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Editorial

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND CLASS

STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY

This issue of *Policy and Practice* coincides with and celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the journal which commenced publication in Spring 2005. Issue 40 is consistent with the journal's original aims of providing a platform for research and practice in development education and ensuring author contributions from both higher education and the international non-governmental sector. It also delivers on another journal objective of breaking new ground by supporting discourse on themes that have been mostly elided from sectoral practice. It is remarkable that class, the theme of Issue 40, has not been more central to development education research given the Marxist influence on Freire and his radical rejection of a class-based society. As Donald Macedo (2000: 13) argues in his introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire 'courageously denounced the neoliberal position that promotes the false notion of the end of history and the end of class'.

Class and inequality

Far from creating a classless society, neoliberalism has deepened class inequalities. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has reported that: 'social class and processes of class reproduction remain important, particularly for the continuity of poverty over time and across generations' (Shildrick and Rucell, 2015: 1). As if to confirm this, Oxfam's (2025: 7) latest annual global economy report finds that total billionaire wealth grew three times faster in 2024 than 2023 and every billionaire saw their fortunes grow by $2million a day on average. At the same time, global poverty has hardly altered at all since 1990 with the World Bank (2024: xxiii) reporting that 2020-2030 is set to be a lost decade with 8.5 percent of the world's population living on less than $2.15 per person a day. Using a higher poverty line of $6.85 per person per day, normally applied to upper-middle income countries, the same report finds that 44 percent of the world's population lives in

poverty (Ibid.).

A survey carried out across 27 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries found that children with the greatest socio-economic disadvantages grow up to earn as much as 20 percent less as adults than those with more favourable childhoods (OECD, 2022). This unequal childhood is corrosive as it also denies equal access to healthcare, employment, housing, leisure and services. The same survey found strong support for measures that could improve social mobility such as increasing taxes on top earners, expanding benefits for low-income households, and introducing or increasing the minimum wage (Ibid.) These are the kind of interventionist measures that have largely been abandoned by Western governments in the period of neoliberalism. For example, the Labour Party in Britain has recently implemented welfare 'reforms' that are targeting the most vulnerable in society such as cutting Winter fuel payments for all but the poorest pensioners and maintaining a two-child benefit cap (Walker, 2024; Elgot, 2024). When confronted with the political choice of either taxing wealth – and at the same time tackling inequality - or inflicting needless economic pain on the most vulnerable in society, the British government has opted for the latter. This is fuelling the sense of a political elite detached from the economic realities confronting vulnerable families, particularly when it was revealed that British members of parliament (MPs) had been in receipt of more than £700,000 in free gifts around the same time as the cuts were announced (Kersley, 2024). Can it therefore be of any real surprise that the latest YouGov (2025) opinion polls on voting intentions in Britain show the far-right Reform UK party leading the Labour government? The 'extreme centre' appears to be opening the political gateway to the far-right.

Another consequence of targeting welfare claimants as part of a narrative of economic 'reform' is the stigmatisation of the poor and working classes whose individual behaviours, fecklessness or moral failings are considered the main causes of their own poverty. 'This is a process of negatively stereotyping those who are disadvantaged', finds the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Shildrick and Rucell, 2015: 3), with the labels and stereotypes 'often applied from the top down, towards those experiencing poverty by those who are not'. These stereotypes often assume that all welfare claimants are poor and those living in poverty are

unemployed. The Trussell Trust foodbank network, for example, has found that one in five (20 percent) foodbank users are from working households and using foodbanks because they are 'in insecure work, for example, zero hours contracts or agency work' (Trussell Trust, 2023: 8). Just as George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* was 'horrified and amazed' to find men 'ashamed of being unemployed' (Orwell, 2024, [1937]: 76) so many of those experiencing poverty today are subjected to what Elizabeth Meade (2024: 28) describes as 'epistemic injustice'; denied the critical consciousness to identify the systemic root causes of their class condition and the freedom to imagine alternatives.

Race and class

Issue 40 of *Policy and Practice* challenges the notion that a Marxist, class-based analysis alone is equal to the challenges of racism, inequality, colonialism and injustice. Freire, who constantly re-evaluated his class analysis, recognised that 'material oppression and the affective investments that tie oppressed groups to the logic of domination cannot be grasped in all of their complexity within a singular logic of class struggle' (Macedo, 2000: 13). In her Focus article for Issue 40 on the colonial legacies of racialised class formation in the education system in Jamaica, Giselle F. Thompson argues that:

> "Too often race is not taken up in discussions about class because it is dismissed as a form of 'identity politics' – as though the identities that define human beings are not important or somehow irrelevant for class formation and the ways in which people experience class".

