KIMMAGE DEVELOPMENT STUDIES CENTRE (1974 – 2018): 'THE KIMMAGE EXPERIENCE'

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Abstract: Using a selective clustering of three main inter-related concepts, namely 'people-centred', 'pedagogy' and 'partnership', this article presents a reflection on the engagement of Kimmage Development Studies Centre within the broad 'development studies' / 'development education' contexts in Ireland and abroad during the period 1974-2018. The programmes that were delivered by Kimmage have since transferred to a new Department of International Development at Maynooth University. Of the three 'pillars' employed, the element of partnership is the most tangible and visible aspect. However, the other two aspects – ensuring people remained at the centre of the work, and the educational approaches used – comprised a dedicated process, which ensured that the content, represented in all of the activities and outputs of Kimmage, remained congruent with good development practice. Though mainly a reflective piece looking back over four decades, the concluding remarks indicate a desire and commitment to continue the legacy of Kimmage.

Key words: People-Centred; Pedagogy; Partnership; Relationships.

Introduction

Kimmage Development Studies Centre (KDSC) was an institute that grew out of programmes initiated by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (also known as Holy Ghost Fathers) in 1974. It was based in Holy Ghost College at Kimmage Manor, Dublin and over the period in question successfully ran educational programmes for people working, or intending to work, in the development education (DE) or development aid sector generally. The programmes included courses that were offered at full-

time undergraduate and postgraduate levels, part-time distance learning options, professional in-service upskilling training seminars, and non-formal evening classes. In addition to the training and education offered at Kimmage Manor, a number of long-running partnerships were established during this time, involving collaborations with institutions in Tanzania and South Africa. Kimmage had the distinction of offering the first-ever fully accredited undergraduate courses in development studies (DS) in the Irish Republic. It was also a pioneer in adopting new credit accumulation processes for part-time students, and being among the first institutions to offer courses that were validated for transnational awards, e.g. between Ireland and Tanzania. A core grant towards its operations was provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs, in the latter years through Irish Aid. For the last five years of its existence, Kimmage was in negotiation with Maynooth University with a view to relocating its programmes and staff, and this was finally effected in June 2018.

Kimmage DSC was in existence for a period of 44 years. This reads like an obituary, and for many who studied and worked there, the cessation of its work in Kimmage Manor in June 2018, was indeed a definite and sad ending. Others among the former staff of Kimmage, including myself, prefer to see it as the closing of a significant chapter (or several chapters) rather than the full story of this unique experience. Therefore, from the outset, I wish to make clear that what follows is not a neutral or detached viewpoint, but I hope, an honest and critical reflection. The term 'Kimmage' will be used in this article to refer to the organisation that, only about half way through its evolution, finally became Kimmage Development Studies Centre (DSC). Over the years, it has been called the 'Development Education course' (Ryan, 2011: 134) initially under the Faculty of Theology at Kimmage Manor. A few years later, it was known as the Department of Development Studies, before becoming what people knew as either 'Kimmage DSC' or 'KDSC', or still for many in the sector, simply 'Kimmage Manor'.

This article is not an historical record and will not subject the reader to the intricate details of every activity engaged in by Kimmage during its four decades of operations. Instead I explore a few aspects of the significant work of this institute under three inter-related headings, or pillars: 'People-Centred', 'Pedagogy', and 'Partnership'. In concluding, I suggest how the legacy of 'the Kimmage Experience' may be a resource for academics and practitioners into the future.

People-Centred

'People-centred development' is a concept familiar in the development sector, which was pioneered by David Korten (1990), and incorporated the values of justice, sustainability, and inclusiveness. Perhaps more familiar to those of us within the education sector is the term 'learner-centred'. I suggest that Kimmage, which evolved into a role which saw it acting as a bridge between academia and the world of practice, managed to create a synergy between these two concepts, people-centred and learner-centred. With reference to the origins of the Kimmage programme, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, (CSSp), based at Holy Ghost College, set up a course in 'development education' for their final year seminarians (4th year theologians) with a view to equipping them with additional knowledge and skills that they would use in their missionary work abroad. I qualify the term 'development education' because the course content in 1974 would be more than a little mystifying for current adherents of development education (DE), including a combination of theories of counselling, community development, adult education, theological subjects, and practical areas such as car maintenance and how to repair a generator! Nevertheless, some core elements, such as adult education theories and methods, were introduced by the first director of the programme, Dr Liam Carey. These were heavily influenced by constructivist theories of learning - the philosophical foundation for learner-centred education – including those of John Dewey, Carl Rogers and Paulo Freire, among others. The congregation's historian, Fr Paddy Ryan commented:

"It could be said that this was an early recognition by the Spiritans of the profound changes in mission and pastoral ministry that were sweeping through the period since Vatican II. Although the course, in its early years, catered almost exclusively for Spiritans and other religious congregations, by the late 1970s an increasing number of applicants, particularly those working in the rapidly-growing overseas aid sector, were seeking admission to the course. No other course in development studies existed in Ireland at this time" (Ryan, 2011: 134).

