in development terms. Discursively, they represent the coming together of influences from international policy as well as domestic politics and organisational influences. From the Rio Conference in 1992 with its emphasis on sustainable development to the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights in 1998, these ‘adjectival

educations' were identified as related to DE and fundable by Irish Aid under its DE scheme, once they involved a global dimension. These included education for sustainable development (ESD), human rights education (HRE), intercultural education (ICE) and global citizenship education (GCE).

The promotion of HRE was significantly advanced through work in this area by Trócaire and Amnesty International in the light of the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Ireland in 1992. Stipulating that all children should have access to HRE, a UN Decade for HRE was declared in 1995. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa in 2002, commitments to ESD were developed and in 2005, the UN United Nations Decade for ESD was launched. In the end, it was not until 2014 that a strategy for ESD was developed in Ireland. Though in other countries the strategy usually built on an existing environmental education strategy, in the Irish case, its natural companion was considered to be DE (DES, 2014). Like other adjectival educations, many development educators not only embraced ESD but contributed to shaping its policy articulation.

Where ESD and HRE had their origins in international development and human rights policy, ICE was framed as an important education strategy for promoting integration and anti-racism in the face of a changing Ireland. Growing references to GCE reflected the emphasis on citizenship education at second level, the taskforce on citizenship (2006) as well as growing concerns about the need for citizenship education in East and Central Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the expansion of the European Union (EU) in the 1990s and early 2000s. In general, by the time the first DE strategy was published in 2003, the link was already made by government between DE and related adjectival educations, with their promotion often advanced using a DE framing. The question was whether they would divert attention away from DE or help to re-shape it, and if the latter, would it be in more mainstream or more critical terms?

Fall-out from the financial crisis and the new professionalisation of DE – from 2008 to the present

There is little doubt that the period following 2008 has been characterised by the fall-out from the global financial crisis and the subsequent recession and austerity in Ireland. As a result, there were immediate and significant cuts to ODA overall, and disproportionately to DE, e.g., government allocations to DE fell from €5.71 million in 2008 to €2.9 million in 2014. Institutionally, Irish Aid's dominance of DE grew through funding, partnerships, and accountability, good governance and measurement requirements. From a discursive point of view, there was growing emphasis on promoting development engagement, on the global, as well as on accountability. In advance of the recession, Irish Aid's second strategic plan (2007-2011) was developed, which made a commitment to promote DE in a variety of settings and Khoo argues that around that time 'an ambitious agenda began to emerge around the mainstreaming, formalisation and professionalisation of DE' (2011: 1). At the same time, she argues, the recession moved DE 'from an expansionary to a contractionary or survivalist mode' (ibid: 2).

The Synthesis Paper (2011), which was produced from a set of reviews undertaken on behalf of Irish Aid, highlighted extensive DE activity going on in Ireland at the time. Despite this, it identified the need for Irish Aid to work more strategically in partnership with key DE providers and through commercial contractors. Global Education Network Europe (GENE) has argued that this has 'led to the successful and widespread integration of DE in some cases' (2015: 54). At the same time, it has contributed to the construction of a 'two-tier' DE sector with the bigger, better funded, more organised partnerships and NGOs on the one side and smaller, more financially vulnerable and less 'mainstreamed' organisations and groups on the other. This can be partly explained by what Khoo (n.d) calls the fragmented but state-centric nature of civil society, which is highly dependent on the state. For her, 'being too coordinated with the state also results in a civil society that does not raise the necessary critical, alternative and counterbalancing views' (ibid: 6). Many smaller DE organisations became more dependent on Irish Aid and IDEA (2014) argues that cuts in

Irish Aid funding severely affected regional DE and One World Centres (2014), while others carved out their own independently or externally funded engagement in DE.

By working in partnership with NGOs, education institutions and DE organisations, Irish Aid also established its position of dominance through consultation and consent. In this, IDEA's role in consolidating the DE sector in Ireland over recent years has been widely acknowledged, especially in enhancing 'the coordination of those engaged in DE, in strengthening their capacity, and in providing a vision for its membership' (GENE 2015: 27). As such, it has facilitated consultations on a number of aspects of DE on behalf of Irish Aid and their work is viewed by Irish Aid as 'commendable and a welcome initiative to help strengthen coherence among stakeholders in the field' (Irish Aid, 2016a: 26).

Despite their contribution to IDEA and their work in DE more broadly, some commentators argue that the bigger NGOs are less interested in DE now than in the past and that this has also helped to cement Irish Aid dominance of the field. Regan (2016) argues that:

“there has been the significant withdrawal of (too) many NGOs from effective and sustained DE ... At present the dominant 'site' of energy around DE is that of the Irish Aid agenda and its modalities ... it will lead to scenarios witnessed in other countries where government effectively controls the agenda, its priority foci and its politics”.

