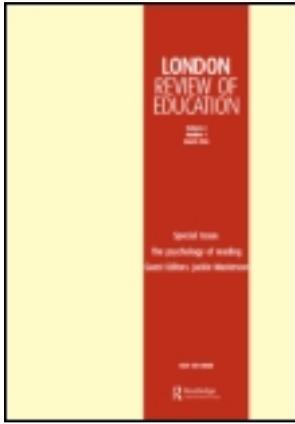


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Creativity: does place matter?

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Creativity: does place matter?

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This article argues that creativity has the greatest potential to flourish if a learning environment is embedded within a community that emphasises a deep sense of place. Yet in a globalised world, rootedness is often regarded as antithetical to creativity. But far from representing dead artefacts that are anti-modern and non-economic, culture and tradition provide the ideal base for innovation. Ireland's creative potential will only be realised if its strong tradition of metaphor, storytelling and imagination is fostered. Education that emphasises the arts rooted in place, provides the condition for an innovative self-reliant country, unique while cosmopolitan, well positioned to compete in a turbulent global economy.

Keywords: place; creativity; higher education; meaning; identity

Introduction

A sense of place represents a deeply emotional and complex attachment to a particular geographical and cultural space. It encompasses a shared experience of history and community, a connection embedded in social networks and rich in tacit knowledge. It informs people's sense of who they are, where they are, where they have come from and where they are trying to go. Erosion of this sense of place is often cited by economists as an indicator of confidence and independence, with deepening it antithetical to creativity and innovation. Yet an emerging paradox is that in a world of global markets, rapid transportation and high-speed communications, locations and cultures are becoming *more*, not *less* important. Advantage lies in *difference* captured by special places and shared values. Being distinctive, thinking differently and having different information enable a community to be creative and innovative. As Michael Porter argues, enduring competitive advantage lies increasingly in the local (1990). The more complex and dynamic the global economy becomes, the more this is likely to hold true.

While there is much debate on the need to develop creativity, many commentators appear blind to the important role that culture and place might play in both the economy and society. But like physical infrastructure, cultural infrastructure needs investment too! An intriguing question: is it by nurturing a strong sense of place, more than science or technology, that is key to Ireland's attempt to become a creative 'knowledge' economy?

Terms like 'culture', 'identity' and 'tradition' should not be misconstrued as indicating an exclusive, singular approach to contemporary Irish culture and society. It is especially important to build a multilingual and multicultural society that harnesses the energy, enterprise and pioneering spirit of new immigrants, committed to the new place they call home. The challenge is to build social cohesion based on creativity with a central role given to minorities, including immigrants. 'Dynamic rootedness' can result in creative and vibrant learning communities with a deep sense of place (Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin 2002, 206). As

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P.J. Mathews asserts, this 'shared spatial dynamics' or the 'creolisation' of Irish culture is a prospect full of exciting potential for the emergence of a vigorous local identity (2005, 12).

New economy

To explore this issue, a good starting point is to look at a world undergoing a fundamental shift from the industrial or manufacturing age of physical goods to a network age dominated by intangibles. The industrial enterprise is wedded to rationality and control rather than emotions, empathy and relationships, characteristics of a network organisation. The industrial enterprise views intangible resources, especially knowledge and skills of people, as a means to leverage value out of tangible resources. Contrast this with the network enterprise where tangible resources exist to leverage value out of intangibles.

Sustainable competitive advantage comes from resources unique and difficult to imitate. While some resources are interchangeable between locations, those least susceptible to imitation, and hence most valuable and sustainable, remain rooted in the social and economic fabric of local relationships. Tangible resources (such as money and technology) are necessary but not sufficient. Intangibles such as human, cultural and social resources, founded on capabilities and relationships, are essential. Imagination, intuition, inspiration, ingenuity, sense-of-self, self-assurance, self-confidence and self-knowledge are crucial.

