Teaching and learning through civic engagement: Prospects for sustainability in teacher education

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This paper considers the prospects for sustainable service/community based learning as an element of a civic engagement strategy within the context of teacher education. It draws on findings of a study of the policy, process and practice of embedding civic engagement in the higher education curriculum in Ireland and the author's experience implementing service learning in initial teacher education. The significance of underpinning rationale, as exemplified in academics' orientation to civic engagement, is explored. The benefits to be gained from strategic alignment with institutional and national policy developments are highlighted. A typology of organisational arrangements for service/community based learning is offered to help explore the relationship between complexity, sustainability and potential for reciprocity. Certain features of the context of teacher education – the focus on development of values and dispositions, the centrality of civic values to the profession and teacher educators' familiarity with the practice of reflection – bode well for the prospect of a sustainable pedagogy which reflects the values associated with reciprocity, diversity and social justice. The inherent challenges associated with developing and maintaining collaborative partnerships, however, may limit the potential for mainstreaming service/community based learning within the curriculum for all student teachers.

Introduction

The plethora of definitions of civic engagement within the literature is testament to the complexity of a contested ideal. It is sometimes conceived of and valorised in terms of what students do in, for or with the community. Such activities represent a highly visible element of a university's commitment to its local community. Gonzales-Perez *et al* (2007) suggest that students, staff and institutional management are all potentially involved in a range of strategies which can be positioned within 'civic engagement'.

> The concept of 'civic engagement' in higher education encompasses a wide range of approaches to developing the civic skills, interests and participation of students, staff and institutional management. Examples include community-based learning (or 'service learning'), volunteering, community-focussed research, participative and collaborative research and educational initiatives etc. … and they most often reflect the norms of values and reciprocity and diversity tied to social inclusion (Gonzalez-Perez, Mac Labhrainn, & Mc Ilrath, 2007, p.187).

The centrality of certain values in the process and practice of civic engagement is of particular relevance to the context of teacher education and to the role which teacher educators might play. Watson (2003, p.25) provides a comprehensive and challenging vision, suggesting that civic engagement implies "strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres". He identifies these spheres as strategic planning; making teaching and learning relevant to the wider world; fostering dialogue between researchers and practitioners and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and as citizens. How such responsibilities might be

fulfilled in the context of teacher education is of some interest. The range of conceptions of civic engagement and the diversity of activities that it comprehends reflect the multifaceted nature of the underlying rationale. This has implications for sustainability of the practice of civic engagement within a sector characterised by competing strategic imperatives and often overloaded curricula.

Amongst those advocating civic engagement in higher education, strategic alignment with institutional policy is frequently advocated as a means of achieving the goal of strengthening this 'third arm' (Votruba, 2005). A potentially more fruitful route, however, is to align with externally set public policy objectives – economic, social or political – which enjoy legitimacy, support and funding. 'Lifelong learning' policy features explicitly in the rationale for many university/community partnerships, where widening participation provides a strategic imperative (Annette, 2006). Examples can be found of civic engagement projects designed specifically to address issues of social exclusion (Banks & MacDonald, 2003). Civic engagement has also been strategically aligned with 'knowledge exchange' policy, securing funding on that basis from a funding council for 'third stream' activities (Whittmore, 2006). The impact of the prevailing policy framework is perhaps most apparent in the reorientation of civic engagement projects to align with new priorities in public policy e.g. from a focus on widening participation to a focus on diversity (Nursaw, 2006).

In Ireland, the emergent discourse of 'active citizenship' – as exemplified in the work of the Task Force on Active Citizenship (2007) – represents a potentially valuable policy with which to align a civic engagement strategy. In addition, a highly relevant and promising aspect of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications [1] has been the inclusion of the competence of 'Insight' as one of eight dimensions in terms of which all awards are described and placed on the framework.

> Insight refers to ability to engage in increasingly complex understanding and consciousness, both internally and externally, through the process of reflection on experience. Insight involves the integration of the other strands of knowledge, skill and competence with the learner's attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs, cognitive style and personality. This integration is made clear in the learners' mode of interaction with social and cultural structures of his/her community and society, while also being an individual cognitive phenomenon (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2003).

Of particular significance in the context of teacher education in Ireland is the recent establishment of a Teaching Council [2], whose responsibilities includes regulation of the teaching profession and the accreditation of programs of teacher education. The Council has developed a Code of Professional Conduct for teachers which underpins the standards for the accreditation of teacher education programs. The emphasis placed on the formation and development of certain values and dispositions is of particular relevance.

> Teachers in their professional role show a commitment to democracy, social justice, equality and inclusion. They encourage active citizenship and support teacher in thinking critically about significant social issues, in valuing and accommodating diversity and in responding appropriately (Teaching Council, 2007).