Hence from the beginning a clear learner-centred approach was part of the programme. Moreover, given the influence of Liam Carey (who was later to head up the Adult and Community Education Department in Maynooth), and a growing constituency of mature learners, created a distinctly adult learning culture in Kimmage. We shall explore this further below under the heading 'Pedagogy'.

But people-centred? Cannot all education programmes claim to be this? Perhaps implicitly. Kimmage explicitly put experiential learning, with influences from Kolb (1984) among others, at the core of its curriculum. This resonated well with the increasingly 'secular' intake, who relished being enabled to share their rich and varied experiences and have these validated as an important part of the programme. As the staff and faculty of Kimmage gradually became a secularized, professional grouping, and with fewer Spiritans involved, the centre began to become a more autonomous institute within Kimmage Manor. However, there was a realization that the influences of the congregation – in terms of its international outlook, inclusive intercultural orientation, and pastoral care for the needs of groups on the margins – had shaped what was certainly a people-centred ethos within Kimmage. This was reflected in the Mission Statement which included the goal '…to create an international, intercultural learning community, which

promotes critical thinking and action for justice, equitable sustainable development, and the eradication of poverty' (Kimmage DSC, n.d.).

The notion of community would resonate with many alumni, whom, many years after their graduation, continue to express themselves as part of 'the Kimmage family'. A replication of the broad vision of development that sees people at the centre of change in their own lives, was established internally at Kimmage. A deliberately non-hierarchical, unconditional respectful approach to relations between staff, and between staff and students, can be credited to Fr Richard Quinn CSSp. He was Director of the centre at a pivotal time in its evolution, when it was transitioning from being a non-formal course provider, mainly for religious on sabbaticals, towards an academically approved institute, aimed at serving the professional development sector at home and overseas.

Contradictions and tensions

Throughout the evolution of this institute, as with any other, were many contradictions and tensions. Contradictions between those who held that Kimmage should present development from a Christian perspective, those who sought to cater to an inclusive multi-faith group of participants, and those who preferred a non-denominational outlook. One can appreciate the challenges inherent in providing a programme which had a distinct religious history, and in a location that was, for the first 20 years of the programme, still home to a seminary. However, to be fair to the Spiritans, the congregation adopted a hands-off approach on such matters as course content. Such differences were more apparent in class discussions on occasion between more devout, faith-based students and their agnostic or atheistic classmates, and these could reflect stark cultural divergences between people from the global South and global North. Yet, to the best of my perhaps selective memory, good relationships, generally were sustained; maybe due to the culture of acceptance that had been established, and/or

the promotion of an idea that we were all working towards a 'Common Good'?

As regards a tension that all learned to work with, an ever-present 'elephant in the room', was the constant insecurity around long-term funding. As I became the 'institutional memory' of Kimmage, I was able to reminisce during discussions about the challenges of planning ahead in only a three or five-year span (the latter was a real luxury) of the 'good old days' when we considered ourselves lucky to have funding for just one year in advance. Such tensions would not be alien to practitioners working within the development education sector, but perhaps not as familiar to those in mainstream higher education.

Another conceptual tension Kimmage has worked with over the years was with regard to interpretations of development education and development studies. As mentioned, although initially identified by the founders of the programme and called development education, when the then director sought formal academic accreditation for the program (in the late 1970s) the official response was to approve it but only with the preferred title of development studies. The distinction made was due to the accreditation authority's assessment that DE was quite unstructured, with unclear borderlines, was values-driven, and more suited to the non-formal sector, whereas DS was more academically acceptable, more structured in terms of content, more objectively measurable, and more firmly rooted in the social sciences. Whether this assessment, now lost in time (I am reliant on the recollection of Richard Quinn, the director at that time), would be a fair distinction today, is debatable. However, for the staff and students of Kimmage, the process delivering the programmes often had more in common with definitions of DE than DS. For example, such as that offered by Trócaire:

"Development Education is an active and creative educational process to increase awareness and understanding of the world we

live in. It challenges perceptions and stereotypes by encouraging optimism, participation and action for a just world" (Trócaire, n.d.).

