

**Dewey, Freire and Student Engagement: A Critique of Tertiary Education  
Policy in Ireland and New Zealand.**

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## **Abstract**

An interest in the connection between engagement and learning in education has a long tradition from Aristotle to, among others, Dewey and Freire. In recent years there has been increasing discussion of student engagement in the university. Much of this discussion emphasises the importance of economic competitiveness and the development of human capital in tertiary education policy. This thesis explores whether tertiary education policy aims are consistent with student engagement in Ireland and New Zealand. To critically evaluate this area of policy the thesis engages with the work of Dewey and Freire. For Dewey and Freire, engagement, learning and the formation of the student in education are inextricably linked. It is argued that the aims and purposes of tertiary education, in Irish and New Zealand, policies limit possibilities for students to engage in their education. For Freire education is always a political process, and it follows that contemporary policy outlines a particular political and ethical vision of the university. Explicitly, this thesis engages with three neoliberal policy ideas that are inconsistent with calls for student engagement: the market orientation of the aims and ends of education; the prominence of an instrumental form of skills education within tertiary education policy; and, the organisation of the university under managerialism.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **The Problem**

This thesis is concerned with whether or not the aims of tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand are consistent with the contemporary drive for student engagement. Student engagement research is a growing and significant field because of its concern with student success. However, much of the student engagement literature is concerned with effective education and student success conceived in narrow academic terms. This thesis examines tertiary education policy aims in Ireland and New Zealand from a philosophical perspective, engaging with the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, two of the foremost educationists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For both Dewey and Freire, education is a way to understand and to participate in communal life. Although their theories have different emphases both argue for forms of education that are engaging; that begin with the student's experience and are critical, dialogic and democratic. This thesis will investigate whether the aims and purposes of tertiary education, as laid out in policy, affect opportunities for students to engage in their education. My research question is thus: *How consistent are tertiary education policy aims with student engagement in Ireland and New Zealand?* This chapter sets out the scope and focus of the thesis; it introduces the problem to be addressed and the context within which the research occurs. To begin, there will be a critical examination of the term 'student engagement', followed by an overview of the theoretical approach used and a brief biographical note on Dewey and Freire. This will be followed with an overview of the two tertiary education contexts within which this study is situated: Ireland and New Zealand. Finally, the thesis structure is mapped out with a synopsis of the remaining chapters.

## **Student Engagement**

Peters, Besley and White (2017) argue that “engagement has never been more relevant” (p. 1). Student engagement, as an umbrella term, has steadily grown into a significant area of research since the turn of the century (Maiers, 2008; Weimer, 2012; Zepke & Leach, 2010a). Engagement infers interaction, reciprocity and mutuality with someone or something beyond the self (Boland & McIlrath, 2007). Student engagement is not a new idea, the connection between engagement and learning in education has a long tradition (Butler-Kisber & Portelli, 2003). From Plato and Aristotle to Augustine, Rousseau, Dewey and Freire, “all involve a consideration of the connection between engagement and learning” (Butler-Kisber & Portelli, 2003, p. 207). For Dewey and Freire, as I will argue later in the thesis, this link is inextricable; education requires both engagement and learning. Student engagement is an ambiguous term that has been used in a multitude of ways, conceptualised differently, with various rationales and applied for contradictory purposes. It is proposed as a panacea for a number of educational challenges, from improving student learning, retention and graduation rates, to curricular relevance and is also credited with benefiting the institution in multifaceted ways, from being a part of institutional quality and marketing strategies, to more significant goals such as improving equality, social justice and democracy and, increasingly, for its economic benefit (Trowler, 2010; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; McMahon & Zyngier, 2009). Trowler (2010) outlines that “[d]iffering educational ideologies have implications for the way in which student engagement is understood and implemented or emphasised in an institution, as well as its significance and purpose” (pp. 40-41). She outlines four perspectives—traditionalism, progressivism, social reconstruction and enterprise, all of which may affect our understanding of student engagement. This section will provide an overview of how student engagement is understood in the literature. Here, I will

consider the questions: What is meant by engagement? Engagement in what? For what purposes? And, to what ends? (Vibert & Sheilds, 2003).

Student engagement research is predominantly a response to a problem perceived to exist in the education system: that is, unengaged or under-engaged students. This lack of engagement is, in the literature, predominantly ascribed to students in relation to their academic pursuits within the classroom. However, Mann (2001) argues that when researchers identify students as unengaged, they are identifying a lack of connection to their study. She explains that when students' study is orientated by the demands of an external other, their beings and desires are not wholly engaged, and these students can become alienated. Alienation: "the state or experience of being alienated" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017), is considered in the student engagement literature in either the existential sense—where it is part of the human condition—or in a socio-cultural and historical sense, as exemplified by Marx (Mann, 2001). The term alienation is used by a number of researchers as the antonym for engagement; rather than disengagement, which may imply a deficit on the part of students (McInnis, 2003).

Student engagement research is often concerned with the link between pedagogy and student engagement, and its rationale is to attempt to find the right or most appropriate pedagogy to engage students (Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992). Zepke (2011) identifies an increasing interest in student engagement research linked to an emphasis on the development of human capital and economic growth. This emphasis leads to calls for more successful students in terms of completion rates, widening access to tertiary education and increased employability. Carey (2013) further argues that the contemporary popularity of the rhetoric of student engagement in tertiary education is an extension of neoliberal ideology into policy. The drive to engage students in tertiary education is, therefore, nurtured by the desire to achieve neoliberal

outcomes. This approach co-opts the educational, democratic and liberating potential of student engagement research.

There are a variety of perspectives used in student engagement research (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Zepke & Leach, 2010b). Zepke (2017) identifies four conceptual frameworks that encompass the main perspectives. There are both similarities and differences in the way in which student engagement is understood across the research community. Nonetheless, there “is a shared view that engagement contributes to success, be it academic, personal or lifewide” (Zepke, 2017, p. 33). The first of these frameworks and perhaps the most popular is the quantitative approach that uses generic indicators of student engagement, as exemplified by the work of Kuh and colleagues on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE is broadly based on the work of Chickering and Gamson (1987) and their seven principles of good teaching in undergraduate education. Large-scale surveys currently preoccupy many researchers considering the concept of student engagement. Using this approach, Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) define student engagement as “the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practice” (p. 542). The survey instrument employed in such research is a quantitative measure of student and institutional behaviours. Widely used throughout the US and Canada (Kuh et al., 2008) it has had a significant impact on the direction of student engagement studies elsewhere. In New Zealand, the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) was adapted from the NSSE. Here, the research focus is “the extent to which students are engaging in activities that higher education research has shown to be linked with high-quality learning outcomes” (Krause & Coates, 2008, p. 493). The six attributes measured by the last survey were: active learning and students’ efforts to actively construct their knowledge,

academic challenge and the extent to which expectations and assessments challenge the student to learn, student-staff interactions and the level and nature of student contact with teaching staff, enriching educational experiences and student participation in developmental educational activities, supportive learning environments and student feelings of support within the university community, and the integration of employment-focused work experiences into study (Coates et al., 2008). This approach has also been borrowed and adapted in Ireland as the Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE), which is based on the NSSE and, more particularly, the AUSSE (Drennan et al. 2014). Such quantitative measures are useful for quality assurance processes, and the last cycle of university quality assurance in New Zealand highlighted student engagement as a significant academic theme in a series of AUSSE reports on the sector that were published in 2011 and 2012. However, its usefulness as an accountability and performance tool must be considered in light of the limitations of an approach that must simplify engagement into measurable units. Also, the survey tends to focus on institutional practices where the institution can exert some control, leaving other aspects of engagement unexamined (Wefald & Downey, 2009). Thus, “engagement becomes part of management orthodoxy” (Carey, 2013, p. 136).

The second approach to student engagement research conceptualises engagement as a psychological process (Kahu, 2013). This framework encompasses behavioural, cognitive and affective dimensions (Kahu, 2013). An example of the cognitive approach is found in Newmann, Wehlage and Lambom’s (1992) definition of student engagement as “active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention, in contrast to superficial participation, apathy, or lack of interest” (p. 11). Entwistle (2005) and colleagues consider approaches to learning. Students are identified as having deep, surface or strategic approaches to learning according to inventories such as the Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students (Entwistle, McCune & Tait,

2013). In New Zealand, Ditcher & Hunter (2000) argue that students' motivations for choosing a discipline of study are often a combination of increasing their future career opportunities and studying subjects that interest them (Ditcher & Hunter, 2000). A problem arises when career motivation comes to dominate this choice, thus affecting student's study attitudes, behaviours and approaches to study. As students increasingly come to think of their studies as a means toward a specific end, they may start to think strategically to achieve that goal, consequently maximising productivity by minimising effort in some areas, ultimately limiting themselves to a superficial understanding of their work. An instrumental approach to tertiary education treats learning as memorisation and regurgitation of lecture material; "The instrumental student has a pragmatic approach to education...Such students ask themselves how (or whether) the study of a text or the writing of a paper can help them achieve a higher grade and thus further their specific career or life plans" (Snyder, 1971, p. 16). Bryson and Hand (2008) describe this kind of instrumental approach to education as false engagement.

Both the behavioural and psychological approaches to student engagement tend to define it narrowly as academic achievement. This is in contrast to a more holistic view of education that conceives of the student as a whole person knowing, being and acting in and on the world. Both often use a deficit approach, which focuses on what the student needs to do to be more responsible for their education, to fix their own "internal deficits or deficiencies" (Valencia, 1997, p. 2). The asymmetries of power that might inhibit this sort of engagement are not always considered or discussed at length. The dearth of literature about the ethical and political nature of education and student engagement is of concern. The apolitical nature of approaches that focus on technical questions of engagement means that they can easily be adopted as techniques and strategies to further neoliberal goals for the university. Education researchers who use the

student engagement concept may do so in ways which ignore (and thus may be complicit in perpetuating) underlying contentious power relations in the lives of purported beneficiaries.

Conceptualising student engagement in this way only offers a partial understanding of education.

The third and fourth approaches to student engagement research described by Zepke (2017) work toward a more holistic understanding of student engagement, which acknowledges social, cultural and political contexts and consequences as well as individual student success.

Zepke (2017) identifies different emphasises within this research. The psycho-cultural perspective involves researchers reflecting on the student's situation outside the university. In particular, Lawson and Lawson (2013) emphasise the "powerful peer, family, and community influences outside of the school" (p. 465) on student engagement, in what they conceptualise as a socio-ecological approach to student engagement. However, students are both influenced by and, in turn, influence the world they live in, and it is this that Kahu (2013) considers in her framework of engagement. Her framework takes account of the structural and psychosocial influences on student engagement such as institutional policies, culture, student background and relationships. She also considers the consequences of student engagement in the personal and social domains such as learning, well-being, personal growth and citizenship.

Research on student engagement situated within a socio-political framework recognises the social, cultural, political and ethical contexts within which learning is situated. This research considers students and education in a holistic way. For Zepke (2015), this is a "holistic view of engagement in which it is a process leading to many possible senses of learning success" (p. 3). Vibert and Shields (2003) argue that, in education, it is possible to achieve the twin aims of academic excellence and social justice. They are, however, concerned with the literature's narrow focus on the student as an individual, leading to an approach to education that they argue

fails to take into account the complexities of contemporary society. In these circumstances, education is often perceived as a technical problem concerned with the transmission of knowledge or the flow of information and has a concomitant focus on the preparation of human capital for the labour market (Vibert & Shields, 2003). Engagement, in this sense, is not perceived as an end in itself but as a method of achieving these ends; “a more friendly method of encouraging ‘on-task behaviour’” (Vibert & Shields, 2003, p. 233). Vibert and Shields (2003) argue that the research on student engagement “is more productively imagined as a continuum, ranging from relatively rational and technical approaches to those that are more constructivist, to those reflecting a critical democratic worldview” (p. 237). They argue for a critical and democratic curriculum that “explicitly raises and deals with political issues including the question ‘in whose interests is this account of things?’” (Vibert & Shields, 2003, p. 235).

McMahon & Portelli (2004), continue in a similar vein, critiquing the most popular research on student engagement as being too narrowly focused on the “specific procedures, strategies, and skills that teachers ought to develop” (p. 60). They, like Vibert and Shields, argue for a critical-democratic conception of student engagement where there are questions about the purpose of engagement and how this purpose is constructed. They argue that questions about student engagement can only be resolved by firstly interrogating the purpose of tertiary education and success therein, as “[h]ow one views success will influence how one acts and what one considers to be worthwhile objectives” (McMahon & Portelli, 2012, p. 3). Student engagement, then, is concerned with the normative idea of what constitutes a *good education*. The conception of student engagement based on critical-democratic practice stimulates the development of personal agency and social transformation guided by democratic values such as social justice, equality, inclusion and autonomy. This approach emphasises the importance of

relationships to engagement and attends to the “nature of the relationships in the educative process and the substantive issues that are raised and discussed and the way they are dealt with” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 71). The importance of relationships in the university community and the effects of contemporary policy on these relationships will be explored further in Chapter 6. McMahon and Portelli’s (2004) conception of engaged pedagogy moves away from a deficit model where the student is, from the outset, constructed as deficient in some way; nor is it confined to students, as it also implies the engagement of “teachers, communities, systems and structures” (p. 71).

Barnett and Coates (2005), while developing a higher education curriculum for student engagement toward active citizenship, argue for an expansive view of student engagement. They understand it as a process that leads to educational success via a strategy that seeks to change student dispositions and habits, so they might better engage with their studies, community and society. Their curriculum framework has three dimensions concerned with knowing, acting and being (Barnett & Coates, 2005). Knowing is concerned with how students come to know while grappling with an uncertain and unstable world. Acting is concerned with how students learn to act in the world, while being involves students becoming more aware of themselves and the world they live in. The work of Barnett and Coates (2005) will be taken up again later in the thesis.

Student engagement also begs the question: engaging in what? As can be seen from this overview of the literature, student engagement is predominantly understood in the research as engagement with and in the curriculum. Some approaches look at how students engage with knowledge (Barnett & Coates, 2004) while many others are focused on what happens in the classroom, with relationships (Zepke, Leach & Butler, 2009) and the immediate learning

environment. There is also a body of work that looks at student engagement with university governance (Carey, 2013) and another that considers civic engagement where students are rightly considered citizens. Additionally, there are questions about how students engage with the curriculum, the university and society beyond the campus perimeter. To this end, there is a significant body of research—called student voice research—which considers *how* students engage or learn to act in the world. In student voice research, the perspective changes from talking *about* students to talking *with* them (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). Fielding (2001a, b, 2004, 2006) has published extensively on the student voice and student engagement within schools, and argues that “[t]he student voice movement has within it the possibility of educational transformation” (Fielding, 2001a, p. 108). Fielding (2004) explores some of the problems of student voice, such as speaking about others, for others and getting heard, and offers dialogue or ‘speaking with’, as a possible solution to these problems. Sometimes when students are included in decision making on curriculum or governance, their engagement is limited and transactional in nature, and is framed as feedback rather than dialogue. In these circumstances, there is a sense that students have little or nothing to offer, they have no expertise, and affairs can be managed better by experts more efficiently and productively.

Bragg (2007) draws attention to how, even when steps are taken to treat students as collegial partners in the university, students can be disciplined to behave in particular ways as active and responsible learners. Her ideas can also be extrapolated to student engagement in governance, where students are disciplined in normalised behaviour around activism, for example, by being taught the appropriate way to protest or participate in meetings. Bragg (2007) supports the action of encouraging student participation in research, thereby, drawing attention to “the exclusions and inequalities that lie at the heart of that society” (p. 356). There is always

politics in education, and this has implications for student engagement, which again will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As adumbrated earlier, the research on student engagement covers a variety of educational research perspectives, although, it is clear that if student engagement is concerned with success, then it is essential to know what success is. This research proposes that the term engagement here, as elsewhere, is often used as a synonym for education and, more particularly, good education. Good education is a normative idea, requiring focus on the purposes of education and how this is expressed within education processes. Good education involves thinking beyond how effective education is, and instead thinking about the desirability of what we are trying to achieve. Biesta (2015) argues for the need to “refocus on the normative question of good education, rather than on technical questions about effective education or competitive questions about excellent education” (p. 75). By engaging with implicit policy assumptions, this thesis argues an approach to education based on the work of Dewey and Freire that is critical in nature and democratic and dialogic in form. To be clear, in this thesis good education is taken to mean that which Dewey and Freire aspire to and outline in their work. For them, good education and engagement are inextricably linked. This approach to education and student learning responds to calls for student engagement as a means to strengthen educational outcomes by working *with* students.

The conception of student engagement developed in this thesis is somewhat different from that adopted by much of the mainstream work in the field. Here student engagement is taken as critical and democratic in nature and is philosophically grounded in the work of Dewey and Freire but not limited by this. There is some literature in the field that takes a critical democratic approach to the study of student engagement. While this thesis aligns with this

approach, it does not necessarily agree with all the research conducted under the critical-democratic umbrella.

Importantly, this thesis will attend to the political and ethical nature of education within and beyond the classroom and indeed the university itself. Much of the literature on student engagement is concerned with *doing* student engagement and with *what works* in teaching and learning (Zepke, 2017), and is framed as politically neutral. Thus, the assumption is that education should maintain the status quo (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). This kind of work is limited by its disregard for the socio-political context of students. By not addressing this context the inequities and inconsistencies within both society and the education system are not identified and are thus often perpetuated. In these circumstances, student engagement research has the potential to become another method of domination. There is no one approach to engage with students authentically, but some approaches are better than others, and the case for this approach is argued throughout the thesis.

This thesis is concerned that a substantial portion of the student engagement research does not question the purpose of engagement in education (McMahon & Portelli, 2004). Much of the research is limited by a deficit approach to student engagement that focuses on student behaviour and attitudes and the practices and techniques that might remedy these. However, practices and techniques are by themselves inadequate if not understood within the intellectual, epistemological, normative and political context within which they arose. Within the literature, there is a variety of concerns about and tensions within and between various aspects of student engagement from student behaviour, to relationships, the university community and civic society beyond, from concerns with curricula design and assessments, teaching methodologies, and environment. However, the theoretical approach to an activity is as important as the practice, as

this can have a direct effect on the process and the outcome of the engagement. Throughout this thesis examples from a variety of practices associated with student engagement are used to illustrate the theory.

This thesis takes a broad view of student engagement that looks to the work of Dewey and Freire for philosophical grounding. While different both were concerned with education that is engaging, that begins with the student experience and involves critically reflecting on that experience through dialogue or communication with others, to create a more equitable and democratic world. This is an approach that is attentive to the ethical and political nature of education. This thesis offers a political, ontological and ethical justification for this perspective of student engagement and a theoretical foundation for thinking otherwise about student engagement.

### **Theoretical Approach**

This thesis is a philosophically-based examination, analysing and critiquing policy ideas within the contexts of Ireland and New Zealand. It draws upon the work of Dewey and Freire in order to critically evaluate ideas promulgated in the policy literature in these contexts. These two educationists were chosen for a number of reasons. They are both referred to in the current body of literature on student engagement. They are both concerned with education that is engaging, that begins with the student experience and involves critically reflecting on that experience through dialogue or communication with others to create a more equitable and democratic world. In their view engagement is, therefore, an inextricable part of education. In different ways and with different emphases they were both concerned with the ethical, political and social nature of education. Student engagement is realised in the process and relationships involved in praxis and reflective experience, through creative democracy and an approach to

education that is mindful of ethics and politics. These are the foundations of Dewey's and Freire's ideas.

Their work enables this thesis to address a qualitative aspect of student engagement that is not always attended to in the research. They are also both concerned with the uncertain and unfinished nature of education. The links between tertiary education policies and student engagement are fraught with tensions and contradictions, and their work offers an approach that remains open to these nuances. While their work contains many differences, highlighted where appropriate throughout the thesis—it also shares a number of themes. The two researchers lived in different times and places, and their work is grounded in different philosophical traditions. Applying their ideas to other contexts, including different countries and different times, must be done with care. They both dismissed the idea of simply borrowing their theories and applying them as a simple educational framework. They argued for the recreation and reformation of their work, and in part, that is what this thesis has achieved.

The work in this thesis is specifically grounded in the two real-world contexts of Ireland and New Zealand. Freire argues the importance of context in order to be able to read the word and the world (Freire, 1996b). He argues that analyses of the social and political situations that influence people's lives must be grounded in real-life. As the way in which people construct knowledge is directly connected to their values and beliefs and, subsequently, to how they make sense of the world. It is impossible, therefore, to explore theoretical ideas without grounding them in the real world. Dewey (1985) argues that "the most pervasive fallacy of philosophic thinking goes back to neglect of context" (p. 5). He explains that when people dissect the world, they must not forget the concrete contexts from which the dissections stem. For Dewey, it is only possible to know the world through interacting with it. Dewey and Freire placed

considerable importance on context, as this undoubtedly affected their educational ideas. A short biographical note to outline these contexts follows in the next sections. Given their positions, the work of this thesis is based within a specific context and critically analyses the contemporary tertiary education policy of Ireland and New Zealand. These two societies are similar in many ways but also present differences that may facilitate more nuanced engagement and comparison. The investigations and arguments presented in this thesis are grounded in both policy and practice in these contexts.

Policy is variously thought of as: a statement of the current state of affairs, a utopian vision for an idealised society, a set of rules designed to bring about change sometimes assisted by a funding commitment, a way to balance competing social interests, a statement of intent, a problem solving plan of action, or a set of guidelines, among other understandings. Policy resists straightforward definition, but it involves both a process and a product (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). Many of the conceptualisations of policy tend toward a portrayal of it as neutral, value-free and independent from politics. More recently, critical studies of policy have come to challenge these previous conceptualisations of the policy project, calling into question the truth of institutions, and social and political relations (Ozga, 2000). Kelsey (2015) argues that “to understand what appears as a law, policy or action you need to excavate below the surface, find the nucleus from which it came and the many subterranean threads that fed into that” (p. 267). A critical policy analysis examines values and centralises power, asking questions such as: whose values are prioritised in policy; why is this approach taken; and who benefits or suffers from this policy? Understanding policies as value-laden means that policy can be understood as a tool that promotes the values and ideology of specific groups in society. Prunty (1985) concludes that in policy, “the authoritative allocation of values draws our attention to the centrality of power

and control in the concept of policy” (p. 136). The values expressed in policy, whether implicit or explicit, show what is important and, thus, who is important.

A critical perspective also questions the motivations and purposes of policy. For example, it may ask: What problem is this policy trying to address? Olssen, Codd and O’Neill (2004) argue that “fundamentally, policy is about the exercise of political power and the language that is used to legitimate that process” (p. 72). A critical policy study understands policy as a tool or technology for maintaining normalised power relations, thereby maintaining dominant power interests. As Codd (2005) argues, policy is concerned with political decisions that use power to change or maintain educational institutions and their practices. In this thesis, the political nature of policy, the values it promotes, and its relationship to education are critically analysed. Chapter 3 consider the politics of contemporary tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand, while Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deals with specific policy ideas that promote a particular way of being and learning together in the university.

This thesis concentrates on education policy *for* Ireland and New Zealand. This means that the policy studied in this thesis is policy from the national level. It should be acknowledged that there are also influential policies at the institutional and local level. However, national policy in both countries influences local policy. In both Ireland and New Zealand, institutional visions and policies in education are expected to align with national visions and policy for tertiary education. And yet, there is still scope within institutions to resist aspects of national policy. State-funded institutions are, however, strongly encouraged to align to national policy. Nevertheless, there are consistencies and inconsistencies within policy, between policy *for* and *in* tertiary education and between policy and its application in the world. Policy doesn’t always infer practice; people do not always agree with or follow through on what is said. There are

always spaces for resistance. Sometimes student engagement work is consistent with policy, and sometimes inconsistent. Some policy documents are also more supportive of some student engagement aims and ideals than other. This thesis seeks to remain open to new understandings of the contradictions and tensions in this area.

Throughout his career, Dewey wrote prolifically and challenged many of the established ways of thinking about education, and he continues to challenge educationists today. Among his ideas, Dewey explains the importance of democracy arguing for democracy as a way of life, a way of inquiring into the world, a manner of expressing our individuality and participating in social life. This democratic way of life means continuously and creatively reconstructing the world and ourselves, making new meaning and creating new habits. Growth is the result of these new experiences. For Dewey, the purpose of education is growth, and democratic experience is the best way to achieve this. This is why education and democracy are intimately linked in his thought. Dewey also argues that education is a social process and that the school is a social institution or community. Although Dewey often writes about the school, his ideas are easily transferable to the university context, and he often did just that. Dewey maintains that education is instrumental in creating social change and the best place for political and democratic action is the student's community, which is the school. He argues that the school is, and can be, democratic. Students can learn from the experience of participating in a local political system; but through democracy, they can also continually recreate that system by developing relationships with others to form a community and creating shared intersubjective meaning. The school also provides an opportunity to grapple with problems that are of real concern to students. Experience is an important part of Dewey's philosophy of education, and he argues that students find more connection to problems that confront them in their daily lives and, consequently, are

more engaged in solving such problems than purely abstract ones. Additionally, he acknowledges the tension between democratic freedom and authority in the classroom, explaining in turn that this tension exists and learning how to navigate it is part of the work of the democratic community of the school (Dewey, 1991).

Freire argues that education is political and focuses on the gritty realities of life and power in education. He argues that education as a mere depositing of information and ideas—what he calls the banking concept of education—turns student from subjects into objects, mere receptacles for information. Critical, dialogical reflection and action for social transformation is, he argues, the basis of any educational endeavour. This form of dialogue liberates students, engages students, centres students, cares for students and, ultimately, always respects students. Freire explains that a “liberatory dialogue is a democratic communication” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.99). It is a way of understanding the world, of making meaning of the world and in turn of acknowledging the relationship between knowledge, authority and power. It is a way of trying to understand the tensions that exist in the world and of acting to improve them. For Freire, like Dewey, a free person is always re-creating the world, permanently in a state of becoming.

The thesis reflects on Dewey’s idea of education for growth and Freire’s idea of education for liberation and emancipation. Both of these conceptions approach education and student formation as processes of becoming, which is in contrast to policy, which conceptualises education as a process to become: employable and entrepreneurial, among other things. In Chapter 5, the works of Freire (on educational virtues) and Dewey (on habits) are used to reflect on neoliberal educational virtues in tertiary education. In Chapter 6, Dewey’s concept of the community of inquiry and its relation to democracy as a way of living together is used to discuss the social nature of education. Meanwhile, Freire’s ideas about the conditions for dialogue that

buttress community are used to reflect on managerialism in the university. It is through discussing these ideas and critically reflecting on policy within the contexts of Ireland and New Zealand that this thesis argues the self-contradictory nature of policy in relation to student engagement.

### **John Dewey**

Dewey was one of the most significant educationists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a leading social reformer; his ideas are still evident in many education systems to this day. He was born in Burlington, Vermont, in the United States of America in 1859, a burgeoning industrialised community (Westbrook, 1991). His father broke from the family farming tradition and set up a local business, but at the outbreak of the American Civil War, he sold his business and joined the army. Dewey's independent and determined mother took her three children to join their father beside the battlefields (Westbrook, 1991), an experience which left a considerable impression on young Dewey. In 1875, Dewey enrolled in the University of Vermont, and upon graduating, began work as a high school teacher in Pennsylvania. After some initial success with publications, he enrolled in Johns Hopkins University in 1882 to study philosophy. After he was awarded his PhD in 1884, he first took up a position at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, followed by the University of Chicago. At the University of Chicago, he set up the famous Laboratory School, which later became known colloquially as the *Dewey School*. The Laboratory School was a place for educational experimentation, where theory and practice were put to the test. In 1904, after a dispute with the president of the university, he resigned and took a position at Columbia University in New York where he worked for the remainder of his academic career (Garrison, 1996). Throughout his career, he was a prolific writer with one of his best-known works, *Democracy and Education*, published in 1916, fore-fronting his educational

ideas globally. He died in 1952 but throughout his career, Dewey was both an academic and, as importantly (though sometimes forgotten), he was also a social activist. His interest in education was part of a broader concern for social justice and its achievement through stable democracy. Politically, he supported women's suffrage, was very active in the teachers' union, and participated in the trial of Leon Trotsky in 1938. It is important to note that Dewey's context was the democratic United States of America, which he perceived to be in a state of *becoming*.

### **Paulo Freire**

Freire is one of the most important educational philosophers of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born in 1921 into a middle class family in Recife, Brazil, his father died in 1934, which had a profound impact on the family. This was a time of economic depression in Brazil, and he and his family did not escape this, experiencing both poverty and hunger. The situation of the family improved over the years and, eventually, he completed his study of law at the University of Recife. After completing his degree, he developed a keen interest in education, fuelled by a prior interest in linguistics and grammar (Roberts, 2000). He went on to work with the Social Service of Industry, where his work brought him into contact with the people of northeast Brazil, and it is within this context that many of his political and pedagogical ideas developed. While at the University of Recife in the 1960s, he connected with many Brazilians while director of a national literacy campaign. Freire's work must also be considered within its social context. Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s was characterised by inequalities of resources and wealth, including necessities such as shelter, food and water. The military coup of 1964 led to his house arrest and eventual deportation (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013), but following on from this he worked in various countries, including Chile, the US and Switzerland, and published numerous books including his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He eventually returned to Brazil

in 1980 following an amnesty declared the previous year (McLaren & Leonard, 1993). Since the publication in English of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970, educators working for social change around the world have found inspiration and hope in his work. He was, himself, a reflective thinker, and throughout his career, there were shifts in his thinking as he strove for a deeper understanding of society (Roberts, 2000). Freire died in 1997 leaving a body of work that has been applied in areas from literacy program development to critical pedagogy, sociology, economics and beyond.

### **Why Ireland and New Zealand?**

The tertiary education systems of Ireland and New Zealand are the context of this thesis. These two countries have numerous similarities including size and focus on economic growth. They are both peripheral to the global economy and yet aspire to be among the OECD's highest performers (Kelsey, 2015). The people of Ireland and New Zealand expect a high standard of living commensurate with their economic ambitions. Both countries have a colonial past, are Anglophone, have similar judicial structures and comparable population sizes. There are also numerous differences between the two nations, which provide opportunities to compare the educational ideas that underpin their tertiary education systems. Ireland's membership of the European Union and its location just off mainland Europe, close to the United Kingdom, is in contrast to New Zealand's relative geographic isolation. New Zealand is a multicultural society with a relatively short human history, whereas Ireland has, until recently, been reasonably monocultural, and has a long human and cultural history. Both countries have experienced a rapidly growing tertiary education system over the last 30 years. They have a similar number of universities that constitute part of the tertiary education sector, and which are complemented by a diverse group of institutions including institutes of technology and private providers. The

unprecedented changes in Ireland and New Zealand's tertiary education systems that have occurred since the ongoing reforms of the 1990s have been widely discussed in the literature of many academic disciplines. This discussion continues as new strategies and policies for the sector are created and promulgated, making the Irish and New Zealand tertiary education systems thought-provoking sites of study for the investigation of the processes and effects of neoliberal policy changes.

### **A Note on Terminology**

At this point, the matter of terminology must be clarified. The concept of a higher or tertiary education sector is relatively new. Until relatively recently, the idea of a tertiary education system at the national level did not exist. Universities as autonomous institutions were independent and, thus, were dealt with and referred to simply by their individual titles. In Ireland, the term *higher education* is used to denote the tertiary education sector, which consists of universities and vocational education institutes offering advanced programs of study. *Further education* is the term used to refer to all other forms of post-compulsory education, of which many are considered vocational in orientation. Increasingly, the lines between further and higher education are blurring, with the ultimate definition depending on the position of the institution's program on the National Qualification Framework. Ireland has a ten-level qualifications framework, and programmes offered from levels 6 to 10 on the framework are deemed 'higher education'. In New Zealand, the term *tertiary education* includes all post-secondary education, vocational education and training, and undergraduate and postgraduate education. It is also concerned with adult literacy. As such, it is more dependent on the age group of the students rather than the complexity of the studies. This difference in the compositions of the sector in each country illustrates that there are different conceptions of the sector. While the terminology

particular to each jurisdiction will be used in this chapter and in quotations included in the thesis, the term *tertiary education* will be used throughout to refer to the sector and the term *university* to refer to individual institutions.

Regarding the application of educational ideas to different educational contexts, both Dewey and Freire used their ideas in a range of different contexts, from schools to universities. They did, however, take careful consideration of the context they were speaking about, particularly as the manner in which their ideas were applied was not always the same. For example, Roberts (2008b) explains that critical thought may be taught differently to a child at an early childhood centre than to a student undertaking a master's degree at a university. When it comes to talking about educational ideas, the exact title and nature of an institution is less important than its educational purposes and the relationships therein, which enhance student engagement and sustain the institution.

### **Higher Education in Ireland**

The island of Ireland comprises two jurisdictions: Northern Ireland and Ireland. Éire, or Ireland, accounts for the majority of the island's landmass and population. An understanding of Ireland's past is necessary to understand its present. It has a history of colonisation, the most recent of which came about in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century with the gradual imposition of English law across the island, a situation that is evident in the legal traditions and close economic ties of the country to this day. In 1919, the Irish Republic was declared by the elected representatives of the day, but between treaties and civil war, a new constitution was not adopted until 1937 and, finally, in 1949, what was a Free State was officially declared a republic making Ireland a relatively young democracy. It was the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 that separated the north of the island (Northern Ireland) from the south of the island (Ireland). A history of weak

economic growth linked to colonisation was interrupted in the 1990s by the “Celtic Tiger”—a time of unprecedented economic growth for the country (Coolahan, 2003). This period of growth was followed by an abrupt economic downturn, and the country was the first in Europe to request financial assistance from the EU and IMF in the wake of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

In Ireland, there are seven universities, 14 institutes of technology, seven colleges of education, and some specialised institutions (Drennan et al., 2014). Ireland’s first university, the University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD) was established in 1592 at a time when universities were becoming established across Europe. Queens Colleges in Belfast, Cork and Galway followed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to religious tensions, these were initially unsuccessful, and the universities at both Galway (NUIG) and Cork (UCC) later became part of the National University of Ireland. The arrival of John Henry Newman to Ireland in 1854 to establish a Catholic University brought religious diversity to a system that was until then Anglican. Newman also brought with him his now famous *Idea of a University* (Newman, 2014). The institution he established became University College Dublin (UCD), currently the largest university in Ireland.

Vocationally-orientated learning at vocational colleges began in Dublin around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These centres later evolved to become the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and were enhanced by the establishment of the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) established in the 1970s around Ireland. In the 1970s, building on a vocational idea of higher education, the government set about establishing two National Institutes of Higher Education based in Limerick and Dublin, which were established under the 1980 Acts. In less than a decade, these were to become universities in their own right. By 2006, the Regional Technical

Colleges were thought to have fully embraced their mission of vocational education and found themselves increasingly providing vocational higher education. They were established as Institutes of Technology (IoTs) and, over time, were delegated the authority to create their curriculum and award their own degrees (Clancy, 2007). In 2007, the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Institutes of Technology came under the umbrella of the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which was traditionally the intermediate body between the universities and the state that administered higher education. Regarding the structure of the sector, there are currently moves afoot to amalgamate the majority of the Institutes of Technology into two multi-site Technological Universities.