In its strategy for the accreditation of programs of initial teacher education, the Teaching Council (2009) states that it expects that processes are in place to facilitate the development of the core values which are set out in the Codes. An international survey carried out by Conway *et al* (2009), suggests that approaches to program accreditation in teacher education generally display some balance of attention to inputs (e.g. selection process, content, resources, nature of practicum, qualifications of teacher staff) and outputs (in terms of the skills, knowledge and competences that graduates have). In Ireland, the relevant authority, the Teaching Council, is attempting to achieve a balance of attention to inputs, outputs and *process*. This paper is concerned with the potential contribution of a particular process to professional formation of teachers while realising a higher education institution's goals in respect of civic engagement.

Aims of the paper

Convincing arguments have been made in support of the pedagogy of service or community-based learning and some evidence can be found to suggest it has positive impacts on student learning, including within teacher education (Anderson, 2000; Murphy, 2007; Theriot, 2006). Potential pitfalls have also been critically examined, in terms of the nature of the community-university partnerships – not just in the context of teacher education. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2006) provide a critical account of the representation of 'community' within the service learning literature in the USA, claiming that it perpetuates a construction of higher education as 'experts' and communities as 'beneficiaries of their remedies'. They highlight the preponderance of 'doing for' – which they characterise as a hierarchical relationship – over 'doing with', where service is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity. The way in which 'civic engagement' might be conceived of and enacted – if it is to involve developing the civic skills, interests and participation of students, staff and institutional management – has attracted less attention in the literature. Moreover, the factors which contribute to the sustainability of such challenging practices have been under-researched. This lacuna deserves attention in the context of contemporary higher education and the range of competing discourses to which academics, including teacher educators, are exposed.

It is valuable, perhaps, to consider some of the findings from research on the process of policy, process and practice of embedding a civic dimension within higher education in Ireland, and consider implications for the particular field of teacher education. To this end I draw upon findings of my doctoral study (Boland, 2008) and on my experience embedding a service learning initiative within an initial teaching education program in the National University of Ireland, Galway. This paper will outline the defining features of service/community based learning and consider how they might transfer to the context of teacher education as part of a civic engagement strategy, with the benefit of a specific initiative to illustrate this. The methodology for my research study and its limitations will be outlined. I will then explore how orientation to civic engagement and a range of other factors combine to influence the sustainability of service/community based learning as an academic practice. Finally, implications for the prospect of embedding service learning will be critically examined in light of the broader context within which teacher education is situated.

Community based or service learning and teacher education

Particular approaches to teaching and learning – variously referred to as 'service learning' or 'community based learning' – have become an increasingly important element of a civic engagement strategy for higher education institutions. The tradition is well established within higher education in the USA and latterly in other contexts, including Australia. A relatively small but growing number of examples can also be found within Irish higher education (McIlrath, Farrell, Hughes, Lillis, & Lyons, 2009). The nascent stage in development of these academic practices in Ireland has been facilitated by the establishment of a cross-sectoral network, *Campus Engage* [3]. The practices have developed in diverse ways, reflecting the differential impact of a range of factors such as rationale and aspects of the national, local and institutional context (Boland & McIlrath, 2007). In recent years, a small number of examples of service/community-based learning have developed in the specific area of teacher education (Hall, 2009; Keane & Boland, 2009; Murphy, 2007).

Defining characteristics of the pedagogy

'Service learning' or 'community based learning' (S/CBL) is first and foremost a teaching and learning strategy. While definitions abound in the literature and the choice of terminology remains highly contested, the pedagogy can be characterised by its goals and underpinning principles. Service/community-based learning aims to develop students' civic responsibility and the skills of citizenship while enhancing community capacity through service. A 'service' is provided to the not-for profit/voluntary sector that meets a need identified by the community partner; students' academic learning is strengthened as they apply theoretical concepts to the real world and their commitment to civic participation is advanced (Honnet & Poulson, 1989; Howard, 1993). Academic credit is gained on the basis of demonstrated application of discipline-specific theory to practice and for reflection on the experience.

A number of conceptual models have been developed to distinguish between different approaches to the practice of S/CBL (Jacoby, 2003; Welch, 2006). 'Transactional' models are characterised by an exchange process, with the community conceived of as recipient of a service while students gain academic credit for experiential learning. Such exchanges leave underlying conditions unchanged at best or worse, in the wake of withdrawal of a needed service to the community. 'Transformative' potential may tend towards a focus on academic or civic outcomes. Transformative models – from the perspective of the student – aim to lead to greater understanding, appreciation, empathy and capacity for critique on the part of students. Transformative models – which focus on community or societal outcomes – seek to question and to change the circumstances, conditions, values or beliefs which are at the root of community's or society's need. This approach reflects the principles of emancipatory education as espoused by Habermas (1971) and Freire (1970) which are familiar to the community of teacher educators. In recent years the transformative potential which service learning offers in preparing teachers for working with diverse communities has been critically appraised (Boyle-Baise, 2002).