The action and participation elements of this definition chime with the process-oriented, practically focused classes run by Kimmage. It seemed as though academic staff worked with an unspoken assumption of 'doing the best we could with what we had' and did not pay undue attention to the labels DS/DE. My colleague Eilish Dillon expressed her challenges with the concept of development itself (let alone DS as a discipline):

> "Do the education processes I facilitate realise the critical potential they set out to achieve? Does it matter whether or not they are guided by participatory methodologies or that they start by questioning assumptions? Are they too focused on the negative and to what extent do they facilitate participants to critically reflect on the possible? To what extent am I aware of how my own constructions of global development are shaped by my taken-for-granted assumptions and the power relations which affect my work? Do I, like many others, replicate the stereotypes and problematic assumptions I seek to challenge and do I give enough focus to reframing understandings of global relationships beyond development?" (2017: 24).

The critical questions posed above echo the reflexive practice of Rosalind Eyben, as described in her book, *International Aid and the Making of a Better World.* Perhaps Kimmage succeeded in achieving what she calls the 'management of contradictions' (2014: 160-1). Eyben's disquiet at working for international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) whom, it seemed, often sought funding from donors who were intent on preserving the status quo, evokes for me that what was sometimes idealized in the classrooms of Kimmage was beyond our capacity to see realized and we could be accused of merely maintaining 'observer status' on situations of injustice.

Nevertheless, perhaps we can draw consolation from these words of Paulo Freire:

> "An education of answers does not at all help the curiosity that is indispensable in the cognitive process. On the contrary, this form of education emphasizes the mechanical memorization of contents. Only an education of question can trigger, motivate, and reinforce curiosity" (Freire, 2003: 31).

On this appropriate note, we turn to the theme of pedagogy.

A Pedagogy of Kimmage?

I place a question mark against the sub-heading because it would be indulgent and erroneous to assume that all the programmes offered by Kimmage – which included academic postgraduate and undergraduate courses, and shorter, not-for-credit professional updating training courses, using both classroom based and online distance learning modes – followed a uniform approach. It is fair to claim that there is not one pedagogy, but a cluster of pedagogies that characterized the approach of Kimmage.

From the beginning of the programme in 1974, there was a definite leaning towards a learner-centred, constructivist approach. It was perhaps not coincidental that Spiritans enthused with liberation theology during that period - some of them embarking for Brazil following their studies in Kimmage – were attracted by the teachings of Freire. It is safe to state that a year did not pass – in each of its 44 years of activities – without some rigorous examination of Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972). Kimmage had a definite Freirean influence and the adult learning foundation of all courses was rooted in the key principles of Freire. However, given the eclectic nature of its course offerings – offering a range of modules which explored global issues, technical approaches, local and personal development concerns, gender, climate change, conflict, etc. – any formulaic and rigid adherence to *conscientization* approaches was simply not practical. In

modules that explicitly featured his ideas and approaches, critiques of his ideas were routinely examined and numerous flaws highlighted, while retaining the core principles of dialogue, relevance, questioning, and praxis – reflection and action – as valuable tools for both staff reflexivity and process work with students. The overarching ideas about the political nature of this 'education of question' and the goals of transformation, remained as inspirational for everyone at Kimmage. Nonetheless, while Kimmage had a Freirean foundation, Kimmage was certainly not 'Freire fundamentalist'.

Consistent with the experiential learning aspect of a learner-centred education, it is helpful to view other approaches within educational traditions that prioritise learning from experience. The works of Sharan Merriam (1995) and Tony Saddington (1992), among others, point towards the traditions of the Progressive and the Humanist schools. These two philosophical traditions emphasised different aspects of learning; for the Progressive, social change, reform, and problem-solving; for the Humanist, self-actualisation, personal growth and integration. The Progressive school was inspired by the ideas of Dewey, Lindeman, Grundtvig; the Humanists by Rogers, Maslow, Knowles and Mezirow. Freire firmly belongs in another tradition, the Radical, along with writers such as Illich, Gramsci, Gelpi, Shor, hooks, Lovett, Thompson, and many more. However, together with the other two traditions, these three form the basis for experiential learning (Saddington 1992) which was present at the outset of the Kimmage programme, through to its conclusion in May 2018. Hopefully, experiential learning will continue to influence the work of staff in their new location at Maynooth University.