Wealth is no longer about big factories but the ability to create new ideas, not just in products, but in the arts, culture and entertainment. Corporate value is increasingly tied up, not in physical or tangible assets like manufacturing facilities, buildings and telecommunications infrastructure, but in intangible assets like customer relationships and brands. The ability to innovate is crucial. A company like Apple shows that to achieve long run sustained success, it is no longer enough to rely on one great product but rather it is the ability to maintain a stream of innovative products that matters. More than ever, strong personal feelings and an ability to foster relationships are critical. Nurturing meaning, delivering experiences and stimulating identities replicate the role that selling goods played in the past. The Internet has amplified this trend, ensuring intangibles are more mobile and tradable. In the e-world, competing involves a completely new way of thinking, particularly in the conceptualisation of service delivery. For many companies, since it is intangibles that are their great untapped source of competitive advantage, a different mindset is needed on how to create value.

The most valuable knowledge is often more constructed than received, and not simply about facts or theories. Its most valuable characteristics are the networks of human interactions embodied in relationships. Michael Polanyi argued for the existence of a tacit aspect to knowledge and maintained that creative acts, especially acts of discovery, are imbued with strong personal feelings and commitments (1974). He placed a strong emphasis on the role of conversation, meaning and dialogue within an open community. Captured in the phrase, 'people know more than they can tell', he held that informed guesses, hunches and imaginings are exploratory acts motivated by what he called 'passions'.

In the network economy, value rises as meaning deepens, as knowledge moves from information to understanding and wisdom, illustrated in digital media by content, tacit patient knowledge in healthcare, originality in crafts, local expertise in food recipes and tradition in farming practices (Castells and Himanen 2002). The quality of knowledge depends on point-of-views or cultural perspectives, and these are now more important than ever. IT companies often spend more on symbolic or design-driven aspects of products than technical development. In innovation, while scientific research or information mediated by computers does matter, what is more crucial is to create conditions where meanings, experiences,

identities and resourcefulness prosper. This is why distinct cultural resources are potentially an enormous competitive advantage.

As the significance of the material diminishes and capacities of the mind become more and more a crucial competitive factor, human attitudes and meaning, which are heavily influenced by society and traditions, become key resources. Such resources are rooted in individuals, places and communities. Storytelling, metaphor, conversation, reflection, development of character and an ethic of quality are essential. Imagination, the most valuable resource of all, is driven primarily by emotions and feelings, the heart rather than rational mind, and nurtured through drama, poetry, literature, music and art. Imagination is founded on inspiration, identity, empathy, memory, tradition, belonging and trust and rooted in the social and economic fabric of personal, local and national relationships.

Sense of place

A strong sense of place has become critical as individuals search for psychological security and meaning in a restless world. People seem to have an increasing need to feel connected, to develop loyalty and commitment not necessarily to 'society' in general, but to their own place in particular. Strong cultural identities emerge when individuals address questions such as: where do I come from? What are our shared values?

Cultural capital, a term first articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, is a set of common values expressed through art, language, music, song, poetry or other forms of cultural expression. It is the fundamental building block of social capital. Social capital in turn is generated by feelings of belonging, relationships, trust and civic responsibility, a kind of glue holding society together. It is not always clear how social and cultural capital contribute to creativity (or for that matter, how the impact of one differs from another). Yet, some things are clear. Creativity and innovation have more to do with social group dynamics and the cultural context rather than individual capability or effort, challenging the romantic ideal of the isolated artist, that still persists to the present day. Social and cultural practices, identity, motivation, negotiated meaning, conversation, and communities of practice are critical elements in this process.

Richard Florida points out that unlike the past where reducing the cost of business or clustering companies in industrial estates was central to development, attracting creative individuals to a place can ensure its long-term competitiveness (2004). Creative people are clustering in places which offer 'authenticity', 'uniqueness' and the lifestyles and diversity they crave. They are attracted by the qualities of a community, while this in turn attracts enterprise, reversing the traditional direction of development. Census data shows that vibrant Irish cities like Galway and Kilkenny grew more in recent years than perhaps less culturally active cities like Limerick and Waterford. Other evidence is consistent with this; it is soft issues, such as culture and the environment, encapsulated in the term, *quality of life*, which will determine the most successful cities and regions in the future.