Clancy (2007) has described the state's role in education up until the 1960s as one of a subsidiarity, whereby the state-aided education institutions rather than owning them. This was particularly evident in higher education, where the Department of Finance funded the sector with seemingly no role for the Department of Education in its affairs. The State was kept at arm's length from the universities for some time, and under the 1971 Act, the Higher Education Authority was established. At this time, higher education began to be considered as a sector rather than as several autonomous universities. The Higher Education Authority was the first sectoral body and was initially perceived as being in sympathy with the universities; a cosy intermediary or even a site of translation between the universities and the government. The purpose and scope of the Higher Education Authority, however, have changed over time and its role in recent years is much more central to the system that has developed. That role is now one of overseeing the sector on behalf of the government. A number of quality assurance agencies were also developed as part of the reforms of the sector, being the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC), the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National

Qualification Authority of Ireland (NQAI) which, in 2012, all amalgamated into Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

The policy changes introduced in Ireland from the late 1950s were initiated by the publication of a report entitled *Economic Development*, which was prepared by T. K. Whitaker, the then Secretary of the Department of Finance and an architect of the modern state. The changes this report wrought included a shift in the political discourse of the country to one where the prevailing political perspective was, from this point, economic (White, 2001). This marked a watershed for Irish social policy, with the centralisation of the economy proposed as the method for achieving a stronger, more prosperous society. In 1992, in a foreword to a Department of Education green paper entitled *Education for a Changing World*, the then Minister for Education, Séamus Brennan, wrote of a moment of change in education in Ireland that would adapt the education system to the “complexities of the modern world” (DoES, 1992, p. iii). A particular area for attention that the Minister noted at this time was the development of “a spirit of enterprise” among Ireland’s youth. The white paper that followed in 1995 was the first in a line of policies and legislation that affected change within Irish education as a whole. The white paper explicitly focused on the development of the individual and the promotion of economic gains (DoES, 1995, p. 4). In the early 1990s, there was renewed debate on education in Ireland following the 1991 *OECD Review of National Policies of Education*. This subsequently led to the Department of Education publishing a white paper entitled *Charting our Education Future* (DoES, 1995). This paper set the course for education policy development in Ireland thereafter. In the words of the Ministry it was;

The articulation, nationally, of a statement of broad educational aims, which focus on nurturing the holistic development of the individual and promoting the social and

economic welfare of society, including the provision and renewal of the skills and competencies necessary for the development of our economy and society (DoES, 1995 p. 4).

The *Universities Act 1997* legislated for the changes that the state envisaged. It contained sections dealing with “the objects and functions of a university, the structure and role of governing bodies, staffing arrangements, composition and role of academic councils and sections relating to finance, property and reporting” (OECD, 2006, p. 150). The Act also outlines eleven objectives for Irish universities that illustrate the government’s understanding of their roles as: vehicles for advancing knowledge and learning through teaching and research; promoters of culture, society, diversity and the Irish language; supporters of national economic development; and providers of life-long learning, and high-quality teaching and research (Government of Ireland, 1997).

In Ireland’s universities over the last 50 years, research has moved from being a peripheral activity to become a central occupation (Clancy, 2015). The establishment of the *Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions* (PRTLI) in 1998 was a paradigm shift in Irish higher education. The government of that time wanted to invest in Ireland’s weak research program to bring it into line with its agenda for innovation and quality improvement. This €604 million research funding program was awarded based predominantly on adherence to a particular idea of quality and the degree of alignment of the institutional research strategy to the government’s strategy. Hence, it became a robust directional force for many in the academic community. Science Foundation Ireland was established in 2000 with a budget of €646 million to spend on research in information and communication technology (ICT) and biotechnology, while the Research Councils for Humanities and Social Science (2000) and Science and

Technology (2001) began with more modest budgets (Clancy, 2007). The intentions of the government regarding the purpose of higher education in Ireland were made abundantly clear by its financial actions.

The current and latest overarching strategic document for higher education is entitled the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011), known locally and informally as the *Hunt Report*. This laid out the government's ongoing strategy for the sector. Coming after the global financial crisis, the *Hunt Report* (DoES, 2011) portrays the university as the incubator of economic prosperity and equates this to a form of societal success. The language and logic of this policy document are permeated with economic imperatives, with higher education inextricably linked to economic development and additionally perceived as a "shop window for national attainment and achievements" (DoES, 2011, p. 31). The strategy ostensibly refocuses on the continuing themes of improved teaching quality, economic relevance of the curriculum, flexible learning pathways and increased industry involvement at every level of the university, to create high-value jobs and real benefits for society (DoES, 2011). This latest policy document continues the previous policy trajectory with a continuation of the same language and logic that had permeated sectorial policy previously. This document observes some themes continuing from previous policies and reports, and could be portrayed as, in essence, a synthesis of previous governmental policies and reports (Walsh & Loxley, 2014). Since the publication of the *Hunt Report* (2011), the Higher Education Authority has continued to publish policies developing the objectives and themes within that report. For example, the launch of the HEA report in 2012 entitled *Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape* offers further medium-term guidance to institutions.

Some trends are evident in the Irish higher education environment over the last 25 years.

Higher education in Ireland has expanded significantly in the last 50 years. In 1965, 21,000 students participated in higher education. By the 2011/12 academic year, this number stood at 196,000 students (HEA, 2013b) out of a total population of approximately 4.5 million. As the sector is predominantly state-aided, increasing numbers of students in higher education meant an increased burden on the state. Private providers accounted for about 10% of full-time provision of student places and most of the part-time provision, which stood at 21% of the total student places (Clancy, 2015). In 1995, the then Minister of Education announced the *Free Fees Initiative* for all third-level students in Ireland, to improve access to higher education opportunities. However, almost from the beginning, fees were gradually reintroduced, firstly as a small *Student Service Charge* that became progressively larger over the years and was not always used for the purpose intended (Connolly, 1996) until, finally, a *Student Contribution Fee* was announced in 2011. While a grant system does exist in Ireland that is aimed at supporting the participation of lower socioeconomic groups, there are no other financial supports for higher education students. Higher education funding continues to be a topical issue.

Concerns about the quality of education in the new institutes of technology and universities led to the development of quality evaluation systems for the sector as a whole. Much of the evaluative rhetoric initially came from the university sector, in a bid to safeguard their reputation as providers of higher education. While the introduction of systematic quality assurance procedures into the university sector was a more contested event and happened at a more gradual pace than with the institutes of technology, it did happen. It should be noted that before these developments, Ireland traditionally had a system of external examiners that presided over academic processes from the awarding of degrees to the allocation of research grants and

the appointment of staff (Clancy, 2015). Although the external examiner system still exists, there have been changes to it. The introduction of accountability mechanisms was legitimised through ‘value-for-money’ arguments and addressed risk aversion or the safeguarding of quality during the development of the private higher education sector.

The influence of university rankings has increased in Ireland in the last number of years, which can be seen in the increasing use of these metrics to market institutions. Most recently, the increasing influence of rankings can be seen in the formulation of policy in the HEA publication *Towards a Performance Evaluation Framework: Profiling Irish Higher Education* (HEA, 2013c). The literature review and bibliography for the publication makes an argument for improving the position of Irish higher education in international rankings. However, education in Ireland has always been strongly influenced by bodies external to the state. From its foundation, there has been a close association with the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the sphere of education (Whyte, 1980), which has waned in recent years (Quinn, Kennedy, Matthews & Kiely, 2006). There is evidence of increased external influence on Irish higher education policy from the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ryan, 2010). The European Union’s *Lisbon Agenda* and the subsequent *Bologna Process* to create a European Higher Education Area promoted the continued adoption of a policy approach based on the development of skills and competencies predominantly linked to the needs of the global employment market. US commercial interests in Ireland have also influenced the sector. A major source of external development funding for Irish universities has come from American philanthropy, in particular, from Charles F. Feeney who, from the 1990s, became the sector’s largest private funder (Clancy, 2015). Due to Ireland’s geographical position, its economic ties with Europe, the predominance of the English language, a low

corporate tax rate and its cultural ties to the US, a number of US transnational businesses seeking a hub in Europe have settled in Ireland. Over the years, there has been continued engagement between the interests of these businesses, both present and potential, and various governments regarding the development of the education system to serve their needs. Irish higher education policy has always been careful to stress the importance of the social aspects of education—from social inequality to civic engagement. However, in practice, these are often secondary to the goals of producing the economic development and human capital necessary to attract and maintain the interest of large multinational enterprises. The proportion of education accessible to underrepresented groups has been an explicit part of the policy discourse since the mid-1990s and yet, empirical studies have shown little improvement in relative terms (HEA, 2013b).

From the early 1990s, the government, buoyed by the success of its newly established, vocationally-conceived universities in Limerick and Dublin, gained the necessary confidence to become more involved in the sector (Clancy, 2007). It was decided that Ireland would focus on knowledge-based industries that required the development of human capital. This approach introduced market-based principles into Irish higher education. The reforms were not, however, unique, as they were part of broader public sector reforms which adopted these principles and accompanying management techniques such as accountability and performativity. The introduction of public sector agreements, particularly post-Celtic Tiger, impacted on staff contacts, pay, terms and benefits. However, Tormey (2007) argues that the introduction of a neoliberal agenda in Ireland was not necessary, as the system was already based on neoliberal consumer choice long before its rise elsewhere around the globe.

While the influence of neoliberalism in Irish higher education is evident from the early 1990s, the country has, since independence, been pro-market in its politics and policies (Lynch,

Grummel & Devine, 2012). The influence of the Catholic Church and its opposition to policies that instated public control over state services such as health and education stifled any nascent socialism in the country (Lynch et al., 2012). The lack of public infrastructure in the state meant that on accession into Europe in the 1970s, Ireland was at a competitive disadvantage and thus relied on the investment of transnational capitalism to sustain the economy. As O’Hearne (2003) argues,

since the southern Irish state correctly realised that the main incentive to attract transnational corporations (TNCs) was low corporate taxes, it pursued a neo-liberal growth model that matched low taxes and fiscal restraint with minimal government interference in business (p. 35).

O’Hearne continues to argue that the objective of achieving national economic growth obstructed the achievement of social objectives. For example, the state failed to use resources to reduce social inequalities or improve social welfare while continuing to decrease taxes, which favoured the wealthy. Lynch, Grummel and Devine (2012) argue that neoliberalism in Ireland was “adopted through political pragmatism and opportunism rather than explicit ideology” (p. 7). While the language of politics is suggestive of a social democratic approach, actual policy and practice contradicts this and is neoliberal in substance (Lynch et al., 2012).

### **Tertiary Education in New Zealand**

Aotearoa, or New Zealand, is a relatively isolated country in the South Pacific with a population similar to that of Ireland of approximately 4.5 million people. The two main islands are generally sparsely populated, with the majority of people inhabiting the three major cities, in particular, the city of Auckland. The country was first settled by the Māori people in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and large-scale settlement by Europeans began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Te Tiriti o

Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi), signed in 1840, is the country's founding document. Today, it is a culturally diverse country with a population of European, Māori, Pasifika and Asian descent. However, New Zealand's social inequality has a racial dimension with peoples of Māori and Pasifika descent more likely to have lower incomes, higher unemployment, lower education, higher participation in the criminal justice system, more inadequate housing and poorer health than other ethnic groups (Goedegebuure, Santiago, Fitznor, & Stensaker, 2008). New Zealand's economy has traditionally been based on the export of agricultural products but, in recent years, there has been a rise in the tourism industry.

Education in New Zealand is provided at the early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The definition of what constitutes tertiary education is quite broad in comparison to that of many other OECD countries. Indeed, New Zealand is unique in that it groups together all post-compulsory and adult education, including industry training, under a single strategy document. This is considered a specific dimension of the New Zealand education system (Crawford, 2016). As a result, there are a significant number of tertiary education organisations (TEOs), and the traditional distinction between higher and vocational education and training would appear to no longer apply. In New Zealand, there are eight universities, the first—the University of Otago—being founded in 1869. This was followed by the establishment of three more universities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Christchurch in 1873, Auckland in 1883 and Wellington in 1897), two in the 1960s (Waikato and Massey) and, more recently, in one in 1990 (Lincoln) and one in 2000 (Auckland University of Technology). Three of these universities evolved from vocational education providers. There are also 16 institutes of technology or polytechnics and three wānanga (institutes of higher education specialising in Māori knowledge and methodologies). Also, there are 216 private training establishments (PTEs), 11 industry

training organisations (ITOs) and 23 community education (CE) organisations (Tertiary Education Commission [TEC], 2017).

The 1970s and early 1980s was a time of international economic change, with capitalism reorganising itself globally. In the latter half of the 1980s, New Zealand underwent significant economic restructuring and “attracted international attention for its wide-ranging program of neoliberal reform” (Roberts, 2013, p. 4). Kelsey (2015) identifies the *New Zealand experiment* as having begun on 26 July 1984 with the election of the Fourth Labour Government. At this time, New Zealand underwent significant economic restructuring and “attracted international attention for its wide-ranging program of neoliberal reform” (Roberts, 2013, p. 4). This heralded a radical shift in the political philosophy of New Zealand; from a Keynesian welfare state to an increasingly market-driven one. The focus of the changes was to reduce government spending on social programs (McLaughlin, 2003). These reforms were framed as a response to a crisis of the economy, with economic stagnation on the one hand and changing economic practices on the other. The economic restructuring that took place at this time had various facets, including the deregulation of financial, labour and other markets, fiscal austerity, the initiation of free trade and capital flows and the corporatisation and privatisation of the public sector (Kelsey, 2015). This program to radically restructure New Zealand’s economic and social institutions was led by the Treasury and is often referred to as ‘Rogernomics’ after the Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas, who initiated the reforms along with his co-finance ministers Richard Prebble and David Caygill. The focus of the changes was to reduce government spending on social programs and public services to balance the budgetary constraints of lowered taxes and public debt, in a bid to stabilise inflation.

As a small country with a unicameral political system, policy and economic change proceeded quickly, unprecedentedly so in comparison to other nations trying similar reforms at the time. Following the Fourth Labour Government, the policy framework was further advanced by the National-led governments of 1990–1999 who were “ideologically committed to a neoliberal philosophy of social reform” (Roberts, 2007b, p. 356). ‘Third-way’ politics was pursued in New Zealand from 1999–2008, which sought a compromise between social democracy and unregulated capitalism. Roberts and Peters (2008) argue that, ultimately, it became just another iteration of neoliberalism. In spite of this and perhaps unsurprisingly, public policy has continued to have a somewhat monotonous quality in New Zealand and indeed globally since the 1990s—that of an increasingly economic focus. Unsurprisingly, the National governments from 2008 until the 2017 election continued with this focus.

Over the last three decades, New Zealand’s tertiary education sector has undergone an almost continuous process of review (Grey & Scott, 2012). Reviews of tertiary education have looked at, among other areas: the system, research funding, adult and community education, private training establishments, the provision of tertiary education in greater Auckland, internationalisation, student support, retention, completion and efficiency. Most recently, the Productivity Commission reviewed the tertiary education system. Each of these reviews has in some way led to change in the sector. Many of these changes mirror international developments in tertiary education. Before 1990, New Zealand universities operated under individual acts of parliament and were relatively autonomous and independent. In 1988, the *Hawke Report* (Department of Education, 1988) followed by the *Learning for Life* policy documents (Department of Education, 1989a, b) signalled changes to the system. Indeed, the concept of a tertiary education system was the first such change. The *Hawke Report* introduced new ways of

thinking and speaking about education, introducing language such as “clients”, “efficiency” and “accountability” into the lexicon. The report softened the language used earlier in a New Zealand’s Treasury report (1987) that attempted to apply economic analysis to education and, thus, to reconstitute education as a private good. However, it heralded the beginning of neoliberal policies in tertiary education (Olssen, 2002) and between 1997 and 1998, a flurry of green and white papers stressed the economic purposes of tertiary education.

After the election in 1999, as part of the new ‘third-way’ politics, the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) was appointed to map out a new direction for the sector. They quickly produced four papers in the *Shaping* policy paper series that advocated numerous changes (TEAC, 2000, 2001a, b, c). The TEAC comprised a number of academics with experience and expertise in the sector, and their recommendations were informed by research and international trends, which was not always part of the New Zealand experience of policy making (Stewart & Roberts, 2015). Currently, the overarching policy document for tertiary education policy is the *Tertiary Education Strategy* (TES). The latest version covers the period 2014 to 2019 (New Zealand Government, 2014) and is the fourth such strategy since 2002 and the second under the Fifth National Government. The priorities outlined in the strategies have remained relatively constant, and focus on strengthening the system, raising foundational skills, strengthening research and contributing to the development of Māori and Pasifika people. This latest TES is underpinned by the *Māori Education Strategy: Ka Hikitia - Accelerating Success 2013–2017*, the *Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017* and *Better Public Services 2001*, the government’s initiative for the whole of the public sector. The TES is operationalised in the *Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities* (STEP), which is a shorter-term implementation plan. Individual institutions then implement policy by preparing their plans, negotiating with state

officials and responding to the government's plan for the sector as a whole (Goedegebuure et al., 2008).

The Education Act was promulgated in 1989 and remains a comprehensive piece of legislation that sets the statutory framework for not only tertiary education but all of the other education sectors. Initially, the Act abolished the Department of Education and established in its stead the Ministry of Education. The University Grants Committee which, until that time, regulated the universities, was also abolished. The Act defines the types of tertiary organisations and the composition, function and duties of institution councils. These duties include strategic planning and the power to appoint the head of the institution. The first amendment to the Act in 1990 introduced a singular regulatory framework for all tertiary education institutions including universities. It also introduced corporate plans, chief executive officers (who were to become the employers of staff in the universities) and new forms of contractual accountability. Collegial processes for decision making gave way to corporate managerialism (Kelsey, 2000 in Codd, 2002). Universities are no longer self-governing but are overseen by government-appointed boards, whose role is to ensure compliance with national objectives. In 2003, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) was established in law and, since that time, it has, along with the Ministry of Education, been responsible for policy and funding decisions for the tertiary sector.

Tertiary education underwent an explosion in participation, from circa 120,000 students in 1985 to 282,000 in 2001, while presently there are over half a million students in the sector (McLaughlin, 2003; TEC, 2017). This massification of education, initially conceived as a democratising force, quickly became a response to a perceived need for an increasingly educated workforce that was also increasingly skilled and flexible. The policies of the 1990s mainly focused on competition and consumer choice, which were construed as a means of increasing

market efficiency (Olssen, 2002; Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994). The prevailing opinion at the time was that students would vote with their feet and, as a result, private institutions proliferated in response to a perceived need, resulting in fierce competition for students (Peters & Roberts, 1999). Ever since the turn of the millennium, there has been an increased emphasis on collaboration and cooperation, and a lessened emphasis on the competitive agenda (Roberts, 2008). At this time, institutions were dissuaded from focusing on competition with other institutions but were simultaneously encouraged to attract new customers into education to meet both national objectives and their own funding needs.

In New Zealand, universities derive their funding from four major sources: government subsidies, student tuition fees, research contracts and other services such as industry training. The proportion of government funding has continued to decline over the years with increases in user (student) funding. Before the reform measures of the 1990s, the tertiary education system operated predominantly without charge to the student. However, fees were subsequently introduced as the system became increasingly perceived as a private good. Student grants were once a feature of the system, but this was replaced by a student loans system and a means-tested student allowance scheme. Moreover, students were increasingly encouraged to accumulate personal debt in order finance their education (or as some witty students observed, their unemployment) at a time when the jobs market was increasingly volatile (Shore, 2010). In New Zealand, funding follows the student, which means that universities have to compete to attract students to maintain their funding. The previous method of allocating funds to institutions was to award bulk grants to institutions. The introduction of competitive funding poses a continuing threat to non-vocational courses. As Olssen (2002) explains, the effect of moving from a bulk funding system to competitive funding has “placed a conservative pressure on course design and

planning, and supports those programmes and courses that are perceived to have direct economic payoff, consequently diminishing those (such as humanities and social sciences) that are not so perceived” (p. 23).

As a consequence of reform, there have also been some changes to research. In particular, there is a new emphasis on research and creativity for innovation in the marketplace, with the continued trajectory of policy to cultivate research for commercial purposes. Prior to 1999, there had been problems funding research, however, the *Performance Based Research Funding* (PBRF) program was introduced to address these deficiencies and ostensibly to encourage and award excellent research activity in the sector. The PBRF is assessed on past performance and awarded based on an evaluation of staff research performance, the number of research degree completions at the institution and the level of external research awarded to that institution. The funding for 2018 is NZ\$315 million and, presently, around 97% of this goes to the universities (TEC, 2017). There has been criticism in the literature of the PBRF, such as its potential for “cementing the idea of competition within the intellectual domain” (Roberts, 2007c, p.491) and its potential for standardising research (Roberts, 2007b). The idea that creativity itself may be threatened by this standardisation is probably the most concerning for policymakers and academics alike. In addition to the PBRF, the ministry provides NZ\$50 million to fund ten university-led Centres of Research Excellence (CoREs). CoRE funding is awarded to research that is collaborative and strategically-focused on government objectives.

To facilitate broader economic reforms, business processes and concepts were introduced into the public sector (Olszen, 2002) and as a result, universities have become more like businesses than public services (Olszen, 2002). A critical aspect of this type of new public management is a focus on accountability and measurement. To this end, the New Zealand

Qualification Authority (NZQA) was established under the *Education Act, 1989*. Its purpose is to maintain the qualification framework of New Zealand, to ensure quality in teaching provision outside the universities and to promote recognition of New Zealand qualifications abroad by mutual recognition of qualification agreements. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, more recently known as Universities New Zealand – *Te Pōkai Tara*, is the statutory body responsible for quality assurance in the university sector. To achieve this, the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) was established in 1993 to provide external academic quality assurance for all New Zealand universities. The universities thus maintain a level of autonomy and control over the auditing process. The prevalence of the terms *quality* and *relevance* in the sectoral policy documentation, particularly the *Tertiary Education Strategies*, have placed a heavy emphasis on these themes. However, as Roberts (2008) demonstrates, quality and relevance have not been subjected to robust examination in the strategy documentation and, therefore, it is not clear what is indeed meant by these ubiquitous terms. The continued monitoring of the performance of academics has encouraged them to perform in increasingly competitive, entrepreneurial and individualistic ways (Shore, 2010).

While the majority of the reforms have a clear market focus, there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of tertiary education in addressing issues of social inequality, particularly in relation to access to education and opportunities to engage with it. For example, in the *Tertiary Education Strategies* (MoE, 2002, 2007, 2010; New Zealand Government, 2014) improving the needs and aspirations of Māori and Pasifika remains a priority (Roberts, 2008). However, while Māori and Pasifika have relatively high levels of participation in tertiary education, most of this enrolment occurs at foundation levels, and university participation is lower than that of the general population (MoE, 2016a). Increasing participation rates and

meeting the needs of Māori and Pasifika students remain challenges for the sector, particularly at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

## **Thesis Structure**

The purpose of this introductory chapter has been to lay out the problem that this thesis explores, to explain how the thesis will be structured, and to clarify the theoretical approach and context within which the research is situated. As part of the clarification of the problem, consideration has been given to the student engagement literature. In brief, student engagement is concerned with student success. However, an education for student success in Dewey and Freire's view has numerous dimensions and operates on and across several domains in the student's life. This thesis engages with the work of Dewey and Freire in order to critically evaluate the ideas promulgated by the policy literature in Ireland and New Zealand. This thesis is grounded in a particular context and, as such, it is the policy of Ireland and New Zealand that informs this analysis. This section provides an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides an introduction to, and overview of, the neoliberal political project and its implications for education. The neoliberal project is not without contradictions and has been expressed differently in different times and places. The ideas and techniques of neoliberalism are evident in tertiary education in many jurisdictions. The chapter maps out some of the assumptions of neoliberalism and some of the ways that it has influenced tertiary education. Three of these influential ideas, in particular, are taken up later in the thesis: 1) the market orientation of the aims and ends of education, 2) the prominence of skills education within tertiary education policy and 3) the organisation of universities and managerialism. This thesis, thus, explores some of the potential effects of neoliberal policy ideas on student engagement in tertiary education.

Chapter 3 considers the politics of education and outlines a Freirean understanding of the link between politics and education. For Freire, education is always a political process, and thus student engagement and education must be considered within the contemporary socio-political context. The chapter considers the politics of contemporary tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand. In this chapter, the politics of policy are made explicit, and it is this politics that informs Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In each of the final chapters, a particular policy idea is taken up and discussed using Deweyan and Freirean analyses. These chapters map the inconsistencies between policy and Dewey and Freire's ideas for engaging students in a critical, dialogic and democratic form of education.

Chapter 4 considers how the contemporary purposes of tertiary education as outlined in policy are inconsistent with student engagement. It explores the formation of the subject and the aims and ends of education using the work of both Dewey and Freire. It is argued that education policy influenced by neoliberal ideas is more concerned with education to become, in contrast to education where the student engages with both education and the world as a continual and uncertain process of becoming. It is also argued that for Dewey and Freire student engagement is bound up with their idea of education.

Chapter 5 explores the formation of the ethical subject in tertiary education and how neoliberal values reconfigure educational virtues. This chapter considers Aristotle's virtue ethics, which he believed essential to living a good life. The development of skills is a key policy theme in both jurisdictions, and this chapter considers how skills are constituted as ethical values by neoliberal policy. The neoliberal conception of skills such as critical thinking and creativity in tertiary education is explored and compared to Dewey's and Freire's more expansive ideas of habits and virtues, respectively. This chapter ends by exploring two contemporary education

challenges (post-truth and democratic governance) and the important role of educational virtues in grappling with these. These examples illustrate how neoliberal skills are inconsistent with student engagement.

Chapter 6 explores the concept of the university community. It discusses the potential adverse effects of neoliberal education policy; in particular, the effects of the techniques of managerialism on this community. For both Dewey and Freire, education is a way to understand, to construct and to participate in communal life. Education and communal life are thus interconnected as education is a social process. Managerial forms of university governance that limit communal life, and the relationships that support this life, consequently limit opportunities for education. Managerialism is thus argued to be inconsistent with student engagement.

Finally, the conclusion proposes some limitations of the thesis and some ideas for further study. Collectively, the chapters explore some of the political and ethical issues emerging from a reflection on policy and the ideas of Dewey and Freire that influence student engagement in tertiary education. The consistency between policy and the drive for student engagement in tertiary education is explored, and a model of inconsistency is set out.

## **Chapter 2: Student *Homo Economicus***

Neoliberalism is a political and economic philosophy that is based on a politics of individualism and a new form of liberal economics (Roberts & Peters, 2008). It constitutes a new approach to classical liberalism. However, it is also more than this; it has come to mean a practice that shapes how we think, what we believe and how we act. Neoliberalism moulds people in its image (Scharff, 2016). Care should be taken not to think of neoliberalism as a monolithic policy bloc, as the context and environment will often change its construction. It is often contradictory and polymorphic; this is due in no small part to its global dissemination throughout states with vastly different historical, cultural, political, social, and geographical contexts. This chapter introduces some of the important ideas of neoliberalism and reflects on the implications of neoliberalism for tertiary education. A robust examination of these topics is beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus of this research is on the ways in which tertiary education policy, influenced by neoliberalism, is inconsistent with ideas about engaging students in education. As such, this chapter provides some context for this study. This chapter maps out some of the assumptions of neoliberalism and some of the ways in which it has influenced tertiary education.

In any current discussion of tertiary education, one can scarcely avoid the prevalence of neoliberalism and its consequences. It has been identified and accepted as an idea, although the nature of the idea and its effects is still in dispute (Metcalf, 2017). It has been described as a political philosophy, an ideology, and a collection of economic reform theories such as New Institutional Economics and New Public Management (NPM; Olszen, 2002). It has also been described as the prevailing economic discourse of western nations (Olszen & Peters, 2005). In tertiary education, numerous changes continue to unfold as a result of the shift to a neoliberal

approach to tertiary education that sees the market expand into the public sphere. Neoliberalism has been taken up differently in different places and has found varying expression in policy and the local implementation of that policy. There are, however, a number of assumptions that underpin this approach and the next section will describe these. This is followed by a discussion of the influence of neoliberalism on tertiary education, democracy, and the subsequent rise of the knowledge society, which is underpinned by the increase in the significance of knowledge as capital.

### **The Individual and Society**

At the heart of neoliberalism is *Homo economicus*, that is, the human being constituted as a rational, self-interested utility maximiser (Peters & Marshall, 1996). *Homo economicus*, or the economic subject, represents economics applied to the whole of life, to areas previously considered outside the realm of the economy. It is a theory of human nature where all reality is structured as a kind of economic competition and all human activities are types of economic calculations. It is based on the idea of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) of human nature, in which humans are conceived as possessive individuals who are primarily concerned with the pursuit of wealth and power (Lauder, 1990). These self-interested qualities are argued to be inherent to the person and not a product of socialisation. It is proposed that rational self-interest will lead to economic prosperity. As Adam Smith (2012) explains,

it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages (p.19).

There are of course problems with the idea of the human being as a self-interested individualised economic unit, not least of which is the many people who do everyday work for others' interests before their own, for example in care work or public service. Many people, such as parents or teachers, have care responsibilities that mean they cannot be purely self-interested. The neoliberal citizen is released from caring obligations because “[t]he ideal type of neoliberal citizen is the cosmopolitan worker built around a calculating, entrepreneurial, detached self. It is a worker who is unencumbered by care responsibilities and is free to play the capitalist games in a global context” (Lynch et al., 2012, p. 83).

Neoliberalism brings the development of the market into previously non-economic aspects of life and the logic of competitiveness that spurns collectivist strategies (Peck & Tickell, 2002). It is also a moral system that indoctrinates students into a competitive logic while making them responsible not only for their performance but for the performance of others (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Harvey (2005) argues that,

[f]or any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be advanced that appeals to our intuition and instincts, to our values and desires, as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful, this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question (p. 5).

When neoliberalism is successful, concepts such as competition and performance are normalised, thus limiting a student's ability to think otherwise. The nature of neoliberalism means that to be constituted as an economic subject is now considered *normal*. Students may come to believe that neoliberal economic rationality is not only the way things are but also the way things ought to be. Education becomes an economic obligation and not an intellectual,

existential or moral one. Alternative ways of being in the world, seeing the world and relating to the world are closed off. Neoliberalism, then, operates as both an external and an internal force (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Competition becomes the organising principle of society and society is perceived as a marketplace. As Olszen (2005) outlines, “[h]uman society is simply a series of market relations between self-interested subjects” (pp. 380–381). Life is, therefore, reconfigured as a competition, and the market decides what is of value and what that value is. The neoliberal logic is founded on a kind of social Darwinism or ‘survival of the fittest’ approach that combines individualism and competition in free-market capitalism for continued material advantage (Lauder, 1990). Individuals come to believe that they are completely responsible for their destiny, talents, initiative and, alternatively, their failure. They must then compete and adapt to survive. Perceiving all human activity as competitive can lead to consequences, such as rising inequality (Hearne & McMahon, 2016; Rashbrooke, 2013). The introduction of competition into tertiary education has been portrayed as necessary to disband its monopoly and deal with the problem of provider capture (university control of tertiary education). The rationale for the introduction of competition is that it is believed to lead to efficiency and academic quality improvement (Roberts, 1998). It is this same logic of efficiency and improvement that can be used to justify the establishment of smaller governing bodies for optimal performance (Roberts, 1998), thereby excluding student and other voices from engaging in their educational environment.

Neoliberalism operates at a number of levels, including on the individual, producing governable subjects. It constitutes people or indeed citizens as consumers and entrepreneurs, who buy and sell goods in a market economy that ensures efficiency and growth through

competition. In the case of neoliberalism, a ‘good’ or ‘normal’ student is one who is competitive, entrepreneurial and productive. Paradoxically, in producing themselves as good students, students may adopt practices to their detriment (Grant, 1997). One such detrimental practice that emerges from instrumental student subjectivity is when students ‘play the game’ to get a qualification. When the goal of education is the attainment of a qualification, and the system can be gamed, a consequence is that the student may miss out on the understanding that comes from engaging in a learning process (Grant, 1997). In the neoliberal university, students are encouraged to think of themselves as consumers, not as members of a university community (Readings, 1996). Students are encouraged to think of themselves as both a consumer and a resource with exchange value, purchasing an educational product to increase that exchange value. The student as a consumer is separated from the university and is then located outside the university, purchasing a service. Chapter 6 discusses how constructing the student as a consumer effectively places them outside the university community.

Margaret Thatcher (Keay, 1989), an admirer of neoliberal political and economic thinkers, famously posited that “there is no such thing as society” (p. 8). For neoliberals, society is merely an aggregate of individuals held together by market relations. Society is reconstituted as a marketplace. Social concerns are reconstituted as individual concerns, and therefore society ceases to exist as individuals compete for supremacy in the market. It is therefore considered meaningless to speak of social aims or the interests of society because the individual is what matters. All human history of seeking varied, contingent and fleeting consensus and cooperation is without merit in this worldview. Neoliberal policies reconstitute the relationship between the person, society and the state; all are now viewed through an economic lens. The principles of competition and performance are stitched into the fabric of human relations.

## The State Versus the Market?

In the social democratic model that preceded neoliberalism in many states, people trusted the Western state to provide public services to benefit society as a whole. This approach was underpinned by ideas of equality and social justice. Neoliberalism centralises the concepts of freedom and choice, which can be represented as incompatible with state regulation and simultaneously be improved by a free market (Small, 2011). In traditional liberalism, the state is perceived as almost always an obstacle to things going well. It is perceived as inefficient and unresponsive, and any intervention by the state is perceived as an encroachment on individual freedom and choice. On the other hand, the market is perceived as the most efficient means of distributing resources. One of the primary roles of the state is to raise taxes to spend on the provision of shared services for the populace. However, within a neoliberal approach, market forces are perceived as a better way to regulate the collective will of the people, as the market purportedly represents this collective will. In his book *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith (2012) introduces the idea of the market as an autonomous but restricted sphere of human activity and the idea of the “invisible hand” as the market force that keeps supply and demand in equilibrium in a free market devoid of government intervention. For Smith, the market comprises one piece of society, but the neoliberal conception of the market represents society as a whole.

The writings of Frederich Hayek (1899–1992) were instrumental to the development of neoliberalism, although he himself was a classical liberal. Classical liberals value the freedom of individuals and believe in a free market with minimal state intervention. In classical liberalism, the market is perceived as a natural force that supports evolution and growth by using a ‘survival of the fittest’ approach. Hayek and the Chicago School owed much to the work of the Austrian

School of Economics, founded by Menger (1840–1921). For Hayek, a market that was unregulated and free from state action was essential for creativity and progress, where only the fittest forms of profit-loss systems would survive (Olssen, 2001). This approach is believed to encourage more social progress than the democratically elected state. As a result, the role of the state is smaller and, consequently, the state shrinks. The shrinking continues as tax cuts impoverish the state and many traditionally state-owned assets are privatised. Non-economic domains such as public health and education are reimagined as economic entities and are sold off.

However, in contrast to classical liberalism, neoliberalism recognises that there is a role for the state; that role is to protect the market. The state becomes the regulator of public service markets, and the relationship between the people and these services moves from a democratic one to an economic one. This means that democratic questions about public services are often reformulated into questions about value for money or the economic value of these services.

Harvey (2005) describes the role of the neoliberal state thus:

The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of the markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution), then they must be created, by state action, if necessary. But beyond these tasks, the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough

information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit (p. 2).

It is, therefore, the role of government to create markets where none existed and then to maintain a system within which those markets can function thereafter.

