Letting the light in: Re-presenting education in a turbulent age

It is becoming increasingly evident that we are living in an age of turmoil and chaos where each day seems to bring new challenges to how we see ourselves and our place in the world, where the taken-for-granted practices of everyday life whether in the market place of Baghdad, on the promenade at Nice or the streets of Paris are thrown into question, where politics itself seems fragile and the growing tide of xenophobia and racism is increasingly evident. In this context, it is easy to be pessimistic and difficult to hope. Yet, if ever the world needed a pedagogy of hope it is now and today is a good day to discuss the potential of Development Education to contribute to that pedagogy. And the educational space itself has its own problems, subject as it has been to the ongoing march of neo-liberalism and the impact of the accountability agenda on the every day lives of schools and classrooms. Enough said on that.

I am speaking today predominantly as a practitioner, and in that context, I think, biography matters. My experience of development education is entirely within the context of mainstream education so I am going begin by using my own biography as a teacher and latterly as a teacher educator to anchor my thoughts in the realities of formal educational settings. I will then outline a view of Development Education and its interaction with the formal sector before going on to focus on primary and initial teacher education to explore whether or how we can conceptualise them differently. Finally, and briefly, I will address the question of purpose and suggest that it is a key determinant of whether or not the potential of DE to re-present education is capable of realisation.

When I became a primary teacher, in the early 1970s, the Irish education system was on the cusp of change as part of the state's response to the modernising agenda of the 1960s when education was identified as a key driver of economic growth. Dominated since the 1920s by the ideology of cultural nationalism, historically, primary education was returning to a big idea that made its first faltering appearance in the Irish education system in the early 1900s - the idea of child centred education. As a young teacher, however, I was cast adrift in a system where my experience as a learner did not match how I was expected to behave as a teacher and the little exposure I had had to teacher education in the confines of a two year training model left me ill equipped to meet the demands of the new paradigm. I was suffering from the dissonance between my biography of learning and expectations of me as a new teacher. I was not alone in this and successive studies have shown the failure of the 'new' curriculum, as it was colloquially called, at the level of implementation.

Teaching in a school which served the Traveller community, I struggled also as a young inexperienced teacher with the dissonance between my understanding of the complex needs of my students and my capacity to meet those needs; between my experience as a teacher in that context and the perspectives of my settled friends, family and the wider society, where even those who viewed the community positively, saw assimilation as the desired outcome. I was struck also by the contradiction between the deficit perspective

which dominated how Traveller children were viewed at the time within education, particularly with respect to language, and my own experience of children who in many cases were orally adept, articulate and creative in their use of language and all of whom used language to communicate their ideas, hopes, emotions.

In seeking to resolve those contradictions I encountered the work of Paulo Freire who had a profound influence on my thinking as a teacher. Like many others, through Freire, I found my way to the field of critical pedagogy, where I encountered theorists such as Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and Ira Shor. Certainly engaging with these theorists helped me to understand the context in which I found myself, the contradictions I was experiencing, the power and the limitations of education. Yet, while I improved in my capacity to critique the system, that dissonance between beliefs and practice remained. I had not succeeded in creating a coherent pedagogy which resolved those fundamental contradictions of practice.

The breakthrough for me came through my interest in the teaching of history, through which ideas about knowledge, perspective and worldview started to take shape in practice in ways that drew me closer to Development Education as a frame, a body of knowledge, an approach and a set of practices. Influenced also by the discourse around children's rights, I felt finally that those dissonances between theory and practice were beginning to be resolved, or at least to play out in more constructive and positive ways.

My personal journey continued in teacher education, with the realisation that teacher education is another space characterised by both possibilities and contradictions, not least of which is the unresolved tension between the kinds of practice endorsed in a teacher education context and the ongoing culture of practice in schools; between the idea of teacher education as a journey and the understandable instrumentalism underpinning student teacher impatience with approaches which are not seen to have an immediate outcome in practice. Nonetheless, it was evident also that teacher education was not only a necessary site of engagement for DE but also a site full of possibility. I will return to those possibilities later in the paper. For now, I want to turn to the idea of DE and offer some thoughts on it.