Contrary to this view, spending on DE by Concern and Trócaire, for example, is relatively high. In 2015, Concern's budget for DE and advocacy was €3.68 million and Trócaire's budget for DE and communications was €2.5 million. While this is the case, the proportion of this allocated to DE is unclear and proportionate funding for DE and advocacy has declined from a high for Concern in 2007 of 3.64 per cent to 2.08 per cent in 2015 and, in relation to DE and communications in Trócaire, from a high in 2004 of 7.8

per cent to a low of 3.9 per cent in 2015. It is also the case that they still play a relatively significant role in their own DE work as well as in allocating DE grants to smaller organisations.

Apart from funding cuts and new working relationships, another key influence on DE in the 2000s was the growing emphasis on good governance, accountability and measurement. Driven by new managerialism and framed in DE in terms of aid effectiveness, emphasis on it was enhanced in Ireland following the recession in 2008. This was reflected in Irish Aid DE strategic plans as well as in the governance and funding mechanisms which were instigated as a result, e.g., the current strategic plan's priorities which are framed in what it calls its 'logic model' and its Performance Management Framework (PMF). Hardiman and MacCarthaigh (2013), for example, reflect on the centralised control and rationalisation associated with the politics of reducing the state in the wake of the recession. The need for the state to respond to its debt crisis served, in this case, to further justify the application of performance management frameworks to the DE wing of development cooperation. It also represented a way of showing 'value for money', initially at a time of projected growth (up to 2008) followed by budgetary restriction and increased public criticism of spending on aid (Delaney, 2012). Though not as powerful a lobby as in the UK, such criticisms helped cement support for accountability and NGDO governance mechanisms even among NGDOs who might otherwise criticise them. This was buttressed by scandals and questions over governance in NGDOs and the consequent support by government for new charity regulations. Through accountability, good governance and measurement tools and legislation, Irish Aid was therefore able to exert more direct control over what DE organisations and activities were funded or not.

In the context of a more professionalised, results-oriented and state-led organisational context, discourses of DE have begun to move beyond DE and educators have embraced a range of influences, including the push to build support for aid and development through 'development engagement', a focus on the global and on citizenship, and notions of 'best practice' and

accountability. Fielder, Bryan and Bracken (2011) highlight that one of the key themes and tensions, which has pervaded DE in the Irish context, is the relationship between public information or awareness of aid, and DE. Increasingly, public information and communications, as well as advocacy and campaigning have found a home along with DE under the terms ‘development engagement’ or ‘public engagement’. The DAC Peer Review in 2009 encouraged the Irish government to ‘strengthen its efforts to communicate its role in Ireland’s development cooperation and illustrate the impacts of using different aid modalities’ (OECD, 2009: 28).

IDEA, in its consultation document around the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid, agrees that there is a need for deep public engagement on development but argues that public communication and information exercises are not sufficient. Where these are prioritised ‘support will remain “a mile wide and an inch deep”’ (2012: 11), IDEA argues. It calls on NGDOs to ‘adopt far more ambitious policies for public engagement. Public engagement in Ireland is crucial – not only to support aid – but to eradicate structural global inequalities’ (ibid). The key issue here is the growing conflation between DE which is or can be critical of development and aid and development engagement which is usually not. With Irish Aid pushing the value of and funding for the latter, where does this leave critical DE?

Concerns about the blurring of lines between DE and development engagement are even more acute with the big NGDOs also moving away from talking about DE and embracing the language of public engagement. Though it still sees DE as central to its work, Concern, for example, argues that ‘public education, advocacy and campaigning are all essential components in equipping people to take informed action for change, deepening their commitment to international development and to eliminating extreme poverty’ (2016a: 13). Trócaire’s 2012 strategic framework was framed in terms of ‘mobilising for justice’. Trócaire describes DE as remaining ‘a flagship programme’ while it has continued to ‘build our campaigning and advocacy work’ and ‘external communications profile’ (Trócaire, 2012: 22). In its latest strategic plan, it talks about the

opportunities for Trócaire to ‘increase the levels of public engagement in our work for a more just and sustainable world’ (2016: 21).

This increasing focus on development engagement has been influenced significantly by changing priorities and understandings of DE in the international development context, for example, both Irish Aid and IDEA refer to the OECD DAC’s work in this area. The move among NGOs towards short-term results-based activism rather than more long-term DE is mirrored, Weber argues, in Canada and England where there has been ‘a shift in the nature of INGO development education programming from a sustained dialogical focus of learning towards programming that emphasizes the shorter-term outcomes of fund-raising and advocacy campaigns’ (2014: 24). The growing conflation between DE and development engagement, with its emphasis on campaigning and advocacy alongside communication and public information, is in danger of shifting DE towards education for development with its ‘support for’ rather than ‘critical engagement with’ development.