As shown in the previous chapter, third-way politics were introduced in New Zealand after the election of Labour in 1999. As with neoliberalism, third-way politics has found different expression in different contexts. Codd (2002) describes it in the New Zealand context as “an intersection of various social democratic discourses with an underlying neoliberal subtext” (p. 40). In general, it can be said that third-way politics has sought a compromise between social democracy and neoliberalism by trying to navigate a middle course between the old social democratic left and the new right. Third-way governments often attempt to make social democratic corrections to what is perceived as the excesses of neoliberalism. The third-way is a hybrid discourse that insinuates “the economic into the democratic or vice versa” (Roberts & Peters, 2008, p. 31). However, although there has been increased attention around social inclusiveness, economic competitiveness remains the bedrock on which the rest of government policy is built. The third way, like neoliberalism, is a new way of “governing by and through the market” (Roberts & Peters, 2008, p. 39). Third-way politics has been described as just another iteration of neoliberalism, which focuses on the creation of citizen-consumers and the localisation of the social (Roberts & Peters, 2008). It has also been characterised as another facet of neoliberalism that softens some of its harder edges in terms of both politics and language. Third-way policy and ideas have continued to evolve over time, and a version of it can be

observed today in both Ireland and New Zealand, where the language of social democracy is used but underpinned by the economics of neoliberalism.

### **A Neoliberal Democracy?**

Democracy is also a contested term and an idea with multiple meanings. It has come to mean many things in the popular imagination. Its Greek etymology *demo/kratis* translates to 'people/rule' or 'the rule of the people'. However, in ancient Greece, the meaning of this was contested, and there was significant debate about who 'the people' actually were (Brown, 2015). Neoliberalism switches all of public life to an economic register where democratic ideas are reconstituted as economic ideas. This has led to a narrowing conception of democracy and democratic participation. As economics invades the private, social and civil domains, there is a transformation of the relationship between the state and the citizen from a political relationship to an economic one; in established democracies, this has led to ideas such as citizen-consumers and marketplace democracies (Roberts & Peters, 2008). Accounts in the literature and media pronounce that there is a present-day crisis in democracy: "the neoliberalism of recent times has seriously eroded the process of democracy within most ostensibly 'liberal democratic' states" (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 1). While some commentators see this crisis as a lack of political and civic engagement by citizens, others point to a lack of everyday democracy in many citizens' lives (Biesta, 2005). The neoliberal university is increasingly concerned with individualised acts of citizenship, such as certain types of service learning that are less concerned with the democratic conditions of the university community and more concerned with charitable donations of time and expertise. The idea of what constitutes good citizenship in a democracy is changing.

Apple (2006) argues that “for neoliberals, the world, in essence, is a vast supermarket. Consumer choice is the guarantor of democracy .... [t]hus, democracy is turned into consumption practices. In these plans, the ideal of the citizen is that of the purchaser” (p. 32). Citizens are reconceived as individualistic, competitive, rational self-maximisers, or as reasonable profit and loss calculators whose rights and freedoms are founded upon free-market economics rather than the more traditional democratic values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance and trust.

### **Equality, Freedom and the Right to Choose**

Neoliberalism also radically reconstitutes some of the underpinning values of democracy, for example by replacing the idea of equality with the idea of freedom (Small, 2011). The notion of equality is an important and central ideal for social democracy. Equality here means equality of opportunity. However, neoliberal rationality influences the public to accept the idea that freedom, or a particular notion of freedom constituted in market terms, is more weighty than equality. This is accomplished by providing so-called educational consumers with a replacement idea, which is the concept of *choice*. Choice provides “a wider range of options both for consumers and for learning institutions” (Codd, 1993, p. 79). Choice has successfully been rebranded as an opportunity and a form of empowerment. Freedom is now expounded as the freedom to choose; that is, freedom from government, and freedom of society’s institutions to choose within the market what to buy and what to sell. Equality has come to be replaced with the freedom to choose. The student as consumer is perpetually choosing (Roberts, 1999) and, consequently, institutions must compete for their business. The idea is that “[s]tudents are regarded as roving, perpetually choosing, rationally autonomous consumers, always seeking out the best value for their educational dollar” (Roberts, 1998, p. 7). The university must therefore continually market itself to the student to improve enrolments and revenues. Paradoxically, the

neoliberal consumer student may have the right to choose where to go to university, but may not have an equal opportunity to actually attend that university.

The neoliberal model dispenses with the idea of equality for all and replaces it with the idea that inequality is good and virtuous (Monbiot, 2016). Inequality is necessary for neoliberalism, as equality means a lack of competition, and competition is essential to increase efficiency. A more equal society means less competition and, consequently, stifles the entrepreneurial imagination and the potential for profit by using mechanisms such as taxation and social welfare. Becker (1971) argues that the market eliminates prejudice and discrimination through competition. However, the rhetoric of competition, which implies winners and losers, is anathema to equality. Also, by making people solely responsible for their triumphs and consequently their failures, neoliberalism singularly fails to address the societal structures and historical factors that may constrain opportunities and perpetuate inequality. Instead, people are made solely responsible for any success or failure, independent of structural factors determined by societal and historical influences.

### **Who Pays? Who Benefits?**

The Keynesian social democratic approach to social and political organisation that preceded neoliberalism emphasises the inherent and immeasurable value of education. This approach positions education as a form of welfare that performs a range of social and economic functions and develops all citizens in pursuit of an equal society (Peters et al., 1994). Social integration and the redistribution of public goods are the primary functions of education in a social democracy (Peters et al., 1994). This model of education is supported by public finance and rests on the idea that those with the ability to pay should contribute more to public services. This means that those with the ability to shoulder more of the burden of public services should

do so. This is the basis of progressive tax systems, where those who earn more pay more tax. It is important to point out that there are other ways of organising society and systems of education that are both realistic and functional, although not wholly without problems.

On the other hand, the neoliberal approach to education understands it as a commercial transaction between the provider and consumer, and one that thrives in the enterprising culture of the free market (Peters et al., 1994). As the market becomes the defining mechanism for regulating society, education moves from a public good and collective right to an individual good and commodity. When learning becomes a question of earning potential, then education becomes an individual responsibility and not a societal one (Holborow, 2012). The user-pays approach to education becomes more prevalent as consumers theoretically only pay for what they consume, which is an appealing idea when people are struggling financially and consequently feel they do not want to shoulder others' burdens. However, what this often means is that the wealthiest in society abdicate their responsibility for others, particularly for those who are less well-off. In less progressive tax systems, in which the wealthy are ostensibly treated equally by taxing them the same as lower earners, inequality is reinforced and increased in society. Equality of access to education is denied to those that cannot afford to pay for education and other services that were previously public. It is unlikely that these imbalances will be readdressed later in life. Thus, the wealthy get wealthier and inequality increases.

In the user-pays model, only immediate transactional costs are accounted for, while more intangible costs, such as the cost to democracy or the environment, are often ignored. The user-pays approach is an exclusively transactional view of education that fails to recognise the existence of social inequalities and the broader more intangible benefits and cost to society. Education understood as an individual investment completely ignores the social dimension of

education. Increasingly, tertiary education is becoming less of a good investment, a situation anticipated by William Morris in 1888:

A superstition still remains from the times when ‘education’ was a rarity that it is a means for earning a superior livelihood; but as soon as it has ceased to be a rarity, competition takes care that education shall not raise wages; that general education shall be worth nothing, and that special education shall be worth just no more than a tolerable return on the money and time spent in acquiring it (para 3).

The relative increases in tuition fees “has heightened students’ and parents’ consumer consciousness about what they expect in terms of their educational experience and in terms of returns on investment in their human capital” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 12), thus producing consumers shopping in an education supermarket where educational interactions are reduced to transactions. This situation is not conducive to engaging students, beyond instrumental transaction, in their own education.

### **A Neoliberal Education**

Readings (1996) argues that there are three major ideas of the modern university: the Kantian idea of reason, the Humboldtian idea of culture, and the techno-bureaucratic idea of excellence. Kant’s theory of knowledge heralded the era of the modern university, with its focus on reason and its roots in the Enlightenment and the throwing-off of the superstitious shackles of the church. While reason was the beginning of this modern conception of the university, Readings argues that the modern university flourished when grounded on the philosophical notion of culture. Humboldt expressed the idea of the ‘university of culture’ with the opening of the University of Berlin in 1810. Humboldt envisaged the university as a site of cultural reproduction that through research produced knowledge of culture and through teaching and

learning inculcated culture. This was a ground-breaking moment in the history of the university, and the development of tertiary education following Humboldt's model later proliferated throughout Europe, the Americas and beyond. Humboldt's idea of the university came about in response to Napoleon's conquest of Europe, as Prussia reformed its education system in order to unite and build a state. Dewey (2004) recognises the inherent tension between the state and the university and how this was rectified for a time with the concept of culture:

The educational process was taken to be one of disciplinary training rather than of personal development. Since, however, the ideal of culture as a complete development of personality persisted; educational philosophy attempted a reconciliation of the two ideas. The reconciliation took the form of the conception of the 'organic' charter of the state (pp. 90–91).

This conception of the university is characterised by emphasising a "higher social unity" (Readings, 1996, p. 61) in the form of the state. Humboldt emphasised the process of discovering knowledge. He sought a niche that would not replicate the work of specialist schools, such as the type developed in France under Napoleon that were tasked with producing officials to run the state. Humboldt's intention was to "treat all knowledge as a not yet wholly solved problem" (Humboldt, 1963, p. 250). This was to be the work of the modern university.

The university has more recently been reconstituted as a corporate enterprise. The corporate university is responsible for contributing to economic and, consequently, social development. The idea of the corporate university is to make a profit (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Nussbaum, 2010) or, at the very least, to minimise losses and inefficiencies (Roberts, 1998). Bok (2004) defines commercialisation as "efforts within the university to make a profit from teaching, research, and other campus activities" (p. 3). He differentiates this from the general

commodification of education that has led to a rise in the influence of economic forces, corporate culture, and managerialism within the university. This conceptualisation of the university is characterised by a shift to concerns about employability and an insistence on the quantifiable measurement of outcomes. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) write of the changing idea of the university from one of public good to one of academic capitalism, which they define as “the pursuit of market and market-like activities to generate external revenues” (p. 11), where “education is an alienable service rather than a public good” (p. 2). This idea demonstrates “the internal embeddedness of profit-orientated activities as a point of reorganization (and new investment) by higher education institutions to develop their own capacity” (p. 11).

Marginson and Considine (2000) argue that the enterprise university as an entity is not solely profit-seeking, but “is as much about generating institutional prestige as about income” (p. 5). “Money is a key objective, but it is also the means to a more fundamental mission: to advance the prestige and competitiveness of the university as an end in itself” (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 5). Giroux (2014) argues that the “corporate university that now defines faculty as entrepreneurs, students as customers, and education as a mode of training” puts in place “modes of governance that mimic corporations” (p. 6). Readings (1996) conceptualises the contemporary university in terms of the dominance of the idea of excellence achieved through increased bureaucratic administration. Furthermore, Barnett (2011) explains that the contemporary university is an entrepreneurial university or a ‘university for-itself’, which speaks to the idea of self-interest, an underlying assumption of neoliberalism. All of these ideas illustrate a university that is concerned with marketisation, competition, performativity, the production of human capital and the exchange value of knowledge. The corporate university’s market ethos supports an approach to education that centralises the rational, competitive, self-

interested individual who is regulated by the market, thereby disassembling the idea of the university as a community based on solidarity.

The overall effect of neoliberal influence on tertiary education has been to commodify education as a service, where students and researchers are reconceived as human capital, to be used in the furtherance of economic growth and global competitiveness. A neoliberal approach to tertiary education reconstitutes education as a delivery system of human capital and technology to the market, with less frequent emphasis on the transmission of culture, socialisation in civic values, and the promotion of social mobility (Collini, 2012). In the commodified cycle of education, students move from being consumers choosing a university based on the marketing activities of the university, to buying in a captive market within the campus and from the university, and perhaps on to becoming a tradable commodity as an athlete or inventor, or simply becoming human capital (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The focus of education shifts from concern for the student to concern for employers. From a neoliberal perspective, these are the same concerns; as employers employ students, which enables these students to have a good quality of life. There is usually no consideration in policy or public discourse of what a “good life” might look like. However, when theoretical and political aspects of programs are crowded out of the syllabus, the ability to critique the motivations and actions of employers and others are curtailed. The power to make decisions about what constitutes a good education has shifted from professional educators to the business community.

The value of education now lies in how well it enables countries to compete in the global marketplace. In *Democracy and Education* Dewey (1980) contends that the reasoning behind much of the education policy of capitalist countries is economic competitiveness and productivity. This reason is still prevalent today, as evidenced by tertiary education policy

documents in Ireland and New Zealand (DoES, 2011; New Zealand Government, 2014). When competitiveness and productivity are central to education policy, education can become the focus for any deficiencies in the optimal functioning of the economy. Competitiveness, particularly in relation to globalisation, has a central position in the tertiary education policy of many jurisdictions in recent years. In this context, competitiveness refers to the performance of one country against other performing countries, and the ability of that country to provide benefits in the marketplace; in other words, to out-compete the competition. Competitiveness has been defined by the World Economic Forum (2014) as “the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country” (p. 4). In its *Global Competitiveness Report*, it reiterates the position that “strong institutions, available talent, and a high capacity to innovate hold the key for the success of any economy” (2014, p. xiii). In the neoliberal model of education, the “invisible hand” of market forces drives competition, thereby increasing efficiency and standards amongst educational providers (Lauder et al., 2006).

### **The Knowledge Society/Economy**

The contemporary public imagination has embraced the idea of the knowledge society. This idea illustrates an increasing concern with knowledge in society, notably its acquisition, use and dissemination. The university is perceived as having an essential role in how knowledge contributes to the economy, particularly as many western countries move from post-industrial economies to knowledge economies (Biesta, 2007). The terms “knowledge economy” and “knowledge society” are often used interchangeably, and their meaning is not always made clear, which is further complicated by a continued evolution in the meaning of these terms (Peters, 2010).

The knowledge society has many facets, including the knowledge democracy (Biesta, 2007) and the knowledge economy. Unfortunately, “it is the economic dimension of the ‘knowledge society and economy’ ideal that has come to dominate over the social element” (Roberts, 2007b, p. 352). Using knowledge for commercial gain is not a new concept—it did not originate with these neoliberal reforms—however, the new focus on the economic importance of knowledge has changed (Roberts, 2007b). It is underpinned by a number of technological developments, particularly in communications. This reframing of knowledge has coincided with a spread in neoliberal ideology. As Olszen and Peters (2005) put it, “[t]he most significant material change that underpins neoliberalism in the twenty-first century is the rise in the importance of knowledge as capital” (p. 18). Knowledge has become increasingly linked to economic growth, social development, and national competitiveness. Thus, tertiary education has gained increasing economic importance as the engine of the economy. In fact, knowledge has become a new form of capital, replacing labour and financial capital as the new economic resource. In the knowledge economy, value is created by putting knowledge to work in the form of productivity and innovation. Knowledge is unlike other forms of economic resources in that it is flexible, ever-expanding and non-rivalrous. Knowledge as a non-rivalrous resource means that the consumption of knowledge by one consumer does not preclude its consumption by other consumers. Unlike other commodities, intellectual property becomes more valuable the more people consume it, therefore it defies the law of scarcity that covers most markets (Olszen & Peters, 2005).

There are numerous theories that underpin the knowledge economy, from the development of an economics of information and knowledge, to the application of free-market ideas to education, and the development of human capital theory, public choice theory and new

growth theory (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Human capital theory emerged in the 1960s from the work of Theodore Schultz, E.F. Denison, and Gary Becker, who promoted the central importance of education for economic growth (Olssen, 2001). The idea behind human capital theory is that investment in human resources would provide a higher return than that in solely physical resources. It advanced the notion that education is a private good that can bestow competitive advantage through innovation and adaptability (Roberts, 2014). Human capital theory assumes that the economy can be analytically separated from society and that politics and culture have little influence over the economy. However, it is clear that there is a relationship between politics, culture and the economy. This theory is also based on the neoliberal assumption that individuals act rationally to maximise utility, a point that has already been disputed here. When human capital theory was first mooted by Becker in the 1960s, it was considered to be too degrading a term to be used publicly as it objectifies and dehumanises people (Holborow, 2012). The Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (1998) defines human capital as embodied “knowledge, skills and competences” (p. 3). This means that a person becomes human capital when they come to possess the requisite knowledge, skills and competences. The idea of human capital weaves together education and capitalism (Holborow, 2012). A person reconstituted as human capital becomes a commodity whose labour is sold to the highest bidder. This is not a new idea in capitalism, but increasingly the university is being made complicit in order to achieve the goals of the knowledge economy. The next chapter takes up further the centrality of the production of human capital in contemporary policy in Ireland and New Zealand, and its implications for student engagement.

Within the knowledge economy, some forms of commodified knowledge are judged to be more valuable than others. This approach has led to the prioritisation of funding for specific

disciplinary fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which are known collectively by the abbreviation STEM (New Zealand Government, 2014). Consequently, there is less funding available for humanities programs and there has been an attendant reduction in the numbers of students taking up these programs in a number of countries. Observing this trend, Nussbaum (2010) argues that the humanities are essential to the development of critical, reflective and creative capacities that are necessary for vibrant democratic societies. She describes the abilities developed by the humanities and the arts as “the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a ‘citizen of the world’; and, finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 7). She argues that policies that prioritise the sciences and their privileged position over the development of creativity and criticality show an impoverished idea of what is meant by the development of critical, reflective and creative capacities. In the humanities, the goal of study is the human activity of understanding rather than the accumulation of skills and information to produce knowledge (Collini, 2012). Understanding requires a human presence and therefore depends on the qualities and interpretation of that person. The decline of the humanities and the study of what it means to be human are less significant aspects of a neoliberal polity; it could be argued then that humans are perceived as less important than profit.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard (1984) argues that the status of knowledge has changed and will increasingly become commodified over time. Roberts (1988) identifies numerous phases in the commodification of knowledge, including “the development of standardised units for trading qualifications (and parts of qualifications); the concentration on skills and information in curriculum policy; and, most importantly, the redefinition of the concept of ‘education’ itself” (para. 18). Lyotard (1984) argues that the old

principle of knowledge was “indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds” (p. 4); however, more recently knowledge has become external to the knower. One effect of this is that the knower, reconstituted as the provider of knowledge, no longer decides on the quality, or truth, of information. The consumer becomes the arbiter of information quality, a situation observed most recently in the post-truth debates. Marshall (1996) argues that “knowledge has been replaced by skills and learning” (p. 2), where knowledge is reduced from “knowing that” to “knowing how” (Peters & Marshall, 1996, p. 70). Furthermore, “skills education has an inbuilt bias towards a vocational education” (Peters & Marshall, 1996, p. 70) and enables a more seamless transition between schools or universities and the labour market. Therefore, skills education implicitly reformulates education toward more vocational aims. As will be discussed in the next chapter, policy is not a neutral statement of fact. The privileging of certain knowledge and skills represents a particular worldview and conceptualises particular forms of knowledge and skills as more important than others. Skills are sometimes mistakenly considered “neutral and value-free” (Peters & Marshall, 1996, p. 70) and thus can be mistakenly considered separate from the process of learning and the context of that learning. This can lead to the idea that skills are easily transferable from one context to another. The foregrounding of skills in many neoliberal policies is often at the neglect of a comprehensive conception of the place and role of knowledge in the university (DoES, 2011; New Zealand Government, 2014).

### **Reorganising Education: Managerialism**

Neoliberalism has changed the way universities operate and, consequently, how they are structured. In Australia, Marginson and Considine (2000) observe several changes to the organisation of universities. Since the advent of neoliberalism, these involve changes from collegial styles of governance to more corporate forms. These changes include: the appointment

of external leadership styled as chief executive officers; the “partial transformation of governing councils into corporate boards” (p. 327); the introduction of corporate language and structures; a lack of transparency within the university in relation to decision making; the breakdown of disciplinary and faculty structures; the marginalisation of research systems in order to assess performance; and the prioritisation of research in terms of quantity of income rather than quality of scholarship.

The introduction of neoliberal principles into education has meant the introduction of neoliberal techniques such as managerialism. The new form of managerialism in education seeks broadly to introduce management techniques and principles from private enterprise into public services on the grounds that it promotes entrepreneurialism, innovation, and productivity (Lauder et al., 2006). The practices and techniques of management are increasingly evident in all aspects of university life, and educational institutions are increasingly encouraged to adapt business practices (Peters, Marshall, & Massey, 1994). However, neoliberal ideas are not always purely applied in the university as managerialism. Managerialism focuses on performance, using the language of business adapted for public agencies. Managerialism emphasises hierarchical systems of governance, measurement, accountability and performance indicators. As Olszen & Peters (2005) explain, “[t]he core dimensions of NPM [New Public Management], are flexibility (in relation to organizations through the use of contracts); clearly defined objectives (both organizational and personal), and a results orientation (measurement of and managerial responsibility for achievement of)” (p. 12). NPM is sometimes used as a synonym for managerialism. These forms of public management have a number of historical commonalities, a shared language and a central focus on the contract. In an analysis of policy, the presence of neoliberalism and the NPM approach is suggested through “concepts such as ‘outputs’,

‘outcomes’, ‘accountability’, ‘purchase’, ‘ownership’, ‘specification’, ‘contracts’, ‘purchase agreements’” (Olssen, 2002, p. 60). This new form of managerialism is concerned with the techniques and practices of management but also politically inculcating market values and practices into public organisations (Lynch et al., 2012). Managerialism can disenfranchise the public, students and staff of the power to make decisions; instead, decisions are deferred to expert managers, and the messy process of democratic decision making can thus be avoided.

Managerialism is also gendered. In *New Managerialism in Education: Commercialization, Carelessness, and Gender*, Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2012) explain that “[w]hile new managerialism is gendered in how it encodes attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity in management, including competitiveness and a focus on performance, it is also driven by a concept of care-lessness that is simultaneously gendered and separate from gender” (p. 177). In this work, the authors also argue that the organisational culture and the subjectivities encouraged by managerialism produce and reproduce “gender inequalities in the workplace” (Lynch et al., 2012, pp. 134–135). Managerialism as an idea is therefore not a set of neutral management ideas and techniques, it can instead be associated with advancing inequality in the university.

## **Accountability**

A consequence of the commodification of tertiary education has been an increased emphasis on measuring performance (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Biesta, 2010). The introduction and prevalence of the discourse of accountability, as part of the neoliberal agenda, has had a profound influence on tertiary education, not the least of which is the introduction of a technical-managerial notion of accountability to the sector. It has reshaped tertiary education governance structures. In fact, Shore and Wright (1999) argue that accountability embodies a new rationality

of governance as “... a vehicle for changing the way people relate to the workplace, to authority, to each other, and, most importantly, to themselves” (p. 559). Since the 1990s there had been a shift in the rhetoric and discourse of accountability in Ireland and New Zealand. This new type of accountability in education is often synonymous with efficiency and associated with the rise of the audit culture (Ambrosio, 2013); it is accountability in the language of accountants (Readings, 1996). Accountability has taken on many guises within the contemporary university, from funding applications, to academic and financial audits, accreditation processes, programme reviews, rankings and governing body oversight, to name a few (Zepke, 2017).

Accountability is a multifaceted, somewhat elusive concept that has changed in meaning over time. Ambiguity over the meaning of the term persists: when it is invoked, it can mean democratic control of public institutions such as universities or it can mean a tool for enabling consumer choice. Craig and Amernic (2002) argue that “university accountability should be regarded as an expression with ‘strong emotive connotations’ and with a ‘somewhat vague and ambiguous’ descriptive meaning, capable of semantic manipulation” (p. 133). The conventional meaning of accountability is of being ‘held to account’. One widely cited definition states that “accountability is a relationship in which an individual or agency is held to answer for performance that involves some delegation of authority to act” (Romzek & Dubnick, 2000, p. 382). This definition infers that accountability is relational and therefore social. It is also moral, as its purpose is to justify an action. Before the introduction of neoliberal tertiary education policies, the form of accountability in evidence in the university was professional accountability. This form of accountability is still common among many professions such as lawyers. The professional guild would regulate their profession and, as such, the public invested their trust in the professional’s specialist knowledge. The professional guild then had a professional

responsibility to the public. In this situation, there must also be an acknowledgement by the public that complex professional issues may require specialist knowledge. This requires a relationship of trust between the public and the professions. There has been a change in this relationship.

The prevalence of the language and logic of accountability in the governance of tertiary education has relegated notions of trust and responsibility, and there has been limited discussion of the alternatives to this construction of accountability (Roberts, 2014; O'Neill, 2002). Biesta (2004) argues that other discourses of accountability have existed historically and need reclaiming. There has been a change in tertiary education governance from responsibility or being held to account for one's actions, to neoliberal accountability of measurement and output (Biesta, 2004; Roberts, 2014). Accountability has reshaped tertiary education governance structures and eroded trust within this community. Trust is integral to responsibility, which is necessary for critical citizenship and the ethical formation of human beings (Roberts, 2014). Therefore, a neoliberal logic and language of accountability reduce the ability of tertiary education to contribute to society through the development of critical citizens.

## **Performance**

The concept of performance is also central to managerialism. Lyotard (1984), in a similar vein to some of the authors mentioned earlier, argues that the idea of the university has moved from Humboldt's cultural conception linked to nation-building to a legitimisation of the university based on its usefulness. He suggests that the idea of tertiary education then becomes one about the optimal contribution it can make to achieve the best performativity of the whole of the social system. This illustrates a changing relationship between tertiary education and society, as the university is subordinated to those with power. The principle of performativity is about

achieving optimal performance or efficiency of the system by minimising inputs and maximising outputs (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Performance-based systems encourage staff and students to act in particular ways that are defined by performance indicators and measurable outputs. The university is then a performing community, and all of its constituent parts and processes must perform at the optimum. Both Ireland and New Zealand have instituted performance management systems in their tertiary education systems.

Funding is often linked to performance, with better-performing institutes receiving better funding. International rankings have had a significant impact and are often used to publicise universities. Universities that are perceived to be of better quality attract more students and consequently more money and resources, while other universities in the same system flounder and become less well attended and funded. The competitive ethos of neoliberalism creates winners and losers among universities in the same country and beyond, thereby encouraging inequity in the system. While it could be argued that some students will always be better served than others by formal education, neoliberalism and neoliberal social policies continue to widen the inequality gap (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014).

### **The Global Context**

Neoliberal policy and practice can be found in a number of countries around the world. There is a body of work that reflects on globalisation, and the relationship between globalisation and neoliberalism and its consequences for tertiary education. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to grapple with these topics. The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the global influences on tertiary education in Ireland and New Zealand. As Barnett (2016) argues it is important “to have a good understanding of the global forces …underlying and shaping universities” (p. 5).

Originating at the end of the middle ages, globalisation is not a new concept, but it has become increasingly significant for tertiary education. Improved modes of transportation coupled with burgeoning market economies meant access to new products and a method to exploit this access. Even today, globalisation is primarily sustained by improvements in communication technology and economic gain. However, the term globalisation is opaque and given to multiple meanings. It is not merely an evolution from the nation-state to a global form of social and economic organisation. It is a political project (Lauder et al., 2006). As an idea, globalisation is complex and, like neoliberalism, a highly sophisticated and dynamic phenomenon. To the public, globalisation and neoliberalism have become synonymous. Olssen et al. (2004) identify three globalisation categories: economic, cultural and political; these are all interrelated and supported by developments in technology. Olssen and Peters (2005) argue that neoliberalism is a dimension of globalisation, the part that deals with free trade. However, globalisation is a useful heuristic tool to help understand a range of policies and processes.

One aspect of globalisation is the transition from insular national economies toward global free trade indicating the decreasing importance of borders of all kinds, coupled with a greater interconnectedness through technology, such as the internet and cheaper transportation modes. This is also facilitated through an increasing number of global networks comprised of organisations, companies and professionals, and an increase in the global movement of goods, people, services and capital over borders. The European Union, an influential supranational organisation of which Ireland is a member, describes four freedoms—people, capital, goods and services—as underpinning the European project where trade barriers are removed, and national laws are increasingly harmonised. Culture also moves, with ideas, knowledge, music, literature and film spreading around the globe. The dissemination and uptake of these ideas are

increasingly rapid as both time and space compress across the planet (Lauder et al., 2006). Commentators diverge on the current condition of globalisation, with positions ranging from perceiving it as less open than it was at the end of the 19th century to it being so advanced as to signify the end of the nation-state.

Education has responded to the influence of globalisation and a global market for education has been formed (Marginson, 2000). International trends and supranational education policies can and do affect national political and policy agendas. Students must now be employable not only nationally but internationally, as states seek to train citizens to compete in a global economy where people, capital, goods and services are ideally free to move at will. The state also seeks to train citizens to understand and extend this way of thinking and being in the world. Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011) argue that there is a global auction for high-skilled labour where the increasing number of tertiary education graduates globally means that highly skilled tasks can now be performed in countries with lower wage expectations and where the quality of work will remain unchanged. Middle class students from America and Western Europe are no longer guaranteed these “high-paying, high-status jobs with a high degree of autonomy” (Brown & Lauder, 2010, p. 234), as jobs move to where the labour is cheaper. Middle class families are already discovering that they are investing more heavily in their children’s education and seeing less return from the labour market (Chang, 2010). Young people are more heavily indebted and less likely to reap social and economic rewards from their education (Dean, August, Rennie & Graham, 2015; Dougan, 2017)

The growing international interest in globalised rankings and ranking systems represents an increasing awareness and interest in the competitive nature of tertiary education. In this way, a neoliberal form of globalisation increases competition among education providers (Lauder et

al., 2006). International rankings, such as the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) or the Times Higher Education Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (THE-QS), attempt to measure the capacity of universities to produce knowledge and capture talent. These rankings focus primarily on research. Rankings have been increasingly used as an indicator of both quality and excellence in tertiary education. International postgraduate students are primarily targeted by global rankings as these students pay full fees, and both universities and countries are keen to attract these students as part of the global tertiary education market (Hazelkorn, 2015).

Institutional rank is believed to transmit social and cultural capital, which resonates with family, friends and potential employers, and this subsequently raises the prestige of the international student seeking employment (Hazelkorn, 2015). Although there has been criticism and concern with the methodologies used in these ranking systems, when results are positive both universities and governments use these rankings to market and publicise their institutions. By using rankings as a marketing tool, universities seek to influence students. Indeed, rankings have been identified as influencing student recruitment, employers, global partnerships, and philanthropy (Hazelkorn, 2015). This is because they play a role in building and maintaining university reputations, status and associated prestige. The introduction of marketing into tertiary education corresponds to the introduction of other business techniques into education. It is presently considered legitimate for education budgets to be spent on marketing, branding campaigns, and public relations. However, ranking as a neutral measure of academic quality is undermined as both staff and students are encouraged to rate their institutions favourably. They may do this because they have a personal stake in whether the university is perceived as good and thus their education or qualification perceived as better, or more valuable, than others. As

outlined, a favourable ranking may help students and staff with future employment. A review of a university cannot be given with the same independence as that of a restaurant: after all, the quality of a meal has little effect on a student's long-term future. This, among other aspects, undermines efforts at a non-biased ranking of universities globally.

The rise in the volume of education policies produced globally in recent years has been associated with processes connected to globalisation, particularly its neoliberal aspects (Robertson, 2017). This increasingly standard approach to policy, includes the economisation of social policies, and often fails to take account of local variation, context and customs. The trend of policy borrowing from other countries is evident where “policies are ‘sold’ on the premise that these policies are likely to promote ...national economic growth and global competitiveness (Tan & Chua, 2015, p. 692). Global ranking systems can pit local needs and goals against those required for global competitiveness. For example, increasingly questions are asked such as: is it more important to support a competent national system of tertiary education or one globally recognised institution? Alternatively, is it more important to support local research or research that can be internationally recognised and therefore contribute to an international reputation? The consequences of globalisation are uneven and, consequently, affect certain countries and even specific people within those countries unevenly and inequitably.

The influence of international organisations on tertiary education has also increased. For example, Europe's Bologna Process, launched in a series of communiqués in 1999, set out to harmonise tertiary education across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and represents one example of the relationship between globalisation and tertiary education (Robertson, 2017). However, it has proliferated outside the European Union and has subsequently been taken up differently and applied irregularly in many parts of the world, further spreading its influence.

Additionally, there is an increasing amount of literature on tertiary education, addressing themes from quality assurance to the development of innovation and world-class universities, which serves to solidify the reach of policy across boundaries (Robertson, 2017). Multilateral agencies including the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have all influenced national education policies. The OECD, for example, has generated a number of research publications on economic development, which notably frame solutions to social dilemmas such as education within a neoliberal ideological framework. The *OECD Country Reports* monitor countries to encourage their compliance with a market-based approach to education (Henry et al., 2001). They, like other international organisations, influence tertiary education using soft power, but it is, nonetheless, real power.

The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 deserves particular mention. Its origins are rooted in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) of 1947. This inspired the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1995. The core aim of the GATS is to create a system of trade rules to promote liberalisation in all kinds of services, including education, which it reconstitutes as a tradeable service. This identification of formal education as a commodified service has had far-reaching implications for education worldwide. As Robertson (2006) argues, “GATS formalises trends already taking place in the education sector (from primary to higher education), by reframing education using the language of trade and justifying it within the global regulatory framework, it transforms education into a legally protected industry that can be traded globally” (p. 2). He goes on to argue that:

... there is a real tension between education as a human right and education as an area of trade. When member states allow education to be included and traded in global

agreements like GATS, member state's ability to ensure that education is a right for all, rather than a commodity to be purchased by the well off is considerably diminished (Robertson, 2006, p. 14).

## **Conclusion**

The economisation of education over the last 30 years in Ireland and New Zealand has had a marked effect on tertiary education. This chapter has set out some of the underlying assumptions, ideas and techniques of neoliberalism that are applicable to tertiary education. These include the increasing individualism in society, the marketisation of public welfare services, the capitulation of democratic values to the mentality of the market, and the subsequent introduction of business techniques and tools to seamlessly transition tertiary education from a public sphere to a private one. With reference to the New Zealand context Roberts (1998) argues that, while the old system had a number of weaknesses, ironically “neoliberal reforms have *exacerbated* rather than solved many of these” (para. 19). This thesis reflects on whether these neoliberal reforms are consistent with student engagement in Ireland and New Zealand. The next chapter will engage with contemporary policy to explore the neoliberal themes emerging from these. The ideas and techniques of neoliberalism discussed in this chapter are evidenced in the policy discussed there. The consequences of these ideas for student engagement will be taken up further in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

## **Chapter 3: Political Engagement**

### **The Politics of Tertiary Education in Ireland and New Zealand**

Education implicitly expresses a political point of view. The creation of tertiary education policy is not a politically neutral activity nor is the daily practice that occurs within the sector. “Every decision, policy, or practice in an educational setting implies a particular conception of human beings and the world and a specific ethical position” (Roberts, 2000 p. 57). The politics of tertiary education is not, however, always explicit. It is not always clear what conception of the world, or what ethical position is being expressed through tertiary education. The relationship between political influence and the construction of policy often is opaque. Freire argues that the relationship between education and politics is inextricable—that is, “the whole activity of education is political in nature” (Shor, 1993, p. 27). “As educators we are politicians; we engage in politics when we educate” (Freire, 1998, p. 68).