Definitions of Development Education abound and while emphases change, they share many characteristics. The definition of Development Education used by website for this seminar, for example, contains many of the elements common across the multiple definitions in the literature: a focus on DE as an educational process; a focus on global inequality and interdependence; a linking of the local and the global; a focus on reflection and analysis; on action and participative citizenship; and with the underlying transformative goal. For me, the definition of DE is still, in many ways, in-the-making (as evidenced by the event today and by the ongoing work of theorists such as Vanessa Andreotti) so the following are not meant to be definitive. Having said that, and coming to DE via the work of Paulo Freire, my interest in the teaching of history and my experience of working with

marginalised communities in an Irish context, these would represent for me its key characteristics:

Development Education:
- Is concerned with global inequalities between and within countries/polities
- Questions taken-for-granted systems, concepts, knowledge, especially those that privilege the powerful
- Confronts issues of power, responsibility and accountability
- Brings a political and historical lens to bear on global issues such as poverty, climate change and conflict
- Is characterised by participative and dialogical methodologies that support reflexivity
- Sees knowledge as plural, dynamic and constructed
- Recognises multiple perspectives and multiple futures
- Recognises that education is never neutral
- Is directed towards actions to create a more just, equal and sustainable world

Firmly rooted in the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and armed with pedagogical approaches that are consistent with its underlying ideology, Development Education offers at the very least the conceptual and methodological tools with which to challenge, question and disrupt dominant narratives and taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. It allows us to encounter troublesome knowledge, to engage with controversial issues and to go beyond Western-centric concepts of inclusion towards active listening and sustained engagement with the Other. And it has the capacity to be re-imagined in both formal and informal contexts and for learners from early childhood onwards.

But Development Education is nonetheless an interloper within mainstream education, intent on dismantling many of the structures and foundations which underpin the global system. Given its potential to challenge existing power relations, to precipitate structural change, to 'up-end the apple cart', it is hardly surprising that it has not found an easy or comfortable fit within formal education, which after all has a different agenda; for many years its presence in mainstream education was marginal and largely confined to teachers who had a special interest in or experience of DE.

Over the past decade or so, DE has been subsumed within a global citizenship agenda, brought in from the cold, so to speak, and made manifest in what Mannion et al. (2011) have termed the "curricular global turn". Prompted by state responses to globalisation and underpinned by a range of discourses, including that of educating young people for a global economy, this mainstreaming of DE has raised issues of domestication and depoliticisation. Writing during the worst of the economic crisis in 2010, for example, Bryan (2011) asked whether DE had been declawed and robbed of its radical voice as evidenced by its failure to challenge the instrumentalism inherent in an education system as well as its failure to

address key choices in economic policy which had local and global manifestations. Others have asked the same question. Mannion et al. (2011) for example, also raise the question of de-politicisation as an inevitable consequence of the "curricular global turn" and posit both the primacy of the economic and cultural over the political in current mainstream conceptualisations of global citizenship education and the taken-for-granted conceptualisations of globalisation that underpin it at the level of policy.

The failure to challenge 'taken-for-granted' assumptions is also at the heart of Selby and Kagawa's powerful critique of the mainstreaming of Development Education and ESD as having struck a 'Faustian bargain' (Selby and Kagawa, 201). They highlight the failure of Development Education and Education for Sustainable Development to challenge the economic growth model in the aftermath of the global economic crash or to problematise concepts such as consumerism, except in terms of elevating the ethical consumer to hegemonic status as the desired educational outcome.

Not surprisingly, contradictions emerging at the conceptual level play out in terms of practice. In an Irish context, Bryan and Bracken (2011), for example, identified a range of constraints and barriers to the meaningful implementation of DE within the second level curriculum in Ireland including constraints relating to time, resources and teacher capacity; integrated across the curriculum, learning in DE tended to be characterised by superficiality rather than depth; the dominance of modernisation theory in how development was conceived across curriculum materials was also identified, along with inconsistencies, contradictions and stereotypes; Finally, the dominance of a charity-oriented, individualised, feel-good conceptualisation of action, and the phenomenon of celebrity activists, what Bryan 2014 refers to as 'Global good guys', all serve to obscure rather than reveal the structures, practices, and relations of power, both historical and current, that underpin global inequality, locating the causes of poverty in a lack of resources and infrastructure and the solution in voluntaristic actions and western aid.