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

It is the unique history, culture, economy and geography of a particular place, urban or rural, that fosters place-based creativity. France and Italy, for instance, have great reputations

for artisan industries based on the *terroir* of their soil, and the social and cultural attributes of their regions. Champagne, wines, beers, cheeses, breads and other food products have subtle nuances and characteristics attributable to their place of origin. Culture is a core pillar of the French economy, crucial for attracting tourists. As the country's first Culture Minister, writer André Malraux, put it, 'Anyone who has to design for the future has to leaf through the past'. Italian design is impossible to imitate, a heritage of arts and crafts resources developed over generations, a critical innovative resource.

In the early 1960s, *Córas Tráchtála* (Irish Export Board) turned to a group of Scandinavian designers for advice on improving industrial design in Ireland (1961). They found the best-designed products, those with the greatest chance of competing on world markets, were craft industries successfully interpreting the Irish tradition. Their Report cautioned against the national propensity for shallow utilisation of foreign models, and urged particular attention be paid to national characteristics that would enable Ireland to market something out of the ordinary, something with a distinctive Irish quality. The aesthetic faculty in terms of environmentalism is weak in Ireland as can be seen from widespread littering and dumping.

In Ireland, ironically, a lack of concern for design and aesthetic quality tends to go hand in hand with a preoccupation with place. Yet this affinity with place appears to have little to do with tending, cultivating or enhancing the material environment. Patrick Sheeran argues that there is the paradox of a professed allegiance to places together with an almost total inability to care for them (1988). This nominal sense of place suggests it is sufficient merely to name a place to mark one's attachment to it. The place itself is of subsidiary importance; there is little actual need to *care* for it. Strengthening a sense of place will not emerge from the individualist culture promoted within Irish education where there is the urgent need for civic education from primary level and up (Sweeney 2002). Civic education implies sharing resources, not maximising one's own interest, and requires students possess an enduring sense of self-worth, and responsibility to use their knowledge, skills, and energy on behalf of their country. It is fostered by equipping young people to live as responsible citizens in complex multicultural societies while still upholding the richness and uniqueness of their own culture.

Linear paradigm

Special places possess distinctive, inimitable, rare, not easily substitutable and valuable resources. Examples could be tangible such as a special soil or marine environment or intangible such as a unique approach to art or design. In an increasingly globalised world, the best way for a small country like Ireland to achieve a competitive advantage is to focus its economic policies on identifying and developing distinctive local features and capabilities, especially relatively immobile ones which cannot be relocated to another country (Bradley 2007). This means concentrating on greater complexity in products and services where its placed-based capabilities can add the most value.

The Irish higher education model of innovation is largely conceptualised as a linear one comprising basic research leading to commercialisation through technology transfer. A Government report recognises that the present model is not working properly, stating, 'higher education-enterprise collaboration operates at a very low level in Ireland and that structures in place to encourage and support the process have failed to achieve significant results' (2007).

Aidan Kane argues that now is a good time to reflect critically on such an approach to innovation policy (2011). He sees Irish policy suffering some of the same pathologies which underpinned the banking failures: hubris, a policy debate of stifling consensus and hostility to

public dissent, and a misplaced confidence in marketing one's way out of real problems. It has indeed been an impressive act of re-possession to reclaim science as a central part of the Irish experience. This role has been underplayed in the past. But in the 1990s, the coalition of academic scientists, public servants and industrialists understood that the only language to which policy makers would respond was that of economics. Such language, according to Kane, was relentlessly adopted and deployed to rationalise a sea-change in Irish public policy. But this economising of the science and innovation debate makes science merely instrumental in public policy and not intrinsically worthwhile, for its own sake, and on its own terms. More fundamental 'reasons for innovation' exist but Kane sees a looseness with evidence and logic in the policy debate which would genuinely shock scientists if applied to their own endeavours. There are boosterish and incredible 'jobs creation' targets for innovation initiatives, with emphasis on the production of commercialisable intellectual property as a measurable outcome from publicly funded research. Kane asserts that this innovation policy is founded on a flawed logic, enabled by a type of echo-chamber closed debate which has also damaged the country in other policy domains.

Writing on national systems of innovation (NSI), Bengt-Åke Lundvall argues that innovation, while produced by firms, is shaped by the broader system of learning which have a strongly national characteristic (1992). Lundvall sees institutions as norms, habits and rules, deeply ingrained, that define how people learn. Examples include the time horizon (for example, Japanese long run thinking versus Anglo-Saxon stock market drive short-termism), trust, expression of authority, social capital, and so forth.