This chapter analyses tertiary education in Ireland and New Zealand to make explicit the current politics of tertiary education in these contexts. This discussion draws on Freire’s contention that education *is* politics (Shor & Freire, 1986; Shor, 1993). As discussed in Chapter 1 the political and ethical implications of policy for student engagement are not always dealt with in the literature. However, education policy also establishes a vision for tertiary education, and people are encouraged to respond with decisions and actions in line with that vision. In this way, policy creates the context for education practice, and outlines a political and ethical position about the way things are and the way things ought to be. Consideration of education and student engagement must begin with consideration of the aims and purposes of tertiary education. These aims and purposes, as laid out in policy, affect possibilities for students to engage in tertiary education.

## **What is Politics?**

The meaning and nature of politics is contested within and between different disciplines, theoretical approaches and schools of thought. Examining these disputes highlights that politics includes conflict and cooperation over terms, concepts and ideas. In its broadest sense, politics is concerned with how we live with each other. It is concerned with how we envision and construct our society and the rules, structures and mechanisms that we develop because of this interaction. Politics is a social activity that is concerned with our continuing search for the resolution of conflict, be that over resources, power or difference.

Sometimes, politics is seen as taking place in a specific arena such as a parliament, or an office of government. It follows, then, that people are excluded from political processes if they are not involved in the activities or spaces that comprise parliament, government departments, or even university councils. Therefore, many people come to believe that they are outside politics, that they are not political, and that politics is the affair of politicians, political parties and policymakers. Alternatively, politics sometimes is taken to mean an activity or process, such as a means to distribute power or the accumulation of influence. Sometimes, people mean involvement in or support of specific political parties when they refer to politics. There are many ways to perceive politics, such as managing the affairs or structures of the state, or competition for or exercise of power in society. Politics has *baggage*, and no one comes to it without some preconceived notion of what it means to them. In this thesis, I employ the term politics in its broadest and most critical sense—that is, how we decide what we will be and how we will live together.

For the philosopher Aristotle, the word *polis* meant literally city-state, and it is from the word *polis* that the word politics is derived. In the *Politics*, Aristotle (2009) professed that “man

is by nature a political animal”, and it is through politics and participating in a *polis* that we realise our nature as human beings. This is because we can exercise our faculty of language and expression through debate and deliberation. The proper purpose of politics is the significant point for Aristotle:

Any city which is truly so called, and is not merely one in name, must devote itself to the end of encouraging goodness. Otherwise, a political association sinks into a mere alliance, which only differs in space [i.e. in the continuity of its members] from other forms of alliance where the members live at a distance from one another. Otherwise, too, law becomes a mere covenant—or (in the phrase of the sophist Lycophron) ‘a guarantor of just claims’—but lacks the capacity to make the citizens good and just.... It is clear, therefore, that a city is not an association for residence on a common site, or for the sake of preventing mutual injustice and easing exchange (Aristotle, 2009, pp. 104–105).

Aristotle argued that politics should be a way of life that makes us good and just. The basis of politics for Aristotle is ethical, as its aim is the creation of the virtuous citizen and the good or just society. In contrast, for modern philosophers such as Kant and Rawls, the point of politics is not to shape the moral character of citizens to make us good. Instead, politics should respect our freedom to choose our values and our purpose, in so far as this is consistent with a similar liberty for others. Aristotle, however, would disagree with this—for him, political association was not a mere guarantee of rights, but a way of living to be good.

### **Education is Politics**

Dewey and Freire have different perspectives on the political nature of education. Dewey did not write on politics and power in education explicitly.

While Dewey's theory of knowledge creation and learning adds to our conception of democracy, he focused on knowledge in too singular a fashion, in ways that dropped out the gritty political dynamics—full of diverse interests, conflicts, complex relations of power—that are essential to realize a broad vision of democratic flourishing (Boyte, 2003, p. 9).

Instead, Dewey was concerned by how people live together and the relationship between democracy and education in achieving that goal. Freire, on the other hand, focused on dynamics of power relations in education. From this focus came one of his great contributions to education—that is, the assertion that education is always a political process.

In his writing, Freire reminds us that education is a political activity. In Freire's view, to be human is to have survived as a human being, to have learned and to have been taught. Education formalised as schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon. However, education spans the existence of humankind. Therefore, to learn is to be human. For this reason, education is central to our development as human beings (Roberts, 2000). Individuals and society are constructed through education. What people learn is shaped by the past and is limited by the present. Giroux (2010) argues that “Freire believed that education, in the broadest sense, is eminently political because it offers students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life and critical agency.”

The political nature of education is reflected in every aspect of the tertiary education process. It is evident in the attitudes and dispositions of teachers. In turn, this influences their teaching whether they know it or not (Apple, 2004). Politics is evident in what is taught and what is not, in how the curriculum is taught and choice of pedagogy, in the aims of education, how it is funded, and in the government policies that govern the sector. Education is intrinsically

political throughout. Every decision that relates to education is political, whether pedagogical, policy-based or administrative. These decisions are political because they are an example of how people decide to live together and learn from each other.

Roberts (2010) argues that Freire would have disagreed with contemporary claims that education has become political. By suggesting that education was apolitical at some previous point, this view reveals “either a naïve understanding of the political dimensions to education or a mischievous attempt to disguise the politics of traditional pedagogical practices” (Roberts, 2010, p. 77). For Freire, actors involved in education cannot claim neutrality, as neutrality itself is a political position. Freire argues that asserting neutrality indicates a commitment to maintaining the *status quo*. The *status quo* is the dominant political position in society. A so-called politically neutral stance accepts the *status quo* by tacitly agreeing with or not rejecting this political position. As Freire put it, “washing one’s hands” of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral” (Freire, 1985b, p. 122). Thus, Freire rejects the fallacy of an education that is politically neutral.

Freire (1997) warns that “[t]he neoliberal point of view reinforces a pseudoneutrality of the educational practice, reducing it to the transfer of informational content to the learners, who are not required to apprehend it in order to learn it” (Freire, 1997, p. 46). Separation of text and context, or word and world, runs the danger of taking away the learner’s epistemological curiosity, which is an essential aspect of student engagement. Freire (1997) argues that many educators who move beyond this separation are charged with being ideological or even inappropriate. However, students who are expected to believe facts without question, and without understanding where these facts came from and how they were created, are being

manipulated. This form of authority, where questions are regarded as an attack rather than an essential part of the learning process, is deeply political (Freire & Faundez, 1989).

For Freire, the politics of education should be made explicit. Freire argues that educators should be open about their political position (Escobar, Fernandez, Guevara-Niebla & Freire, 1994). Freire argues that teachers should make their views known to students but not impose them. Exposure to teachers' views helps students understand the politics and power relations that surround them and influence their daily lives and education. The teacher's views, along with all other ethical and political perspectives, should be open to challenge and critique (Freire & Faundez, 1989; Escobar et al., 1994). Students have the "right to compare, to choose, to rupture, to decide" (Freire, 1998, p. 68). The teacher has an important role, not only in recognising and putting forward their politics for critique, but also in providing the necessary resources and environment for students to discuss and critique alternative views (Roberts, 2000).

Given the interventionist nature of education and the resulting unequal relations of power between lecturers and their students, how lecturers and others in positions of power in the university decide to deal with this matter is fundamentally important. The lecturer must provide authority in the classroom, but the purpose of this authority is to support freedom through dialogue and therefore liberation (Roberts, 2000). This kind of authority supports student engagement in the classroom. As a vehicle for communication, dialogue in the classroom is not politically neutral. It is influenced by the past, by social structures, and by present relations. Even non-verbal communication is influenced by its historical, social, economic and political legacy.

It is the teacher's role to provide direction and structure to dialogue, and to assist students to put together their knowledge so that the dialogue may move forward. A classroom where

politics is explicit does not replace content knowledge—rather, it complements it. The teacher creates the setting for dialogue so that students can liberate themselves. This reflects an attitude toward teaching that transcends rigidity and embraces uncertainty and discomfort but does not support disorder. For Freire, pedagogy must have “a conception of human beings and the nature of reality, an epistemological theory, and ethical position, and a political stance—from which broad (not fixed) underlying principles are derived” (Roberts, 2000, p. 70).

Freire was open about his political perspective and encouraged others, particularly teachers, to be open too. His own political position was the liberation of the oppressed through social justice:

I am a teacher who stands up for what is right against what is indecent, who is in favor of freedom against authoritarianism, who is a supporter of authority against freedom with no limits, and who is a defender of democracy against the dictatorship of right or left. I am a teacher who favors the permanent struggle against every form of bigotry and against the economic domination of individuals and social classes. I am a teacher who rejects the present system of capitalism, responsible for the aberration of misery in the midst of plenty. I am a teacher full of the spirit of hope, in spite of all signs to the contrary. I am a teacher who refuses the disillusionment that consumes and immobilizes. I am a teacher proud of the beauty of my teaching practice, fragile beauty that may disappear if I do not care for the struggle and knowledge that I ought to teach (Freire, 1998, pp. 94–95).

Freire’s was a politics of emancipation. At the root of this form of critical pedagogy is a set of democratic values, such as equality and solidarity. Freire argues that education can support social change toward social justice as it humanises us. By being in a community, we are humanised by our interactions with each other. For Freire, our ontological purpose is to be more

human. Therefore, it is essential to see and acknowledge our fellow human beings as subjects with agency, as opposed to objects in the economy or other social structures. It is through dialogue and by questioning ideas that are perceived as common sense that we become conscious of our beliefs, our values, and our culture, which so often are taken for granted. We come to question myths, doctrines, ideologies, and indeed all forms of knowledge: “Through problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions” (Shor, 1993, p. 26).

A democratic society that is built upon democratic values and principles must be sincere about aspiring to a democratic education—not just an education for and through democracy, but an education which is democratic. Education preceded the democratic state in Ireland and New Zealand. For this reason, the importance of education in sustaining and enhancing democracy is not always made clear in these countries. For Freire, education that uses the terminology of freedom and liberation, but decries democracy and democratic values in its every manifestation, cannot be liberating. Specific political perspectives call into being initiatives such as tertiary education policy and university structures. Freire argues that only a liberating education can produce democratic citizens that are capable of questioning power, control and forms of knowledge in society.

A liberating education enables people to learn to govern, not to merely be governed. It is an education that empowers participation in politics as it advances knowledge and literacy (Shor, 1993). It stands in opposition to an education that inculcates political alienation and passive acceptance. A liberating education democratises culture—it “is a politics for cultural democracy” (Shor, 1993, p. 27). A transformative education, however, has detractors, even among those most empowered by it, such as the student body. Shor (1993, p. 29) sums up this problem in his

essay *Education is Politics*: “in a school system devoted to banking pedagogy, students internalize values and habits which sabotage their critical thought”. Students become used to thinking that they are entirely to blame for their situation. In the absence of tools to assist them to think otherwise, they do what they have been trained to do—that is, reject the opportunity for liberation. Oppressive power maintained through banking education can suppress democracy, supporting an undemocratic and unequal polity.

The university is a political institution that cannot exist “beyond the social and political system of the society” in which it is located (Escobar et al., 1994, p. 136). Academic policies are enacted in local contexts, which shape the way they are constructed and enacted. Freire argues that no academic policy is purely academic, because “there is no metaphysical essence of the academy” (Escobar et al., 1994, p. 137). Instead, the university is part of a global political context. Freire reiterates that recognising the political nature of the institution is not an excuse for teachers to proselytise their political position. It is important to support political pluralism in the university so that students come to know and understand different political points of view. Freire argues that academic policy should respect positions that are different to those expressed by actual policies. For Freire, the politics of the university must respect difference. It is this tolerance for difference that underlies Freire’s critical dialogical approach to education.

### **Making Politics Explicit: Rationales for Tertiary Education**

This section now turns to the politics of tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand. The development of policy in these contexts was discussed in Chapter 1. In both contexts, there have been shifts in thinking about the purpose and role of universities and tertiary education in the last 30 years. In general, this shift as reflected in policy has prioritised the economic role of tertiary education. Chapter 2 outlined how neoliberal ideas expressed in policy

have reconstituted education to further economic growth and global competitiveness. To this end, tertiary education has been perceived as providing human capital by educating students with specific market orientated skills. Decision making about what is in the educational interest of students has shifted from the lecturer to the employer. In addition, knowledge has been reconstituted as a commodity.

To effect these changes, the governance of universities increasingly has moved toward corporate organisational structures. This reconstitution of educational relationships throughout the university causes problems for students and educators, as will be discussed later in this thesis. University governance has been reorganised as corporate-style accountability. Performance tools have been introduced into the sector and are monitored by the State. More recently, the idea of student engagement has been introduced into policy discussion in different ways. This section explores tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand and the politics emanating from that policy. Tertiary education policy in these countries demonstrates political concern for economic competitiveness, the production of human capital and the commodification of knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, the economic role of tertiary education has been prioritised in contemporary policy. In Ireland, tertiary education is perceived as “central to the economic renewal we need to support individual well-being and social development” (DoES, 2011, p. 9). Today’s vision for tertiary education in Ireland is that:

In the decades ahead, higher education will play a central role in making Ireland a country recognized for innovation, competitive enterprise and continuing academic excellence, and an attractive place to live and work with a high quality of life, cultural vibrancy and inclusive social structures (DoES, 2011, p. 26).

This statement prioritises the economic merit of tertiary education. This theme continues in Irish policy-making, where economic concerns guide policy despite criticism of facets of the economic model of tertiary education. Announcing a new strategy for tertiary education in March 2014, then-New Zealand Minister of Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment Steven Joyce said:

The tertiary education and research systems are vital parts of the Government's Business Growth Agenda. The Business Growth Agenda is the Government's comprehensive economic program to take this country forward and deliver the higher incomes and more jobs that Kiwi families deserve (Joyce, 2014).

In New Zealand, the idea that the purpose of education and research is to serve the economy is restated as a matter of necessity and common sense. This way of thinking about education has been normalised through a series of policies. Additionally, research from other countries is invoked to present education and research as precursors to economic growth.

However, feedback on a draft strategy document (New Zealand Government, 2013) showed that students and staff unions supported the promotion of other benefits of education—including its social, cultural and environmental merits—as well as its economic contribution. In spite of this, the emphasis in New Zealand remains on the economic value of education. The former Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment highlighted economic growth, technological progress and participation in the global economy as problems to be solved by education policy. Meanwhile, the Minister characterised education providers and institutions as inward facing and aloof. In the policy feedback synopsis document, feedback from staff, students and institutions is dismissed as protectionism by vested interests. However, the

document describes business interests as deserving beneficiaries of the most recent education policy (New Zealand Government, 2013, p. 5).

### **Economic Competitiveness**

Ireland has made economic competitiveness a key policy theme across its public services since the late 1990's (Clancy, 2015; DoES, 2011). With its small, open economy, Ireland is vulnerable to changing dynamics in the global economy. This has contributed to Irish policymakers' perception that competitiveness is vital for investor confidence and sustainable economic growth. Tertiary education is perceived as essential for competitiveness. It is a crucial policy input that appears under the heading "Knowledge Infrastructure" in Ireland's competitiveness pyramid (a theoretical construct used by Ireland's National Competitiveness Council). The relationship between tertiary education and the business sector is seen as key to achieving competitiveness and returns on exchequer funding:

A renewal and transformation of the relationships between higher education and enterprise can position Ireland at the leading edge in the competitive global environment. This is the only way to ensure an effective return on sustained public investment in higher education and research over the decade and for ensuring success in the application and commercialization of new knowledge (DoES, 2011, p. 32).

In New Zealand, "the overarching goal of improving New Zealand's international economic competitiveness" underlies the changes in policy and strategy of the last 30 years (Roberts, 2008, p. 53). As Roberts explains: "The underlying narrative... runs something like this: the world is undergoing rapid economic change; New Zealand will need to be clever and innovative if it is to adapt to this changing world; education can and ought to play a key role in this process" (Roberts, 2008, p. 54). The latest *Tertiary Education Strategy* conforms to this

politics: “This strategy has been designed to guide tertiary education and its users (learners and businesses) towards a more prominent contribution to a more productive and competitive New Zealand” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 2).

Global economic competitiveness is a specific political position outlined as an aim of tertiary education policy in both countries. Policy documentation from both countries links global competitiveness to the future wellbeing of students. The pursuit of global economic competitiveness influences ideas about the purpose of education and the role of education in achieving this end.

### **The Production of Human Capital**

Irish policymakers long have seen universities as crucial to the production of human capital. However, the publication of the government report *Investment in Education* (1965) marked the beginning of an ideological shift in the focus of tertiary education policy, from personal development to human capital (Clancy, 2003). The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011) continued on this trajectory. The *Strategy* asserts the importance of human capital in facilitating economic recovery, outlining how this can be achieved by expanding participation in higher education: “If Ireland is to achieve its ambitions for recovery and development within an innovation-driven economy, it is essential to create and enhance human capital by expanding participation in higher education” (DoES, 2011, p. 10).

This policy views the creation of jobs and recovery from the global financial crisis as an individual responsibility, by equating the country’s capacity to generate jobs with the quality of the workforce. This is another example of the narrowing of the state and its responsibilities by shifting responsibility to the person, encouraging individualisation that disconnects people from their responsibility for and to others. Education as the development of human capital is

domesticating, and moulds the job-seeking population into a specific template of the ideal worker.

The Irish approach envisages that the workforce produced by tertiary education will be capable of dealing with complex global issues and will attract companies who wish to employ skilled graduates. The Irish government wishes to provide career preparedness and reskilling of workers or job training to the people of Ireland to increase employment. This kind of specific skills training has been considered the responsibility of employers and conducted at their expense. However, in recent years, this has been reconceptualised as the responsibility of public education. Reconceptualising public education in this way means that education becomes tailored toward the needs of the private sector. It is not enough for students graduating today to be employable—increasingly, they should be job ready. This model of education benefits employers but is portrayed as a public good. Reconceptualising the purpose of education as a private rather than public good threatens the very existence of public education. At a time when student fees for tertiary education have been reintroduced, it could be argued that many tertiary students are in fact paying for company training.

New Zealand tertiary education policy also emphasises the importance of education in the production of human capital. The then Minister of Education (2014) argued that “[a] skilled workforce is the engine room of a thriving economy”. One economic goal of reforms in New Zealand from the 1990s on was the creation of a knowledge economy. The concept of knowledge economy emphasises the importance of education in the production of human capital. The ability to produce human capital has become a key determinant of national economic performance, which is linked to increased social well-being:

Skilled, knowledgeable individuals are essential to the success of businesses and other organisations. Access to skilled workers allows businesses to increase the value of their products and services and to pay higher wages. In turn, people are better off, healthier and happier, and New Zealand is a more attractive place to live and work (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 3).

Many students in New Zealand have come to think of employment as the principal outcome of education (McCrone, 2018). As then Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment asserted at the launch of the *Tertiary Education Strategy* in 2014: “the reality is that the vast majority of students who go to university do so to get a ticket to a well-paying job” (Joyce, 2014).

Efforts to change student expectations of tertiary education to an economic rationality are questionable in universities in particular, where alternative ideas about the world should be presented and discussed rather than indoctrinating particular approaches to education. My own experience in New Zealand university classrooms is that many students find unfamiliar philosophical and educational ideas overwhelming. Before matriculation, many students’ understanding of tertiary education is that its purpose is to prepare them for a job. It can be shocking, then, when a lecturer explains that there are other ways of thinking about the purposes of education than as preparation for work. The purpose of tertiary education in New Zealand is to supply business with a skilled workforce:

New Zealand’s prosperity relies on a skilled, flexible and innovative workforce. New Zealand needs an education system that ensures businesses have access to the skills they need to lift productivity, support economic recovery and drive future economic growth (New Zealand Government, 2012, p. 2).

For this reason, education is aimed toward the needs of business, producing students that are equipped for private sector employment. Policies to increase access to tertiary education in New Zealand were initiated to meet the perceived need for an increasingly educated, skilled and flexible workforce (New Zealand Government, 2014). The danger is that this vision of education will produce docile learners that are subservient to the needs of business, without the critical capacity or agency to question the requirements or thinking of these businesses.

New Zealand policymakers have linked human capital to economic growth and competitiveness. New Zealand's Productivity Commission (2017) describes human capital as one public benefit of tertiary education, which "helps drive national economic growth by developing the human capital of the labour force. This much is widely accepted, though the extent of the effect and the mechanism are contested" (p. 28). Irish policymakers also portray human capital as central to achieving sustainable economic competitiveness:

The Innovation Task Force Report should be seen in light of the Government's policy on Building Ireland's Smart Economy (2008) which highlighted the central importance of building the innovation or 'ideas' component of the economy through the utilisation of human capital—the knowledge, skills and creativity of people—and the ability and effectiveness of that human capital to translate ideas into valuable processes, products and services (DoES, 2011, p. 66).

The politics of human capital development is typical to neoliberal politics. Ireland and New Zealand both are neoliberal democracies. Neoliberalism in both countries has made the role of universities and the tertiary education system increasingly central to economic performance. This has led to increased interest in tertiary education among citizens as well as governments. The idea of universities as factories producing human capital is an obstacle to meaningful student

engagement. As will be discussed in the next chapter, both Dewey and Freire argue that tertiary education has merit beyond its contribution to the economy.

## **Useful Knowledge**

Policymakers have recast knowledge as a product or asset. In turn, universities have been recast as sites of knowledge production. Chapter 2 outlined the focus on creation of knowledge societies or economies in many Western democracies. This link between knowledge and the economy has pushed tertiary education into the realm of economic policy. Tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand has connected knowledge to economic performance. Useful and relevant knowledge has become part of the production of human capital or monetised for the development of the knowledge economy. Tertiary research in New Zealand has become a vehicle for economic growth, as “[l]inking research more actively to the needs of industry plays an important part in creating an innovative and productive economy” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 16).

In addition, education providers must look to business to establish what knowledge is relevant: “Government expects TEOs (tertiary education organisations) to work more closely with industry to improve the relevance of research and achieve greater transfer of knowledge, ideas and expertise to industry and wider society” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 17). Then New Zealand Minister of Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment encouraged research that “meets user needs” (Joyce, 2014). This situates “users” of research as businesses rather than citizens.

Policymakers in Ireland also have linked research and the production of knowledge to the needs of industry: “Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is focusing on investing in high-quality research relevant to the Irish economy” (DoES, 2011, p. 64). In addition, Irish policy documents

note that “[t]he further expansion of higher education is inevitable and essential if we are to fulfil our aspirations as an innovative and knowledge-based economy, and we must ensure that this happens within a coherent policy environment that serves the advancement of knowledge, wider national development and the public good” (DoES, 2011, p. 31). The creation of a knowledge economy, where knowledge contributes to the economy, is thus a key component of policy. Knowledge reconstituted as capital in turn influences ideas about what types of knowledge are valuable. In these circumstances, the value of knowledge can be reduced to economic value.

As discussed in Chapter 2, current education policy prioritises STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects in the rubric of success that conceptualises knowledge as a product. Dewey had a particular regard for the natural sciences, but even he did not value scientific knowledge above other forms of knowledge. Dewey’s community of inquiry and Freire’s dialogical approach to education—both discussed later in this thesis—explain that knowledge is never absolute or complete. In contrast to this position, tertiary education policies in New Zealand and Ireland prioritise particular forms of knowledge because of their economic usefulness.

In Ireland, “[t]he central importance of mathematics and science arises because of the technological orientation of our leading companies and the growing importance of these subjects in addressing future skills needs” (DoES, 2011, p. 36). In New Zealand,

The priority is to ensure that the skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs. This includes addressing new and emerging shortages in specific areas, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills needed for innovation and economic growth (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 10).

In this view, the humanities are not seen to make the same contribution to economic competitiveness as STEM subjects. This in spite of Irish policymakers' recognising that it is "the arts, humanities and social sciences that have consistently attracted the largest numbers of students and these are the domains in which Ireland has made a real global impact" (DoES, 2011, p. 38). STEM disciplines are predicted as necessary in the future, while other disciplines are not. The clear conclusion then is that the knowledge created within STEM disciplines is more important than other forms of knowledge.

Tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand also highlights the importance of skills accumulation. Roberts (1998) argues that, in New Zealand, "the concentration on skills and information in curriculum policy" is another phase in the commodification of knowledge. In Ireland, skills are perceived as foundational in tertiary education:

Various surveys, nationally and internationally, show that students, academics and employers believe that higher education has an important role to play in preparing students for the workplace and for their role as citizens, and that undergraduate education should explicitly address the generic skills required for effective engagement in society and the workplace (DoES, 2011, pp. 56–57).

In New Zealand, "[o]btaining and developing transferable skills is one of the most crucial outcomes of tertiary study, including within generalist areas of study as well as vocation-specific qualifications" (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 10).

The types of skills that students are meant to acquire are those that are relevant to the market. These types of skills often are referred to as transferable or generic skills. Current education policy emphasises the development of critical, creative, innovative and entrepreneurial graduates. However, the idea that students should acquire, rather than learn, these skills and the

overemphasis on skills as outputs and endpoints of tertiary education can close off possibilities for developing these traits. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

## **Good Governance**

Ireland and New Zealand share a history of distrust of academics by the State. More recently, both countries have seen changes in the way universities are perceived by the public. This has increased government and public pressure on universities to be more accountable and to continually improve performance. This has led to the implementation of corporate-style governance into tertiary education in the form of managerialism. As discussed in Chapter 2, this has meant the introduction and implementation of management techniques and principles from private enterprise into tertiary education, which was previously considered a public service. In Ireland, public funding for tertiary education is used to explain the introduction of these forms of accountability and performance management in the sector:

Funding and operational autonomy must be matched by a corresponding level of accountability for performance against clearly articulated expectations. This requires well-developed structures to enable national priorities to be identified and communicated, as well as strong mechanisms for ongoing review and evaluation of performance at system and institutional levels (DoES, 2011, p. 14).

The idea of what constitutes good governance is technical and bureaucratic rather than professional and democratic.

The New Zealand government has exerted increasing control in the tertiary education sector since the publication of the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission reports (TEAC, 2000, 2001a, b, c). This is evidenced by developments in quality assurance, staff development and key performance indicators for staff (Leach, 2014). The prominence of the tools of

managerialism in the sector is part of a continuing regime of improvement in support of economic performance:

In light of the challenges facing New Zealand and the tertiary sector, TEOs must continue to improve the value they deliver to students, businesses and the country. In recent years, Government has sought to improve this value by introducing performance-linked funding and developing educational performance indicators for TEOs (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 21).

The good governance of the sector is at the heart of policy and underpins all of the strategic plans for the sector: “A focus on maintaining and improving system-wide performance must underpin all of our strategic priorities and operate across the whole tertiary education sector” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 21). In other words, accountability and performance are how the State attempts to ensure that academics and institutions comply with policy and the politics of education it implies. Chapter 6 will discuss the inconsistency of this approach to governance in tertiary education with students’ engagement in their university.

### **Engaging Students**

Tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand demonstrates an increasing drive to engage students in tertiary education. As stated earlier, student engagement has become a significant area of research in tertiary education as much of it aligns with neoliberal political ideas and practices (Zepke, 2017). This section will investigate student engagement as a theme in tertiary education policy building on the overview of the literature in Chapter 1. Tertiary education policies in Ireland and New Zealand demonstrate distinct views on student engagement. In Ireland, student engagement is mentioned in policy explicitly. In New Zealand, there has been less explicit use of the term student engagement in policy until more recently.

The exception is in relation to Māori and Pasifika students and their communities.

Engagement of Māori and Pasifika students is an important goal of many New Zealand government policy documents (MoE, 2002, 2007, 2010; New Zealand Government, 2014). Most recently, student engagement has emerged in the New Zealand policy lexicon in the Productivity Commission report (2017). In response to this report, the then-Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment described “[c]reating a more student-centred system in which informed, engaged students can access the education opportunities best suited to them” (New Zealand Government, 2017, p .3) as an avenue “to progress the Government’s broader tertiary education priorities” (New Zealand Government, 2017, p. 3).

More recently, the Minister of Education has outlined a vision for education “that is inclusive, that can adapt to the needs of the modern world. It needs to engage every learner—in a much more personalised learning experience. We need our people to be resilient, creative and adaptable, able to work collaboratively as well as independently” (Hipkins, 2018). The Minister adds that “[t]he education system should bring out the best in everyone, providing all New Zealanders with learning opportunities so they can discover and develop their full potential, engage fully in society, and lead rewarding and fulfilling lives” (Hipkins, 2018). Here, the Minister outlines the importance of facilitating students to engage with their learning, as well as with society beyond the confines of the university. As this thesis will show this position is inconsistent with current policy.

Earlier New Zealand government statements on tertiary education policy displayed limited concern for student engagement in tertiary education, whether in teaching and learning, governance, or with the community. In 2007, the government’s tertiary education strategy advocated for “[s]trong connections between tertiary education organisations and the

communities they serve” (MoE, 2007, p. 16). However, the strategy’s conception of community was limited to other tertiary institutions, the business community, and Māori and Pasifika communities. There is, however, an inconsistency between the economic goals of policy unpinned by the idea of the competitive individual and the social goals of engaging community underpinned presumably by democratic values such as equity and solidarity. There is a possibility that engaging with the community within the current policy context becomes another thing that students have to do to meet their course requirements. This is a type of surface engagement and can result in students not reflecting on the purpose of what they are doing and perhaps not recognising the social, cultural, political and ethical context they are engaging in.

In terms of engagement in governance, legislation was introduced in 2015 to remove previous legislation that protected student and staff representation on university councils in New Zealand, leaving their future inclusion to the discretion of the council. This policy was mooted for change again in 2018. In comparison student representation at institution-level governing bodies is legislated for in Ireland as well as most other European jurisdictions. In terms of engagement in teaching and learning, New Zealand students until recently were considered “responsible for their own performance” (MoE, 2010, p. 20). In this way, student engagement was limited to a behavioural understanding of engagement, with no discussion at the policy level of more holistic approaches to effective education.

In Ireland, tertiary education policy ostensibly aims to create a “high quality student experience” (DoES, 2011, p. 11). The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoES, 2011) outlines three inter-connected objectives of higher education: teaching and learning, research, and engagement with the wider and international community. Student engagement is important to each of these elements. The policy draws attention to “[t]he adoption of new forms

of pedagogy for greater student engagement” (DoES, 2011, p. 52), to students’ contribution to the design of curricula (DoES, 2011 p. 53), and to the importance of community engagement by institutions. In this policy document, community “engagement means taking on civic responsibilities and cooperating with the needs of the community that sustains higher education—including business, the wider education system, and the community and voluntary sector” (DoES, 2011, p. 74). The policy document raises issues connected to research on student engagement in tertiary education.

In Ireland, the Higher Education Authority Working Group on Student Engagement in Irish Higher Education (HEA, 2014) outlines student engagement as “student involvement in decision-making processes in higher education institutions in relation to governance and management, quality assurance, and teaching and learning” (p. vii). The Working Group uses Trowler and Trowler’s (2011) definition: “Student engagement is the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution” (p. 1).

The report proposes that ten principles should underpin the development of policy to encourage student engagement at the institutional level. The report outlines these principles to assist institutions to develop cultures of engagement. The principles outline that the “institution will adhere to democratic principles” (2014, p. x) and will include the increasingly diverse student population in the academic community and its decision making. In addition, the report notes that institutions will facilitate feedback from students, ensuring that “the feedback loop will be closed in a timely fashion” (p. x). Institutions and student unions will be transparent in their decision making, remain “self-critical of their student engagement practices” (p. x), and “ensure

that values and practices with regard to student engagement are applied consistently through particular institutions and across institutions” (p. x).

The report describes students as partners and active member of their education institution. Rather than consumers, students are co-creators of knowledge. In addition, students are expected to contribute in a professional manner to decision making bodies. Both institutions and student unions should support this. Last, the report encourages staff and students to strive for more open and trustful relationships to build collegiality. The report outlines many policies to support student engagement. The report recognises the competing ideologies that can underpin student engagement within institutions and advocates for an approach to student engagement that perceives students as partners in a learning community. However, the report is underpinned by policy that prioritises the economy and the economic benefit of education, and so this inconsistency will inevitably mean that some students are treated as collegial partners and others as consumers of education.

The report argues that perceiving students as consumers “places them as somewhat detached, external service-users rather than internal members of the HEI [higher education institution]” (p. 4), with negative effects on student education. However, the overarching tertiary education policy is consumerist, even as it supports student engagement. Ireland has a history of pragmatism in its education policy (Walsh & Loxley, 2014). In this vein, Irish policymakers have accommodated different philosophical positions in tertiary education policy. However, such approaches can lead to incoherent policy. This inconsistency is problematic. This thesis contends that, in spite of ongoing research on student engagement in Ireland, the main thrust of policy as outlined previously in this chapter is at odds with these initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

Governments in Ireland and New Zealand are interested in education for its contribution to economic growth and competitiveness through the production of human capital and the commodification of knowledge. However, an analysis of current policy in both countries shows that the same terminology and ideas continue to be applied in both contexts. That is to say that the same ideas are represented in both policy contexts. These ideas illustrate how there has been a transformation of the relationship between the state and the citizen from a political relationship to an economic one. In Ireland and New Zealand, education mainly is considered a tool of the economy. This is the politics of education in these countries.

The problem of a neoliberal politics of tertiary education is its potential to close off opportunities for educational experiences. In the next chapter, alternative understandings about the purpose of education and student success from Dewey and Freire will be discussed. These approaches both begin with the student's experience. Living as a consumer creates dispositions that are at odds with dispositions that are necessary to enact a more just society. This idea is developed in Chapter 5. Viewing students as human capital raises the question of the role and responsibility of the university in the formation of the subject. This idea will be examined further in Chapter 4. The next three chapters will demonstrate inconsistencies between policy aims outlined in this chapter and ideas from Dewey and Freire about engaging students in tertiary education.

## **Chapter 4: Ontological Engagement**

Education is concerned with the formation of the student. Dewey and Freire have specific theories on how the student is formed through education and to what end this formation occurs. They both reject forms of education that emphasise the future to the detriment of the present, that reduces knowing to memorisation and passively accepts the *status quo* without critique. An education to become human capital is just such an approach. Dewey and Freire are often referred to in the literature on student engagement (Zepke, 2017; Trowler, 2010). Their approaches to education are models of engagement where students learn how to know, to act and to be in the world with each other. These three facets of education are linked to the older ideal of education as *Bildung*, which encompasses knowledge, practical wisdom and the formation of the self. The concept of *Bildung* is often associated with the modern university as outlined by one of its eminent architects Wilhelm von Humboldt.

Dewey's and Freire's approaches to education centralise student engagement. They both argue for an approach to education that is based on the experience of the student, but that also critiques this experience with the guidance and expertise of the teacher. Both insist on a form of education that marries a reflection on experience with action toward social justice and democracy. This process is how students come to know and act. Dewey and Freire argue that students should remain open to new ideas, new ways of relating to each other and understanding themselves and the world. They are therefore both concerned with education toward becoming where the student engages in education and with the world as a continual and uncertain process of becoming. Thus, education remains an open question that must be continually grappled with.

## **Dewey's Critique of Traditional and Progressive Education**

Dewey observes in *Experience and Education* (1988b) that “the history of educational theory is marked by opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without” (p. 1). Dewey was writing about schooling and not the university; however, his ideas are just as relevant to education in the university as they are in the school. Dewey (1988b), writing in the late 1930s, critiques a particular form of traditional education. This form of education comprises the preparation of the student for the future and for success in life, achieved through the acquisition of information and predetermined skills. In this form of education, the past informs the present and as such the necessary attitude of the student is one of “docility, receptivity, and obedience” (p. 6). The present experience of the student is not taken into account. The student’s “individual peculiarities, whims, and experiences” (Dewey, 1976a) are minimised in order to conform to a “goal of finished accomplishment” (Dewey, 1983a, p. 122). Traditional education then is an education for conformity or “mindless action” (Dewey, 1983a, p. 122) in order to achieve predetermined goals. Consequently, the student is not required to engage with the material or in the class, but to receive, accept and remember. This approach to education requires dispositions that are at odds with calls for student engagement which at minimum call for some form of action by and relation with the student.