Some of these findings identify capacity and structural limitations in the system, which are more general and which require a systematic response. For example, integration, seen simultaneously as a response to curriculum overload and a way of embedding interdisciplinary areas across the curriculum, is a highly complex process which presumes deep knowledge by the educator of the areas being integrated and which requires explicit planning for progression in children's thinking, knowledge and skills. Yet, based on teachers' self-reported practices at both primary and second level and on analyses of second level textbooks, the evidence would suggest that how integration is actualised in practice conforms to the 'add-development-and-stir' model identified by Bryan and Bracken (2011), and the incidental and accidental integration identified at primary level by Waldron et al. (2011).

The second area I want to spend a little time on lies at the ideological heart of DE - the idea of 'action'. Rooted in the Freirean commitment to the inseparability of reflection and action,

DE shares this orientation towards action with a range of other justice and citizenship oriented educations, such as ESD, HRE, CJE, CCE and CE itself. And this tendency towards individualised, voluntaristic and 'safe' modes of action is characteristic of the softer forms of all of these 'adjectival educations'. Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology of the good citizen, for example as comprising the personally responsible, the participatory and the justice-oriented, has informed a number of critiques of Citizenship Education in an Irish context and the identification of the 'personally responsible' citizen as the dominant conceptualisation at the level of curriculum and practice in Irish schools (Waldron & Oberman, 2014). Writing about this concept twelve years ago in the context of the Environmental Awareness and Care strand of Geography in the Primary Curriculum, I suggested that "While there is some attempt to critique issues of social concern … when it comes to action, the locus is the immediate environment of the child and the focus for action is exclusively environmental rather than social or political. One gets the sense of comfortable and safe parameters being drawn around the concept of action, a sense in which the idea of action upon the world is itself domesticated" (Waldron, 2004, p. 222). I'm not suggesting here that this is an easy problem to resolve in an educational context, nor that there is no space for personal responsibility or individual responses to societal or global problems, simply that a failure to move from the individual to the collective works against the transformative potential of DE.

Recognising these limitations, however, and the overarching neoliberal frame in which we operate, does not mean that children's experiences in formal education are never transformative or that there are not teachers whose practice extends beyond the limitations outlined above. Neither do we have the luxury of giving up, but rather the obligation to do 'what is historically possible' even in inhospitable contexts (Freire, 1980, p. 170-171). Returning to Selby and Kagawa (2011)'s critique, they identify a range of potential spaces where the Faustian bargain could be unpicked: These include drawing on critical theory to frame questions which address power; challenging taken-for-granted ideologies; identifying and exploring the silences in discourse; using informal and relational spaces within formal education to extend awareness; building on concepts and practices which are part of mainstream ideology (identified as Trojan horses) such as multiple perspectives; recognising that there is diversity even within formal systems and finally returning to first principles in terms of what I would term 'purpose'. I will return to the idea of purpose towards the end of this paper, but first I would like to explore the spaces which I see within the contexts I've identified, and the challenges and possibilities inherent in both for representing education.

Within the context of primary education in Ireland, I want to identify a number of key spaces that could be seen as 'Trojan Horses' to use Selby and Kagawa's (2011) phrase, or perhaps best conceptualised as sites of possibility. The first of those concerns how knowledge is viewed within primary education, in terms of its epistemological underpinnings and the pedagogical and curricular approaches that flow from that. Underpinned by a social constructivist epistemology, primary education is philosophically

attuned to the idea of knowledge as constructed, dynamic and plural; while considered to fall within a child-centred paradigm, the Irish curriculum has moved away from both the traditional content-focused and didactic approach to curriculum which characterised Irish education at primary level from the foundation of the State, and also from the individualistic conceptions of learning inherent in the child-centred education of the 1970s and the reification and externalisation of knowledge associated with discovery learning. Heavily influenced by three key theorists, Vygotsky, Dewey and Bruner, children are seen as co-constructors of knowledge, which itself is seen as open-ended, subject to change and open to challenge. The idea, for example, that mathematical problems have multiple 'right' answers, and that there are many valid ways of approaching a problem is gaining increasing currency in practice. This epistemological stance is made evident at the level of curriculum but also in the kinds of pedagogical approaches adopted to enact the curriculum, such as enquiry learning. The experience of teaching history and engaging with history as a learner, for example, makes many of these ideas manifest.