Proponents of service learning have highlighted the benefits to be gained by constructing it as a pedagogical tool, claiming that integration within the curriculum can lead to successful incorporation, to proliferation and to legitimacy as an academic practice (Zlotkowski, 1995). Pollack (2000) claims, however, that reconfiguring it as a pedagogical tool compounds the enduring challenge of differentiating service learning from internship or other forms of experiential learning. Service learning is often defined in contradistinction to volunteering, with which it is commonly conflated. The award of academic credit for learning connected to the discipline is a defining characteristic – such opportunities can be readily identified in a range of community settings in the context of teacher education. S/CBL is differentiated from conventional work placements and internships in terms of the emphasis on civic outcomes and the assessment of capacity for reflection as opposed to the assessment of students' academic performance. This distinction is more difficult to establish in the context of teacher education, especially when much teaching practice occurs within the not-for-profit sector i.e. publicly funded schools. The opportunities offered by S/CBL as a civic engagement strategy can best be illustrated with an example from within a program of initial teacher education in Ireland.

Learning to teach for social justice: An example from teacher education

'Learning to Teach for Social Justice' is an elective course within the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), offered in the National University of Ireland Galway. The PGDE is an academically demanding one-year graduate program of initial teacher education (post-primary/secondary sector) with a strong emphasis on reflective practice. The program includes a significant practicum which is assessed using criteria which, while including attention to capacity for reflection, focus primarily on classroom performance. 'Learning to Teach for Social Justice' represents one element of a partnership between the School of Education and local community organisations, specifically the Galway Traveller Movement. This relationship has been built up over a number of years by one of the academics involved in this S/CBL initiative – an educational sociologist with a strong social justice ethic. Latterly, the process has been co-facilitated by a teacher educator with research interest in the broader area of civic engagement. They share a belief in the transformative potential of service/community-based learning (Keane & Boland, 2009).

The S/CBL course is closely connected to the academic content of two core courses. In 'Education, Diversity and Social Justice', students are expected to critically appraise the relationship between education and important variables such as social class, 'race'/ethnicity and gender. In 'Catering for Diversity', students are encouraged to adopt a critical pedagogical stance and to consider how schools and teachers can implement intercultural and social justice educational philosophies and methodologies. The S/CBL unit offers them the opportunity to reflect critically on these issues and develop these skills, based on direct experience.

For the 'Learning to Teach for Social Justice' course, student teachers serve as tutors in a community-led homework club or other educational setting, providing academic support

and mentoring to post-primary pupils from the Traveller community [4] many of whom experience discrimination and/or educational disadvantage. For many of the student teachers, the motivation to engage derives from a desire to remedy their limited experience of diversity during their own education and life experience. For some, it derives from an already well developed sense of social justice. The course is taken by a small minority of the program cohort.

Through a dialogic process, learning outcomes were drafted collaboratively by the participating academics, the partner community organisations and participating students. It was agreed that it was reasonable to expect that, on completion of the experience, student teachers should be able to adapt their pedagogic skills to a one-to-one teaching situation, implement a range of motivational strategies and use education technology as a creative and motivational resource. Student teachers are expected to critically reflect on issues of diversity, interculturalism and educational disadvantage and consider the impact of culture and tradition on expectations, experiences and perception of education. The course also requires them to engage professionally with a partner organisation, students and parents and to cope with the level of uncertainty that is a feature of an informal and relatively unstructured learning environment. They are expected to be able to review their own personal philosophy of teaching and, significantly, to communicate their individual and collective learning to others in an end of year presentation. Student teachers are assessed on the basis of (i) satisfactory and sufficient engagement in the community organisation and in the campus-based activities, (ii) completion of a reflective paper and (iii) participation in a group presentation.

What distinguishes this kind of initiative from volunteering or from teaching practice in schools? Student teachers work in the homework club alongside volunteers from other academic programs who gain recognition for their participation – an ALIVE certificate [5] – but no academic credit for their learning. LTSJ students, however, gain academic credit for their achievement in assessed learning, as part of their academic program. Many of the criteria for assessment are quite different from those used in other 'academic' courses and from those that apply to their classroom performance on teaching practice. The extent to which assessment of capacity for reflection features throughout the PGDE program, however, lessens the apparent distinctiveness of S/CBL within teacher education compared to other disciplines e.g. engineering, languages or law.

The service learning initiative is one of a number of collaborative activities between members of the School of Education and its community partners. These include teaching inputs by members of the community organisation to the PGDE, collaboration in diversity training workshops, provision of ICT training and resources, co-operation on advocacy work and joint conference presentations (Boland, Keane, & McGinley, 2009). Presentations by students and community partners offer an opportunity to develop the civic skills, interests and participation of students, staff and institutional management, by raising levels of awareness and challenging some of the stereotyping which minority communities still experience. The expectations of the community partners – which include benefiting from alliance with the university as they try to influence policy at local and national level – indicate the potential for reciprocity and for longer term

systemic outcomes. In response to an external evaluation, members of the community organisation have expressed the view that:

> The university has the potential to influence existing schools as they have a network of principals and contacts. The Department of Education and Science would be more open to an invitation from the university to discuss the issues, than an invitation from the Galway Traveller Movement (Keating, 2009).