Traditional education, Dewey wrote, is built upon the notion that bodies of information and skills developed in the past must be transmitted to students through education. This form of education is therefore bound up with the past (Dewey, 1988b). The emphasis is on subject matter rather than how knowledge was developed or the experiences of the students that might allow them to relate to the subject matter. Specific forms of knowledge and types of skill are predetermined as more important while the student’s experience is considered less so. This form

of education is overly focused on content and subject rather than the student's experience. Knowledge is decoupled from the experience that created it and passed it on to the student. However, it is by connecting experience to knowledge that the student creates meaning. Information torn from its roots in experience can lead to a lack of motivation, a lack of organic connection that enhances meaning and a hampering of the logic processes of the student (Dewey, 1976b). Thus, this gap between content and experience can lead to a lack of engagement by the student.

Dewey (1988b) describes a tendency to formulate what he termed *either-or* beliefs in education and thus to break education terminology into exclusive opposites: for example, authority versus individuality, discipline versus freedom and subject matter versus experience. These educational opposites draw attention to some unresolved issues in philosophy and education. Dewey outlines that progressive education is often described in opposition to traditional education:

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning from experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as a means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world (Dewey, 1983a, p. 7).

Dewey points out that while the general philosophy of progressive education might be sound, how this is worked out in practice can vary. He argues that a coherent philosophy of progressive education cannot be worked out in opposition to a philosophy of traditional education as this

leads to *either-or* thinking that rejects one aspect of education outright rather than rethinking it in a positive way. Dewey rejects dualistic thinking of this kind.

In a similar vein, educational ideas such as student engagement are, in the abstract, sound; however, understanding and practice varies enormously. A coherent philosophy of student engagement cannot merely be constructed in opposition to aspects of education that are perceived as unengaging. Engaging students is, at its core, what Dewey describes as “the organic connection between education and personal experience” (Dewey, 1988b, p. 11). It is to the concept of experience that Dewey turns in order to work out a comprehensive philosophy of education that engages students by connecting knowledge to their personal experience.

### **Freire's Critique of Banking Education**

Like Dewey, Freire (1996) critiques the traditional system of education in Brazil using the concept of *banking education*. This is an apt characterisation of a particular type of education where knowledge is deposited and withdrawn as if from a bank. Extending this metaphor further into education, the teacher is reconceptualised as a depositor of knowledge (Freire, 1996b). The student passively receives information from the teacher and textbooks and stores it, as a bank would do with money. This reduces the concept and process of education to a transaction between objects. The role of the student is reduced to receiving information, memorising and reiterating it, thus the process of inquiry is stymied. In this form of education, the relationship between the student and the teacher is one of authority where “the teacher teaches and the students are taught” (Freire, 1996b, p. 54). The relationship between teacher and student is limited because “[i]nstead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 1996b, p.

53). Additionally, the scope of the student's action is also limited to receiving information rather than being actively involved in the process of inquiry.

In banking education, the student is conceptualised as an empty vessel whereas the teacher is all knowing. Students are made aware of their inability as it is implied that they currently do not know and perhaps will never know enough. As students always know less, they and others perceive their voice as less valuable, less audible, less included, and less considered. This implies a political view of the world where human beings are divided between those who know and those who do not. This approach to education denies the humanity of the student. Freire (1996) explains “[p]rojecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (p. 53). This negation dehumanises the student.

This conception of education also views knowledge as unproblematic, decontextualised, and abstracted. Knowledge is reduced to an object, rather than conceptualised as an ongoing process of discovery and modification in response to a changing world. Knowing is substantially reduced to memorising existing knowledge, and thus the lecturer becomes merely an expert in transferring knowledge. Knowledge can also be deposited in textbooks and separated from context there (Escobar et al., 1994). When the production of knowledge occurs at a site removed from the classroom the qualities necessary to produce knowledge, such as critical thinking, uncertainty, curiosity and scepticism, are missing from the educational process (Shor & Freire, 1987). Education conceived of as banking, privileges some types of knowledge over others; for example, knowledge that can be monetised, packaged and sold. There is an inherent danger in perceiving knowledge as a finished product, one that is complete and not open to questioning or challenge: “when we separate *producing* knowledge from *knowing* the existing knowledge,

schools become easily spaces for selling knowledge which corresponds to capitalist ideology.... schools are set up as delivery systems to market official ideas and not to develop critical thinking” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8). When this occurs, knowledge can be framed as neutral and objective, even though it is political and thus open to be used in ways that may not be in the interests of the student.

In banking education, hegemonic political views or social structures are not questioned but passively accepted. Banking education tends to dichotomise everything into simple opposites: “[i]mplicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator” (Freire, 1996b, p. 56). This creates an understanding of the world as something apart from oneself, a world for which others are responsible. Instead, Freire interprets the fluid and dynamic relationship between the individual and our existence communally as dialectical and political (Freire, 1996b; Darder, 2015). For Freire, schools are inextricably linked to cultural, political and economic life (Freire, 1996b). However, banking education is not concerned with a critique of the cultural, political and economic systems that perpetuates it, only the production of useful students to sustain these systems.

Students are thus taught to passively adapt to the world as it is and not to question, change or improve it (Freire, 1996b). They are encouraged to stay unengaged; this is an inherent contradiction of neoliberal education where calls for student engagement are offset by educational practices that keep students passive and unengaged. For example, at the University of Canterbury, McCrone (2018) reports that community engagement is one of four key student attributes, alongside employability, global awareness and bicultural competence. The University Vice-Chancellor declares that “a community focus is something staff are now expected to work

into the heart of their courses”. However, while students are expected and encouraged to engage in communities outside the university, they are not always encouraged to engage in the university community to the same degree. In reporting on the Vice Chancellor’s views, McCrone intimated that “[i]f the campus seems, well, rather tame compared to the 1970s and 1980s, then the youth now have other values they want to express. There is a Millennial mindset” (2018, p. 2). Whether this “mindset” has anything to do with the fact that the majority of these students have only ever experienced a society and education system guided by neoliberal public policy is an open question. Students are, however, simultaneously expected to behave passively within the university but to engage with the world outside of it. This contradiction highlights an inconsistency of policy and the banking style of education. Nevertheless, in contrast to banking education, Freire proposes a pedagogical approach that explicitly engages with the political nature of education.

### **Education for Growth**

Dewey argues that the purpose of education is the same as the purpose of life and this means growth. He works out that the educational implications of this idea are as follows:

Our net conclusion is that life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, that means (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming (Dewey, 1980, p. 54).

The two central educational implications of this idea are that education is life and that it is also the reconstruction of experience.

For Dewey education is life, it is not preparation for life. Dewey argues that “...the educative experience can be identified with growth when that is understood in terms of the active

participle, *growing*” (Dewey, 1988b, p. 19). It is an active and continual condition rather than a state to be achieved. Dewey argues that any attempt to pin down that which toward growth is aimed renders the concept rigid and inconsistent with the idea of growth itself (Dewey, 1980). Dewey’s concept of growth was profoundly influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution. Consequently, Dewey’s conception of growth leading to more growth is analogous to Darwin’s biological conception of life leading to more life (Noddings, 2012).

For Dewey, education for growth means an education that is continually challenging and reconstructing experience. The process of education occurs through experience although not all experiences are educative. Dewey defines education as the “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1980, p. 82). This means that the process of reconstructing experience enhances the student’s ability to deal with new experiences in the future. The idea of education for growth is especially significant when considering the changing nature of the world or as Dewey puts it: the environment. The idea of growth as the purpose of education connects the present to the future. Thus, the uncertainty and possibility of the future can be considered as it is made. This consideration involves the development of a disposition toward continual learning and a commitment to continuing education. That is the essence of reconstruction of experience, a continual disposition toward learning. Growth is not something that can be achieved instead it is a constant process of development or enlargement of experience. Growth takes place when experiences are reconstructed. For Dewey, this reorganising of experience occurs through communication and reflective experience.

Growth is not a static outcome or result; it is not a terminus or a destination to be reached but a continuously active process of transformation. Growth is not the goal of perfection but

rather the activity of perfecting (Dewey, 1983a, p. 181). Dewey argues that there is a difference between ultimate ends and ends-in-view in education. Ends-in-view are never final but always in continuous formation through experience and communication with others. What Dewey calls ends-in-view are guiding aims rather than final end-states. In a somewhat precarious world, ends-in-view provide direction for the future without closing off possibility. Ends-in-view can provide intelligent direction to present action. Growth then is open-ended to accommodate the unpredictable and evolving nature of experience.

It should be noted that Dewey used the terms *purpose* and *aim* interchangeably, and this has been criticised by R.S. Peters (1973) among others. Peters highlights the difference between educational aims and purposes, where purpose are associated with reasons for action. For example, one might seek to discover the purpose of a particular action. On the other hand, an aim suggests something that we are trying to achieve. Therefore, they do not mean the same thing. In education, Peters (1973) argues, once the meaning of education is explained, aims are redundant, as aims are an integral part of the concept of education itself; there can be no concept of education without aims.

Dewey was not satisfied with traditional education that sacrificed the student's present for a particular idea of the future. He was concerned that a predefined future purpose of education might not correspond to the student's actual future. Instead, Dewey connects his idea of education as growth to the reconstruction of experience, and this opens up possibilities for continuously and creatively thinking about, and engaging with, the future as it evolves. Dewey (1916) argues that authentic aims of education must be founded upon the nature of education itself. When educational aims are instead subordinated to specific interests, such as preparation for work, they are "not a stimulus to intelligence" (Dewey, 1980, p. 117). Dewey argues that

within education with market-focused external aims “there is little preparation to induce hardy resistance, discriminating criticism, or the vision and desire to direct economic forces in new channels” (Dewey, 1984b, pp. 128-129). Additionally, there is a danger that when education has external aims students may come to think that work is carried out merely for external reward and this undermines the continually reconstructive nature of education that Dewey argues for. It also undermines ontological engagement as something students do for themselves.

Dewey’s conception of the purpose of education as growth has been criticised by, for example, Callan (1982), Hildreth (2011), and Hofstadter (1963). Critics find Dewey's statements regarding growth ambiguous and elusive. Hofstadter (1963) argues that growth is an inapt metaphor for education, particularly given Dewey’s emphasis on the reconstructive and social nature of education. He also argues that there is an implication that the student’s interests reformulated as growth are somehow more important than society’s interest. He is at odds with Dewey because he explains that the internal demands of growth are at odds with social reconstruction and the demands of society. Additionally, Hofstadter (1963) outlines the difficulties in establishing curricula where the purpose of education is growth, and learning is based on experience. Despite these criticisms, the benefit of understanding education in this way is its potential for perpetually thinking otherwise about education. It enables students to reflect and engage in their own experiences, to decide and continually update their own version of growth in concert with their community and the world. Its effect then is the growth of the student rather than the expression of prevailing interests.

Education for growth is a somewhat ambivalent term. However, in line with his other thinking, Dewey argues each generation must redefine and reconstruct what is meant by education for growth. The process of growing is what is essential, and this is a process of

uncertain struggle where ends-in-view may guide the process, but ultimate ends other than continuing growth and learning are educationally risky as these ends close-off the potentiality of the future. This means that externally imposed ends in education curtail the actual processes of engaging, reconstructing and growing. Deciding on predetermined ends in policy, if taken seriously, could potentially limit student engagement in the process of reconstruction that both prepares the student for and creates the future.

### **Education for Humanisation**

Freire argues that dehumanisation is not only an ontological possibility but also an historical reality, however, not an inevitability (Freire, 1996b, p. 25). Dehumanising situations, what Freire terms limit situations, that challenge the pursuit of humanisation can be challenged by transformative limit acts (dialogical praxis). Dehumanisation is evidenced in the world where there is injustice, exploitation and violence, wherever people yearn and struggle for justice and freedom so that they can reclaim their lost humanity (Freire, 1996b). Freire's principal insight that education can be misused to reproduce inequality and oppression in society is significant. Many people in Ireland and New Zealand are privileged to live in relative comfort in comparison to the poorest half of the planet, although there is also increasing inequality in both countries (Hearne & McMahon, 2016; Rashbrooke, 2013). In Ireland, in 2016 10% of the people owned 54% of the wealth. At the other end of the spectrum, 50% of the people held less than 5% of the wealth (Hearne & McMahon, 2016). In New Zealand, at the same time, the wealthiest 20 % held 70% of the wealth, while 40% of households held just 3% (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). Other forms of inequality also persist such as unequal pay between men and women, alongside complex issues of racial inequality to name a few. On a global scale, there is extreme inequality as 82% of the wealth created in 2017 went to just 1% of the global population whereas 50% got

nothing (Lawson, 2018). This is the situation that Freire addresses with his approach to education.

For Freire, the purpose of being human is the ethical idea of humanisation; it is our ontological vocation to become more fully human. Thus, his conception of humanity is one of *becoming*, but unlike Dewey, he is specifically concerned with how education can socialise students into oppressive dehumanising systems, as in the case of banking education. Dehumanisation interrupts and deforms this process of becoming. It closes down the possibility for reflection, dialogue and action in the struggle against oppression. In these systems, students are caught in a continuous cycle of dehumanisation (Tan, 2018). Instead, he advocates an approach to education that is sensitive to power and politics so that students can become more critically aware of the world they inhabit and consequently act to change it. He advocates for critical dialogic engagement in education and the world.

For Freire (1985), education is always political, never neutral. Education can maintain the *status quo*, but it can also change the world by enabling students to critique the world. Freire's conception of power is both complex and political in nature. He writes of 'oppressors' and 'the oppressed', but his conception of power is more nuanced than this simplistic dichotomy would imply. For Freire, oppression is multi-layered and often contradictory. For example, the oppressed can simultaneously be oppressors. A white woman might suffer injustice because of her gender and yet not recognise the additional injustice enacted against a woman of colour who is subjected to both sexism and racism. In the university, a student is privileged because they can avail of a university education and yet may experience injustice or exploitation within and outside of the university. For Freire, these particular forms of oppression can be understood in relation to a broader theoretical conception of oppression (Freire & Macedo, 1995). There have

been some criticisms of Freire's conception of power including Weiler (1991) who argues that Freire's theory of oppression as outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is both abstract and universalist. Freire, however, argues the importance of both meta-narratives and specific experiences in his conception of power as one gives meaning to the other, because "education is politics, art and knowing" (Freire, 1985a, p.17). Lived experience is not unproblematic as it can categorise race, class and gender according to a dominant cultural paradigm. Thus, lived experience needs to be critically read and meta-narratives can assist in this endeavour as contingent universalities (McLaren, 1994).

Freire (1985) has a dialectical view of power as both a positive and negative force, working on and through people where there is always hope, as domination is never complete. For example, the oppressed may also come to internalise their oppression (Freire, 1985b), and become oppressors themselves. A 'fear of freedom' may lead them to desire this, as they perceive oppression as inevitable (Freire, 1996b). Oppression is not an inevitability but the oppressed must depend on themselves and not others for liberation. In contrast, oppressors also depend on the oppressed for their liberation as they do not have the insight or experience borne of oppression to accomplish this for themselves. Freire (1996) argues that attempts to moderate the power of the oppressor is manifested as false generosity. This occurs when a person's ability to be generous is predicated on a position of power and the ability to maintain this position. For example, when a person gives a donation to a charity but does not ask or care to understand why other people are in this position; this is an act of false generosity. True generosity means that no one should have to ask for basic human rights and freedoms. Oppressors employ tactics such as conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and cultural invasion to maintain their domination

(Freire, 1996b). Oppression also objectifies the oppressed where “[t]he antidialogical, dominating *I* transforms the dominated, conquered *thou* into a mere *it*” (Freire, 1996b, p. 148).

In contrast, liberation is the continuing quest and political project for humanisation. A liberating education is a democratic education, “an unveiling education, a challenging education, a critical act of knowing, of reading reality, or understanding how society works” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 38). It is a process of struggle towards liberation. Tan (2018) argues that “[i]t is a march towards becoming a subject who knows and acts” (p. 371). Roberts (2000) argues that a liberating education is not a rigid set of methodologies but is “a specific orientation to the social world” (p. 67). Liberation is a praxis: that is a reflection upon the world to transform it. Thus, it is through the quest for liberation that the oppressed are liberated. Freire (1996) argues that a commitment to liberation requires the rejection of banking education and its replacement with problem-posing education as a “[l]iberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information” (Freire, 1996b, p. 60). And it is these acts of cognition, of coming to know, that constitute an ontological engagement as to know is to become.

Liberation is also an act of love as this is its motivating force. It is a transformation toward social justice, equality, freedom, solidarity and tolerance. To overcome oppression and proceed toward humanisation, people must first understand the causes of oppression and then work to change the situation through transforming action. A liberating education is a problem-posing education. It is learning to recognise power in solidarity with each other. It is not achieved at the expense of others. It is a social act, where relationships are engaged in with others and the world (Freire, 2013, p. 3). For Freire, a social act is carried out with other human beings. Consequently, Freire’s project of humanisation has been criticised as anthropocentric (Aronowitz, 1998). However, in the publication *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Freire, 2004), he

acknowledges that the needs of the planet are not separate from the needs of human beings. He explains: “I don’t believe in loving among human beings if we do not become capable of loving the world. Ecology has gained tremendous importance at the end of the century. It must be present in any educational practice of a radical, critical, and liberating nature” (Freire, 2004, p. 47). He, therefore, calls for all life to be included in radical progressive politics and education toward liberation.

Problem-posing education is an instrument of liberation (Freire, 1996b). It is an ongoing never-ending process of becoming where both the unfinished nature of the person and the world are acknowledged. For Freire, education starts at the point of incompleteness, of knowing that we do not know. He argues “[i]t is our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable” (Freire, 1998, p.58). However, education cannot complete the student. Curiosity, doubt, uncertainty and the need to seek out new knowledge are evidence of the student’s awareness of incompleteness. An education that is predominantly preparation for employment is an education to become. An education that acknowledges unfinishedness and the continuing quest for humanisation is an education for becoming. Awareness of incompleteness is part of the human condition. Freire explains that “unfinishedness is essential to our human condition. Whenever there is life, there is unfinishedness” (Freire, 1998, p. 52). For Freire human incompleteness means that nothing is ever truly final or absolute and this leaves open the possibility for change and development. Conceptualised this way people are never without hope. Indeed the concept of unfinishedness empowers. Freire argues that an unfinished person in an unfinished world is constantly transforming the world and undergoing the effects of this transformation in return (Freire, 2013). Therefore any attempt to prepare or adapt students to an idea of reality that is fixed, that is certain and complete, is futile. Reality is constantly being created and transformed;

therefore preparing students for a specific future idea of the world based on present ideas of what that reality is or might be, is not consistent with an education for humanisation.

If banking education is an education for domination, then problem-posing education, rooted in dialogue, is an education for freedom (Freire, 1996b, p. 62). It is through dialogue and questioning ideas perceived as common sense that we become conscious of our beliefs, our values, and our culture, which are so often taken for granted. It is also through examining society's structures and institutions that greater understanding is achieved. Indeed a "problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality" (Freire, 1996b, p. 62). As Shor (1993) points out "[t]hrough problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions" (p. 26). It encourages critical thought, and questioning, as students come to ask questions rather than merely accepting solutions that they are then required to memorise. This ability to question and pose problems has the potential to liberate students. As problem-posing education critiques reality, it cannot serve the interests of those who would oppress.

A problem-posing approach draws on the interests and experiences of the student. In problem-posing education, the relationship between teacher and student is transformed. The student becomes student/ teacher, and the teacher becomes teacher/student, as each learns from the other. This repositioning of the relationship between teacher and student in problem-posing education to one of mutual learning does not negate the role of the teacher nor reduce their role to facilitator (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Instead, both teacher and student become increasingly conscious of the world though problem-posing education as "it would be impossible for anyone to begin it without becoming involved in it" (Freire, 2013, p. 134). In his later work, Freire insists on the need for structure, direction and rigour in liberating education (Shor & Freire, 1986). It is the teacher who provides these. In Freire's view a rigorous teacher is one who

continuously fully engages with and relearns their field of study (Roberts, 1996b). It is through dialogue that students and teachers become critical researchers and co-creators of knowledge. This is how rigour does not descend into domination. This reformulated relationship between teacher and student underpins a form of student engagement that goes beyond that which is possible in an authoritarian environment of the kind encouraged by neoliberal policy ideas.

### **Education for the Development of Human Capital for Economic Competitiveness**

The question of the purpose of education is essential when thinking about the kind of student that is being formed through tertiary education. If we do not know what we are trying to achieve, we cannot make decisions about approaches, contents or the types of relationships that are necessary in tertiary education. According to Dewey's and Freire's ideas, an education to exclusively become human capital is an approach to be avoided. They mooted their ideas in the last century and in Dewey's case, he referred to schools rather than universities. However, the centrality of the idea of the student as future human capital in contemporary policy is problematic. Education to become human capital as outlined in Irish and New Zealand policy documentation is overly concerned with the future skills, knowledge and competencies that students must develop, in order to maintain competitiveness. Nevertheless, as Dewey (1988b) points out letting the past determine the present has implications for student engagement, particularly as it fosters certain kinds of capability. Following Dewey's advice is not a rejection of the idea of preparing for the future but rather an opportunity to rethink it and its implications for education. Encouraging students to confine themselves to memorising material promotes attitudes of obedience which can thwart engagement. For example, critique might sometimes be construed as defiant rather than engaging.

Additionally, preparing students for a future based on present ideas of what that future might be is also problematic. Back in the mid-1990s in Ireland, there was a campaign orchestrated at government level to promote computer studies programs in tertiary education to serve Ireland's growing technology sector which included global technology firms such as Intel, IBM and Hewlett Packard. Potential students were promised job opportunities and good salaries to entice them. Less than a decade later a number of high profile companies laid-off workers at computer plants around the country. New graduates in the industry found themselves without a job and with little immediate prospects in the industry. By 2002 *The Irish Times* (Lillington, 2002) reported that the numbers of students applying for computer studies programs in Ireland were in decline. This decline was attributed to job losses. Again there was a concern that there would not be enough graduates to support the industry in the near future. Somewhat cynically, perhaps, a company executive reported that it was no great loss for the industry as "having no passion whatsoever for their chosen career, these posers would never be technology's thinkers, dreamers or entrepreneurs - much less find any satisfaction in their work" (Lillington, 2002, para. 29). At the time some commentators argued that the problem was with the Irish government's approach to recruitment for science and technology programs in tertiary education which was judged superficial in nature, meaning that the state was not perceived as efficient enough at producing the necessary human capital (Lillington, 2002). Perhaps preparing students for a specific future based on present ideas of what a specific future might look like, might in hindsight not have been in the best interests of these students.

### **Reflective Experience**

Dewey's philosophy of education is based on a conception of educative experience. He argues that there is an organic connection between experience and education where experience

refers to “the actual life experience of some individual” (Dewey, 1988b, p. 61). Dewey argues that while some experiences are educative, other experiences may be mis-educative. An experience is mis-educative if it distorts growth which is the purpose of education: “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (Dewey, 1988b, p. 11). Dewey argues that the quality of an experience is judged based on both its immediate agreeableness or disagreeableness and its ability to contribute to future and further experience known as the principle of continuity of experience. He proposes that a theory of experience is necessary to understand what educational experiences are, and how things might be arranged to facilitate these experiences.

Dewey (1988b) argues that the two principles that identify educational experiences are the principles of continuity and interaction, and experience arises from the dialectic of these. Although described separately, the principles of continuity and interaction are in practice connected and interdependent (Dewey, 1988b). The principle of continuity stipulates that “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1988b, p. 19). Therefore each experience a person has will influence that person’s future. Dewey argues that experience is also always connected to prior experience. Therefore a teacher must bring themselves into the world of the student to try to understand these prior experiences. Dewey (1980) explains that education is that “reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (p. 82). Education then is the perpetual reconstruction of experience. However, experience is not a passive undertaking as it must have meaning to the person undertaking the experience.

The second principle for interpreting experience is *interaction* which “assigns equal rights to both factors in experience - objective and internal conditions” (Dewey, 1988b, p. 24). That is to say that Dewey assigns equal educational importance to the educational environment, and the student’s interests, desires, capacities and needs. Interaction demonstrates how the educational situation influences experience. The student’s experience derives from the interaction between the student and the environment. Dewey argues that people can only know the world by experiencing or interacting with it. In *Democracy and Education* (1980) he explains that the self is continually forming and reforming through. The individual does not come into the world fully formed but is made and continually remade by society, by objects, by social institutions, or through their environment. The self is ever changing. It is not fixed before action but realised through action and reflection or through reconstructing experience. Through experience and interaction, both the self and the world are changed. Dewey argues that “experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (Dewey, 1985, p. 26). The principle that experience is developed through interaction necessitates a socially educative environment.

Experience is also transactional as both parties are affected (Quay, 2016). This mutual transformation is core to Dewey’s epistemology where the self may come to know the world by experiencing or interacting with it. The world and reality are only ever revealed through action and activity. Experience is formed by the actions taken when one is trying to make sense of the world thus making the self part of the world and making the world part of the self. Subjects cannot separate themselves from the world as they affect and are affected by it in turn. Dewey’s account of knowledge takes its starting point in the concept of experience where knowledge is a construction located within the transaction between the organism and environment. The terms

*transactional constructivism* and *transactional realism* have been used to draw attention to transaction as an essential element of experience (Sleeper, 1986; Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Education for Dewey is about the construction of personal meaning as a participant or agent rather than as a passive spectator (Dewey, 1980). Here personal meaning is co-created through communication with others as

“[i]f we had not talked with others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves.... Through speech a person dramatically identifies himself with potential acts and deeds; he plays many roles, not in successive stages of life but in a contemporaneously enacted drama. Thus mind emerges.” (Dewey, 1981, p. 52)

*Reflective experience* is the term that Dewey gives to the continuing process of action and reflection outlined in his theory of inquiry. Dewey’s theory of inquiry or process of knowing, in synopsis, involves the experience of doubt, the construction of the problem, hypothesis, consideration of consequences and experimental action (Dewey, 1986). Dewey, like Freire, refers to doubt and uncertainty as instigating the process of inquiry. Moreover, for Dewey, as for Freire, uncertainty is the source of both philosophy and science because it is at the root of inquiry (Westbrook, 1991, p. 328). The theory of inquiry is not sequentially or distinctively fixed. The means constitute the end of inquiry, for without the means the end would not exist. Inquiry involves previous experience, theoretical reflection and experimental action (Dewey, 1986). If a person fails to theoretically reflect on the initial problem and moves straight to action, this becomes a process of trial and error, and this can potentially reduce the quality of the experience. Dewey favours reflective experience that requires more than just the minimalist thinking involved in the process of trial and error. He instead argues for a theoretical reflection on experience, rather than just a practical reflection (Dewey, 1985). Trial and error do not commit a

person to actual consequences as these operations provide “a medium of a postponed conclusion and of investigation continued till better grounds for affirming an object (making a definite, unified response) are given” (Dewey, 1985, p. 77). It is this reflection on consequences that transforms action into intelligent action. For Dewey, a quality experience requires reflection. It is through the theory of inquiry that meaning and knowledge are developed where “thought enables us to attribute meaning to these transactions” (Quay, 2016, p. 1019).

Dewey’s theory of knowledge as inquiry reflects his attentiveness to the idea of incompleteness. In *Democracy and Education* Dewey (1980) explains that “the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action” (p. 149). The self is not fixed before action but realised through action and reflection or through reconstructing experience. Dewey’s notion of experience is predicated on the idea of adaptation and is influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution. The Deweyan purpose of education is growth, and this is continually challenging, and reconstructing our experiences. This reconstruction of our experiences increases our ability to deal with other experiences in the future. Our ability to learn from our experiences and to modify our actions because of our previous experiences opens us up to the formation of habits and dispositions. And finally, our incompleteness means that we can know and can change. Dewey’s theory of knowledge is based on an ontological engagement between students and the world as a process of coming to know and of becoming.

### **Praxis**

Praxis is a continuous action and reflection on experience, through dialogue, toward social change. The concepts of dialogue and praxis are central to both education as the formation of the subject and the creation of knowledge. Praxis is the process of coming to critical awareness. It encompasses a critical reflection on ourselves, our history, and our current

situation to take transformative action to change the world. It is both a rereading and remaking of the world. The world as Freire perceives it encompasses both the physical world and the social world as human beings make it. Praxis enables students to come to critical awareness as they reflect on their actions in the world. It is also an opportunity to engage with the diversity and complexity of history, as a way to enter into a critical dialogue that does not accept the world unquestioningly, that instead questions and unveils power and authority (Freire, 1996b).

Humans are continuously remaking the world and, therefore, continuously changing. Thus, a continual engagement with praxis is necessary. Continual reflection and action constitute praxis, neither can be reduced to mere verbalism or empty activism. Both constituent parts are integral to praxis because “[w]hen a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating “blah” (Freire, 1996b, p. 68). “On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism” (Freire, 1996b, p. 69).

Activism, with an emphasis on action, makes dialogue, in the Freirean sense, impossible as there is no possibility for reflection.

Dialogue is a process of “encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (Freire, 1996b, p. 69). Dialogue involves the construction and tackling of questions otherwise known as problem-posing and lies at the heart of a liberating education. Through dialogue, students can learn about the conditions of oppression within society, the injustice and inequality in their lives and the lives of others. The student’s experience is the starting point from which students can critically engage with knowledge in order to understand more completely. Dialogue is part of being human, as Freire (2013) argues that “to be human is to engage in relationships with each other and with the world” (p. 3).

Dialogue is not limited to deepening understanding but is part of making a difference in the world. Education as dialogue can transform people into active subjects, where students come to question myths, doctrines, ideologies, indeed all forms of knowledge. It is through dialogue that students come to problematise the world by unmasking social realities. Freire explains that dialogue involves the construction and addressing of questions. Thus problem-posing education develops critical consciousness through dialogue. Through critical dialogue, students enter the process of problematisation.

Dialogue is also a way of knowing and coming to know the world. Knowledge is constructed through dialogue as a process of coming to know. Freire describes education and the process of coming to know as follows:

Education takes place when there are two learners who occupy somewhat different spaces in an ongoing dialogue. But both participants bring knowledge to the relationship, and one of the objects of the pedagogic process is to explore what each other knows and what they can teach each other. A second object is to foster reflection on the self as actor in the world in consequence of knowing (Freire, 1998, p. 8).

Dialogic problem-posing education links experience, reflection and action. It is through dialogue that praxis occurs. For Freire, dialogue is praxis; it is where students learn the interdependence of action and reflection. Freire's conception of dialogue goes well beyond the common perception as a conversation between two people; instead, it is both a critical "act of knowing and a means of action for transforming the reality which is to be known" (Freire, 1972, p. 180). Freire describes the relationship between dialogue, the word and praxis as follows:

As we attempt to analyse dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: *the word*. However, the word is more than just an

instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word, we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world (Freire, 1996b, p. 68).

Freire also understands dialogue as social praxis, that is, action and reflection through dialogue for the transformation of the world. Dialogue is a process by which we can enter into each other's worlds. It is a social process where we communicate with each other, and by engaging with each other, we are humanised (Shor & Freire, 1987). Dialogue necessarily involves an *other*. Since language is primarily social so is dialogue as necessitated by this interaction. Our ability to be in relation to others is what identifies us as social and political beings. “Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (Freire, 1996b, p. 69).

For a teacher to be open to relearning through dialogue, dialogue necessarily has to be democratic in character: “[l]iberatory dialogue is a democratic communication” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 99). A democratic culture is, therefore, necessary for dialogue to occur as students need to be free to question, explore and pose problems in a climate of mutual respect and equality where they may co-investigate with their teacher. In this situation, students can give voice to injustice in their lives. Freire explains that “dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants” (Freire, 1996b, p. 70). However, respecting others’ ideas by listening and critically evaluating those ideas does not mean that one must necessarily agree.

Freire believed that some ideas are better than others however one must remain open to the possibility of these ideas being surpassed (Roberts, 2010).

The term conscientisation (conscientização in Portuguese) has been widely debated, but it can be summarised as “the process of deepening one’s understanding of the social world” (Roberts, 2008, p. 100) or the development of critical awareness (Freire, 2013, p. 15). It is the social process by which we become aware of the world and the conditions and sources of oppression. Freire (1998) argues that “the breakthrough of a new form of awareness in understanding the world is not the privilege of one person. The experience that makes possible the ‘breakthrough’ is a ‘collective experience’” (p. 77). Additionally, it is a social process because “there is no conscientisation outside of praxis” (Freire, 1985b, p. 60) and Freire’s praxis occurs through the social process of dialogue. It is an integral part of thinking, making meaning and deepening one’s understanding of the world. In the liberating classroom, students examine society’s structures and institutions, scrutinise what is said, what is done and how people relate to one another.

Freire explains that historical accounts of contemporary culture are reflective of the political and economic interests of the ruling class (Freire, 1996b; Darder, 2015). It is a particular version of history that comes to be established in the cultural psyche. Knowledge has historicity, in other words an historical moment. A sense of history is central to the struggle for humanisation. Therefore students must interrogate knowledge carefully and also reflect on how this new knowledge changes them. Students come to understand how society works by “reading the world”. Reading the world requires an ability to analyse the social and political situations that influence people's lives. Freire (1998) points out that there is a dialectical relationship between reading the word and reading the world as one cannot happen independently of the other.

Knowledge always has a socio-political context. Freire (1998) argues that when we acknowledge our uncertainty and therefore incompleteness, we are open to questioning. He explains that uncertainty is the beginning of the process of coming to know. When we can question ourselves and our current social situations and structures, we are open to conscientisation. This awakening of critical awareness is the social process by which we become aware of the world and the conditions and sources of oppression (Freire, 2013). As the world is recreated so too is our knowledge of the world, and conscientisation thus is a continuing process of coming to know the world. It is in this context that Roberts (1996a) argues that “conscientisation … is the reflective component of praxis” (p. 188).

Freire argues that the way we understand the world affects the way we may potentially change it. He states that, in problem-posing education, students: “develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1996b, p. 64). Freire argues that “reading does not consist merely of decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). An act of knowing can only occur in relation to the world. Freire explains that there is a dialectical relationship between people and the world. A dialectical relationship means that both the world and the people are continuously changed by each other; they are deeply and complexly interrelated.

Another critical element of Freire’s praxis is transformative or liberating action. For Freire, experience, understanding and critical thinking lead to transformative action through dialogue. As part of a dialogic praxis, the student’s actions can enhance the student’s future experience. While the reflective component of praxis emphasises reading the world, the active

component draws our attention to remaking the world. Remaking the world involves naming the world as an action toward liberation. Language and the words that people use to name the world can be oppressive, and therefore an emancipatory education requires the subject to take control over naming the world, to become an active subject. Naming the world is a means by which humans understand, analyse, and act upon their reality. These acts are toward social justice. “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (Freire, 1996b, p. 69).

