



# Education Between Ethics and Religion

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From Denominationalism to  
Where?



# A Poetics of Difference

‘World is crazier and more of it than we think,  
incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion a  
tangerine and spit the pips and feel the  
drunkenness of things being various’  
(from *Snow* by Louis Mac Niece)

# Overview

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- Goya – ‘As If They Are Of Another Breed’
  - The Irish Context of Schooling – A Peculiar Reality
  - What is Ethos? The Multilayered Aspect of Ethos
  - Different Ethoi in Irish Education
  - Where to Now? Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector 2011/2012
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# Goya – 'As If They Are Of Another Breed'



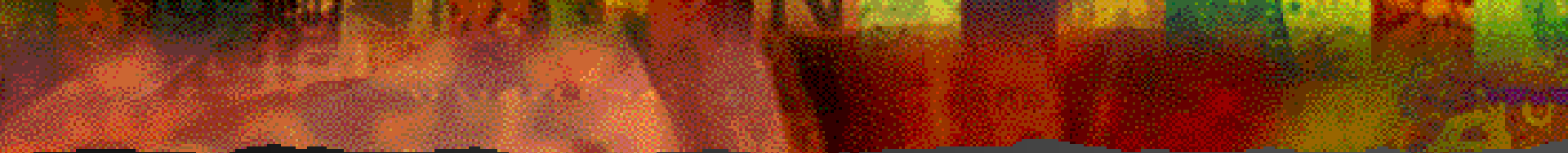
*Si son de otro linage.*



## From Cesaire to Young to Freire

‘millions of people who have been skillfully injected with fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement’  
(Cesaire, Discourse on Colonialism)

‘reform can come only through a change in cultural images, stereotypes...real change in the mundane reproduction of dominance’  
(Iris Marion Young)



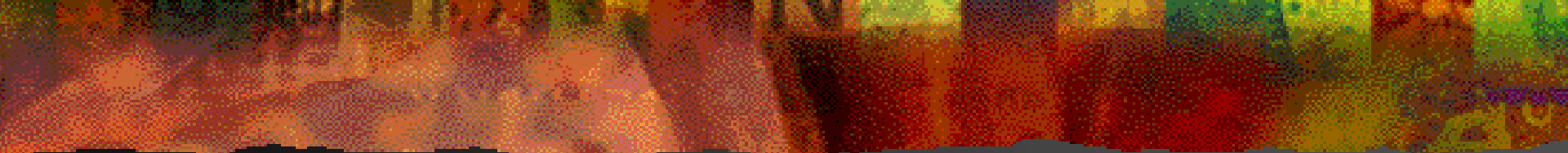
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‘the oppressed have been made “beings for others”..the solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves” (Freire)



## Avoiding 'Chauvinism' in Education – Where Interculturalism and Development Education Coincide

'many people believe that their culture is the core of the one life worthy of human beings or that those belonging to supposedly inferior cultures count for little or nothing. I call such beliefs and the conduct they motivate 'chauvinism'. The word names a familiar evil, at work not only in the horrors of ethnic cleansing but also in the pettier bigotries that fuel so many conflicts around the world' (Callan, 'The Politics of Difference and Common Education')



## Religion as a Problem for Liberal Democracy (Alexander and Mc Laughlin, 2003)

- Liberalism emphasises individual autonomy whereas religion emphasises distinctive traditions
- Liberalism emphasises critical rationality and epistemology while religion often involves a qualification of reason
- Certain versions of liberalism emphasise religion as a private matter, not relevant to schooling
- ‘the intricate relation between the civic and religious’





# Multicultural Society

‘Multicultural societies throw up problems that have no parallel in history. They need to find ways of reconciling unity and diversity, being inclusive without being assimilationist, cherishing plural cultural identities without weakening the precious identity of shared citizenship’ (Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*)

# The Irish Context of Schooling – A Peculiar Reality

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- Almost uniquely in Europe, Ireland has a monopolistic denominational tradition in schools
  - 96% of primary schools being denominational, with 90% Catholic and 6% Protestant
  - There are two Muslim schools and one Jewish school
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# The Irish Context of Schooling – A Peculiar Reality

- Only 2% of schools are multi-denominational
- The multi-denominational schools are primarily Educate Together schools (also several Gaelscoileanna)
- there are *no* nondenominational schools (often seen as a Constitutional issue although this is ambiguous)

## Teacher Education Issues of Ethos

- Student teachers are educated in separate environments for Catholic and Protestant, with 100% denominational governance (Donnelly 2011)
- Up until 2011, 100% of teacher students took the Religious Certificate and Religious Education
- Since 2008, an Elective on Different School Contexts has been taught
- In 2010, several students chose an alternative of Ethics and Education in St. Pat's
- Q: Where do non-Christian teachers go in Ireland to be educated?