The innovative idea and its development have many inputs, scientific research being just one. An innovative process has academic research acting as a window on the world, identifying and acquiring knowledge from elsewhere as well as internally. In essence, two fundamental processes lie at the heart of innovation. One is called analysis, problem-solving or rational decision-making. Companies focus constantly on it, treating an innovative concept as a problem to be solved as efficiently as possible, often reducing innovation to merely a set of engineering requirements. It is also the ethos that dominates many business programmes, especially MBA degrees. The other process, what might be called irrational, inspirational or intuitive thinking, is close to what Richard Lester and Michael Piore call 'interpretation'. This is more about orchestrated structured conversations that emerge from a community that conceives and discusses new products and services (2004).

Drawing on research at the MIT Industrial Performance Center on innovations in a range of sectors such as mobile phones, medical devices and fashion, Lester and Piore show the pressures of globalisation lead many companies to try to get new products to market as quickly as possible. This drives them to favour project-driven analysis, closure rather than long internal conversations, certainty over ambiguity and the exclusion of troublesome stakeholders. What is required is balance between the analytical and interpretive processes. However, the current emphasis on expanding market competition risks choking off the vital interpretative spaces required for innovation. Since innovation is largely a social enterprise, embracing and exploiting ambiguity and confusion among stakeholders such as designers, engineers, marketers and customers is crucial. Hence, Lester and Piore's research demonstrates that there is a special role for universities in stimulating innovation by providing spaces where enterprises can be innovative and creative in ways that are not constrained.

Cultural repossession

David Landes of Harvard concludes in a groundbreaking book that 'if we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference' (1998, 516).

Culture is a core pillar of France, a country whose humanist ideals and cultural nationalism, independent Ireland was meant to be based on (Murphy 2008). Italy also illustrates the importance of culture and meaning as a competitive strength. Italian design is impossible to imitate, a heritage of arts and crafts resources developed over generations, a critical innovative resource (Verganti 2003). Nordic countries have long recognised cultural rejuvenation as essential for national self-reliance with rootedness providing a quality aspirational work ethic and empowered innovative community. Danish education is deeply influenced by the nineteenth century Grundtvig folk high-school concept which communicates a deep purpose, awakening pride in national culture while refusing to devalue others, and love of learning that continues long after a student is finished with formal study (Borish 1991). In Finland, a country Ireland is often urged to emulate, dynamic integration in the global economy, strong national sentiment, a unique language and closeness to nature, represent important sources of meaning (Castells and Himanen 2002). Irish commentators focus on that country's huge R&D spend but do not appreciate that strong affirmation of its culture is the key and might similarly be a driver of innovation at home.

Ireland's future development lies in generating a spirit of self-reliance in diverse creative, transformative, multicultural communities committed to place. If de Valera thought of Ireland as a society and not an economy, then surely it is far more common these days to hear discussion of the *economy* than the *nation*. This vision of an Irish nation, speaking its own language, politically and economically independent, and embracing a 'frugal self-sufficiency' was not, in spite of modern notions of 'economic man' (sic), a necessarily unattractive one. Joe Lee makes the point that most of those who laughingly deride de Valera's flights of fancy and his 'maidens dancing at the crossroads' have not troubled themselves to read the actual text of the speech (1999). Although de Valera's speech does include 'comely maidens', there is no evidence of them dancing, at the crossroads or elsewhere. It was a rich vision, not incompatible with the contemporary concept of sustainable development. Unfortunately, it is ridiculed today, held up as evidence of a veritable 'cloud cuckoo land' inhabited by de Valera and others who dreamed of a bucolic, pastoral, Irish-speaking backwater, rich in 'saints and scholars' if poor in material possessions and economic efficiency, going along in its own measured tread, with nary a thought for the rest of the world. To give fair play to such critics, it is clear that although de Valera had a vision, he had no idea how to achieve it. Still, faulty execution ought not necessarily be an indictment of the vision or the ideal itself.