Naming the world involves generating new ways of naming and acting in the world borne out of a dialogical process of action and reflection. As with Freire’s other ideas, it is “a continuous process of creating and re-creating” (Roberts, 1998, p. 44). Naming the world requires a synthesis of reflection and action through the process of dialogue. It is “also the process of change itself: the human quest to understand and transform the world, through communication with others” (Roberts, 1998, p. 44). Freire’s approach to education, like Dewey’s, is founded on engagement with others and with the world. It is an approach to education that relies on engagement, and that manifests as engagement.

## **Conclusion**

One of the central themes of tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand is that students are formed as human capital through tertiary education. Both Dewey and Freire criticise forms of education that conceptualise students as empty vessels waiting to be filled. They also criticise capitalist forms of education that are overly concerned with the production of workers. Dewey and Freire propose that education should be more broadly concerned with student formation as becoming, rather than limiting it to the development of the student as human capital for national economic competitiveness. Both Dewey and Freire set out ideas for

an education that understands the student as becoming. They draw out approaches to education that while different in many respects are also connected by their concern for the student's formation in the domains of knowing, acting and being. Both reflective experience and praxis are opportunities to develop agency, that is, opportunities for *being* and *becoming* in the world. This illustrates that there is no one approach to authentically engage students, as there is no one approach to education. However, some approaches are clearly better than others. An education that is reflective, dialogic, uncertain, unfinished, and directed toward growth and humanisation can encompass preparation for employment while remaining open to questioning it.

There is a fundamental inconsistency between calls for student engagement in education and a neoliberal or capitalist framework that works to alienate students. An authentic engagement process must call into question the social and economic framework on which tertiary education in Ireland and New Zealand are based. Thus students can become critically aware of the dominating and alienating nature of neoliberalism in these contexts. Authentic student engagement, therefore, runs contrary to the interests of neoliberalism which positions itself as a neutral force in education. Within a neoliberal approach the educational interaction between the student and the lecturer, their peers, or university management, are established from the outset as one of dominance rather than mutuality. However, those involved in the educational process can assert their agency to resist these forms of interaction. Nevertheless, it is the policy structures in place that create a situation that needs resisting in the first place. Therefore, the conceptualisation of the student as human capital in tertiary education policy is inconsistent with efforts to engage students as human beings in tertiary education.

## **Chapter 5: Ethical Engagement**

### **Ethical Formation**

Ethical ideas of what constitutes a good education are underdeveloped in contemporary tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand. However, neoliberalism as a moral system, like all ethical approaches implicitly establishes and prioritises particular moral values and dispositions. Thus, the habits and dispositions deemed necessary to be an economic subject and support economic competitiveness are prioritised as virtuous. Within tertiary education policy, the skills that students obtain have emerged as the most essential aspect of education. While knowledge and understanding are significant aspects of contemporary policy, they do not occupy the same space as the discourse of skills. Educational dispositions and virtues occupy no space at all. There has, perhaps, been a conflation of other educational ideas under the umbrella term *skills*. This chapter seeks to explore the concept of skills reconstituted as educational virtues in current policy and the potential implications for student engagement. In particular how these skills constituted as neoliberal values are inconsistent with student engagement. To this end, two crucial neoliberal skills or capacities, that is, critical thinking and creativity are considered. In contrast to the neoliberal virtues of policy, there is a reflection on the virtues and habits that Freire and Dewey, respectively, thought necessary for the kind of critical democratic engaging education that they champion. Finally, there is a deliberation on two contemporary challenges for education and the virtues and habits that are helpful in confronting these.

### **The Ethics of Neoliberalism**

In *The Moral Dimension*, Amitai Etzioni (1988) equates the neoclassical paradigm with a disregard for ethics. The lack of deliberation on the moral perspective, or any discussion of ethics, in contemporary tertiary education policy bears this out. Contemporary policy

apparently has little concern with the ethics and morality of education. However, Ball and Olmedo (2013) argue that neoliberalism has become a “moral system that subverts and reorients us to its truths and ends” (p. 88). Or, as Margaret Thatcher (Butt, 1981), an advocate of neoliberal policies, put it “[e]conomics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul”. Neoliberalism may have a disregard for the consideration of ethics, but it is nevertheless a moral system and a way of thinking about and looking at the world. In an attempt to realise particular ends, neoliberal policy implicitly establishes and prioritises particular moral values—specific ways to be and act. Policy documents also outline a hierarchy of values, by prioritising those values perceived as the most important, and by explicitly and repeatedly mentioning these in the documents. Less important values are mentioned less frequently or not at all. This is how the morality of neoliberalism is unveiled. Furthermore, the official identity of students, whom they are supposed or required to be, is outlined in policy documents and this in turn influences who they are and who they become.

### **Aristotle's Virtues**

Virtue ethics are largely based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (2009) where Aristotle was concerned with what constitutes a good life and the virtues both required and cultivated by this. Reflecting Aristotle's influence, the education of virtues has long been influential in the Western education. Somewhat confusingly, the terms *values*, *virtues*, and *dispositions* are sometimes used interchangeably in the contemporary literature. Values tend to refer to individual beliefs and attitudes that may or may not be morally virtuous. In Aristotle's theory of virtue, he cites two types of virtue; intellectual (*dianoetikai*) and moral (*ethike*). A virtue (*arête*) is a trait of mind or character that helps us achieve a good life, which underpins a happy life (*eudaimonia*). As Aristotle saw it, virtues are essential to the good life, as the value of virtues

depends on their relation to human wellbeing. The concept of virtues denotes moral excellence and is commonly understood as defining a standard of moral conduct. In his study of moral ethics, Aristotle argued that to have moral virtue is to be disposed to feel and act in a certain way, that is, to have certain dispositions. Using his doctrine of the mean, Aristotle argued that the way to act was to take a middle way, that is to say, that virtues are intermediate or mean states. One example of a mean state is courage; which lies between the excess of rashness and the deficiency of cowardice. Courage is, therefore, a virtue. Virtues are variable and depend on the context but are never excessive or deficient. Moral virtue then, is “a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it” (Aristotle, 2009, p. 31). What this means is that deficiency and excess are not the same for everyone, and it is through practical wisdom or the art of living a good life (*phronesis*), sometimes colloquially called good judgment, that we might determine this for ourselves.

For Aristotle, virtues are dispositions to act in the most appropriate way according to some principle of universality or authority. Although the word *disposition* appears in many modern texts, Aristotle used the Greek word *hexis*, meaning an active or habitual disposition, sometimes written as ‘states of character’ that are deeply rooted and are induced through habituation. He argued that the soul was made up of dispositions, along with feelings and capacities. Of these three, dispositions are learned responses to a situation (Aristotle, 2009). Dispositions then are habits formed through repeated choices and actions. Put another way, people become disposed to act in specific ways through habituation. Virtue is a disposition acquired through habit. Habits are learned, and they are learned by practice and by reflection. Habituation then is central to character formation. Aristotle makes clear that one cannot teach

the virtues using argument nor can we make people good. Virtue must be learned by being virtuous, that is, in the same way that a person learns to ride a bike by riding a bike. An action can only be virtuous when a person understands the ends to which their actions aim and action is guided accordingly. A disposition is also an attitude in action; one may hold a value believing it to be virtuous but unless one acts on this value, one is not virtuous. Virtue is, therefore, practical, as the purpose of virtue is not merely to know what is good but to put this into practice. What matters, in the end, is that we act well. In order to act well, experience is required. Acting well increases human wellbeing by helping to achieve a good life. For Aristotle, human virtues, not economic gain, are the key to achieving a good life.

### **Neoliberal Educational Virtues**

Neoliberal education policy not only conceptualises the student as an economic subject but also explicitly emphasises and highlights the particular habits and dispositions that are necessary to be an economic subject. These habits and dispositions are how students should be disposed to act in order to be virtuous or achieve the neoliberal idea of a good life within a neoliberal system. *De facto* the neoliberal conception of ‘the good life’ is constituted as a sound economy that mostly benefits winners in a game of “survival of the fittest”. These dispositions are necessary to maintain the neoliberal hegemony. Roberts (2014) explains that “policy does not determine practice in precise detail, but it does set parameters within which decisions can be made and actions taken” (p. 226). Policy establishes a vision for tertiary education and people respond with decisions and actions in line with this vision. This raises a number of questions: What does policy tell us about students? What dispositions should students learn by habituation in tertiary education? A review of the relevant policy discourse outlines some dispositions that are considered as necessary for the education of the contemporary student, but it does not

explicitly engage any moral argument around what ought to be. Within the educational policy discourse studied, the skills that students obtain through tertiary education have emerged as the most essential aspect of their education. As Barnett and Coates (2005) argue:

there has come to be a framing of the curriculum mainly as a matter of skills. Knowledge and, to a lesser extent, understanding are typically granted a place, but for the most part the forms of development expected of students are to be understood mainly as various forms of skills, as means to ends beyond themselves. (p. 14)

Skills have become an essential theme in tertiary education. The requirement for learning outcomes associated with quality assurance measurement mechanisms has, in large part, led to the increasing usage of a simplified language of skills.

The term *skills* is used to signify discrete activities, which it is argued can be learned independently by students, removed from ethical and political considerations. They are understood as outside or apart from the student, an activity or experience they can procure. Thus, skills can come to be possessed and are not so much practised as acquired. Skills are also constructed as the means to reach a variety of educational ends. One of these ends, graduate competencies, has become inextricably linked to skills. Generic or transferable skills are frequently referenced in the tertiary education discourse. The terms *generic* or *transferable* as applied to skills imply that these skills stand alone and are independent of their academic history and context. However, these skills emerged from particular academic disciplines and cultures over time and are inextricably linked to these origins. Thus, the current language of skills used in policy falls short of adequately or richly describing the human quality of dispositions in education, as this has developed in the history of the liberal university (Barnett & Coates, 2005).

The consensus on what constitutes essential generic skills for undergraduates internationally, as researched by the OECD (2013), include skills such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving, teamwork, communication, creativity and ‘learning to learn’ as well as disciplinary specific skills such as disciplinary knowledge and professional skills. Skills here are understood as the common link between various aspects of a tertiary education curriculum. These skills are understood as a combination of knowledge and the ability to be able and disposed to act in certain ways. Alternatively, the term *competency* is offered as an umbrella term internationally instead of the more usual skills, and it is defined as including skills, knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes (Council of Europe, 2016).

Tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand highlights generic skills that students are expected to have attained upon graduation. In Ireland “core skills such as quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, communication skills, team-working skills and the effective use of information technology” (DoES, 2011, p. 33) along with “adaptability and creativity” (DoES, 2011, p. 51) are portrayed as key to addressing societal need and the needs of the future labour market. Students are also to learn to be adaptive, creative, independent, well-rounded thinkers, lifelong learners and citizens: “A high-quality student experience should equip graduates with generic foundational skills such as being adaptive, creative, rounded thinkers and citizens – in addition to a comprehensive understanding of their relevant disciplines” (DoES, 2011, p. 11).

In New Zealand, appropriate skills are those that “lift productivity, support economic recovery and drive future economic growth” (New Zealand Government, 2012, p. 2).

The priority is to ensure that the skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs. This includes addressing new and emerging shortages

in specific areas, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills needed for innovation and economic growth (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 10).

The policy is, then, predominantly concerned with students learning generic or transferable skills that are tightly and immediately relevant to the marketplace. These transferable skills include “the ability to communicate well, process information effectively, think logically and critically and adapt to future changes” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 10). It appears that in Ireland and New Zealand as well as other tertiary education systems there is a consensus on the kind of skills that a student must learn to succeed. The implicit notion of success here is the development of “people who will create and value wealth, meet the demands of employers, and minimise wastage on ‘irrelevant’ activities” (Roberts, 2014, p. 224). A skill is constituted as an ability that helps the student achieve a good life, which is consequently thought of as contribution to the economy. Thus, policy reflects a specific political and ethical position on the nature of tertiary education.

Tertiary education is increasingly perceived as limited to the production of skills for employability. As Nussbaum (2010) puts this: “nations prefer to pursue short-term profits by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit-making” (p. 2). In New Zealand, the latest policy asserts that “[t]ertiary education plays a central role in equipping young people with the key employability skills and qualifications they need to begin a career” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 11). Whereas in Ireland the policy proposes that “[b]oth undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes should develop the generic skills needed for effective engagement in society and in the workplace” (DoES, 2011, p. 18). Both countries are

concerned with skills that contribute to economic development as a synonym for societal development.

As previously mentioned, there is much repetition in the kind of skills argued for in tertiary education. Employers are explicit about the kind of skills graduates are to possess for the labour market. The ability to think critically, analytically and laterally, is frequently mentioned. Here, thinking is constituted as a skill, and inquiry is reduced to a method. The doubt, questioning, curiosity and discomfort that may underpin and inform inquiry are routinely discounted. The decimation of the humanities that specialise in this kind of nuanced deliberation is some proof of this disregard. These skills appear to be more valuable when emanating from the STEM traditions. Critical thinking is constituted as a skill and possession to be acquired, but not by immersive initiation into the messy pursuit of thinking and research. The academic disciplines provide a structure and content for this immersion.

Likewise, creativity and its neoliberal synonym *innovation* are prized by government and employers as a vehicle for enhancing productivity while simultaneously creating new ideas and products for economic exploitation. Students should also be adaptive and flexible in their future jobs passively accepting “zero-hours contracts”, economic instability and general uncertainty. Uncertainty in education and in relation to knowledge is necessary to the pursuit of growth, liberation and a good life. There is, however, a difference between the kind of uncertainty that is chosen by the student who undertakes study, and economic uncertainty that is externally imposed for the benefit of external others and private interests. Lifelong learning is also constituted as a skill. However, it does not necessarily refer to understanding the relationships between knowledge, its production, and the world. Ironically, education packaged as the acquisition of skills portrays education as a finite activity, rather than the as a process which the term *lifelong*

*learning* implies. Other un-enumerated skills are covered by general appeals for the development of generic and transferable skills that support both economic competitiveness and citizenship. The skills and dispositions that support these aims are not necessarily consistent with each other.

### **A Rose by any Other Name?**

The language of policy describes skills using familiar terms that seem to imply a similar meaning to more traditional education virtues. Skills can have multiple meanings attributed to them that enable them to span the gamut of social and economic aims leading some to claim that these aims are in fact closely aligned. As a representative of the *Irish Business and Employers Confederation* asserts:

Providing a business perspective should not be confused with having a utilitarian view of education,” says Tony Donohoe, Ibec’s head of education and social policy. “We also need a broader view of education that relates to the development of individuals as independent and creative thinkers, and to the promotion of active citizenship and support for ethical values.”

He says the goals of satisfying the needs of enterprise and developing well-rounded, ethical and culturally literate citizens are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they are closely aligned.

“We might have a less elegant language around these attributes – ‘employability’, ‘entrepreneurial skills’ or ‘thinking outside the box’ – but they reflect traditional principles and values of learning,” he says (The Irish Times, 2017).

Neoliberal skills can have the same title as educational virtues but mean something different. Civic virtue or the creation of good citizens is raised in general terms in the policy

discourse. For example, “[t]he improved economic outcomes for New Zealand will also support society to achieve broader benefits and individuals to develop as confident, creative, and culturally enriched good citizens” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 7) or “[a] high-quality student experience should equip graduates with essential generic foundation skills as adaptive, creative, rounded thinkers and citizens (DoES, 2011, p. 11). However, there is little discussion on how this might be achieved, apart from the inculcation of the skills necessary for students in the marketplace. The implication is that the skills required for the student as *homo economicus* are the same skills needed for good citizenship.

The policy discourse around the creation of good citizens is interesting for the following two reasons. Firstly, good citizenship is comprehended as a skill, usually appearing alongside a list of other student skills and attributes. Citizenship is constituted as an action separated out from the knowledge, understanding, values and dispositions that would help formulate a richer conception of what it is to be a citizen. This is a narrow conception of citizenship, where “citizens are constructed as self-interested individuals in a world driven by the logic of production and consumption” (Roberts, 2014, p. 227). The primary duty of the democratic citizen is reduced to the performance of the act of voting every few years. Secondly, these citizens are expected to conform to one particular understanding of the world as being the only way to understand the world (Roberts, 2014). It is not that there are no other understandings available, but that advocating for other understandings suggests that one is perhaps unrealistic, naïve or extreme in some way. It is essential to understand that there is a difference between what critical thinking means in a policy grounded in neoliberalism versus what critical thinking might mean to an educationist from a different theoretical or even ideological tradition.

Buzzwords like *innovation*, used as a synonym for *creativity*, can also mean a particular kind of

creativity. While education has always played a significant role in the preparation of individuals to work, educationists such as Dewey and Freire argue that it is one of many aims, with the ultimate goals being individual growth or liberation, respectively. Thinking about educational dispositions within a neoliberal framework where the economy is the paramount concern is different from thinking about educational dispositions where education is the paramount concern.

### **Critical Thinking and Critical Consciousness**

The development of critical thinking is a popular tertiary education policy aim. It is also a popular skill with employers. As Nussbaum (2010) explains “leading corporate executives understand very well the importance of creating a corporate culture in which critical voices are not silenced, a culture of both individuality and accountability” (p. 53). Many businesses understand that some of the significant failures in the contemporary corporate world are rooted in a “culture of yes-people” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 53). The influence of business on the prioritisation of skills in tertiary education policy is evidenced by the influence of such groups as *The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs* in Ireland and statements from New Zealand policy such as the “skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs” (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 10). The development of critical thinking is considered important for students, and this is reflected in policy, where critical thinking is formulated as a skill, involving analytical reasoning and independent thinking. When critical thinking is reconstituted as a skill, it is depoliticised (Roberts, 2014) and taken out of the ethical sphere and thus limited. Consequently, constituting critical thinking as a skill is problematic because it can limit the potential of critical thinking.

Tan (2017) argues that there are two dominant, although not the only, approaches to critical thinking “confrontational and individualistic on the one hand, and collegial and

communal on the other” (p. 988). Neoliberal policies also influence the way critical thinking is understood. Here, the idea of the critical student is related to the individualistic concept of continuous improvement of the self and the conditions of neoliberalism. Critical students use their critical thinking skills to adapt themselves and their environment towards increased productivity and competitiveness for economic gain. There are, however, other ways to understand and think about critical thinking, but its neoliberal reconceptualisation as a skill limits the way it is often understood. When critical thinking is reconstituted as a skill, there is the possibility that it can be perceived as a discrete possession that may even be acquired. The virtues that support critical thinking, such as courage, humility, curiosity, open-mindedness, insight, understanding and scepticism, to name but a few may then be perceived as separate from critical thinking when they are integral to it. There are however richer conceptualisations of critical thinking, ones that are radically open, that intimately connect the student and what they are learning, ones that engage students in education and beyond in ways that are meaningful to them.

Freire’s notion of critical consciousness differs from the understanding of critical thinking centralised in policy. For Freire, the purpose of education is liberation, achieved through dialogue and the realisation of conscientisation. This is in contrast to the conception of critical thinking as an individual acquisition that does not require any particular engagement with the world. As previously outlined, critical consciousness means critically reflecting on one’s self and reality and the way these have been created, and then using this understanding to take transformative action to make a change. Critical consciousness is the reflective component of praxis (Roberts, 1996a). It is a reflection on experience that leads to action. Freire (1996) argues that, except for teaching purposes, it is undemocratic to separate, “the technical knowledge one

needs to be a good plumber and the political knowledge one needs to be part of the polis" (Freire, 1996a, p. 115). When there is a separation of knowledge from its process of production, what Freire termed the gnosiological cycle (Freire & Shor, 1987, pp. 7-8), students do not get the opportunity to learn first-hand the skills they need 'to learn how to know', and to reflect critically on this process. Technical knowledge alone may prepare a student for a career, but it does not necessarily enable that student to participate in society as a citizen. To be a citizen demands reflection and a struggle for citizenship itself (Freire, 1996a). In the liberating classroom, students examine society's structures and institutions, scrutinise what is said, what is done, and how people relate to one another. Therefore, critical consciousness is a social process. Students also reflect on how this new knowledge changes them. They come to understand how society works by "reading the world". However, this form of critical thinking and understanding is only significant when accompanied by transformative action. Critical consciousness is, therefore, the movement from compliance to transformative action. Moreover, while advocates of critical thinking might support this idea in theory, it requires action. In practice this type of critical thinking requires recognising the political nature of education, an appreciation and responsibility for inequality in society, and a desire to teach and know beyond mere measurement.

To illustrate the difference between critical thinking and critical consciousness in tertiary education I would like to briefly explore service learning, particularly as it is also an area of study for those interested in student engagement. *Service learning* is the term used generally to describe an "integration of academic material, relevant community-based service activities, and critical reflection in a reciprocal partnership that engages students, faculty/staff, and community members to achieve academic, civic, and personal learning objectives as well as to advance

public purposes” (Bringle & Clayton, 2012, p. 105). However, not all service learning programs approach community engagement in this way. It has alternatively been constituted as “a public relations effort of universities and colleges...a countermovement to academic corporatization...part of a wider cultural project to produce self-responsible and socially responsible, enterprising citizens” (Raddon & Harrison, 2015, p. 134). There are a variety of approaches to service learning programs, and thus, as a pedagogic approach, it does not necessarily support critical thinking. The type of interaction between the student and the world can be uncritical and accepting of the status quo. Critical consciousness, as has already been mentioned, requires “deepening one’s understanding of the social world” (Roberts, 2008, p. 100).

Shor (1992) argues that a curriculum that avoids questioning society stifles students’ development as critical thinkers. Service learning can actively promote a particular understanding of learning and the world thereby undermining critical thinking. Freire (Escobar et al., 1994) uses the metaphor of the bus journey to explain the kind of radical dialogue that includes critical consciousness. He explains that often in education, even versions of dialogic education, young people get on a bus in the middle of a journey accepting the trip, the destination, the plan for getting there, even the current mode of transport; that is, they accept the established rules for the journey. However, by encouraging students to accept the way things are, they are discouraged from critiquing situations, and thus from developing critical consciousness. Critical thinking in many service-learning programs is narrowly confined to critiquing only what others predetermine as problematic. This is in contrast to the development of critical consciousness which starts with the student, who may then critique the rules or reconstruct how the problem is framed. It is ultimately their responsibility to engage with the world in order to critique it. However, students cannot do this themselves; they must work with others, and with

the community but not on the community involved with the service learning programme. As Boyte (2003, p. 12) explains,

[m]uch educational experience of our students teaches a narrow view of problems as discrete and disconnected. Service or even service learning does not necessarily address this problem at all. More generally, we also often teach the kind of innocence and irresponsibility that grows from cultivating the stance of outside critics, not engaged actors.

Further, in some service learning programs, students may work in communities but avoid questioning the nature of the problem that they are there to address. For example, students working with homeless people might find ways to feed and clothe people, perhaps solving immediate issues but not necessarily thinking about or addressing the substantial problem of how these people became homeless in the first place. In this way, students are taught to work on people rather than with them. Students in this situation do not necessarily learn how to adopt a critical attitude towards the world or that this may even be desirable. That is, students can learn that a superficial understanding of problems is sufficient in order to perform tasks. When the purpose of education is growth or liberation, there is a possibility for authentic praxis and the development of critical consciousness. When the purpose of education is more focused on the development of *homo economicus* the kind of critical thinking the student engages in may also be limited.

Configuring critical thinking as a skill has implications beyond the university. For example, service learning programs can also promote a particular understanding of citizenship, whereby citizens are constituted as obedient, critical performers of prearranged tasks that are deemed universally valuable. Service learning can limit the development of critical, reflective

and creative thinkers and actors when it does not encourage or support students to be critical, to analyse the problems of society (including the university as part of society) in order to act to affect social change (Kahne & Westheimer, 2001). And as previously discussed authentic student engagement requires more than a superficial understanding of problems, authentic engagement requires calling into question the very foundations of society,

### **Creativity and Innovation**

Within the neoliberal managerial culture of tertiary education, creativity is often reduced to an academic buzzword or marketing term, used alongside and sometimes even interchangeably with other jargon such as innovation or entrepreneurship. These terms imply a type of creativity associated with the market. There is a rich literature on creativity that covers many disciplines. One definition of creativity summarises it as the agentic possibility of creating, which is original, valuable and purposeful (Gaut, 2010). The literature shows us that it is a difficult concept to define, somewhat nebulous and subject to change. Policy is ubiquitous, however, in declaring creativity and creative thinking essential skills for the contemporary tertiary education graduate.

Creativity had a central place in Dewey's thinking, or as he would put it, creative imagination. He argued that "imagination is the chief instrument of the good" (Dewey, 1934, p. 350). For Dewey, creativity does not deal with "imaginary stuff" but in seeing "old things in new relations serving a new end which the new end aids in creating" (Dewey, 1934, p. 34). For Dewey (1988a), democracy and creativity are symbiotically and integrally related; one supports the other. He argues that "only by inventive effort and creative activity" (p. 225) can democracy be created. Dewey (1988a) argues that a good society needs difference; it needs its nonconformists and eccentrics because they think about the world differently or, put another way,

creatively. When people engage in dialogue with opposing points of view, they may produce new and alternative ideas. Diversity, then, is necessary for creativity, and a healthy democracy protects both. The individual, who is different, as indeed all individuals are, needs a democratic state in which to flourish. Diversity needs strong democracy to thrive and vice versa. For Dewey, the only form of community that will satisfy the needs of the individual is a participatory democracy; as valuing individuality means valuing a social system that gives voice to the individual. This is why Dewey saw the relationship between the person and the state as a relationship of mutual support. Dewey believes that democracy is a way of associated living, and this is why the school, or university, in this case, should be organised democratically. Universities are places where students can learn to live together with others for mutual benefits associated with their growth, the growth of their fellow students, and that of society as a whole. Democracy too needs creativity as Dewey also insists on continuously and creatively reconstructing the institutions of democracy. To this end, he insists on the participation of students in democratic forms, played out in the mini-society that is the school, from the earliest reasonable age (Dewey, 1976c). Thus, democratic universities that engage students in democracy and a democratic way of living not only teach students a way to live together but also teach them creativity.

As previously discussed, Freire put forward the concept of ‘banking education’ where the teacher becomes a depositor of knowledge and student passively receives this knowledge and stores it as a bank would do. This conception of education views knowledge as relatively unproblematic, objective, decontextualised and abstracted and, as such, stifles creative thinking. Giving students the opportunity to understand how knowledge is created and practise its creation and recreation helps them to understand the relationship between knowledge and creativity.

Studying, both knowledge and the processes by which it is created, also helps students to understand that knowledge is often contestable and unfinished. Knowing that knowledge is not settled provides for the possibility to be creative and inventive. An education that acknowledges the unfinished and incomplete nature of knowledge fosters the critical capacity to reflect on and judge, to critique and challenge knowledge. When the production of knowledge occurs at a site removed from the lecture theatre, laboratory or seminar room the qualities necessary to produce knowledge, such as critical thinking, uncertainty, curiosity and scepticism, are missing from the educational process (Shor & Freire, 1987). Reconnecting knowledge, knowing and the production of knowledge, opens up the possibilities necessary to enable creative thinking. Creativity constituted as a skill that can be deposited via formal education is antithetical to creativity. Creating is a process, not a product.

What we learn from the work of Freire and Dewey is that creativity or creative thinking are not unique skills but are in fact integral to the process of thinking itself. Creativity is part of the process of thinking, knowing and living together. Creativity is also part of how students make meaning and relate to one another, it is an unending process, and engaging process and like democracy it is a way of living and recreating ourselves, and the world. Reducing creativity to the production of ideas that are economically valuable misunderstands the nature of creativity and creative thinking and its embeddedness and interconnectedness within the processes of learning and knowing.

### **Freire on Virtues**

As already noted Freire argues that human beings are always in a state of becoming, they are unfinished and will always be unfinished; however, through education, they may be transformed. This unfinishedness, this incompleteness, is revealed through the experience of

doubt and uncertainty. The purpose of being human is the ethical idea of humanisation, of becoming more fully human; it is, therefore, an ontological vocation. For Freire, humanisation is the ethical ideal, and it is through dialogical praxis that humans pursue this vocation. Curiosity and the need to seek out new knowledge is evidence of the awareness of this incompleteness. It is because human beings are aware of their unfinishedness that they are capable of making choices that are ethical or unethical. Therefore “the education of women and men can never be purely instrumental. It must also necessarily be ethical” (Freire, 1998, p. 57).

Policy has reconstituted skills as virtues, and the virtuous student as flexible, critical, creative, a lifelong learner and good citizen. There are, however, other ideas about the virtues necessary for education. While some presumably have value in the market, others are not for the market. The intellectual, human and civic virtues necessary in formal education have been discussed by a number of leading educationists. In Freire’s later works, he paid particular attention to educational virtues as an idea to explain human formation and flourishing and, as such, he is particularly helpful in developing an educational account of virtues (Roberts, 2012). He was particularly concerned with how human qualities, be they virtues, dispositions or characteristics, had merit in education. For Freire, education is more than teaching methodologies or skills acquisition, and more than a marketable product or service. For him, education is a complicated process involving teaching, learning and ethical formation (Roberts, 2008, p. 104).

As discussed in Chapter 4, education is concerned with the formation of the student, and this cannot be an ethically and politically neutral process. The myriad political and ethical decisions made about and within education every day, from government policy to curriculum and teaching methods bear witness to this. Freire believes that politics and ethics should be made

explicit to students, but that any particular perspective on these should not be imposed upon them. These views, along with all other ethical and political perspectives, should be open to challenge and critique in the classroom. Students should have the “right to compare, to choose, to rupture, to decide” (Freire, 1998, p. 68). Freire argues that it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide the necessary resources and environment for students to discuss and critique alternative views (Roberts, 2000). This does not mean that the teacher cannot provide authority in the classroom; however, any exercise of authority must reinforce freedom and liberation through dialogue (Roberts, 2000). These are important parts of pedagogy that must have “a conception of human beings and the nature of reality, an epistemological theory, an ethical position, and a political stance – from which broad (not fixed) underlying principles are derived” (Roberts, 2000, p. 70).

Chapter 4 also outlines Freire’s ethical position as humanisation. This means that to become more fully human, human beings should pursue their ontological vocation. Freire’s moral philosophy is based on a dialectical understanding of the nature of reality where consciousness and the world are constantly interacting and changing each other, and because of this, humans have a responsibility not to impede others from pursuing their vocation. It is also imperative that in the quest for humanisation human beings think about the kind of world that best supports them and others pursuing this ideal. Freire argues that while humanisation may be an individual ontological vocation it can only be achieved collectively, and therefore human beings must support relations of liberation where all have an opportunity to engage in dialogical praxis in order to achieve this. For Freire, humanisation is an ethical responsibility.

In order to pursue humanisation, Freire argues the necessity of different virtues in a student’s quest for transformation and liberation through education. The virtues that Freire argues as integral to this kind of education include: care, openness, curiosity, collegiality,

reflectiveness, humility, critical consciousness, flexibility, coherence, authenticity, decisiveness, patience and impatience, commitment, critical reflection, action, uneasiness, and uncertainty (Freire, 1996a, 1998; Freire & Faundez, 1989; Freire & Shor, 1987; Roberts, 2008). These virtues are learned through students' experience of the educational environment and not through particular lessons on virtues. Students learn through their experiences with all members of the university community, from their lecturers through to administration, and the policies that frame their environment. Additionally, because liberation is a collective experience these virtues can only be learned in relationships with others through critical dialogical praxis.

In *Pedagogy for Liberation* (Shor & Freire, 1986), Freire argues that these virtues cannot be brought about when we separate out the production of knowledge from knowing. This situation is analogous to separating out research from teaching. Moreover, this can lead to a situation where educational institutions such as schools and universities become spaces for selling knowledge that is disconnected from the process of inquiry. However, the virtues demanded by the production of knowledge are lost. Students can only learn these virtues by habituation and through experience. Virtues such as curiosity and critical reflection are essential for learning, and these virtues cannot be developed through a 'banking-type' education that itemises the multitudinous and interdependent facets of education. The banking concept of education prepares students for a passive accumulation of facts. The students that succeed in this form of education are those that learn the facts rather than challenging them. If a student has come through an education system that is primarily based on banking education, they are primarily formed as obedient learners. Both the policy discourse and the ethos of the university teach students the importance of obedience and not the necessity of curiosity, of critique or the courage to share our ideas with others. When student success is narrowly conceived as obedient

academic behaviour that leads to retention, increased achievement, graduation and eventually employment, students do not have an opportunity to learn the virtues necessary for their education (McMahon & Portelli, 2012; Zepke, 2017).

A virtues approach to education underpins Freire's concepts of praxis, dialogue and critical consciousness, and his commitment to social justice and democracy. Here, the application of intellectual virtues such as curiosity, open-mindedness and humility enable deeper understanding (Roberts, 2007a). Freire outlines that the university must, therefore, be:

a space to gather and engender certain democratic dispositions, such as the disposition to listen to others—not as a favor but as a duty—and to respect them; a disposition towards tolerance, towards deference to the decisions made by the majority that nevertheless does not deny to anyone who differs in opinion the right to express his or her disagreement; the disposition to question, criticize, and debate; the disposition to respect the public matter that among us comes to be treated as a private matter but that as a private matter is not valued (Freire, 2005, pp. 116-117).

Shor (1992) summarises the values underpinning a Freirean approach to education as participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated in everyday life, multicultural, dialogic, de-socialising from mass culture, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, and activist (pp. 16-17). These values summarise the commitment and practice Freire identifies as necessary for a liberating and humanising education. For Freire, educational virtues are inextricably linked to broader human virtues in the process of educational transformation and liberation and come from human ideals such as love (Freire, 1997; Roberts, 2008, 2010). Love underpins all of the educational virtues: the curiosity and intellectual humility necessary to learn, the openness,

tolerance, commitment and respect required for dialogue, as well as and as well the care, collegiality, coherence and authenticity that are necessary to teach.

### **Some Criticism of a Virtues Approach to Ethics**

Alongside Freire's work, there are a variety of approaches to the contemporary study of virtues illustrating its appeal (McIntyre, 1985; Nussbaum, 1988). However, it would be remiss not to briefly acknowledge that virtue approaches to education are not without critics. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to thoroughly examine these arguments, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge them. For example, a dilemma of virtue ethics that persists is the idea that virtues are universalising by nature (Noddings, 2012). However, one of the ideas associated with postmodernism is a scepticism of metanarratives and universalising notions. Cultural imperialism is an example of universalising particular cultural norms, where one set of values and customs is perceived by the groups that hold them as morally superior to other people's cultural values and norms. Such examples are why some philosophers are concerned with this possibility.

In opposition to ideas about the universalising nature of virtues is the idea that virtue is unique to the culture and, therefore, relative. Relativism presents moral values as particular to certain societies. That which is a moral value in one culture may not be morally appropriate in another. Critics of relativism argue that this means that there is no way to judge which values are better and which are worse. However, supporters of relativism might argue that universal principles are not necessary, and it is possible to urge moral change if necessary with a sensitive understanding of cultural norms. A further criticism of virtue ethics is the idea that virtues are habitual and learnt through practice. Some people, due to a lack of opportunity, may not be in a position to acquire certain habits that may be perceived as virtuous. Moreover, as some virtues

are prized more than others, this could lead to the development of a hierarchy of virtues and also, consequently, of people. Those people that are the most virtuous may position or indeed find themselves at the top of a hierarchy of virtues, as a new elite. The potential for elitism is rightly worrying for some critics (Noddings, 2012).