Another shift ‘beyond DE’ towards ‘the global’ has come in light of the move from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which feature prominently in the Irish Aid DE Strategy 2017 – 2023. It highlights the ‘important role for global citizenship education including DE’ in target 4.7 of the SDGs (2016: 10). The SDGs indicate a shift internationally from focusing on poverty and inequality in ‘the Global South’ to addressing these issues globally, and there is greater focus on sustainability and environmental challenges and responses. At the same time, as they are still framed broadly within a goals, targets, and measurement approach, they are potentially prone to repeating the inadequacies of the MDGs, especially if North-South notions of development are not challenged. In addition, IDEA argues that ‘the SDGs require active citizen participation and broad partnerships in order to achieve the transformative change which they promise’ (2016: 3), and it reiterates the role that DE can play in that.

In tandem with a shift in emphasis in the development goals, other terms such as GCE have become popular (Bourn, 2014), and the most recent Irish Aid DE strategy frames DE under GCE, a significant departure from previous understandings (2016). Though there has been some debate about terms and understandings of DE in Ireland, which have featured over the years in various reports (Kenny and O'Malley 2002), there is a reluctance in the Irish context to let debates about DE over-shadow the work. While the shift to the global and GCE represents a more connected understanding of global development, its potential to challenge existing North-South development assumptions in DE remains a challenge.

Along with the professionalisation of DE, a key feature of discourses of DE in recent years has been the increasing prominence of the notion of 'best practice' or 'good practice' in DE. Following an Irish Aid recommendation in its strategic plan (2007), IDEA has promoted good practice through the development of various guidelines, e.g., for schools (2011), for producing DE resources, and for DE in adult and community settings (2014). Other sets of 'good practice guidelines' developed include those for DE in volunteering (Comhlámh, 2013) and in primary schools (DICE, 2014). Currently, general 'good practice' guidelines are being piloted among some IDEA members. This emphasis supports a type of professionalisation of DE which conflates 'good' or 'best practice' with accountability, good governance and measurement for results, with IDEA and NGOs following Irish Aid in advancing the calls for accountability in the face of 'huge challenges and a potential crisis of trust' (IDEA, 2014: 5). Though the language of accountability has become pervasive, it is not understood in uniform terms throughout, with some emphasising accountability in terms of responsibilities to donors, whereas others regard it as 'helping civil society become involved in holding governments, institutions and the private sector to account' (Trócaire, 2012: 31). At the same time, there is very little open critique of accountability or governance frameworks and their influence on DE in Ireland, and even where the emphasis on, or approaches to, measurement are questioned, its overall value is often taken for granted.

Many of these recent global trends were emphasised in the GENE Review of Global Education in Ireland (2015). The review process which GENE undertook on the request of Irish Aid, involved significant engagement among DE practitioners and policy makers in Ireland and it served to focus Irish Aid on DE and to contribute to its articulation of a third strategic plan for DE in Ireland (2016). While the GENE Review recommendations largely reflect submissions to the review on behalf of IDEA members, its influence remains to be seen. As yet, there has been little significant change in the structure and organisation of DE since the publication of the GENE Review or the latest Irish Aid strategic plan.

Conclusion

The approach to critical history I have adopted here, which is influenced by Foucault's approach to genealogy, shows that understandings of DE are not fixed but created, shaped, negotiated and struggled over in different institutional contexts. As such, it does not regard the reality of DE as natural or as a progressive result of the past but shaped by the very real day-to-day living out of decisions and struggles. Exploring the past to understand the present it calls us to question our assumptions about and understandings of DE, where they might have come from and what they might mean. As evident here, there have been different waves of discursive and institutional influence in the Irish context where discourses are embedded in layers over time. While emphasis on some is replaced by others, they often linger in complimentary or contradictory co-existence.

In adopting this critical history approach, this article gives some insight into why critical discourses of DE are often accompanied, and sometimes overtaken, by more technical, individualised or charity ones e.g., with growing emphasis on development engagement and talk of accountability, good governance and the need for measuring results. It highlights the power relations shaping our understandings and practices of DE, showing the rising dominance of Irish Aid in DE in Ireland in consultation and partnership with NGOs, which has resulted in growing threats to the potential criticality of DE.

A critical understanding of how DE has been shaped by different influences offers insights into how it can be shaped more critically or instrumentally, collectively or individually, through more or fewer resources, in formal or non-formal contexts. It also invites more critical histories of DE, which place emphasis on different voices or experiences and which can provide new and alternative insights into the past of DE in Ireland so that we can more critically understand the present and shape the future.

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