Contemporary Ireland is badly in need of the driving vision that characterised the Irish Cultural Revival, that period some 30 years before the foundation of the State in 1922. The Revival was an exhilarating mix of cultural cohesion, idealism, self-reliance and creativity, encompassing a range of innovative initiatives in commerce, agriculture, theatre, literature, sport and language all relating to a common theme: an awakening interest in Irish identity, broadly defined. The Gaelic League, Gaelic Athletic Association, Co-operative Movement and Abbey Theatre attracted an eclectic array of individuals involved in projects across a wide spectrum, with a sense of identity and national purpose bounding them in a common enterprise. Co-operative organisers, sceptical farmers, idealistic patriots, language enthusiasts and literati of all stripes contributed to the democratic, experimental, exciting mosaic of the time. This vision was never articulated as one seamless manifesto, still there existed certain characteristics that were common to many organisations.

Foremost was self-reliance or character and the notion that responsibility for development resided in Irish, not foreign hands. Shared identity, self-confidence and sense of place were all prerequisites to the development of character and imperative for creativity and innovativeness. Character was at the core of the Gaelic League, the intellectual movement that fostered use of the Irish language and supported native literature and arts. Central to

its philosophy was an insistence that the Irish could not reach their potential except within a proper cultural milieu. It held that creative personalities cannot be produced without an integrated community having a unique and continuing experience of its own.

Ireland cannot build a vibrant creative society without a stronger sense of place in the world. While we are now in a completely different political, social and technological context it is essential to recapture the Revival spirit and excitement. But its exhilarating message seems lost nowadays on most politicians and those leading our education institutions. Useful lessons can still be learned from say W.B. Yeats on the potential of the arts in Ireland's economic development. Just as the Revival emphasised the authenticity of place in defining Irishness, a sense of shared place holds the key to creating a common identity and innovative mind frame. This is an advantage from the perspective of widespread immigration of recent years. Privileging place over a common ethnic and cultural identity permits the accommodation of cultural difference while working as a welcome antidote to the mantra of globalisation that 'geography doesn't matter.' Prospering in a multicultural world requires individuals that possess a deep understanding of their own culture. With greater self-confidence there is usually more curiosity and openness to the outsider. It is essential to locate oneself in context, since grounded this way, people appreciate the cultural values of others with whom they must co-operate. While remaining open to outside influences, they learn to identify difference and appreciate distinctiveness. They are able to absorb many different ideas, yet are not dominated by globalised cultural influences. But many immigrants today feel that the Irish appear to lack a clear sense of themselves and their own culture. One confessed that in reading the works of John McGahern and Brian Friel she found a more fully formed sense of belonging and self-assurance in the past than she sensed among those today (Mac Cormaic 2007).

Policy re-balance

The challenge is to foster rootedness, without recourse to a dangerous form of nationalism, as a unique cultural or social milieu, transforming individuals, sustaining individual difference while enhancing a sense of belonging. This means generating dynamic and vibrant learning environments which emphasise identity, experiences and meaning driven by self-discovery and exploration, going from learning-about to learning-to-be. Creativity is founded on a spirit of self-reliance and relationships based on community trust, tradition and civic engagement. It is driven by stories that create a rich visual imagery. Far from representing dead artefacts that are anti-modern and non-economic, stories potentially represent significant assets that foster innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and meaning. Valuing folklore, for instance, is not merely an exercise in naïve nostalgia, or an attempt to turn back the clock to some perceived idyllic golden age. In a globalising world, 'the local' matters most, and so exposure to folklore is ideal for helping people navigate between the local and global.

It is intriguing to consider what might be the impact on the young, many of whom suffer from alienation, should a concerted effort be made to foster a strong sense of local identity. Proponents of science often hold that innovation rests on rational discovery of 'new' knowledge waiting to be discovered and applied. They tend to slight 'ordinary' knowledge, depreciating the capacities and interests of the non-expert and amateur. They are often antagonistic to common sense and practical knowledge mediated through everyday experience, devaluing the everyday, the popular and the non-elite.