The second space I want to identify is the extent to which the idea of critical thinking has increased in visibility in the discourse around children's learning, indicating a shift away from a basic skills narrative towards one that recognises the importance of providing opportunities for children to develop higher order thinking from the start. While this shift is incomplete and the conflation of education with the acquisition of basic skills is still evident, particularly at primary level, there is increasing recognition of the importance of enabling children to think creatively, of developing their capacity to work together to interrogate a problem, to listen to and build on each other's ideas.

The final space I want to reference relates to a fundamental paradigmatic shift in understanding in relation to how children and childhoods are conceptualised which recognises childhoods as multiple, and as socially and historically constructed and that sees children as agents in that construction. Prompted by developments in the sociology of childhood and by the implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this shift incorporates a number of features relating to how children are viewed, which in turn have a considerable impact on their engagement with the formal structures of schooling. This fundamental shift in how children are viewed can be seen, for example in the creation of democratic spaces within education evident in a growing number of schools where children and adults share decision-making, and the emergence of child-led curricula.

These shifts in understanding are relevant across the curriculum but have particular resonance for DE and for the argument that children should engage with complex, challenging and 'troublesome' knowledge from their earliest experience of school. Jerome Bruner's hypothesis that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (1977, p. 33) has helped to shift the focus from what children, by virtue of their age and ascribed stage of development, could *not* do to the idea of working with children's emerging capacities. While the idea of 'readiness'

which underpins questions such as 'how young is too young' (Kelly & Brooks, 2009) still has currency in theory and practice, there is an increasing acceptance of the need to engage young children in critical thinking on social justice and equality-related issues, particularly in the context of research that suggests the early appearance of stereotypical, sectarian and racist ideologies in children's thinking and discourse (Robinson & Díaz, 2009; Connolly, Smith & Kelly, 2002). The evidence suggests that by the time children start school "their perceptions of difference largely reflect and perpetuate the dominant racialised, gendered, sexualised, classed and body stereotypes and prejudices that prevail in the broader society" (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2009, p.4). The idea that one would then leave those ideas and perceptions unchallenged does not seem tenable.

I am going to draw on the findings of two studies, both of which I was involved in at different stages, to illustrate both the challenges and possibilities in terms of children's emergent thinking. The first one, by Ruane et al. (2010), focused on three to five year olds' emergent understanding of global justice issues. The research was conducted in a range of settings including Junior and Senior Infant classrooms and early childhood settings (preschool). Using a qualitative research approach which used stories, images and participative activities, the research team engaged the children in discussion, storytelling and activities around the local and global worlds, and concepts such as fairness and poverty. The research found that the children in the study demonstrated emergent understandings of ideas such as poverty and fairness, even in the preschool settings. They showed altruistic tendencies and were capable of seeing things from others' perspectives. However, while it was clear that they came to formal education with well-established poverty-related associations and stereotypes relating to the wider world, local images which portrayed inequalities were not easily understood by them. Perhaps most strikingly, the research evidenced the early dominance of stereotypes in children's conceptions of Africa, with children as young as three making associations between Africa and poverty, despite the variety of images and contexts presented. Evidence suggests that charity campaigns are influential, even with children as young as four years old, in shaping their views of African countries in particular and the impact of campaign messages was evident in children's responses. The study concluded with the recommendation that children's capacities to engage with issues of global justice were emergent, and that there was a sufficient starting point to begin to prompt children to question their assumptions about the local and the global and to begin to unpick the stereotypes under construction, explore diverse experiences and different perspectives within countries as well as between and encourage children to recognise plurality and complexity (Ruane et al., 2010; Weldon, 2010; Picton, 2008).

The second study, by Oberman et al. (2014), focused on 7-9 year olds and asked whether critical literacy could provide a lens through which children could explore global inequalities and issues. Critical literacy is a developing practice and in the context of child education

even more so. With that caveat, the following features of critical literacy informed this study.