One of the goals of the pilot project has been to explore the potential for embedding S/CBL more widely in programs of teacher education – this work is ongoing. Within the already overloaded curriculum of a graduate program of initial teacher education, however, the logistics of extending access to a meaningful S/CBL experience for over 200 students are not inconsiderable. There are inherent tensions associated with any attempt to embed this elective course as a core or mandatory element of the program.

'Learning to Teach for Social Justice' is but one small-scale example of S/CBL within teacher education. It highlights some of the distinguishing features of the pedagogy and how it marries the enhancement of academic outcomes, professional competence and critical skills, while meeting a defined community need. The initiative can be broadly situated within a model of civic engagement with an explicit transformative purpose which is shared by the partners to the process. It is not the intention, in this paper, to offer an evaluation of this initiative but rather to consider the implications of findings from a wider study for the prospect of embedding initiatives such as this within the curriculum of teacher education.

Methodology for a multi-site case study

Research strategy

My doctoral study aimed to address a number of research questions relating to the policy, process and practice of embedding a civic engagement dimension within the higher education curriculum in Ireland. The research questions related to underpinning rationale, how a civic engagement dimension was conceived of, interpreted and operationalised within the curriculum and the factors influencing academics willingness and capacity to embed a pedagogy for civic engagement, with attention throughout to the significance of context (Boland, 2008).

The research was conducted using a multi-site case study methodology, in the spirit of naturalistic enquiry and within the interpretative paradigm. Four cases of community-based/service learning were studied in depth, over a three year period. Using an approach which combined purposeful sampling and theoretical replication (Yin, 2003), four projects were selected in four different higher education institutions which provided a basis for comparison and contrast in terms of potentially relevant features. These included institution type (within a binary system of higher education), level of institutional support for the initiative, nature of the project design, tenure of the relevant academic and the disciplinary context. The four cases (one of which was interdisciplinary) were drawn from the disciplines of psychology, engineering, art, languages, intercultural studies and education.

Participants were selected on the basis of their relationship to the S/CBL project and their position within the institution e.g. 'embedders', 'co-operating-colleagues', 'project facilitators', 'enablers', 'link persons' and 'strategists'. The central actor in each case was the embedder – the person responsible for designing and implementing a curriculum initiative which bore the characteristics of service/community-based learning. Participants could be categorised according to these and other attributes e.g. position within the institution, discipline, seniority, gender and prior experience in civic engagement. Unstructured interviews and documents served as the main sources of primary data. Forty one interviews were conducted with 31 participants within the institutions and with four external actors from the national or international policy context, totalling forty six hours and over 450,000 words.

Data analysis and the derivation of orientations

Data analysis techniques included thematic analysis, techniques of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), comparative method (Ragin, 1987), cross-site analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), case study method (Yin, 2003) and the concept of fuzzy generalisations (Bassey, 1999). Using the facilities of a CAQDAS package (*Nvivo 7*), the process of data analysis first led to the development of a thematic framework which focused on three themes (i) underpinning rationale (ii) the process of embedding a civic dimension within the curriculum and (iii) factors influencing academics' willingness and capacity to do so. The query tools of *Nvivo 7* facilitated the generation of further analytical categories and the testing of a series of emerging propositional statements.

One of the outcomes of the data analysis process was the derivation of a typology of 'orientations' to civic engagement which reflected the respective influence of various sets of conceptions, practices and values. Once these conceptual categories were created, it was possible to explore the prevalence of these orientations among participants, with reference to the various attributes by which they could be described. With the caveat that, in the context of a multi-site case study, the number in each category was small, some key findings are relevant to the issue of sustainability.

Scope for naturalistic generalisation

As a study of policy, process and practice in respect of a phenomenon at a particular point in time in Ireland, questions inevitably arise regarding representativeness, generalisability and relevance beyond the scope of these four cases and this particular context. The use of a multi-site strategy enhanced the credibility of the conclusions and the inclusion of rich descriptions of the cases aided the process of naturalistic generalisation. While few in number, the four selected sites provide ample contrast across both sectors of Irish higher education, given its scale. All research studies have their limitations and boundaries. The focus on the experience and perspectives of key actors within the institutions – rather than on those of students and community partners – can be justified by the nature of the research questions and the need to place boundaries on the scope of the research. This study spans a particular time period, 2004-7, within which these practices were developing with each successive year, highlighting

the challenge of representing an inherently developmental process. My own professional and personal association with the sector and many of the participants represented both a potential limitation and a distinct advantage as an 'insider researcher'. My efforts to maintain a degree of 'researcher detachment' have been aided by the fact that I had not, at that stage, attempted to embed pedagogy for civic engagement within my own academic practice. Mindful of Stakes' (2005) claims regarding the value of the particular, I present the findings of this study as a potential contribution to the goal of advancing our understanding of the very idea of civic engagement within higher education.