Storytelling has emerged as the preferred approach for teaching leadership effectiveness in many companies today (Ready 2002). Moreover, innovation is driven very much by stories which create a rich visual imagery through conversation, reflection and shared meaning. The Irish are great storytellers, one reason the country's cultural traditions are so valuable. How-

ever, Ireland's current innovation policy focuses largely on scientific research based on objectivity, denying the legitimacy of the subjective world of feeling, ignoring the country's distinct and most valuable resource, a sense of connection and the imaginal life (O'Connor 2000).

The scientific mind simplifies and narrows experiences into manageable principles whereas literature and the arts emphasise complexity, crucial if entrepreneurial imagination and innovation is to flourish (Chia 1996). While scientific research is certainly important, breakthrough ideas require intelligence of the heart and hand, not just intelligence of the head. The new usually begins with an unspecified emotion or feeling which then morphs into a new insight or idea that is then related to a problem or context; only then does it get framed by a rational structure or form (Scharmer 2007). Ireland's tradition of metaphors, narrative, stories and mythology, if integrated properly with science and technology, offers a huge competitive advantage. Combining the scientific mind of separability and rationality with say Irish mythology, which is not linear but with a meandering interconnectedness, is ideal for the emerging sustainable age where conversation, empathy, meaning and relationships are critical. In social networks, the Irish have advantages but these will only be fully realised if the artistic is combined with the scientific interpreted through the prism of Irish cultures and traditions.

For imagination and innovation to flourish, it is crucial that interdisciplinarity, diversity and sustainability become central elements in learning across all educational levels, from primary up to fourth level (explain to an international audience). A radical transformation is needed to nurture personal development, creativity and civic responsibility. In a sustainable network era, a key challenge is to help young people change their thinking from individual rights to collective responsibilities, independence to interdependence, luxuries to necessities, short-term to long-term thinking, and growth that benefits a few to development and vitality that benefits all. This implies a culture founded on the realisation of human potential and the interdependence of social, economic, and ecological well-being. Young people, in particular, should be helped to think globally but feel rooted in Ireland, so learning must emphasise a sense of place and shared meaning nurtured by experience. This is at least as important as skills in science or mathematics in developing an innovative ethic, as well as a responsible and caring society.

This is why the arts by fostering an appreciation of language, grounded in the imagination and emotions, is so valuable. The arts question the values of the state, of economic progress, and of society at large. The tradition of Irish writers such as Wilde, Shaw, Joyce or O'Casey is of artistic defiance and imaginative challenge rather than cultural compliance and orthodoxy. Louis MacNeice held that the writer should not be the mouthpiece of society, but its conscience. More recently, poet Gerald Dawe questioned the alignment of the arts with economic recovery (2011). Cultural tourism, to Dawe, is no substitute for or solution to recent failures of the economic and political system in Ireland.

The arts help young people engage in discussions, perform practical work, make decisions and work within a mutually supportive environment, while drawing on and learning from each other. It takes place within an action research or experiential learning framework and illustrates how, through both individual and teamwork, value is created by implementing imaginative concepts. Rather than transferring information, which is often just instructive and imposed, the arts engage the young person in transformative learning. Since we experience the world through our bodies, it is important to engage the heart as well as the mind, balance intuition with analysis, focus on character and community, and cultivate wisdom rather than the mere accumulation of facts.

The more practice and experience students have of contacting and exploring their inner emotional world the more confidently they can creatively deal with change and be open to

new possibilities. The arts help them to think holistically and work in multidisciplinary groups. At present, they often fail to see connections and patterns whereas in a sustainable or ecological view of the world, the emphasis is on relationships. Thinking is systemic rather than linear, integrative rather than fragmentary, concerned with process, emphasising dynamics rather than cause-effect and pattern rather than detail. It is fundamentally about recognising wholeness.

Radical overhaul

It is difficult to identify a consistent theme flowing through Irish post-compulsory education. Many programmes, even ones within the same institution, appear to share no common mission or unifying narrative that can inspire or give meaning to the educational experience. Even though access to information is now widespread on the Internet, traditional lecturing, sometimes to classes of hundreds of students, is still the norm. The assumption, as Abbott and Ryan put it, is that 'no learning is taking place unless students are being taught' (2000, 218). As the Boyer Commission maintained, what is learned can often not be carried beyond the classroom, so even students with highly developed knowledge of a subject find it difficult to put that to use except in the artificial world of university examinations (1998). Students often lack a coherent body of knowledge, fail to see connections, and possess no clear sense of how one course is related to another. Learning should be based on cultivating the natural curiosity and impulse to learn of individuals rather than rewarding them for performing for the sake of others. This means learning in order to attain one's own goals, guided by one's own values, not the approval of an outsider such as a lecturer or teacher. The Commission argued that all students should clearly understand from the time they arrive on campus the reason they are at university: it is to become a *discoverer*.