# What is Ethos? The Multilayered Aspect of Ethos

- Ethos refers originally to 'character', in the first case individual character and values
- Simultaneously, it signifies social character formation and thus a potential conflict
- Ethos is multi-valent; referring to ethnicity, language, religion, ethics, gender, class, sexuality etc
- School ethos is multi-layered; e.g. curriculum, expressive culture, organisational (Norman 2003); 'individual schools differ'

# Denominational Schools: Faith Formation and A Comprehensive Moral Education

- A denominational religious ethos aims as a matter of policy to foster in young people a commitment to a particular religion
- Examples – Catholic, Church of Ireland, Muslim, Jewish
- Faith formation is integral to the school
- Religious and spirituality education ‘from the inside’ (Alexander and McLaughlin 2003)

# Denominational Schools – Issues and Problems

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- Provides a strong grounding in a particular tradition with an integral ethic
  - No provision for children of other faiths or belief systems. Children's rights
  - Ethical education remains grounded in the faith perspective
  - Teachers' rights
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# Multidenominational Schools: The Common School

- the truth claims of religion and other belief systems are explored as part of the school's ethos but truth is not associated with a particular view
- The Educate Together Learn Together curriculum : comparative ethical and religious education ('from the outside')
- No faith formation within school time



# Multidenominational Schools – Issues and Problems

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- Respect rather than tolerance – ‘equal treatment as of right’
  - Can children understand religion outside traditional initiation?
  - Is the comparative programme sufficiently robust to provide conditions for formation of citizens?
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# Multi-Faith Schools: Combining Faith Formation and Ethical Education (VEC)

- The VEC model plans to teach ethics or comparative religion together while also providing segregated religious instruction
- 80% of religious and ethical education is comparative
- 20% of religious and ethical education is 'faith formation' (e.g. Catholic', 'Other Christian', 'Muslim', 'Humanist/Atheist')

# Multi-Faith Schools: Issues and Problems

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- A courageous attempt to balance opposed perspectives?
  - A danger of succeeding in neither approach, neither faith nor citizenship?
  - Issues with the logistics and resources needed for such differentiated ethical and religious education
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# NonDenominational Schools: Secularism and Ethical Education

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- religious education in the sense of fostering of religious belief or practice is precluded
  - there is a strong ethical and citizenship education component
  - Religious symbolism may be prohibited
  - France, USA, Spain: secular state education
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# NonDenominational Schools – Issues and Problems

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- Secularism is not necessarily anti-religious but sees religion as a ‘nonpublic’ matter
  - Is there a desire for nondenominational schools in Ireland?
  - Could ignorance of religion foster prejudice in children?
  - Is secularism another form of religion?
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# Where To Now?

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- **Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector 2011/2012**
  - **Testimony from Irish Teacher**
  - **Going Forward**
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# Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector 2011/2012

- New patronage in 258 schools
- Abolition of primary school rule that RE is most important part of curriculum
- Ethical education compulsory for all teacher education
- Nondenominational schools are to be explored as possibilities

## Testimony from an Irish Teacher

- 'I write as one of a large group of LGBT people who works as a primary school teacher in a Catholic school. I must participate in and teach a religion I don't believe in. I have regular visits from the local priest to keep an eye on how I am teaching religion. No other teacher gets these visits. The INTO have been sympathetic but ..they advised that I do not rock the boat' (Irish Times 22/11/2011)





## Where To Next?

‘Philosophy is always a creature of its past, but it is also a creator of its future’ (John Dewey)

‘We must cease living under the dictatorship of no alternatives’ (Roberto Unger)

‘Where to for the common school? Less a detailed blueprint and more a voyage of discovery’ (Fielding and Moss)