The study used the mosaic approach popularised by Clark and Moss, 2001, which is characterised by multiple sources and types of data, and by children as co-constructors of meaning. Using a power-point narrative, which explored issues around the distribution of resources using a fictional community of stick figures, images drawn from a diverse range of global contexts and children's own representations, children explored issues relating to power, capitalism, distribution of resources, global inequality and social justice. Again, stereotypical views of the Global South prevailed in the first instance and awareness of the wider world was informed by their own family experience, media, fundraising campaigns and school work. Negative stereotypes of Africa predominated and images of African contexts were predominantly seen through the lens of poverty, regardless of setting. The study identified the deep-rooted nature of those stereotypes and their impact on children's thinking. People in Africa have to walk a long way to get water; people in Africa who had basic provisions were lucky and had received them through aid. And the dependence by developing countries (seen as mainly African, lesser extent India or Asia) on Irish or international aid as illustrated by the quotes.

This research was primarily focused on whether critical literacy provided an approach for exploring global citizenship issues with this age group. While the findings were complex and many, the following key points are worth mentioning:

- The dynamic of the critical literacy sessions was experienced positively by children as an empowering process
- Opportunities to develop problem-solving capacities, build negotiating skills, and discuss moral and justice issues were evident
- There was some open-ended exploration of philosophical issues relating to power, ownership, capitalism and the distribution of resources
- Children's access to prior knowledge emerged as one of the biggest challenges in enabling them to engage critically with images as representations of reality
- But they did bring assumptions to the surface and provided a good starting point.

If we accept the argument that primary education is a site where DE is not only possible but necessary, that children are already engaged with the world and in the world, that knowledge is conceptualised as open-ended, dynamic and plural, that approaches to learning are characteristically participative, that multi-perspectivity is an embedded practice, that young children have emergent capacities to engage with difficult and complex ideas, then Development Education itself could be conceptualised as the overarching frame of education. And indeed, there is a growing, if small, number of schools for which that is the case. Deeply engaged in the practice of critical global citizenship, they are equally

committed to a critically reflective practice. So why is it not universal within the system – there is ample evidence, for example, of the persistence of more traditional didactic teaching, of ongoing tokenism in relation to children's voices and participation, and of the continuation of paternalistic discourses conceptualising children as primarily in need of protection and formation (Waldron & Oberman, 2016).

When I spoke initially of my experience as a new teacher in trying to negotiate the dissonance between my experience as a learner within the system and the kinds of practice I was expected to implement in the classroom, I was unaware that what I was experiencing is one of the most recognised challenges of teacher education, aptly named by Lortie in 1975 as 'the apprenticeship of observation', that is the idea that the learning experiences of student teachers prior to their entry into teacher education have a formative effect on their thinking, contributing to beliefs, lay theories and perceptions which can work against the ideas and experiences they encounter on their ITE programmes and that can be remarkably difficult to shift. The idea that children learn best working alone in quiet classrooms; that there is only one right answer; that teachers (and textbooks) are the source of knowledge in a classroom to name but a few.

The idea that these beliefs need to be surfaced, unpicked and challenged early and often during teacher education is an established part of the pedagogy of teacher education. Established also is the idea that such reflection should be embedded as part of the ongoing practice of student teachers and should continue as part of professional practice on graduation. Many theorist have called for this 'unlearning' of what student teachers know to be true to extend beyond their narratives about learning and teaching to include their beliefs, perceptions and theories about the world, and their relationships with others, engaging with issues relating positionality, power and collective responsibility (Bryan, 2014; Andreotti, 2006). There is some synergy, then between the practice of reflection as part of the established practice of ITE and the kind of critical interrogation of the self and of the world seen as part of the process of a range of justice-oriented educations, including DE. It's not an unproblematic space however. Currently the dominant conceptualisation within teacher education in Ireland as expressed by the Teaching Council is one which is apolitical, to a large extent individualised (though drawing also on collective models of communities of practice) and overwhelmingly tied into a neoliberal discourse of continuous improvement of professional practice and ultimately to a meta-narrative of accountability, if current Teaching Council policy on CPD is enacted. Making a shift from this 'safe' reflective space to a more 'unsafe' and 'troublesome' space within Initial Teacher Education requires building structures at programme level which support that and ultimately a broader consensus across teacher education which acknowledges its value.