Granted, a lot of faculty experience, discussion, and hard work go into determining course content and combining individual modules to form a programme. However, as Neil Postman explains, the *means* by which young people learn is merely an engineering or technical problem (1996). The more fundamental problem is a metaphysical one, the *why* or *reason* for education. If students are confident at creatively dealing with change and open to new possibilities, they are better prepared for a network society.

Education should mean more than simply preparing students for a job or cultivating the intellect. Educators should be concerned with students' personal values and welfare, as well as their interpersonal and intercultural skills. Fostering self-esteem, healthy relationships, and socially responsible behaviour is a priority. Educators should imbue ethical behaviour, or to repeat that old-fashioned word, *character*, within the education experience. Students should learn to think holistically, work in multidisciplinary groups, cope with change and develop systems and products that are sustainable and caring of nature and humanity. Too much emphasis on technical skills rather than the formation of quality relationships is flawed.

Perhaps the best way to nurture creativity and innovation would be for each Irish third level institution to pursue a clearly defined interdisciplinary purpose, in effect a roadmap to guide all its research and learning activities. Educators need to structure programmes that would connect to this shared institutional mission through a seamless web or network of exploration. If higher education is to respond appropriately to the education needs of a learning society, this is a very big challenge, since universities are structured through the disciplines and disciplinary specialisation is what tends to be rewarded.

The absence of an ethic of civic responsibility or citizenship is one of the largest social problems now facing Europe. Citizenship cannot be taught but may be learned if educators create an environment where tradition, identity and community are respected and valued. If

the social or cultural context is ignored, investment in science and technology will not be money well spent. For a culture of innovation to take root, it must nurture relationships of community and trust. An engaged university, one that actively encourages a culture of mutual respect and purposeful activities involving academics, students and members of the community, is ideal for fostering the creative spirit. It would help if students had opportunities, as a central feature in their education, to engage with and learn from the local community. Education for creativity must foster idealism and identity to invigorate civil society. For as long as young people believe their vision can change the world, they are motivated, willing to lead change and be creative.

The social animal innovates when there is room for individual commitment, a sense of belonging and an awareness of his or her own capabilities, feelings, emotions and values. If cultural identity were more central to Ireland's self-image, it would contribute to integrity, civic responsibility, aesthetic sensibility and ecological stewardship. A country's wisdom, values and self-knowledge offer breadth, purpose and confidence. Giving individuals meaning in their lives with a sense of continuity between past and present, results in a more trusting, caring and higher quality environment. Standards become internal, deriving impetus from personal values, integrity, tradition, community, empathy and intergenerational solidarity.

In practice

Here is an outline of how a programme containing the ideas above might look like in practice so a radical attitude would be fostered, creativity developed and idealism generated. A key objective would be that graduates obtain a thorough understanding of the important role that place, traditions and cultures play in creating, developing and sustaining an innovative society. Another would be to nurture a community where students learn for themselves rather than merely receive information and knowledge from lecturers. An education environment would be created in which students do practical work, make decisions, work as members of teams and both compete and cooperate. This would stimulate an international alongside strong local cultural identity, develop an independent attitude along with responsibility to the community and foster self-confidence, a strong moral ethos and a spiritual dimension. The Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) at NUI Galway, which promotes civic engagement through a range of academic activities, is a good example of this in practice.