Orientations to civic engagement and conceptions of the academic role

Orientations

The term 'orientation' has been used to denote analytical categories that "include the attitudes, knowledge, aims and action tendencies of educational developers in relation to the context and challenges of their practice" (Land, 2000 p.13). Land claims that orientation influences action and that the strategic conduct of individuals can be characterised by an orientation to their practice. In respect of other aspects of academic work e.g. teaching and learning and assessment, 'orientations' to practice have received growing attention (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2002). The concept of orientation proved apt as a device for considering different kinds of rationale/motivation in respect of civic engagement in general and service/community based learning in particular. Analysis of the interview data led to the creation of a set of orientations to civic engagement, reflecting rationale/motivation, as reported by participants themselves, inferred from their data or attributed to them by others. The orientations which emerged were as follows:

1. Civic orientation: a rationale centred on concern for civic/social issues. This could be further divided into
   a. Local civic: which centred on the local community and issues therein (e.g. educational disadvantage in local schools) and
   b. Broad civic: centred on a concern for broader civic/social concerns (e.g. the collapse of community life in general).
2. Student/learning orientation; a rationale focused on enhancing student learning and personal development, realising cross-curricular goals, opportunities for vocational preparation, the development of transferable skills, giving students insights into prospective career choices, exposing students to life in the 'real-world' and giving them opportunities to work in contexts which are characterised by diversity.
3. Personal orientation; a rationale deriving from personal beliefs, values and experience e.g. prior experience working as a volunteer, personal beliefs about the value of experiential learning, concern for widening participation, informed by own background or a desire to contribute to a specific interest/issue
4. Higher education orientation; a rationale focused on the role, purpose and interests of higher education, ranging from conviction about higher education's

civic purpose, to more pragmatic perspectives on how the pedagogy might help differentiate between institutions in an increasingly competitive market.

The rationale for civic engagement, as understood by different sets of key actors, is multifaceted, complex and rarely uni-dimensional (Boland, 2008b). Academics display a keen sense of their own motivation, firmly rooted in their personal convictions and a keen interest in opportunities to enhance student learning. Foremost was their conviction regarding the value of applied, practical, experiential learning and the personal benefits to be gained by a student from exposure to an environment outside the institution.

While the 'civic' orientation is most closely identifiable with the institutional perspective (e.g. the strategists), it also features in academics from disciplines where civic values are core (e.g. education, intercultural studies). While the concept of 'community' featured strongly for those articulating a civic orientation, it was commonly constructed as local in nature and as an entity with needs and problems. This phenomenon was evident amongst all categories of participants, from embedders to institutional leaders. 'Community' as an element of a civic rationale was most apparent within institutions located in close proximity to areas of disadvantage e.g. where homelessness or poverty was visible 'on the doorstep'. Concepts such as citizenship, democracy and civil society rarely featured in the discourse of those concerned with embedding or supporting the pedagogy, other than for those with a strong civic orientation or those for whom it is a central tenet of their discipline, such as in teacher education.

The impact of the external context

Silences in the discourse were illuminating. It was notable that the strategic intent of the institution (as articulated in its strategic plan) has little apparent impact on academics in terms of their motivation for adopting such pedagogies. Indeed, there was evidence that strategic direction was regarded by some as something to be resisted!

> People almost see something sinister in that – that the government comes out with a Task Force on Active Citizenship and they'll identify with certain dimensions of it [in higher education]. Often academics will see that as interfering with academic freedom. Now all of a sudden we all have to be altruistic and we all have to have our students volunteering… People can be quite cynical when something comes as an edict almost, and often our 'edicts' are not explicit edicts but they're strategised or incentivised through funding (Educational developer).

As noted earlier, a potentially relevant aspect of the new National Framework of Qualifications has been the inclusion of the competence of 'Insight' as one of eight dimensions by which all awards are described. Neither the existence nor the nature of the 'insight' dimension, however, registered with participants as an incentive for embedding S/CBL within the curriculum or indeed as a possible means of legitimising these counter-normative practices. Indeed few were even conscious of it. The extent to which participants – academics in particular – were unaware of or impervious to opportunities for alignment with institutional and national strategic priorities was striking. While reflecting a degree of disenchantment and some cynicism, it also

represented a lost opportunity to gain recognition and legitimisation for practices which resonated strongly with their personal beliefs about education.

The academic role

The issue upon which there was least consensus and most ambivalence was the place of values in higher education and the role of academics in that domain. On the one hand, some regarded interrogation of values as an integral part of their role and that civic engagement represents a vehicle for achieving important educational goals.

> To me [civic engagement] is part of the students' education, its part of their learning, that they understand that they're part of a society. I teach accountants, potential accountants, so my whole philosophy with them is that they are members of a society ….So we look at their political perspective – and some of them are not even sure what it is – but what do they see as their responsibility to society? (Enabler).