One of the persistent problems identified in the literature and addressed earlier is the persistence of depoliticised, charity-led models of development in educational contexts, and the conceptualisation of action as individual, voluntaristic and compliant. Shifting those

conceptualisations and practices requires that teacher education provide opportunities for student teachers to make that journey from conceptualising change at the level of the individual to engaging with systemic change. There is some evidence that this shift is realisable within an ITE context from a transnational study led by Marily Cochran-Smith and published in 2012 which charted a 'modest' but perceptible shift to structural perspectives in their understanding of social justice issues arising from their teacher education programmes. If such shifts are to occur, then the role of what Michael Apple has termed 'powerful theory' becomes critical.

Engagement with troublesome knowledge and with powerful theory are part of the mainstream conceptual landscape of teacher education in Ireland. Student teachers are routinely exposed to big ideas about the political nature of education, the nature of knowledge, constructions of normativity and difference, issues of power and powerlessness, and structural explanations for local and global inequality to name just a few of the key ideas evident programmes surveyed. They routinely encounter methods of teaching, constructions of knowledge, modes of engagement across a range of areas that are consistent with the kinds of critical, open-ended, participative teaching approaches characteristic of DE. So if we have a primary education context that is open to development education perspectives and teacher education programmes that provide student teachers with key experiences consistent with Development Education, why are empirical studies continuing to find the same old, same old tropes and stereotypes in the system?

One explanation could be that there is a mismatch between what we as teacher educators think we do, and how student teachers experience teacher education. Drawing on Marsh and Willis's (2007) frame of the planned, enacted and experienced curriculum, the idea that teacher education programmes as we design and enact them are experienced in that way by student teachers is questionable and issues around coherence, and theory/ practice binaries abound in the teacher education literature. Years of student evaluations have taught me that, recognising that their classroom practice will ultimately be measured, student teachers predominantly value that which is evidently practical in its orientation.

A number of years ago all of the teacher education colleges across Ireland, north and south, took part in a longitudinal study which followed the 2004 cohort through to graduation (Waldron et al., 2009). Focused on student experiences in history, geography and science, prior to and during their ITE programmes, much of the findings were positive in relation to their experiences as student teachers. Their ideas about what it meant to be a good teacher, for example, grew in depth and complexity, demonstrating the emphasis placed in the programmes on ideas such as enquiry-based learning and on the importance of participative approaches. One finding in particular was troubling – a shift away from a range of ideas, evident in their entry questionnaire but virtually absent from their exit questionnaire, around the kinds of concepts and dispositions that could indicate a sense of purpose beyond a commitment to professional competence. The relative absence of ideas relating to

diversity, environmental awareness and, except in a small number of cases, ideas associated with global justice, suggested that ITE programmes had been more successful in developing students Pedagogical content knowledge rather than a commitment to broader values that might underpin their practice. In their suggestions on how Development Educators might 'sidestep' the Faustian bargain, Selby and Kagawa argued for a return to first principles, to those questions that ask us to consider, among other things - Why we are committed to this approach to education? What values matter most and why? Similarly for student teachers understanding the 'why' of what we do and how we do it, the why underpinning the choices we make as teachers in relation to content, pedagogy, modes of engagement, organisational structures etc. – what I would describe as a sense of purpose. Indeed, a sense of purpose has been identified as a key determinant in whether or not a student teacher's pedagogical content knowledge survives the transition from college to classroom and the socialization into the culture of the school which may not align with college practice (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 260).

Providing student teachers with the spaces to engage with troublesome knowledge, to interrogate their assumptions and beliefs, to think critically about the world and their places within it, to encounter different ways of seeing the world and to think about the 'why' underpinning pedagogical choices may go some way towards developing that sense of purpose, particularly if accompanied by an ongoing conversation with practice.

Teacher education is a complex space and teaching is a complex activity. There is no easy answer to the challenges that accompany efforts to mainstream DE and any response is tentative, emerging and partial. Yet, both primary education and teacher education offer key spaces for DE, to let the light in, to challenge, to disrupt and to transform and despite the ambiguities and contradictions continuing to engage in those spaces is a responsibility we all share. To quote Beckett: Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

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