However, two other traditions – the Liberal and Behavioural schools – are not totally discarded either. The latter could feature in some instructional orientated trainings done by Kimmage, and elements of the Liberal – a more cognitive centred, transmission of knowledge approach – are difficult to eschew, particularly since they remain the orthodoxy in mainstream education, and most of us, teacher or student, are firmly

inculcated within this tradition. Nevertheless, the experience of the learner was a consistent requirement, and seen as a primary aspect of all classwork at Kimmage. Therefore, in summing up 'a Kimmage pedagogy', one is left with the notion of a cluster of approaches that embrace key elements of the Humanist, Progressive and Radical traditions, and which call for participatory, interactive methodologies encouraging discussion, dialogue and critical reflection.

Partnership

Another buzzword in development practice, and elsewhere is partnership (Cornwall 2007; Horton et al, 2009; Chambers, 2012). Indeed, Robert Chambers (2013) in an online blog, claimed '*The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* repeatedly talks of *partners* and *partnership*, which added together are used more in the Declaration than any other word or word root (my count is 96 times)'. For Kimmage it was more than a buzzword, it was a practical necessity. As a relatively small institute – compared with almost any other educational establishment – it was vital to seek collaboration with others in order to adequately resource activities and remain relevant to the sector. Despite a negative perspective sometimes heard from a few other academics and development agency personnel - that Kimmage was in a 'little cocoon' out there in the suburbs of south west Dublin, with limited interaction with the wider worlds of academia or the broader professional development sector - three substantial examples can quickly refute such ill-informed comment.

Firstly, in 1994 Kimmage embarked on a collaborative programme with a Tanzanian-based Danish institute, MS–Training Centre for Development Cooperation (MS-TCDC). The partnership was to last 20 years until it was concluded in 2014. Secondly, inspired by this first successful experience of a 'North-South' partnership, Kimmage was invited by the Training for Transformation Institute to provide academic support to a new programme based at the Grail Centre, Kleinmond, South Africa. This

partnership began in 2003 and continued until 2018. The programme was extraordinarily successful, attracting participants, mainly women, and largely but not exclusively from the continent of Africa, all of whom perceived themselves as 'grassroots activists' and pursued social change, justice and equality in their respective countries. It continues today with support from Arrupe College, Harare, as part of the transfer of Kimmage's operations to Maynooth.

Thirdly, Kimmage was the lead partner in a consortium, which included international training and research NGOs, International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) from the UK, and Management of Development Foundation (MDF), a consultancy from the Netherlands, which together successfully tendered for a training and learning programme, subsequently called DTALK (Development Training and Learning at Kimmage), and which was delivered with the support of Irish Aid from 2005 – 2012. This programme provided participants with short courses covering a wide range of development practice and attracted between 800 and 1,000 personnel from across the NGO and missionary sector in each year of its existence. Unfortunately, Irish Aid discontinued funding for this training in 2012.

These experiences of partnership have been hugely beneficial to Kimmage. They were not successful in terms of sustained financial gain, but certainly in terms of personal and organisational learning. On reviewing the partnership with MS-TCDC in an earlier programme (Reilly 2017), I noted the characteristics highlighted by Wanni et al (2010:18), as consistent with the experience of Kimmage staff over the two decades:

> "…a dynamic collaborative process between educational institutions that brings mutual though not necessarily symmetrical benefits to the parties engaged in the partnership. Partners share ownership of the projects. Their relationship is based on respect, trust, transparency and reciprocity. They understand each other's cultural

and working environment. Decisions are taken jointly after real negotiations take place between the partners. Each partner is open and clear about what they are bringing to the partnership and what their expectations are from it. Successful partnerships tend to change and evolve over time".

Each of these long-running international collaborations in Tanzania and South Africa were successful for a variety of reasons, but two factors can be confidently asserted; they were not time-bound and they were mutually respectful relationships.

The first factor, limitation of time in partnership programmes, was highlighted by Teferra (2016, online):

"The literature on development cooperation, including university cooperation, is replete with challenges of forging successful, productive and truly equal partnerships between institutions in the North and the South. One of the persistent concerns of such programmes and partnership schemes have been the brevity of their lifetime".

On this topic, he is echoing the views of Aburi et al (2010), Oliphant (2013), and McEvoy (2013). The second factor, relationships, is a more elusive, less tangible aspect, but the sheer longevity of the partnerships points towards a special 'X Factor', and I am convinced that this was it. This emerged as a significant phenomenon during the research on the Kimmage-MS-Training Centre for Development Cooperation partnership (Reilly 2017). Several colleagues, from Kimmage and MS-TCDC referred to it including Stella Maranga, who was involved in the programme from its earliest days and had been engaged in the first two programmes delivered with Kimmage:

"… it was an easy relationship we had, I wonder now if the fact that there wasn't a financial transaction between us, if this contributed

to the relationship feeling mutually beneficial? We remained in this relationship because we wanted to be there, not because we felt we wanted something. Kimmage as well. We got something from each other" (Reilly, 2017: 38).