Where 'preparing good citizens' was regarded as a valid educational goal the inherent challenge in attempting to determine the extent to which such goals have been achieved was recognised. Reference was made to a need "to track some of the ones who have left, down the line, and see … does it lead to better citizens, if you can say that, in a judgemental sense when they leave" (Key agent). Fears were also voiced however, about the risk of 'imposing one's own views' and the prospect of 'civic education' was eschewed.

> Civic engagement, I'd see that as being more of a philosophy of trying to produce, in inverted commas ... 'better citizens'. I don't believe that is my role as an educator (Embedder).

The issue of academic rewards and workload featured throughout, in one way or another. A range of contrasting attitudes to the question of recognition for academic staff could be discerned. The association with volunteering was regarded as a problem.

> But for some I think you don't get them away from the idea that it's not volunteering; the vice president for research would think this is totally minor, nice stuff but not, not the real business (Strategist).

Inevitably, the issue of academic reward of recognition was an important theme. Absence of 'official recognition' was a source of some grievance. Where academics' endeavours in this domain were valued and valorised, it was generally acknowledged that such achievement were never 'on a par with peer reviewed journal articles'. The tendency to conceive of S/CBL 'merely' as a pedagogy – rather than as a civic engagement strategy – contributed to its diminished standing in the academic reward structure. The significance of this phenomenon, however, varied amongst individuals.

> I have never been rewarded for any of the things that I have done, that I would regard as civic engagement. I would not wish to be, I think it's completely different to teaching, which is part of my job. Civic engagement is not part of my job. It will inform my job, it will make me do my job better (Enabler).

Curriculum planning for S/CBL

Curriculum design process

In service/community-based learning (as with any other pedagogy) the academic's role is to design the curriculum – the activities and learning experiences which afford students the opportunity to learn – and to select appropriate, transparent and fair means of assessment of their achievement. Within the cases studied, curriculum planning was characterised by an organic, incremental and bottom-up approach, most commonly undertaken as a solitary and independent activity, rather than as a collaborative effort. Embedders' beliefs about education and their orientation to civic engagement, however, were more tacit than explicit, in both their discourse and their practice. They were rarely reflected in formal curriculum documents. In some cases the actual mode of teaching and learning used (i.e. service/community-based learning) was not indicated within the course outline – ostensibly in the interest of flexibility. More significantly, the civic-oriented goals and learning outcomes which might be anticipated were rarely made explicit. This may prove to be an inevitable part of the nascent phase in the development of the practice. There was evidence throughout of a degree of tentativeness about committing to an experiential community-based pedagogy. In practice, embedders tended to use or adapt existing module/s as a means of circumventing the need to submit a new module for validation and of ensuring a degree of flexibility. In some instances, the pedagogy was not formally 'named' and in one case existed entirely 'below the radar' within the institution.

S/CBL provided obvious opportunities for students to demonstrate application of their academic knowledge and skills – assessment in this domain presented few challenges. The vexed issue of assessing 'good' values or dispositions in a curricular context recurred. This dilemma was most apparent in how – over a couple of iterations of some projects – there had been a drift away from assessing 'civic outcomes' towards a focus on the 'purely academic' outcomes. Assessment of capacity to reflect was the most challenging aspect of the assessment process for many academics, resulting in its marginalisation or elimination from the formal assessment process, especially in disciplines where it did not feature as a routine practice.

The new pedagogy was generally introduced into pre-existing academic programs and consequently embedders talked freely of finding, making or borrowing time on the timetable. With the advent of modularisation and the tying of contact time more closely to European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits, time – as represented on the timetable – becomes a negotiable and tradeable commodity. Often incorporation in the curriculum was achieved through skilful negotiation and creative timetabling with the support of an enabler within the institution. Such arrangements represented a significant achievement given the politics of curriculum and the harsh realities of trading subjects.

> If something goes in, something goes out… [but] nobody wants to give in. Everybody wants to keep loading up the curriculum, but nobody wants to take anything out (Academic leader).

Organisational factors

A key decision in the curriculum planning process relates to how the learning experience is to be organised and managed. It was possible to identify the two most significant dimensions upon which organisation of S/CBL differed. These emerged as a basis for classifying and understanding the cases.

1. Internal: The level of internal collaboration amongst embedders
   - Solo: designed and implemented by one academic
   - Collaborative: designed and implemented by two or more academics as a team
2. External: The nature of the external relationship with community
   - Student led: where student projects/placements were sourced primarily by students, singly or in small groups
   - Partnership: where student projects/placements were sourced and organised in partnership with community agencies.