### Dewey on Habits

In Dewey's writing, he often calls traits of character habits, rather than virtues or vices and, while there are few references to virtue, habit is a central idea in his work. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey (1983a) considers the relationship between virtue and habit. For Dewey, virtue is a type of habit. Dewey's pragmatic ethics has been used to resolve some of the challenges to a virtue ethics approach, such as the problem of virtues perceived as types of universal values, or as culturally relative (Rice, 1996). In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey points out that real growth is characterised by "developing the fundamental dispositions toward growth and further education" (Dewey, 1980, p. 338). It is Dewey's concept of growth that enables him to reject universalism without embracing cultural relativism: "it is in the quality of becoming that virtue resides. We set up this and that end to be reached, but the end is growth itself" (Dewey, 1960, p. 172). For Dewey, education for growth is an education that is continually reconstructing our experiences. It allows for the development of our capacities to achieve our potential. Our ability to learn from our experiences and to modify our actions because of our previous experiences opens us to the formation of habits. A habit is a form of "efficiency of action" connected to "an intellectual disposition" (Dewey, 1980, p. 159) that gives us control over our environment, enabling us to respond to new environmental conditions and to continue to grow. Our ability to make these changes of habit and environment for ourselves and

to reconstruct our experience is an expression of our autonomy. Growth is the constant redevelopment of habits.

Dewey argues that any act has the potential to be moral and, therefore, there can be no definitive differentiation between moral and non-moral domains (Rice, 1996): “Any restriction of moral knowledge and judgments to a definite realm necessarily limits our perception of moral significance” (Dewey, 1960, p. 144). Therefore, for Dewey, what is virtuous will differ over time and between contexts—virtues are not fixed: “for the use to which any known fact is put depends upon its connections” (Dewey, 1980, p. 366). He draws the example that while the knowledge used by chemists and safecrackers is the same, the connection to different aims and habits gives the knowledge they use different meaning. His position differs from a relativist who might argue that there are no legitimating external grounds for virtues and that they are all culturally relative. Dewey does recognise a difference between virtues that are customary and correlate to prevailing cultural mores, and those that are the result of a reflective inquiry that includes the use of sympathetic imagination to think through the consequences for others as well as oneself (Nussbaum, 1997). Virtues are not personal possessions and cannot be conveniently considered in isolation, but rather in “interpenetration” (Rice, 1996, p. 277). “To possess virtue does not signify to have cultivated a few nameable and exclusive traits; it means to be fully and adequately what one is capable of becoming through association with others in all the offices of life” (Dewey, 1980, p. 368). Dewey argues that the practice of virtue requires particular social and material conditions; therefore, the acquisition of virtue is not a solitary pursuit:

Honesty, chastity, malice, peevishness, courage, triviality, industry, irresponsibility, are not private possessions of a person. They are working adaptations of personal capacities with environing forces. All virtues and vices are habits which incorporate objective

forces. They are interactions of elements contributed by the make-up of an individual with elements supplied by the out-door world (Dewey, 1983a, p. 16).

Bernstein (2010) rightly proposes that Dewey uncomfortable with the pedestal that rational argument is put upon. That is to say, he is not happy with removing reason from emotion and preferred instead to speak of intelligence. Intelligence is a combination of habits and dispositions formed and embodied in everyday practice, in which *dispositions* are particular types of inclination and aspiration (Bernstein, 2010). It is the ability to think and reflect and is social in origin (Biesta, 2006). Intelligence developed through formal education helps us to perceive social injustice. Through the development of specific habits and dispositions, we create necessary social reform. Dewey objects to traditional education that is merely an accumulation of facts. Passive learning, where students receive instruction, requires passive listeners and receivers of information. It is a situation where teachers control and decide on every facet of the learning experience, and as a result, students' intellectual and moral development is stunted. There is no growth. Routine is associated with the separation of the intellectual aspect of habit from action; it therefore also prevents growth.

For Dewey, then, the habits, will and disposition necessary for a prosperous, progressive society cannot be taught directly, but must instead be taught indirectly through the medium of the environment, as with virtues education. The environment, in this case, is taken to mean "the sum total of conditions which are concerned in the execution of the activity characteristic of a living being" (Dewey, 1980, p. 26). Teaching, then, is partly about creating the social conditions that enable the student to learn. Learning takes place through experience, and by experience, the student is changed, and new habits are formed. In this cycle, reflection on action becomes experience. Experience, in turn, forms habits of the mind and modifies disposition. He argues

that educating students using real-world problems that are of real concern to these students is, in fact, the best way to teach them. Not all experiences are, however, equally educational. In Dewey's view, "democratic social experiences" provide more opportunity for growth. He argues that institutions are responsible for advancing good character and the virtues associated with it. For Dewey, virtues, along with habits and character, are interactions with the social and physical environment, meaning, they manifest from everyday human activity (Rice, 1996).

### **Skills and Intellectual Virtues in a Post-Truth World**

The conflation of skills as virtues is an important issue for contemporary education and to illustrate this I turn to a contemporary problem for education, the idea of so-called post-truth. The term 'post-truth' is a word that has come to prominence in the wake of mainstream political upsets such as Brexit and the 2016 American presidential election in the United States of America. Post-truth has been defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Dictionary, 2017b). This means that in the current era the truth is often considered, less important, less admired and much less pursued than appeals to emotion.

Freire argues that to speak truthfully, there must be "coherence between what we say and do" (Freire, 1997, p. 51). So, for example, when people's lived experience does not reconcile with government statements made via the media they recognise an incoherence signifying a lack of truthfulness. They may not know who the perpetrators of the deception are—whether it is the experts advising governments, the state (including politicians and bureaucrats) or the media—or understand the nuanced interaction of interests in the administration of the state. However, they know that what they hear is untrue, or at the very least, not wholly true, because it is incoherent. The university is incoherent when statements by management—such as stating a desire to listen

to students and actively include students and staff in decision making—are in practice reduced to a consultancy in the form of information sharing by management. Coherence is necessary to build the trust needed for society to work. The spread of post-truth as an idea signifies another significant decrease of public confidence in democratic institutions such as the university. Given the purpose of the university, however broadly conceived, this is a particularly egregious move.

Appeals to emotion have always played a large part in elections. In recent years, politicians across the political spectrum and, subsequently, the media, have advocated that economic globalisation is better for the national economy, yet social inequality has increased (Hearne & McMahon, 2016; Rashbrooke, 2013). Tertiary education has been offered as one solution to tackle society's subsequent ailments. While it is easier than ever to get into tertiary education, there is less chance of the prestige that previous generations obtained from a university education. There appears to be less social and economic benefit to tertiary education as it has become more open to the general public to attend. Now that the ivory towers are in a somewhat ruinous state, it is much easier to attend them.

Simultaneously, there has also been an increase in the level of qualification required for many jobs, so that a tertiary qualification is increasingly perceived as a minimum qualification for many positions. Moreover, the debt burden assumed by predominantly young people to fund their tertiary education ensures their future compliance with the demands of the economy. People's experience of tertiary education, what happens to them during their education and after it, is often at odds with the public perception and the political rhetoric. Educationists understand that education solely for employment does not satisfy the task of educating the student, while students increasingly believe that anything outside of an education solely for employment constitutes a waste of time and the potential indoctrination of a political position. Educating for

more than employment has become a political stance and not just an educational one. These conflicting understandings and experiences are often at odds with ‘official speak’. When political leadership fails to try to find a way to speak to these complexities and to show an understanding of the varied lived experience of people, then a society where people prefer to trust instinct rather than reason is perhaps inevitable.

In a post-truth world, the ability to identify dispositions such as closed-mindedness, arrogance and wishful thinking and understand their implications for the world is significant and particularly desirable. Students must learn to distinguish between fantasy, fiction and facts, understanding the differences and nuances associated with these different ways of thinking. To be able to detect what is true from what is not, requires an ability to step back from the world. Put another way; to be with the world, rather than just in the world (Benade; 2014; Freire, 1985b). Students must also understand that there are many ways of knowing and that these are historically grounded, have proofs, and exist within a variety of traditions. Understanding this enables students to distinguish these accounts from fictitious ways of knowing and knowledge. The prioritisation of the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects by government policy demonstrates to the public that these forms of knowing and knowledge are perceived as more important and possibly even more authentic than other types.

Furthermore, the internet has made it possible for anyone to share any information they please. Information is increasingly taken to be the same as knowledge. However, information is separated from the process of knowing. When knowledge is separated from knowing, there is the possibility of packaging knowledge as units of information and selling it on. Schools then become spaces for selling knowledge—they are reduced to delivery systems for dispensing knowledge and producing human capital, and not as spaces where critical thinking is developed

(Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8). When knowledge is decontextualised, it is shorn of much of its meaning by reducing it to the sum of its parts. Knowing, perceived as the transference of information or existing knowledge, means that teachers become specialists in transferring information in the same way the Internet might, but without reference to the student or their context. The process of coming to know and learning how knowledge is produced teaches us many of education's most important virtues, including "action, critical reflection, curiosity, demanding inquiry, uneasiness, uncertainty" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 8). The post-truth era that deals in false information illustrates a lack of understanding about how knowledge is created. The idea of post-truth is perhaps a warning and an opportunity to once again engage with these ideas (Farrell, Nieto Ángel & Maciel Vahl, 2017). How students come to know and make meaning is central to student engagement. There is an inconsistency between an education for the accumulation of information and an education that critically engages with the student's experience in the process of coming to know and act. This form of engagement offers a potential approach to grapple with this post-truth moment.

### **The Habit of Democratic Governance**

Another contemporary challenge for education is the burgeoning threat to democratic governance in many Western democracies. As previously mentioned, policies in both Ireland and New Zealand reference the importance of the formation of citizens through tertiary education but do not substantively address democratic citizenship. There are a number of educational virtues that underpin citizenship education and the continuing consideration of how people live together. To begin with, the virtue of coherence underpins the good governance that is required to build trust. Through the practice of governance in the university, all members of the community can practise and thereby learn the human and epistemological virtues necessary

for good governance. Governance is one place where critical democratic student engagement can be learnt by being democratic. In Europe, student participation in university governance is near universal at both national and institutional levels, with faculty and departmental levels lagging slightly behind (ESU, 2012). This inclusion of the student voice in tertiary education governance began with the student revolts and democratisation waves of the 1960s and 1970s that were characterised by large-scale student protests. However, the European Commission's (2006) *Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education*, which promotes efficient governance structures and the need for external governors, has created challenges for participation in governance.

The European Student Union (ESU) has outlined a general concern among student unions that they are being marginalised from decision making by the introduction of further layers of bureaucracy populated with experts (ESU, 2012). On the one hand, student participation in governance is championed to achieve the goals of democratisation, and on the other, students are excluded for efficiency reasons. Each university has different processes in place by which decisions are made. In some universities, corporate governance models are now applied to decision making processes, with a chief executive officer acting as the key decision maker on day-to-day matters and a corporate-style board deciding on strategic matters. Academic matters — decided traditionally by practising academics at academic councils — have now largely been subsumed into the corporate style structure of the university, with academic boards losing much of their power and decision making ability.

In recent years in both Ireland and New Zealand, there has been new legislation regarding tertiary education governance. In Ireland, there is a statutory obligation to include both staff and student representatives on the governing bodies of tertiary education institutions and also

government agencies that work in the sector. In New Zealand, amended legislation (2015) has removed the necessity of including staff and student representatives on tertiary education governing bodies (although this is currently under reconsideration with the Education Amendment Bill 2018). The perceived need for increased efficiency in decision making processes has led to downsizing governing bodies. The logic apparently is that having smaller governing bodies with fewer people means that there is less dissent from challenging or difficult representative voices, sometimes contemptuously termed ‘vested interest groups’ and, therefore, there is quicker decision making. Quicker decision making is therefore considered more optimal than inclusive decision making. Student representation is in general healthy in Europe, as it is increasingly included in national legislation. In practice, however, students’ unions are experiencing an erosion of their voice in university governance; for example, by limiting voting rights or prescribing the issues that they are allowed to vote upon (ESU, 2012). There is a very clear move from a democratic phase of university governance to a more managerial phase. University managers are left to make it look and feel like students are involved in decision making without actually giving them any real say. The incoherence of this position is not sustainable, and it is not truly educative.

Dewey argues that when one’s power is limited, one has little responsibility, and this can lead to an attitude of passivity. He also points out that when responsibility is denied, our ability to assume any responsibility for the future, including in the shaping of society and public policy, is curtailed (Dewey, 1985). Thus, if we have no experience with democratic governance, then we may have difficulty participating in it. At university, students can learn to understand how democracy works and experience that they have the power to influence their society by participating in its governing: “people need to be educated for democracy by not only expanding

the capacities that enable them to assume public responsibility but also through active participation in the very process of governing” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 5). Routine exclusion not only denies us the experience necessary for taking part in public life, but it also denies us our connection to the public and our responsibility for each other. It is through participation in public life that we come to understand our connection and responsibility towards each other. Dewey points out that in schools; the history of autocracy that exists is more likely a matter of habit than deliberate choice. Making a different choice requires our awareness of the existing situation and its potentially adverse consequences for students. In the university where we are dealing with adults, especially when so many of them are young adults stepping up to their public responsibilities for the first time, it is of particular importance that we address the democratic potential of education with renewed vigour. For democracy must be rebuilt time and again for every generation. Dewey (1988a) argues that a democracy based solely on political structures does not secure the democratic dispositions necessary to be a sustainable part of people’s everyday lives and conduct. Democratic responsibility is a habit. The university as a democratic social space exposes students to democratic practices and empowers them to participate as informed citizens.

Democratic schools do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts by educators to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life...These arrangements and opportunities involve two lines of work. One to create democratic structures and process by which life in the school is carried out. The other is to create a curriculum what will give young people a democratic experience. (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 9).

Students have the opportunity to understand how democracy works and experience that they have the power to influence their society by participating in its governing. However, being involved in decision making is not what matters here, it is being involved in decision making that is compatible with democratic values and practice, where the “mission of the university as a place both to think and to provide the formative culture and agents that make a democracy possible” (Giroux, 2014, p. 17) is secure. Conceptualising the student as citizen provides opportunities for engagement with democratic governance within the institution as education for the role of active democratic citizen. Authoritarian corporate structures applied indiscriminately to tertiary education governance limit possibilities to teach students about participation in democratic governance. Ultimately, the role of tertiary education in its entirety must be educational. Neoliberal skills are constituted too narrowly to enable students to engage democratically in order to become good citizens. Becoming a good citizen is a stated aim of policy, but the narrow treatment of skills in the policy is inconsistent with student success in achieving this aim.

## **Conclusion**

The increasing spread of neoliberal values has reconfigured our understanding of educational virtues. Skills, particularly generic skills, have become the most essential aspect of education. The role of students in policy is minimally laid out; however, they are the potential holders of the all-important skills that will produce economic value and are consequently dealt with as human capital rather than as human beings (Barnett & Coates, 2005, p. 24). The generic skills championed by policy, when unpacked, are revealed as hollowed-out conceptions compared to the rich understanding of these concepts elucidated by Dewey and Freire. This illustrates that using the same language in policy as in the literature does not mean that the same

thing is being said. Generic and transferable skills constituted as neoliberal values, are not always consistent with the kind of education that supports student engagement as argued by Dewey and Freire, and by this thesis.

Context matters, and never more so than in a post-truth world. The virtues that Freire champions and the habits outlined by Dewey as necessary in education provide more possibility for the future of education in a post-truth world than the limiting skills outlined by policy. In this sense, policy might be seen as self-defeating, as its focus on skills that produce economic value may lead to practices that undermine tertiary education systems, rendering them unfit to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Educational virtues such as open-mindedness, intellectual humility, curiosity, understanding, uncertainty and criticism, underpinned by human virtues such as generosity, tolerance, respect and, ultimately, love, provide significant potential for learning and the kind of critical, democratic, student engagement in educational institutions that is necessary if students are to meet the demands of contemporary life adequately.

## **Chapter 6: Social Engagement**

### **The University Community**

Dewey and Freire view education as a way to understand, to construct, and to participate in communal life. Thus, education and communal life are interconnected. The ‘university community’ is not a new concept, its etymology is found in the Latin phrase *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* which is generally taken to mean community of teachers and scholars. Alternate terms such as the ‘community of scholars’ or the ‘academic community’ also have appeared in the literature. The idea of community captures the social nature of the university. Philosophers and educationists have written about the university as an idea and an institution that, in its utopian form, often is expressed as a model community of rationality and justice in disinterested pursuit of ideas (Readings, 1996). Here, the work of Dewey and Freire offers ideas about the importance of community and how people might live and learn together in the university. Increasingly, these ideas offer valuable insights in the current neoliberal policy setting that views students as individual self-interested rational utility maximisers.

The influence of managerialism on the university is a significant departure from the idea of the university as a community. This has implications for how students engage with and in the university. Policy in Ireland and New Zealand shows that managerialism is policymakers’ preferred approach to administration in universities. As outlined in Chapter 3, tools and techniques of managerialism such as quality assurance and performance management have been introduced to improve the management of universities and ensure compliance with policy objectives. However, managerial forms of university governance that limit communal life may consequently limit educational opportunities. This chapter will reflect on the influence of

managerialism on the university community, including how students engage with and participate in this community.

There is a range of conceptions about the idea of community in the context of tertiary education in the academic and policy literature. Community can refer to people living alongside universities or from the geographical catchment area of the university and has meaning in a spatial sense. Community also can denote society or groups within society that share a common history, interests, or characteristics. The ‘business community’ is one example of how the term *community* is used in the policy literature. Community is an elusive term, but it evokes ideas about commonality and unity that are comforting to many people. As Young (1990b) puts it, “community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort” (p. 228).

The community of scholars or the academic community are terms with many meanings. Both terms describe an environment that sometimes is thought of as a professional community of academics, but also as a community of all those involved in the university project: academics, students, and staff. In this usage, the university community is a phrase that can reflect the utopian ideal of a university that includes all of those involved in the university as a social project. Clarke Kerr, former Chancellor and President of the University of California, coined the term *multiversity* to refer to the vast complex entities that constitute the modern university. He argues that the university began as a community of masters and scholars that perhaps at one point in its history had a “central animating principle” (Kerr, 1995, p. 1). However, as he amusingly put it, the modern university increasingly is described more accurately as a collection of communities, or “individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking” (p. 15).

Prominent American educationist Ernest Boyer (1990) also advocates for an idea of the university as a community. He proposes that a good university is not only a community—in addition, it is a community that is purposeful, honest, disciplined, just, caring and celebrative (p. 14). He explains that a purposeful community is “a place where the intellectual life is central, and where faculty and students ‘work together’ to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus” (1990, p. 3). A university is a just community when it is “a place where the dignity of every individual is affirmed, and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued” (Boyer, 1990, p. 5). An honest “university is an open, honest community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected, and where civility is powerfully affirmed” (Boyer, 1990, p. 7). A university is a disciplined community when it is “a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group, and where well-defined governance procedures guide behaviour for the common good” (Boyer, 1990, p. 9). A university is a caring community when it is “a place where the well-being of every member is sensitively supported, and where service to others is encouraged” (Boyer, 1990, p. 11). Boyer concludes that a “university—at its best—is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered, and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared” (Boyer, 1990, p. 13).

However, Young (1990b) rejects this conception of community, arguing that it “privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one’s understanding of others from their point of view” (p. 228). She argues against idealising a particular idea of community that privileges the group over the individual. This has the potential to suppress individual agency and difference, thereby denying diversity. She argues that our “urge to unity” and mutual identification (p. 228) means that the identity of the group is achieved through understanding who is excluded from the group. This means that the idea of

community acquires its meaning from what it both includes *and* excludes. Thus, by its very nature, community must include and exclude people. An example of this is the idea of the university as an ivory tower, a community of academic elites, and an institution most of society was prohibited from attending for most of its history. For Young (1990b), the ideal of community is a myth, an unrealistic vision in modern urban societies where the political consequences of the idealised community often are exclusive and oppressive of difference. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990a), Young explains that her arguments against community are not arguments against group solidarity. Instead, they are a way of confronting cultural imperialism.

### **Community of Inquiry**

Dewey proposes that people respond to the challenge of an incomplete and uncertain society through an education that stresses communication and intelligent inquiry, along with a reconstructive attitude (Garrison, 1996). Dewey's idea of community extends beyond a narrow conceptualisation of community as a mere assemblage of people or any form of associated activity. For Dewey, how people live together is not just a matter of physical juxtaposition. Rather, it should express genuine interaction within the community of experience (West, 1989). For Dewey, "the worth of any social institution... is its effect in enlarging and improving experience" (Dewey, 1980, p. 9). In *Democracy and Education* (1980), Dewey proposes two criteria for evaluating social life.

The first is how numerous and varied are the shared interests of the community that are allowed expression—that is, the extent to which members of the social group have an equal opportunity to participate in the group and have their interests expressed within that group. The privileging of individual members of the group or specific interests means that the whole social

group is deprived of shared experiences that would contribute to their growth. Dewey's second criterion for evaluating social life is how full and free is the interplay, cooperation, and communication with other groups (Dewey, 1980). This second condition concerns the extent to which there is communication between social groups. This communication and cooperation leads to readjustment and reconstruction of social habits and institutions in response to new interactions. It is this reconstruction of reflective experience that leads to growth. It is an opportunity to learn from each other and expand our own perspectives.

In his philosophy, Dewey made an explicit link between education and democracy. For Dewey, democracy is educative. His idea that the purpose of education is growth highlights potential social arrangements that best support this purpose. It is the concept of community that provides the conditions for education as growth. In a community, each individual is cognisant of others within the community and behaves accordingly to enhance the interests of others, thus achieving a common end. Flew (1977) challenges Dewey's idea that in a community each individual must be cognisant of the common end. Instead, Flew argues that individuals can be in social relationships that constitute a community even if they are not cognisant of a common end. Flew argues that many people do not consciously decide to be members of a community.

A Deweyan community is a democracy, as it is the only form of social organisation that allows for free social inquiry and full communication within society. "A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic" (Dewey, 1980, p. 105). For Dewey, democracy is the only way of living that supports the "process of experience as end and as means" (Dewey, 1988a, p. 229). Experience is central to Dewey's theory of education. A democratic community creates the

necessary environment to produce and support an informed, articulate public and critical citizenry that is necessary for the success of the democratic project.

Dewey argues that a democracy should not rely on external authority beyond the realm of lived experience. For this reason, “democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness” (Dewey, 1988a, p. 229). In summary, a community where there is full communication directed toward the common interest—a situation that can only be termed democratic—facilitates rich experiences that enable growth.

For Dewey, the full communication necessary for growth in education and democracy is an opportunity to learn from each other, especially those we disagree with, and to expand our perspectives while consequently improving social cohesion. Dewey equates social life to communication, and both are educative. In Dewey’s view, education is social because human beings are social. Learning cannot take place in a social vacuum. For Dewey, community and democracy are inseparable: “regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself” (Dewey, 1984a, p. 328).

The *community of inquiry* was Dewey’s idea of a learning community. The community of inquiry is any group that is involved in the process of inquiry into problematic situations. Dewey’s conception of experience is outlined in Chapter 4 and is central to understanding his idea of the community of inquiry. In this community, members work together to solve problems that their community encounters, while establishing rules for how they might continue to exist together. When individuals act together in the community of inquiry, they adjust their perspectives and habits to form a coordinated response to the problem at hand.

In this process of forming a community of inquiry, the individual is transformed, and a shared intersubjective understanding is formed by the community. This understanding is not necessarily an identical shared understanding, but it is part of a shared intersubjective world (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). A member's sense of belonging to the community subsequently is strengthened by the increase in their shared intersubjective understanding. It is "a relationship that is dynamic, flexible and reciprocal", and that values ethical trust over strategic trust (Haynes, 2018, p. 144).

A contemporary challenge to Dewey's conception of the shared values and goals of the community is the recognition and inclusion of diversity and its implications (Young, 2010b; Readings, 1996). Dewey's concern for the individual in social relations is exactly a concern with how individual diversity is included in social life. The quality of social life depends on diversity and difference, as it "is a means of enriching one's own life-experience" (Dewey, 1988a, p. 228). As discussed in Chapter 2, the rational, self-interested individual is at the heart of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism perceives the autonomous individual as free to make choices and to act independently. Thus, autonomy is perceived as freedom from the influence of others or the world.

Dewey is sceptical of this abstraction of the individual. He argues that it is a mistake to think of the individual as somehow separate from society. He writes that "the non-social individual is an abstraction arrived at by imagining what man would be if all his human qualities were taken away" (Dewey, 1969, p. 232). Dewey recognises the importance of individuality. However, he believes that it is realised through the collective will—that is, the collective will is not an obstacle to individuality but supports it (Menand, 1992). Collective activity is important to the task of self-realisation. For Dewey, the purpose of society is to provide the mechanism by

which people may realise their full potential and freedom (Dewey, 1978). For Dewey, this self-realisation is the true end of life.

For Dewey, social life may be educative, but education is a way to participate in social life as a community of inquiry. The community of inquiry creates intersubjective meaning through reflection on experience that leads to growth and therefore is educative. In a Deweyan community, people share mutual interests that are congruent with the interests of others. In this community, all members engage in an ongoing matrix of decision making and communication, and democracy is a way of life. Dewey argues that including the contribution and difference of each individual is a continuing process of negotiation and adjustment that releases the capacities of each individual within the community. In learning to solve communication problems, students learn attitudes and values associated with a democratic way of life. The community is built, shaped, and changed by its members, who are responsible for its growth and affected by its effects.

### **Democracy as a way of Life**

For both Dewey and Freire, democracy is the best way of living in and organising a community. Freire, like Dewey, argues for an education based on the principles and values of social justice and democracy. In addition, he believes that the best form of social life is democratic, as this facilitates dialogue and praxis. Dewey's idea of democracy is not a mechanism for weighing up individual preferences, but a "form of social organization, extending to all the areas and ways of living" (Dewey, 1987, p. 25). For Dewey, education and democracy are inextricably linked as education is necessary for the formation of "the habits of mind and character, the intellectual and moral patterns that suited citizens to the mutual responsibilities of a shared public life" (Dewey, 1987, p. 44).

For Dewey, democracy as a way of communal life or “associated living” is the best way of achieving self-realisation. This is why, for Dewey, the school must mimic society and more particularly democracy, as it is a “miniature community” (Dewey, 1976c). Dewey argues individuals are not born as democratic citizens—people can only prepare for social life by participating in it. The role of the university as an educational institution, then, must prepare students for social life by enabling them to participate in the social life of the university and beyond in order to advance the common good. In policy calls for community engagement are aimed toward civil society or the business community, however, the university is the immediate community that the student is part of and it is where the student can learn to engage with others in community. In this way, the university is not just an academic institution. It is also a social institution that must prepare students for democratic living (Tan, 2006).

As explained in Chapter 5, education produces the habits necessary for citizens to undertake a shared public life (Dewey, 1987). The democratic school provides students with an opportunity to understand how democracy works in everyday life. For Dewey, democracy is not just a mode of governance but a way of living and being in the world together. For Dewey, the school—or in this case, the university—is part of society. Thus, students must learn to participate in their school community. However, students also are citizens outside the university before and after they are citizens within it.

Like Dewey, Freire argues that “[d]emocracy is taught and learned through the practice of democracy” (Freire, 1997, p. 91). Freire stresses the importance of students experiencing democracy. He argues that students should undertake an apprenticeship in democracy (Freire, 2013). Such an apprenticeship may help students understand that democracy, like liberation, must be achieved through dialogue, praxis and struggle. Both educationists argue that

democracy is an ongoing project that requires continued effort and continued reinvention. However, democracy is still an idea that has not been fully realised within or without the university as Whitman puts it:

We have frequently printed the word Democracy, yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted (1999, p. 38).

Nevertheless, within the university community, students can experience an apprenticeship in democratic citizenship that may one day live up to Whitman's ideal.

Participation in a democratic university is “preparing the youth of the country for active, intelligent participation in the building and the rebuilding and the eternal rebuilding—because, as I have said, it never can be done once for all—of a genuinely democratic society” (Dewey, 1938, p. 330). Dewey was talking about children here. However, even as greater numbers of tertiary students matriculate long after they finish their secondary schooling, many authors refer to students as young. Nevertheless, students and others can take on the rebuilding of a democratic society at any age. Giroux (2002) explains that “education must be treated as a public good—as a crucial site where students gain a public voice and come to grips with their power as individual and social agents” (p. 432). He argues for the protection of tertiary education as a public good, a place “where students can learn the power of questioning authority, recover the ideals of engaged citizenship, reaffirm the importance of the public good, and expand their capacities to make a difference” (p. 450).

Readings has criticised this idea of the university as a model community (1996). He argues that the university in the age of globalisation no longer is a model community or microcosm of society in which students come to understand the social bond and engage in democratic public life to advance the common good. Instead, he describes an emerging “university with no idea”, an institution “that does not derive its name from an etymological confusion of unity and universality” (1996, p. 122). Readings wants to preserve the idea of the social bond as a continuing question, an “uncertain experience of being together” and an incalculable obligation to each other that we cannot fully understand (p. 188). However, Dewey (1988a) argues democracy is how we recreate society keeping it an open question and an ongoing project. Dewey’s democracy is creative. Unlike Dewey, Freire’s conception of democracy foregrounds politics and its vicissitudes. As described in Chapter 3, education, for Freire, is politics. For him, learning must reflect life as a citizen—one that questions dynamics of power, control and knowledge. It is through dialogue that students learn to govern not simply to be governed, and it is to dialogue this thesis now turns.

### **Dialogue as Social Praxis**

The making of a shared understanding, of creating something in common, within community is what Dewey (1980) referred to as communication. Shared communication means shared interests. Dewey argues that it is through communication and learning to solve communication problems that we establish our shared mutual interests and values. It is “a process of sharing experience until it becomes a common procession” (Dewey, 1980, p. 12). There is more than a logical liaison between community and communication (Dewey, 1980). Dewey’s idea of communication is not limited to the sharing of information. Instead, it involves the reconstruction of experience through action, or what Biesta (1994) refers to as “practical

intersubjectivity". A Deweyan democratic community exists because of the commonalities of its members, and it is through communication that these members come to possess these commonalities. A Deweyan community, then, is characterised by its common interests, and its interactions and cooperation with other communities. For Dewey, the more manifest these characteristics are in a community, the better the community.

Like Dewey, Freire (1987) connects communication and community. Both argue that community provides the social context for individual cognition. For Freire, the struggle for democracy, liberation, and humanisation is a social process that is conducted in a community with others. By being in a community, we are humanised by our interactions with each other. As dialogue is social, it requires interaction; it requires a relation to others. Human beings are formed through interaction (Freire, 1996b). Through dialogue, people can develop a sense of community. Dialogue is essential to developing relationships of cooperation in the university, as in society. Dialogue creates the conditions for new forms of pedagogical relations that are emancipatory rather than domesticating. In banking education, for example, teacher-student relations are hierarchical. Dialogue subverts this model, and instead, teachers and students learn together from and with each other (Freire, 1996b). Freire recognises the power of language to empower students: he (1996b) argues that “[h]uman beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.... Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it *for* another” (p. 69).

Dewey and Freire are not alone in their assertion that the university is foremost a place of dialogue. Barnett (2016) argues that theorists who have engaged explicitly with the university—such as McIntyre, Habermas, Readings, Derrida, and Nussbaum—have diverse philosophical positions. However, each has defended what Barnett terms “the university-as-debating-society”

(p. 6). He explains that central to the ideas of these philosophers is the university as a place of critical reason, where all points of view can be heard, and arguments can be fully played out.

Barnett argues that, when we collate the positions of these theorists, the university becomes a space of ‘dissensus’, an ‘ideal speech situation’, in which ‘rival and antagonistic views’ were proffered ‘without condition’, and so are able freely ‘to conduct their intellectual and moral warfare’. In the process, the ‘internal goods’ of the university would be protected and, in turn, critical thinking and democracy would be enhanced (Barnett, 2016, p. 7).

Many authors view the university as a place of dialogue that enhances critical thinking and democracy.

Dialogue is the medium through which education occurs. It links experience, critical reflection and action. It is through dialogue that knowledge is constructed. It also helps build a sense of community as people participate in the reconstruction of problems (Darder, 2015). It is a pedagogical approach and a method of deconstruction of discourse and the structures of society, but it is also a democratic tool. It is a way of dealing with complex cultural conflicts within society. Genuine dialogue requires horizontal relationships of mutual trust (Freire, 1996b). Through education, students become conscious of their social reality. They transcend passivity induced by communiqués as they enter into actual communication that requires other, more active, dispositions. Freire (1996b) specifies that the conditions for dialogue include humility, hope, faith, and love and each of these is indispensable for trust to flourish in a community. These are *a priori* conditions whereas trust is created through the process of dialogue when people are in a horizontal relationship of mutual respect with each other. These qualities are necessary for solidarity and consequently a liberating education.

For Freire, dialogue is a democratic process that can lead to critical awareness and, ultimately, to transformative action. He (1996b) insists that authentic dialogue is impossible without critical reflection, but it also produces the conditions necessary for the development of critical consciousness. For Freire, it is impossible to develop critical thinking without dialogue. Only through engagement with the world and each other is it possible to unveil reality. Critical consciousness is, therefore, a communal phenomenon. Dialogue also requires cooperation to develop understanding in order to change the world (Freire, 1996b)

Cooperation stands in opposition to individualism and competitiveness, which lie at the heart of neoliberal tertiary education policy. Cooperation illustrates a belief in the potential of others, in their capability to participate in their own becoming, their own liberation (Freire, 1996). Freire argues that while trust is necessary for dialogue, it need not precede it. Trust can result from dialogue where people come together to transform the world (Freire, 1996).

In *Paulo Freire on Higher Education*, Freire (1994) argues that “[t]he university environment should be pluralistic and dialogic, even though sometimes polemics, controversy, and quarrels live together” (p. 97). How, then, is it possible to be pluralistic and dialogic while navigating controversy and quarrels? Freire (1996a, 1998) articulates numerous virtues that are necessary for the kind of dialogue that supports a liberating education. Principles such as tolerance are the foundations of an emancipatory praxis. Freire’s notion of tolerance extends beyond a mere ‘live and let live’ approach or even a passive acceptance of other points of view. “Tolerance is the virtue that teaches us to live with difference and learn from it” (Freire, 1996a, p. 148). For Freire, tolerance is founded on a respect for others; it lies in respecting difference. To be tolerant, students must actively engage with other points of view and not merely passively accept that these perspectives exist.

Freire (1995) argues that tolerance “is the ability to enjoy difference. It is to learn from difference. It means not to consider ourselves better than others precisely because they are different from us” (p. 21). He argues that only through the exploration and reflection of other points of view can students learn tolerance by practising it, as “[t]he learning of tolerance takes place through testimony” (Freire, 1997, p. 50). Tolerance does not mean agreeing with others if opposed to their points of view (Freire, 1996b). Freire (1997) argues that “[c]oherence between what we say and do sets limits to tolerance and keeps it from derailing into connivance” (Freire, 1997, p. 51). In coexisting with other people, we retain the right to make judgements on the worth and accuracy of different contributions (Roberts, 2003). Being tolerant is not to deny conflict; it is to authentically and respectfully engage with conflict in order to learn from each other.