And secondly, this from Prudence Kaijage, a former Principal of MS-TCDC:

"For institutional partnership to succeed personal relations matter. We (MS-TCDC) had many other institutional collaborations, I don't think many were as equally productive as the one we had with Kimmage. When I looked back, some of the things I could point towards, that personal chemistry, it's something that is under-rated, not valued but it does make a difference" (ibid).

Relationships certainly seems to be a neglected aspect within development discourse. This is emphasised by Eyben (2006, 2011) as she sees relationships as a key – and sometimes missing or overlooked – aspect of development practice and aid. For example, her critique on the Paris Declaration is interesting. While it emphasises principles of mutual responsibility and partnership, she says, there was 'little consideration as to how donors should change to live up to these principles' (2006: 2). She goes on to say:

"There has been little public discussion of what we have learned from psychology; that ultimately, the only people we can change are ourselves (Harris, 1969) and that in order to be part of the solution, donors must recognise that they are part of the problem" (ibid).

Eyben is supported in her argument by Chambers who discusses the competing paradigms of 'Things' and 'People' (2010: 11-12). He records the growth in popularity of a more 'People' based rhetoric (if not reality) in development practice through the 1990s, and then the shift again, towards 'Things' in the 2000s. A move away, perhaps, from People-Centred

Development? This aspect of prioritizing good relations between those who work together, as a full-time or part-time staff (most of whom had long unbroken records of employment at Kimmage), between staff and course participants, and between Kimmage personnel and colleagues from other organisations, is evidently something to be recorded as part of the 'Kimmage Experience'.

Conclusions

The choice of these three pillars is an attempt to reflect upon, and describe, some of what I consider key aspects of the contribution Kimmage has made to the development sector, both in Ireland and internationally. Of the three, the element of partnership is the most tangible and visible aspect. However, the other two aspects – ensuring people remained at the centre of the work, and the educational approaches used – were essentially the dedicated process, which ensured that the content, represented in all of the activities and outputs of Kimmage, remained congruent with good development practice.

What have we learnt from the four and a half decades of Kimmage? Perhaps one point we can conclude from this brief subjective survey is that Kimmage was part of, and witness to, many profound changes in development studies / development education. Changes to the content of curriculum, reflecting changes in demand from dramatically different cohorts of learners, i.e. from religious practitioners to lay volunteers, to professional development workers, and more recently, to professionals seeing options to work on short-term assignments, overseas or at home. Changes in the types of course provision from traditional year-long academic courses to flexible, part-time, including distance learning options. Changes in participation from North and South, i.e. people from the global South engaged as lecturers and trainers on programmes, people from Ireland and elsewhere in the global North, attending as students in Tanzania and South Africa. A blurring of distinctions between DE and DS?

What is the legacy of Kimmage, and can those of us fortunate to continue in this work, now in Maynooth University, build upon it? Is this so-called 'Kimmage Experience' – characterised here with the three pillars of 'people-centred', 'pedagogy', and 'partnership' - really unique? Can the special atmosphere and environment of learning that was created and carefully nurtured in Kimmage Manor, be rekindled? My clear bias is that it could be, but that it will not be easy. My former colleague in Kimmage, Richard Quinn always maintained that development is 'an Art not a Science' and the same is true for development studies / education.

As I write this reflection on the work of Kimmage, I am considering these three pillars and wondering which will stand strong in the years ahead? Partnership is something that can be carried forward, and perhaps our 'ex-Kimmage' faculty have something that other departments and institutes here in Maynooth may find a useful addition to research and learning linkages with other institutions. Pedagogy? We have reasons to be optimistic here too, because of successful attempts to engage students in participatory lecture sessions to date, and also that we seem to be swimming with a current rising tide towards more interactive learner-centred pedagogies here in Maynooth. However, the classroom architecture and learning space generally still leave much to be desired. People-Centred? That is the responsibility of the new faculty of International Development. There is a commitment to continue with this as a core value, attitude and behaviour. This is epitomised by a favourite poem, often misattributed to Gwendolyn Brooks, but actually written by another contemporary of hers, June Jordan (1970):

> "Our earth is round, and, among other things
> That means that you and I can hold
> Completely different Points of view and both be right.
> The difference of our positions will show
> Stars in your window I cannot even imagine.
> Your sky may burn with light,

While mine, at the same moment,
Spreads beautiful to darkness.
Still, we must choose how we separately corner
The circling universe of our experience.
Once chosen, our cornering will determine
The message of any star and darkness we encounter."

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