The enduring tendency for academics to work independently in a solo capacity – by choice or by virtue of the obstacles to collaboration – was confirmed by these cases. Sourcing of placements/projects/community organisations by students was the preferred strategy – primarily in the interest of fostering self-reliance and a sense of ownership of the project. The logistics of doing otherwise often proved prohibitive. Where S/CBL placements/project were organised unilaterally by students, the responsibility for the quality of the experience fell to the student. In such cases there was limited expectation of continuity of projects or of enduring community partnerships from year to year. In projects where placements were sourced, organised and managed in partnership with community agencies, this responsibility was borne primarily by the embedder/s and the community partner, to a lesser extent. In these partnership arrangements, there was a greater chance (or even an expectation) that links would be maintained from year to year, if they proved mutually beneficial.

On the strength of the case study data it was possible to establish a composite measure of 'level of complexity' with 'collaborative/partnership' projects positioned as the most complex and solo/student-sourced as the least complex in organisational terms, on a continuum, illustrated in Figure 1.

Level of complexity	Type of SL/CBL project		Capacity for reciprocity	Incidence of challenges
	Internal organisation	External relationship		
Most	Collaborative	Partnership	Most	Most
↑	Solo	Partnership	↑	↑
	Collaborative	Sourced by student		
Least	Solo	Sourced by student	Least	Least

Figure 1: A typology of projects based on level of complexity
(combination of internal organisation and external relationships)

Not surprisingly, incidence of challenges (such as organisational issues, disconnectedness, problems with internal relationships, – 'meetings more meetings' – funding, resources and ethical issues) was directly associated with the level of complexity of a project. While organisational issues outweighed all other types of challenges for all types of project, they were at their most acute in complex projects. Problems associated with expectations (unclear or unfulfilled) were apparent only in collaborative, partnership relationships. Ethical issues, including that of intellectual property, raised wider questions about the values underpinning civic engagement and the institutions' traditional proprietorial position in relation to IP.

The likelihood of an imbalance in the benefits accruing to students and to the community partners was widely acknowledged. Ironically, embedders were more likely to be aware of this in collaborative or partnership models where efforts were made to promote reciprocity. Arising from her experience embedding a S/CBL project with art students, for example, an embedder reflects:

> And I've a feeling it's the students [that benefit] because they walk away after six weeks having had this big flashy show, which really hasn't got a lot to do with the community that they're in. . . . and I would hate to think the communities have been used like paint, a medium. That is always a problem on the mind and you're also attracting different type of students because now it's getting real sexy (Embedder).

Embedding S/CBL

Embeddedness

In conventional parlance, the term 'embed' invokes incorporation into an existing entity and a degree of permanency. Conceptions of embedding S/CBL ranged from an emphasis on a high profile, structured, coherent approach to a belief that a truly embedded pedagogy would be invisible, by virtue of being 'woven into the fabric' of the institution. It was possible to use a number of indicators as proxies for the apparent level of 'embeddedness' on two dimensions as follows:

1. Embeddedness within the curriculum – based on indicators such as the extent to which S/CBL is established as a defined element of an academic program and/or how established it has become as an integral/core/mandatory element of an individual module.
2. Embeddedness within the institution – based on indicators such as the existence of an explicit policy on civic engagement, the provision, position and location of a dedicated unit to support and promote S/CBL throughout the institution and the prevalence of other examples of S/CBL within the institution.

A composite measure was devised using a combination of curricular and institutional embeddedness. From the cases studied, this composite level of embeddedness was a good indicator of the sustainability of an individual S/CBL project. The more embedded a practice was, the greater the likelihood that, in spite of all other challenging organisational factors, the embedder was likely to be willing to continue and develop the project. A range of other factors and conditions proved influential in the decision of individual academics to continue such work.

Sustainability

No single factor accounts in a consistent and predictable way for variations in the willingness and capacity of academics to embed a pedagogy for civic engagement – where 'to embed' infers a commitment to continue. While time and workload feature for most embedders as significant factors, absence of recognition within the institution is more likely to act as a disincentive. The impact of concerns about 'time and workload', combined with low levels of 'recognition', is at its most acute where academics feel the pressure of a wide range of responsibilities, including research. The combined impact of these factors tends to be greatest for more complex and challenging projects and in more research-intensive institutions. Exceptions to this generalisation may be explained by reference to an individual's orientation to civic engagement and/or the centrality of civic values to the discipline of the parent program. The commitment of one research-active senior academic to the continuation of a challenging collaborative partnership project – where colleagues were not – exemplifies the impact of a strong civic orientation.

There was universal acknowledgment that embedding S/CBL was and would remain entirely dependent on the initiative of individual enthusiastic, innovative academics. There was an implicit acknowledgement that no one should be expected to introduce S/CBL to their academic practice unless they regarded it as appropriate, viable and compatible with their values and belief about teaching and learning. Key agents were more likely to advocate an experimental approach in favour of 'mainstreaming' by decree.

> But it's like everything else . . . you have to 'suck it and see' with enthusiastic champions before you can start embedding; you have to show that it will work (Key agent).