Topics covered would include immersion in cultural experiences in language, music, song, storytelling, dance and drama along with the basics of Ireland's artistic and craft traditions. Exploratory natural science fieldwork would involve visits to urban, suburban and rural locations to foster aesthetic qualities, rootedness, self-discovery, ecological awareness and ethical behaviour. Participants would study interdependence, alternative technologies, biodiversity, systems thinking, eco-design, efficiency, recycling, resource maximisation and waste minimisation. They would explore, practice and be inspired by imaginative traditions that centre on ambiguity, meaning, intuition, metaphor, narrative, storytelling, mythology and counter-intuitive thinking, drawn from Irish literature, language, music and the arts in general. They would study how cultural identity, values, connectedness, self-knowledge and spirituality affect imagination and creativity as well as explore cultural sensitivity, experiences, emotional empathy and cross-cultural negotiation processes. Their overall learning would be integrated by introducing them to the initiation, valuation, management and practical implementation of sustainable innovation projects. This way, participants would gain an understanding of how value, both market and non-market, in the short as well as long-term, is analysed and created. They would collaboratively research this, which would be written up and presented.

A radical change would clearly be necessary to assess student performance for this kind of transformative learning. Traditional testing by means of examinations would be the exception rather than rule. Innovative assessment methods based on subjective or qualitative criteria rather than traditional testing by means of examinations would be central. For instance, in the case of a collaborative project involving the local community, this would be assessed not just by using quantitative criteria such as economic return but also the social and environmental contribution the project is likely to make to the long-term sustainability of the community. Since tacit knowledge would be emphasised more than codified knowledge, assessment would be based on demonstrating valuation through action and practice; not an exam culture but rather implementation of an imaginative spirit in innovative projects.

Students thrive in an atmosphere that nurtures creativity, imagination, intuition, personal development and mutual respect as some fabled TED talks by renowned creativity expert and educator, Sir Ken Robinson, illustrate so well. Students must have practice and experience in exploring their inner emotional world. This is best done within the supportive environment of a learning community. The more confident they are at creatively dealing with change and open to new possibilities, the better they are able to contribute in innovation. Exploration through engaged learning should be at the heart of the education experience to enhance individual and community well-being. Exposure to such self-discovery means students are likely to emerge as engaged, responsible and creative citizens.

I recognise that the alternative form of education proposed here could be viewed as somewhat idealistic by academics firmly entrenched in their disciplinary specialisations. I am also aware of the structural constraints within universities, institutions particularly slow to change. To be fair, some universities are implementing an alternative but somewhat closely related vision centred on globalisation and 'global citizenship', a sympathetic view which emphasises the global rather than the local.

Conclusion

Tradition offers people an opportunity to reflect on their place in the world, helping them better manage uncertainty about the future. It harnesses a spirit of self-discovery and an innovative mind-frame. Cultural identity contributes to integrity, civic responsibility, aesthetic sensibility and ecological stewardship. Individuals with meaning in their lives, and with a sense of continuity between past and present, build more trusting and caring communities.

Philosopher John Dewey classified education as a process of living and not as a preparation for future living (1897). The idea that a strong identity is opposed to materialism, the profit motive, technological innovation and modernism, reflects an unfortunate legacy of the elites who governed it over its first decades. In the space of 80 odd years, the country has moved from one extreme to another: from a place where culture featured prominently in the national vision to its opposite, where science, rationality and markets dominate. It should instead harness the positive elements of both, taking advantage of its distinct characteristics while generating special relationships with countries who also suffered the humiliation of colonisation.

Ireland needs to embrace its imaginative traditions which is fostered by belonging, purpose and idealism. Much can be learned from a resurgent cultural self-confidence of the late 1950s to mid 1960s. Outstanding figures of that era such as Seán Lemass and Seán Ó Riada possessed a sophisticated regard for traditions. While T.K. Whitaker helped transform the Irish economy by embracing the world, a strong cultural perspective was at the core of his vision. As bestselling US author on globalisation Thomas Friedman argues, countries like Ireland need to develop sufficiently strong cultural and environmental filters to operate successfully in today's world.

They need roots as well. Pride in place, cultural traditions in language and music along with a new emphasis on sustainability and biodiversity, can form the bedrock for a learning society. The university has a special role in helping Ireland achieve dynamic knowledge-based enterprises. In an innovation age, a sense of place must be central to the development process. Policies that recognise the specific nature and feelings of the population, even if latent or unexpressed, achieve an inimitable competitive advantage. This is the great opportunity, and yet an undoubted challenge, if Ireland is to develop a creative learning society.

Notes on contributor

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