To learn tolerance, it is not enough to permit the discussion of other points of view in the classroom. Instead, dissent and discussion should be actively encouraged. As previously outlined, Freire encourages teachers to make their political positions known but not to impose this position on students. Indeed, it is through exploring the teacher’s position alongside other positions that students learn to be tolerant. Freire argues that tolerance is integral to democracy, as to deny difference is to deny it and thus democracy. However, “[t]eaching tolerance and democracy requires the coherent testimony of parents and teachers” (Freire, 1996b, p. 148). In education, Freire argues for coherence between what is said and what is done (Freire, 1998). He proposes that “[a]n educator who says one thing and does another is irresponsible, and not only ineffective but also harmful” (Freire, 1997, p. 90). Part of educating for tolerance and democracy is encouraging students to discuss their ideas, listening to students, respecting their

differences and the challenges they face. This reinforces a democratic ethos in the university and elsewhere, which underpins the machinery of democracy, such as laws and elections.

Freire does not believe in suppressing difference—indeed, he believes that difference can provide a starting point for dialogue. Freire explains that the university community has the potential, through solidarity, to support the transformation, liberation, and humanisation of all those involved in it. The university community is, then, a place where people can engage with the conflicts and contradictions of difference through dialogue by creating a shared intersubjective world; a place for debate, dissensus, consensus, and critical inquiry. Freire does, however, recognise that dialogue requires a shared commitment to working with each other.

Freire argues for “unity within diversity”, thereby acknowledging the necessity of unity and diversity in the push for social transformation: “If I say *unity within diversity*, it is because, even while I recognise that the differences between people, groups, and ethnicities may make it more difficult to work in unity, unity is still possible” (Freire, 1997, p. 85). Freire’s hope is that concentrating on unity while simultaneously acknowledging diversity means that neither is sacrificed. Thus, compromise may support people to develop solidarity with each other. Commitments to dialogue and to the potential for human transformation are examples of the types of unifying ideas Freire supports.

Readings (1996) argues that the university should be a “dissensual community”, where the concepts of identity and unity are abandoned. Readings contends that the modern university was organised as a community to reflect unity through communication. However, this means that the modern community is inherently universalising since it is based on the assumption of a shared human capacity for communication (Readings, 1996, p. 182). That is, the very idea of community is universalising in that it ascribes to all people an ability to communicate. He

argues that the idea of community should be kept a radically open question. Freire addresses the idea of community as universalising with his concept of “unity within diversity”. Like Readings, Freire does not want to abandon the idea of community. Instead, he proposes an alternative that, taken along with his other ideas on education, suggests leaving community a radically open question that can be continuously engaged with.

Freire also warns that unity within diversity is necessary to address a tactic of the powerful known as “divide and conquer” (Freire, 1996b, p. 141) whereby difference is used to diminish the concerns of the less powerful. In the university, this can manifest when the increasingly diverse student body and its transient nature through the university are perceived as opportunities to divide the student community. An example that serves to illustrate this is the story of one group of students at a university who argued that postgraduates should retain the right to print hard copies of their work. In response, a member of university management said another group of students—one concerned with environmental causes—was opposed to printing by students. However, many of the students who had argued for printing also shared their peers' concern with the environmental effects of printing at the university. In this way, the university pitted student interests against each other. Dialogue between all the parties was not encouraged as a way to reach a potential solution by seeking to understand each other. Instead, the students were asked to pay more money to the university as the educational environment was further deconstructed in additional cost units. In this particular case, the university imposed no environmental sanctions on its administrative staff or made any attempt to research printer usage in the university and its potential environmental impact. The goal, therefore, was not environmental sustainability but to “divide and conquer”. Freire's solution to these types of

dilemma was to concentrate on similarities as well as differences, thus creating unity in diversity (Freire, 2014, p. 143).

Both Dewey and Freire argue that education is social in nature. Dewey argues for a community of inquiry where democracy is a way of living and a way of associating with each other. The community of inquiry is both a way to create experiences that further communal growth and also a way to practice being together. For Freire, dialogue is crucial to social praxis. It is a way to reconstruct problems, which are at the beginning of problem-posing education. However, Freire's conception of dialogue goes beyond mere deposition of facts. Dialogue develops cooperation and trust. It is supported by virtues such as tolerance that teach students to learn to live with and enjoy difference. How then is managerialism consistent with the ideas laid out by Dewey and Freire for student engagement in the university community? A consideration of the social relations that are envisaged as organising and supporting the university under a managerialist regime are reflected on in the next section. The prioritisation of particular ways of relating to each other in the managerial university is thus considered.

### **Hierarchical Relationships**

Managerialism emphasises hierarchical systems of governance as opposed to collegial forms of governance. Relationships are the foundations of communities and communication is how people build relationships. Managerialism reformulates relationships in the university. Dewey and Freire outline that relationships in education take place in community as they are educational, dialogical and democratic in nature. Therefore, their approaches to student engagement in decision making go beyond merely including student input. Instead, they envisage students as part of a university community, who as members of that community are

entitled to make decisions about the university in continuous dialogue with others in the community.

The collegial nature of the university community as a community of inquiry, as a place of dialogue that enhances both critical thinking and democracy, and that provides the social context for individual cognition, forms the basis for its organisational characteristics. Malcolm and Tarling (2007) argue that “[a]n aspect of an organisation can be termed collegial if all who are members of that organisation, or a subgroup involved in that aspect, are able freely to participate in its activities and in the operation and oversight of them” (p. 231). As mentioned in Chapter 2, managerialism attempts to import corporate culture into the university with an increasing focus on corporate governance and a move away from the idea of the university as a community and more collegial styles of governance.

Universities in a democratic society also have a responsibility to model democratic behaviours, both in the institutional sense of having democratic structures and processes in place to facilitate democratic decision making, but also culturally, through dialogue as part of a critically reflexive praxis that enhances students and their community, where democracy is a way of life. For Dewey and Freire, including students in decision making welcomes students' difference and diversity as integral to the work of the university. The challenges associated with including and responding to difference are at the beginning of problem-posing education. Diversity enriches experience and enables students to learn to engage with difference through dialogue. Diversity strengthens the university as a community and as a place of dialogue. Envisaged in this way, the student is integral to the processes of the university—they can identify problems, debate and proffer solutions, which they are also responsible for implementing as they

are responsible for the community. The student is thus valued as a member of the university community.

The tools of management can be useful to the functioning of the modern multiversity. However, these techniques and principles can become problematic when the university is reorganised as a result of the imposition of these tools, rather than as a response to the needs of the university community. For example, the nature of the governance of the university has changed in many universities in Ireland and New Zealand, where management increasingly is responsible for decisions within the university. In addition, New Zealand in 2015 amended legislation to remove the right of students and staff to have their own representatives on university governing bodies. This placed decisions about the university in the hands of external experts. It also signalled a change to the collegial idea of the university.

Further, universities' decision making has become centralised as committees lose their authority to make decisions and senior management teams take responsibility for decision making in the university. In Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy (Kelly, Noonan, O'Reilly & Pandya, 2012) describes how "many Academy members feel that their ability to influence decision-making within the broader institution has been steadily diminished" (p. 21). Analogously, the European Students Union (ESU) announced that there was a general concern among students—that they were being moved away from decision making centres on strategic issues while further layers of bureaucracy were introduced populated with experts who would more and more make decisions that directly affected students (ESU, 2012). Calls by the European Commission for more efficient governance structures and the appointment of more external governors in the university led to changes in many European countries where students moved from being thought of as partners in the university to being thought of as either inefficient

or underqualified decision-makers. When students do get to input into decision making via consultation processes their input is often in the form of a deposit of information. This excludes a continuing process of mutual learning from and with each other. Increasingly, decision making in the university is portrayed as the domain of management experts who specialise in efficient decision making that will lead to productive outcomes. In these circumstances, it appears that student engagement in the university community is inconsistent with managerial practices.

Tertiary education leaders are modelled on corporate leaders, with less emphasis on their continuing intellectual contribution to society and more on their ability to chair a meeting, act like a manager, and “to bridge the world of academe and business” (Giroux, 2002, p. 439). These leaders look to the corporate world to define their vision for the university, rather than defining it themselves. The corporate world provides the template for how universities are to be structured using corporate governance models. In addition, it provides direction for unilateral decision making by self-styled chief executive officers. Freire (1996) argues that “leaders who do not act dialogically but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not embrace, nor are they liberated: they oppress” (p. 159). These models of governance may be appropriate for the corporate environment. However, in the public sphere of the university, they impose ideas about the way things ought to be and teach students these ideas indirectly via the hidden curriculum.

### **Contractual Relationships**

Under new managerialism, relationships within the university are formalised by using the device of the contract. The contract changes the nature of relationships within the university from professional to contractual. This reconstitution of this relationship has implications for the university community, and student engagement in the community. A consequence of thinking of

the university and its management in business terms is that students are thought of as consumers or customers in the education supermarket. This reduces education to a transaction or service. The re-conceptualisation of students as consumers is linked to the increase or reintroduction of university fees in Ireland and New Zealand.

In addition, the creation of a market for tertiary education that fosters competition for students within the sector has endorsed the idea of the student as a consumer (Brown, 2011). Students as consumers are encouraged to think of themselves and education as a resource with an exchange value. Education becomes an investment for individual gain. In the United States, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) observe that “the neoliberal state began to turn students into consumers as early as 1972” (p. 22). How the student is perceived affects how they are treated within the university. Roberts (1998, 2006) explains that when students are understood as consumers, the power dynamic between students and their university changes from a pedagogical relationship to a contractual one (Codd, 1995).

As discussed previously, Freire explains the relationship between the teacher and the student in banking education as one of authority (Freire, 1996b). The role of the teacher is to deposit information, and the role of the student is to receive it. For Freire, the ability to question and pose problems liberates students and teachers. In problem-posing education, the issue of the unequal relationship between the student and the teacher is resolved, as the student becomes both student and teacher, as each learns from the other. The relationship between the teacher and the student is reformulated to one of mutual respect and learning. The teacher is no longer an authoritarian ruler of the classroom setting nor are they reduced to mere facilitator of learning—instead, they learn from and with the student. Through dialogue, students become critical researchers and co-creators of knowledge.

Thus, this relationship between teacher and student is reformed as a democratic relationship. However, in a contractual relationship, the student purchases an educational service from the lecturer. There are problems with thinking of education as a service and qualifications as a product as, unlike their market counterparts, they operate under different rules. A student, for example, cannot in any reputable institution merely purchase a grade or a qualification. Nor can they demand a refund for a service they believe is substandard. This is because, in the uncertain and opaque black box of education, neither the student nor the lecturer is entirely sure of the outcome. For Dewey and Freire, education is a dialectical process that changes those involved in it. The process can and should fill students with feelings of doubt and uncertainty. These are not the feelings normally associated with customer satisfaction.

Students are not the only members of the academic community whose dealings with others in the community have been reconstituted into contractual relationships. The position of academics in the university has changed with the rise of neoliberal policies, and this too has implications for student engagement in the university. Academics no longer are positioned as professionals. Instead, they are staff in service to the university, which in turn is reconceived as a corporate employer. Academic staff thus are reconceptualised as employees rather than educators. The employment contract is the means by which this reconstitution is achieved. Olssen and Peters (2005) argue that “the essence of contractual models involves a specification, which is fundamentally at odds with the notion of professionalism” (p. 325).

The shift to the hierarchical governance structures advocated by a managerialist approach has the effect of de-professionalising staff (Olssen & Peters, 2005). This means that the professional judgement of academics can be discounted within the managerialist university. Increasingly, the lecturer is perceived as a technician responsible for the delivery of a curriculum

or prescribed knowledge, skills, and competences. Their duty to the university ends within the parameters of their contract. Conceptualising the lecturer in this way reduces education to a mere deposition of information. As outlined in Chapter 4, this is an education model that Dewey and Freire argue against vehemently. In addition, education as the deposition of information is at odds with providing an education that is engaging for students.

Through the use of the contract, members of the university are separated from the university community. Staff and students reconstituted as employees and consumers respectively, do not have a share in the ownership of the university. Staff merely are employed by the university and students as customers are purchasing a service or product. The contract re-conceptualises staff and students merely as self-interested and devalues their contribution to the communal life of the university. As outlined in this chapter, the communal life of the university is integral to a vision of the university as a public place of inquiry and dialogue that enhances critical and democratic thinking of diverse individuals in community with each other. The application of contractual relationships throughout the university diminishes the idea of the university community. Thus, the contract restricts the university's potential to engage students in the work of that community. In turn, the university community can no longer remain a radically open question of how people may live together in a progressive democratic society.

### **Measurable Relationships**

Where a student is perceived as consumer, institutions, directed by policy, often use managerial tools to ensure customer satisfaction. The introduction and prevalence of the discourse of accountability since the advent of neoliberal policy in Ireland and New Zealand has influenced student engagement in tertiary education. Quality assurance mechanisms and student feedback surveys are used in many universities to enhance student satisfaction and monitor

student engagement. Importantly, Gibbs and Dean (2014) argue that student satisfaction and student happiness are not the same things. They outline the limitations of a satisfaction approach in thinking about student happiness. Often university managers are focused on organisational structures and processes that improve student satisfaction. However, the scope of issues that influence student happiness extend well beyond the reach of these structures and processes. The managerial aim of improving student satisfaction, therefore, often is beyond the scope of university management's influence.

In the managerial university, a student is thought of as engaging with the university more fully by completing questionnaires such as the National Student Survey, attending focus groups as part of quality enhancement exercises, or participating in customer complaints procedures (Kay et al., 2010). In this way, the student's role is reduced to evaluator (Kay et al., 2010). Michael Fielding (2001) describes this level of student engagement as reducible to "student as data source". This concept positions the student in the role of an advisor rather than as a decision-maker, limiting the student's domain of involvement to the quality assurance of educational services (Klemenčič, 2011). In this way student voice is valued only in particular ways (as feedback in quality assurance processes), at particular times (when it is asked for) and in particular fora (designated by management or others in positions of authority).

This reduces communication between the student and others in the university to a process of seeking and giving feedback. In turn, this reduces the scope for democratic dialogue or engagement. Freire (1996b) explains that "dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants" (p. 70). However, an emphasis on student feedback reduces students to passive receivers of communiqués, restricting their active engagement in communication. The student as

a consumer, therefore, finds it more challenging to engage critically or democratically with the university. Other ways of being a student and seeing the student are necessary to realise this goal. Therefore, the type of institution and the ways students are talked about and administered within the university have implications for how they are involved in the institution.

In *Paulo Freire on Higher Education* (1994), Guevara-Niebla argues that “the practice of education revolves around the teacher-student relationship, as an interchange, a bringing together of particular subjects, and on a wider scope and encounter of the educator or educators with the community” (p. 28). Roberts (1998) argues that the relationship between the student and the teacher has undergone significant change in recent years. Neoliberal policies have reconstituted relationships of responsibility to relationships of accountability that are “more formal, more hierarchical and more linear” (Roberts, 2014, p. 230). Accountability is concerned with the standards to which students and staff perform their tasks and duties. Roberts (2014) describes responsibility as an ethical responsibility, “a quality we uphold when no one is looking” (Roberts, 2014, p. 230). This is in contrast to accountability procedures that are compliance driven and, based on a neoliberal lack of trust, focused on risk management. Furthermore, rigid accountability structures undermine trust in tertiary education. In contrast, relationships of trust are required for democratic citizenship both in the university and outside it. A managerialist account of accountability undermines the trust necessary to develop and sustain the educational relationships that are a necessary part of student engagement.

Performance is a key principle of tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand. The idea of performativity is based on a lack of trust that also undermines the community. That is, the university community is undermined by the concept of performativity predicated on the untrustworthiness of that community. Roberts (2007) outlines that in performance-based

systems, the emphasis is on acting out a role. Performance-based systems encourage staff and students to act in particular ways that are defined by measurable outputs. In turn, this leads staff and students to adopt habits and subjectivities that respond to these ways of being in the university. Increasingly, the idea of student engagement in universities is subject to the creation of performance indicators to meet measurable outputs.

Tertiary education theorists and practitioners have criticised the use of performance systems in research institutions, where one can be a top performer without having “to demonstrate how, what and why one knows as a result of undertaking research” (Roberts, 2007, p. 358). Likewise, a university may be a top performer at engaging students without having to demonstrate whether they have engaged beyond the narrow neoliberal interpretation of the term as ‘communicating with’. In this sense, universities can make a performance of student engagement and use this performance as a selling or marketing point for the university, while never engaging with students critically, democratically or dialogically. An example of this is when student satisfaction survey results are used to advertise universities, or when ranking exercises are used for publicity when favourable for the university. When educational relationships are reduced to measurable relationships, student engagement can be reduced to a bureaucratic exercise that may enhance the reputation of the university without enhancing student success.

### **Competitive Relationships**

In addition, managerialism can increase competition in relationships within the university. Universities are encouraged to compete with other universities for student enrolments and thus marketing budgets are increased to attract students. Students are also encouraged to compete with each other to attend the best universities and, thereafter, to get the best jobs. In *Ethics*,

Dewey (1978) criticises competition as one of society's primary social ills. He objects to competition as a means to justice, arguing that "competition under an individualistic system tends to destroy itself. For the enormous powers which the new forms of economic agency and technique give to the individual who can wield them, enable him [*sic*] to crush competitors" (Dewey, 1978, p. 476). Competition may be useful to regulate business. However, for Dewey, competitive social relations interfere with the student's capacity for growth in education (Dewey, 1985). Competition assumes isolated individuals that are self-interested. Both Dewey and Freire favour cooperation over competition. A liberating education based on solidarity with others is not achieved to the detriment of others.

In 2015, a competition called the 21 day challenge was instigated with 30 students in six teams from all colleges at a New Zealand university (Brook, 2015). These students worked with New Zealand industry leaders to solve issues in a Filipino community. The teams had 21 days to complete a business plan, which was then judged with a 15 minute presentation. The ostensible purpose of the challenge was to promote social awareness and entrepreneurship by developing business skills and competences that contributed to the wider world. This competition pitted students against each other to see who could best engage with a community outside the university. The competition proposed to solve complex community issues with a corporate approach as indicated by the use of business plans. The benefit of the engagement was to the students, who effectively used the community interaction to develop their entrepreneurial skills. This is an example of competitive behaviour applied in university teaching and relationships reconstituted as competitive. The problems with the situation outlined in this example are manifold, however, constituting student engagement with communities as a form of competitive enterprise is particularly egregious. Moreover, simple communication and interaction are not the

same as being involved in dialogue as a social praxis. Dewey (1980) argues that by limiting the cooperation between groups the quality of social life is also curtailed. This example also illustrates an approach to education critiqued by both Dewey and Freire. Thus while this example was used to illustrate community engagement in university publicity it is actually inconsistent with student engagement.

Community engagement often is conceptualised as equipping students with valuable employment skills (Lau, 2015). Increasingly, community engagement is offered as a key graduate competency in a number of universities. Ireland established Campus Engage in 2007 to promote civic and community engagement as a core function of tertiary education. Civic and community engagement are endorsed by the same *National Strategy for Higher Education 2030* (2011) that solidifies the use of managerial techniques and practice in tertiary education in Ireland. It is clear that policy conceptualises a good citizen and *homo economicus* as mutually compatible, however there is little discussion or direction on how this might work in practice. There has more recently been discussion of metrics for measuring engagement. The *Higher Education System Performance Framework* (2013) proposes that universities should assess students against their engagement with the business sector and communities external to the university. In this way engaging with the community can become a competitive process as students and universities are assessed on their engagement, which can lead to increasingly competitive behaviours. Competition, then, can become a dehumanising force within and beyond the university.

Competitive relationships within the university can undermine student engagement because they undermine cooperative relationships. For example, a competitive approach to student engagement with the community promotes an idea of the student as self-interested. A

relationship with others based on competitive self-interest conceptualises education as an individual pursuit rather than a social activity that requires the cooperation of others.

## **Conclusion**

Tertiary educations theorists and practitioners have raised concerns with current tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand—in particular, regarding the good governance of the sector. Increasingly, universities have introduced management techniques and practices from the corporate world. Policymakers and university administrators intend these techniques and practices to improve the efficiency and productivity of the university through corporate governance. However, Dewey and Freire argue that good governance in education should be democratic and dialogic because it must be educational. The dialogic nature of education is discussed in Chapter 4, while the democratic nature of education is discussed in this chapter. For Dewey and Freire, dialogue and democracy are not mere additions to education that may encourage student engagement. Instead, they are inextricable from education. This is why Dewey and Freire's ideas for education are so conducive to student engagement whether envisaged in the strictly academic sense or in the broader sense of formation of the self in the world with each other.

The university community enables debate and critical inquiry. It is educative, with the potential to liberate and humanise the community as a whole. In highlighting concerns that arise from the neoliberal conception of the university, my position is not one of nostalgia for a mythologised version of the past. Instead, I have demonstrated some damaging effects of neoliberalism, and its expression in governance as managerialism, on the university community. The particular concern of this thesis is with the inconsistency of neoliberalism in tertiary education settings. The neoliberal approach to teaching and education policy calls for improved

student engagement while simultaneously the techniques and tools of managerialism work to alienate students from the university community. The consumer student is positioned outside and apart from the university.

The university community is eroded further by the effects of managerialism on students, academics and others in the community. Relationships are reconstituted by managerial practices. Relationships conducive to education that are cooperative, tolerant, critical, dialogic and democratic are replaced with ones that are hierarchical, contractual, measurable and competitive. Managerialism, thus, restricts the potential for relationships that support student engagement within the university. While education policy sets parameters within which decisions are made and actions carried out within the university, these inconsistencies also leave space for resistance by students and academics. The university community is made up of students, academics and staff. It is shaped by the values, culture, policies, and other conditions that scaffold the daily work of the institution. Management techniques and practices applied judiciously can enhance the work of the university and student engagement, but managerialism as a way of organising the university is inconsistent with student engagement in tertiary education. As the university community of the University of Aberdeen argues, both staff and students “belong to the university” and the university should be “restored to the community to which it belongs” (*Reclaiming our University*, 2016, p. 1).

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Ten years ago, I was elected a Students' Union Officer in Ireland. It was my job to represent individual students within the university. To this end, I participated in committees, conferences and other events where student and policy issues were discussed, in university, national and European fora. Back then, I was concerned about the way students were involved or, more accurately, not involved in university decision making. It was my experience that many actors in the university sector understood the importance of engaging with students to facilitate students' education, development and participation in public life. Consequently, some university members went out of their way to build relationships with students, involve students in decision making, and encourage students to participate in the university community. While some other members did not.

My duties as a student representative included consultations, surveys on teaching and the student experience, presentations on strategic developments, invitations to attend policy launches, to stand in official photographs, and generally to be seen to be participating. It seemed to me then that, as a student representative, I was in a privileged position within the university. Even so, I felt I was performing engagement rather than engaging. Some quality or ethos was missing from my experience and this provided what Dewey called a moment of doubt, which began my process of inquiry. In part, this thesis is the product of my critical reflection on my experiences at that time and on stories shared by my fellow students, both then and now, about student engagement in the university.

This thesis is concerned with whether tertiary education policy aims in Ireland and New Zealand are consistent with the drive to engage students in university life. Tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand promotes a particular vision of the university and its purpose

that has the potential to undermine student engagement efforts. This vision is underpinned by the neoliberal political and ethical project. Neoliberal education policy narrowly conceives of, and ultimately negatively shapes, the education of the students it purportedly aims to engage. This vision of the university focuses on its role in the development of human capital, the formation of the economic subject, and is organised according to corporate practices. It is inconsistent with the conditions necessary for authentic engagement with, and by, students. Current policy developments do not enhance student engagement but constitute a threat to it. The concern is that neoliberal ideas that are evident in policy—and as a result, in university practices—work against efforts to engage students in tertiary education.

As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, research on student engagement in broad terms is concerned with student success. However, for Dewey and Freire engagement is linked inextricably to education. Their vision of student success is of a critical, dialogical, democratic education that engages students through their studies with each other and the world. Therefore, both Dewey's and Freire's approaches to education centralise student engagement. Success for Dewey and Freire is education that leads to growth and humanisation, respectively.

Student engagement occurs when students learn to analyse themselves and the world critically and consequently take action to affect social justice. Dewey and Freire argue that education should enable the student to grow and to liberate themselves through critical dialogical praxis. It is the role of the educational environment to provide the experiences that are necessary to enhance this process. Dewey and Freire offer strategies to achieve these aims, such as the necessity of unfinishedness and uncertainty in education, the usefulness of virtues and habits, the social nature of education, and the importance of political and ethical perspectives.

This thesis has engaged with the work of Dewey and Freire to evaluate Irish and New Zealand tertiary education policy. To this end, there has been a consideration of educational ideas from Dewey and Freire alongside ideas from tertiary education policy. The purpose has been to compare Irish and New Zealand education policy with Deweyan and Freirean ideas about student engagement. However, in comparing these ideas, it ought to be noted that there are tensions and contradictions between philosophy, policy, ideals and practices in the links between neoliberal education policies and student engagement.

Context is where ideas and experience intersect. Ireland and New Zealand share some policy goals. However, each country's implementation of tertiary education policy—as well as popular responses to policy changes—is unique to its sociocultural and historical environment. This difference provides scope for the discussion in this thesis. In particular, educational practices have emerged throughout each country's tertiary education system in response to policy decisions. Some of these examples have been discussed within the thesis. Additionally, these examples highlight scope for future research on this topic.

The neoliberal political and ethical project involves the introduction of market principles into the everyday lives of citizens, who are repositioned as consumers and individual maximisers of utility. Social questions about how we live together are reconstituted as economic questions. Neoliberalism remains the prevalent discourse in many western nations. It has pervaded tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand. This thesis reflects on the implications of some neoliberal ideas for tertiary education and student engagement in particular. In the end, the logic of the market does not necessarily determine levels of student engagement. For example, neoliberalism affects students' ability to pursue activities that act in opposition to consumerist agendas. In a situation where students are understood as consumers by politicians, policymakers

and other social actors, it becomes harder for educators to resist policy and the discussion that accompanies it. In line with previous research on the effects of neoliberal ideas on education in the last 20 years, this thesis concludes that neoliberalism restricts the potential for student engagement in tertiary education.

Often, policy documents attempt to imply a neutral stance toward education. Nonetheless, education is politics, and education policy is political even when it is presented as neutral. Universities are shaped by the society they are situated in and the ideas that influence society. The political and ethical dimensions of education highlight the deficiencies of neoliberal politics that claim to engage students to improve student experiences. Education policy outlines specific political goals that tertiary education is to achieve beyond merely reproducing society. The aims and purposes of tertiary education as laid out in the policy ensemble in Ireland and New Zealand, are concerned with economic growth and competitiveness through the production of human capital and the creation of desirable, useful and relevant knowledge.

In this sense, education policy and practice increasingly are concerned with students' usefulness in the economy. In addition, policy is concerned with compliance with these goals. In consequence, managerial systems of accountability and performance have become increasingly influential in the university. Good governance in the university has come to mean corporate governance. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the thesis highlight inconsistencies between the objectives outlined in education policy and ideas about engaging students in tertiary education.

Education policy in Ireland and New Zealand explicitly positions education as the foundation of human capital. Both Dewey and Freire reject forms of education that emphasise the future to the detriment of the present, that reduce knowing to memorisation, and accept the status quo without critique. They are both concerned with the student's formation in the domains

of knowing, acting and being and argue for forms of education where students learn to reflect on their experiences critically with each other to act in support of social justice. Students are more than human capital—they are human beings. When students are conceptualised as objects, they are dehumanised. Their capacity to critically reflect on the world is curtailed by a political approach that confines them to a future as docile workers.

In contrast, education as an engaging praxis encourages students to engage with the word and the world in order to change the world. An education to become as typified by education for human capital stands in contrast to education for becoming. For Dewey and Freire, education remains an open question. They both acknowledge the role of education in preparing students for employment. However, they reject the neoliberal emphasis on the production of workers as the primary objective of education. Thus, in positioning education as the production of human capital, the influence of the market orientation of tertiary education can become an obstacle to student engagement.

Education also is an ethical practice. Neoliberalism has reconfigured our understanding of what is important in education. Although not always explicit, neoliberalism establishes and prioritises particular values and dispositions. The individual, self-interested, rational utility maximiser is the neoliberal ethical ideal. To achieve this ethical ideal, tertiary education policy prioritises the development of particular skills that students ought to obtain to be virtuous and contribute to society. The best way to contribute to society is seen as a contribution to economic competitiveness and productivity. Thus, skills have a moral dimension. Additionally, skills have emerged as the essential aspect of tertiary education in recent years.

Unfortunately, prioritising the economic and individual dimension of skills such as creativity and critical thinking deprives these skills of richer meaning that could enhance their

contribution to students' education. Skills that undermine the pursuit and practice of educational virtues and habits such as open-mindedness, humility and curiosity also have the potential to undermine the kind of critical, dialogic and democratic student engagement emphasised by Dewey and Freire. Tertiary education faces challenges in many western societies, such as the threats to truth and democracy that have been seen in recent global political developments such as the US presidential election and the Brexit vote. However, living as a consumer creates dispositions that are divergent with those necessary to respond adequately to such contemporary challenges in order to enact a more just society.

There is an inconsistency between educating for a democratic society based on virtues such as tolerance, humility and altruism, on the one hand, and the skills that are necessary for the development of like-minded, self-interested, utility-maximising consumers on the other. There are, nonetheless, virtues and habits that can enable students to deal with the contemporary challenges of life. If student engagement is about student success, then the development of rich conceptions of educational virtues and habits is essential to that success. The prominence of skills education, which hollows out educational virtues to reproduce relevant skills in tertiary policy, thus is inconsistent with student engagement.

Education for both Dewey and Freire is a social process. As such, education also is a way to take part in communal life. Student engagement is a social concept, as it too is concerned with the way students interact with their studies, peers, lecturers, and with the physical, social and political environment. However, neoliberalism undermines social cohesion and threatens the solidarity of the university community through managerialism. Managerialism has become the preferred method for running universities. Quality assurance and performance management systems have been introduced to ostensibly improve the governance of universities. Nonetheless,

these forms of organisation can hinder public life in the university and, consequently, limit educational opportunities for students.

The techniques of neoliberalism have the potential to alienate students from the university community, where relationships in the university are reconstituted as competitive, commodified, accountable, performative and hierarchical. Emphasising these relationships can act to the detriment of relationships of responsibility, care, and tolerance, and that are dialogic and democratic in nature. It is these types of relationships that underpin Dewey and Freire's concept of engaging education. Thus, the university community is corroded by the effects of managerialism. Likewise, the dismantling of collegial relationships has obvious implications for student engagement that relies on building such relationships.

Increasing calls for community engagement by universities highlights the inconsistency in policies to enhance student engagement. Students are somehow expected to behave compliantly within the university but to actively engage with the world outside it. There is an inconsistency between economic policy goals and the social goal of community engagement. The former are underpinned by the idea of the competitive individual, the latter by democratic values such as equity and solidarity. Within current tertiary education policy frameworks, engaging with the community within and beyond the university is in danger of becoming just another criterion students must meet to attain their qualification. In this context, community becomes a means to an end rather than the means to sustain education thereby reproducing and creatively reforming society.

The main argument in this thesis is that the aims of tertiary education policy in Ireland and New Zealand are inconsistent with student engagement. This argument is sustained by critiquing current tertiary education policy objectives from a Deweyan and Freirean perspective.

In this way, it has been demonstrated that these policy aims run counter to ideas about engaging students in tertiary education. There is a contradiction between an education where the student becomes human capital and an education where the student engages in and with the world as a continual and uncertain process of becoming.

In addition, this thesis has demonstrated the inconsistency between the generic skills that are prized by neoliberalism and the educational virtues and habits that support the kind of critical, democratic, and engaging education championed by Dewey and Freire. There is an inherent contradiction between an education that facilitates critical awareness, and the dominating and alienating nature of the social and economic framework of neoliberalism. Finally, this thesis has shown that approaches to governance in tertiary education, such as managerialism, undermine a collegial and democratic university that engages students in dialogical relationships that are not merely contractual, hierarchical and competitive.

The educational ideas of Dewey and Freire—in particular, reflective experience, praxis and commitment to democracy as a way of living—underpin an idea of student engagement as critical and democratic. Critical democratic engagement is not a new approach in education, especially where educators are concerned with engaging students rather than delivering ‘banking education’. However, critical democratic engagement is not an approach that has been embraced in education policymaking in Ireland and New Zealand. If one of the aims of tertiary education policy is the development of the critical and creative student, then this thesis argues that critical student engagement in a radically democratic university would support this goal. However, these aims are in direct conflict with other policy aims, such as education to produce human capital. The first set of aims is based on an awareness of our unfinishedness, while the latter is based on a quest for certainty. This is not to say that education cannot include elements of

completion, usefulness or preparation for employment. However, these should be one part of an education that remains a radically open question. This type of education encourages each student to be themselves with each other.

This thesis contributes to the body of work on student engagement by providing some initial work on a philosophy of student engagement. This approach specifically connects several of the philosophical ideas of Dewey and Freire to the emerging theme of student engagement in tertiary education. While there is some literature in this burgeoning field that references the work of Dewey in particular, there is a dearth of work on the philosophy of student engagement. This thesis seeks to begin to remedy this deficit. The original contribution of this thesis is that by taking a philosophical approach to understanding student engagement in tertiary education a new understanding of student engagement emerges.

### **Limitations**

This study has some limitations. First, the breadth of work across the disciplines on tertiary education means that there are areas of interest that could only be touched on. Additionally, this thesis has highlighted the fallibility of certain philosophical, social and ethical constructs. However, concepts such as these are not always true or always false; they are contingent, uncertain and unfinished, as is this work.

Second, this work is constrained by context. Context is vital to ground the study and reflect on a real-world example that is evolving continually. As Dewey points out, we can only know the world by interacting with it. On the other hand, context means that some ideas might not fit other contexts. However, despite historical and contextual differences between Ireland and New Zealand, policy and practice in tertiary education in both countries substantively is the

same. Many of the ideas in these policies are replicated in countries around the world, although this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

## Possibilities for Further Research

Student engagement is a broad area of research. The work of Dewey and Freire is used here to examine strategies to enhance student engagement in tertiary education and the effects of education policy on student engagement. However, there is more than one approach to an education that engages students, and many other philosophers, researchers and writers have reflected on this topic. Their ideas could also be used to critique practice and relations of power within tertiary education. More research is needed on specific instances of student engagement with the university, including dynamics that underpin this engagement—for example, student representatives on governing or other decision making bodies in education.

Ideas such as the “*dissensual* community”, where unity and identity are abandoned, but somehow the social bond is preserved as a continuing question, highlight opportunities for future research. In addition, there is room for more critical studies of tertiary education in Ireland in particular. The role of tertiary education in response to global challenges such as climate change and environmental destruction also deserve more attention. The rise of authoritarian leaders and political parties around the world has implications for democracy in other countries. Consequently, Dewey’s radical vision of democracy as a way of living has possibilities for further research on student engagement in tertiary education and beyond.

In addition, there is scope for further critiques of tertiary education policy, including student engagement in tertiary education, from feminist, decolonising, democratic, ecological and postmodern perspectives. New Zealand universities are bound statutorily to be the “critic and conscience” of society. In these times of “alternative facts” (d’Ancona, 2017), universities

must continue to challenge falsehoods and magical thinking. There is continuing scope for more philosophy of tertiary education.

This thesis has argued that contemporary education policy aims are inconsistent with student engagement in tertiary education. The concern here is with opening up possibilities for students to engage toward becoming in tertiary education, and that the implications of current policy may render the university unfit to meet the challenges of the modern world, thereby contesting its role in society and its very reason for existence.

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