Teaching and learning through civic engagement: Potential within teacher education

I have used the phrase 'teaching and learning *through* civic engagement' to acknowledge that, generally, it is primarily for the sake of student learning that

most of these practices exist. I have attempted, however, to clearly position S/CBL as an element of a wider civic engagement strategy. I have focussed on rationale from the perspective of academics because of the significance of their beliefs about teaching, learning and the role of higher education in society for the practice of S/CBL. This focus on academics is warranted because the pedagogy – by virtue of its nature and organisation – involves engagement by academics, as well as students, in an experiential learning process. While the role of community partners has not been addressed explicitly here, the example of 'Learning to Teach for Social Justice', gives some indication of the potential role they might play in a S/CBL initiative within teacher education and of the expectations they might have.

Findings from this study suggest that the nature of the rationale for service/community based learning has implications for its sustainability. The decision to embed the practice represents an individual response to a range of context-contingent factors and the academic's orientation to civic engagement plays an important part in that decision. The negative impact of factors which arise from complex projects or challenging contexts can be ameliorated by strong personal conviction regarding the potential for enhanced student learning. The transformative potential of more complex projects is an important incentivising factor for those with a strong civic orientation, such as for those working in teacher education. Organisational design also impacts on sustainability – collaborative/partnership projects are more challenging and have less certain futures. The study suggests, however, that where projects are complex, sustainability is enhanced if civic values (e.g. diversity, citizenship or social justice) are central to the parent discipline. These findings would suggest that the prospect of embedding collaborative, partnership models of S/CBL in the context of teacher education is promising.

These nascent developments in Irish higher education provide further evidence to support Zlotkowski's (1995) contention that legitimacy can be gained from constructing service learning as a pedagogy that enhances academic outcomes for students. The experience of the sustainable projects in this study, however, also lends support to Lounsbury and Pollack's (2001) assertion that reorientation of service learning (in the USA), with a greater emphasis on measurable, cognitive outcomes, has diminished its ability to legitimately pursue other civic outcomes originally associated with the pedagogy. There is evidence in my study that, in some disciplines, embeddedness within the curriculum was achieved by marginalising the more challenging assessment methodologies e.g. assessment of reflection. The capacity of teacher educators to promote and to assess reflection, however, augurs well for the successful incorporation of this defining characteristic of S/CBL.

The enduring challenge to which Pollack (1997) alludes to – of differentiating service learning from work placements or other forms of experiential learning – is heightened in fields such as teacher education. One way of conceiving of the distinction between this form of experiential learning and the practicum is that S/CBL initiatives – such as 'Learning to Teach for Social Justice' – can provide students with time and a safe space within the curriculum to engage in a personal journey of discovery, outside of the confines of a high-stakes practicum focussed on performativity. At the same time, S/CBL offers students the opportunity to contextualise learning from their academic courses.

A number of features of teacher education bode well for the prospects of a sustainable pedagogy which reflects the values of reciprocity, diversity and social inclusion associated with civic engagement. It is perhaps reasonable to speculate that teacher educators are less likely to express the level of ambivalence about the role of values in education shared by many of the academics in this study. Nonetheless, the design of learning opportunities for students to interrogate values and develop dispositions such as a commitment to social justice – in a manner that is consistent with those same values – remains challenging. Building and maintaining respectful, reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships with community remains the most challenging and most rewarding aspect of the civic engagement project. The emphasis on professional formation and the development of values and dispositions sets teacher education apart from many other disciplines in higher education in another respect. The endorsement of strategies which assist these processes – by key statutory bodies such as the Teaching Council – provides alignment opportunities for those seeking legitimisation and critically, seeking space within a curriculum.

Collectively, these factors suggest that teaching and learning through civic engagement offers genuine potential within teacher education as a pedagogy and as a civic engagement strategy. The irony is that in order to develop S/CBL as a civic engagement strategy which enhances learning, offers benefits for community, develops the civic skills, interest and participation of students, staff and institutional management while fostering strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative, interaction with the wider world – it may prove necessary to forfeit ambitious goals about universality. Embedding S/CBL as a sustainable practice in a manner consistent with its principles and values, may not be compatible with the ambitious goal of mainstreaming it within the curriculum for all. Such is the choice facing teacher educators, confirming yet again that a range of curriculum strategies is required to provide opportunities for the development of the core values of the teaching profession, while also attempting to realise the wider goals of civic engagement.

Notes

1. The National Qualifications Framework was proposed by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act and established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. It is a system of awards at ten levels (1-10), described in terms of eight dimensions. See http://www.nfq.ie/
2. The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession. See: http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/
3. *Campus Engage* is a network of higher education institutions in Ireland which aim to promote civic engagement in Irish higher education. See http://www.campusengage.ie
4. Travellers are an indigenous minority, documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long shared history and value system which make them a distinct group. They have their own language, customs and traditions. See http://www.paveepoint.ie/ for further details.
5. ALIVE (A Learning Initiative and the Volunteering Experience) was established by the CKI to harness, acknowledge and support the contribution that NUI Galway students make by volunteering. See http://www.nuigalwaycki.ie/menu.asp?menu=3091

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