Freire, too, argued that just as 'one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class, one cannot understand racism fully without a class analysis' (Macedo, 2000: 15). This coalescence of race and class is, according to Thompson, 'vital to understanding the emergence of capitalism'. She strongly argues and evidences that the racial and class-based discriminatory practices imposed on Afro-Jamaican children by colonial practices and institutions continue to manifest themselves in the poverty, inequality and disadvantage experienced by African-descended communities today. Thompson calls for an end to racialised class formations that create a two-tiered education system in Jamaica and reparatory justice for communities that continue to bear the injustices of

colonialism. She finds that post-independence, Jamaica remains in the grip of neo-colonial international financial institutions (IFIs) that have entrenched colonial practices in education through debt and structural adjustment programmes. She calls for an anti-colonial development education praxis that can support the kind of policy-based interventions that are needed to disrupt the colonial lineage evident in the divergent pathways to education in Jamaica based both on class and racial inequalities.

Class apartheid

The second Focus article in Issue 40 written by Sandra Altenberger also seeks to interrupt colonial continuities but from a feminist post-colonial perspective. Drawing upon her doctoral research and Spivak's (2007) concept of class apartheid, Altenberger considers the extent to which global citizenship education (GCE) 'stabilises class apartheid as defined by UNESCO, and what is needed to counter this continuation/reactivation of class apartheid'. She offers a deep analysis of the constructions of class-based subjectivities in GCE policy and discusses how the sector can address 'uncritical conceptions' of GCE by, for example, drawing upon Andreotti et al's (2018) 'HEADS UP' social cartography. It is a welcome contribution to the debate on GCE and post-colonialism and concludes by calling on the sector to identify and characterise 'the conditions of world society as postcolonial'.

Educational censorship and de-skilling by the political right in Brazil is the urgent topic debated in the third Focus article written by Abdellatif Atif. A conservative social movement called *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without a Party) is masking its aim of removing political consciousness and Freirean praxis from the school system in Brazil under the guise of neutrality. Drawing upon the concept of 'antagonism', Atif argues that education is 'inherently political' and essential to a democratic vision of society. While the neo-conservative right in Brazil is claiming to depoliticise education through neutrality, it is intensifying politicisation toward right-wing ideological control evidenced through the targeting of courses on sex education, multiculturalism, and climate change education and adoption of a moralising campaigning that condemns the 'instrumental agendas' of the left. Atif draws upon an analysis of legislative proposals for adoption by the Brazilian National Congress that mirror the

principles of *Escola Sem Partido*. These bills aim to restrict teachers from 'expressing political, ideological, or religious views in the classroom and limiting discussions on topics such as gender and sexuality'. This article serves as both a warning of the threats posed to education by rising authoritarianism across the world and a rallying call for educators to 'address political questions in a way that highlights their complexity rather than reducing them to binary oppositions'.

Development education approaches to class equality

Fiona Creedon and Sally Daly have contributed a Perspectives contribution to Issue 40 from the global youth work sector which argues that 'poverty, particularly its intersection with class, is under-represented within a non-formal education context in Ireland'. Their article presents evidence of a 'deeply unequal' Ireland that appears not to be meeting its national and international targets and obligations in regard to child poverty and welfare. Creedon and Daly argue that a global youth work approach premised upon development education's radical learning tools can enable young people 'to reflect on class as a site of struggle'. They conclude that class and poverty have been largely invisibilised in Irish society which makes it essential that young people have the learning tools to 'challenge their own experiences of oppression' and the 'current reality of inequality'.

Maria Gallo's Perspectives article presents research on the long neglected epistemic community among global alumni networks which are valuable contributors to development education and 'collective actions for equality, social justice, and environmental action'. Gallo presents research on global alumni networks across six countries (Czechia, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Denmark, and Ireland) that have supported rich intersections 'between local community impact and social class'. As networks 'that embody the aspirations of a country's higher education system', Gallo believes they effectively combine the local and the international by raising awareness of global issues through local actions and events.

The Viewpoint section of Issue 40 carries a wealth of reflective, radical and solidaristic writing from many of the leading practitioners in our sector. Audrey Bryan and Yoko Mochizuki critique the alignment of development education with the increasingly pervasive social and emotional learning (SEL)

advanced by the OECD and prominent economists such as Nobel Laureate Professor James Heckman. Underpinning SEL is the idea that children from low-income, working-class backgrounds are lacking non-cognitive social-emotional skills – a form of pre-distribution – rather than the economic poverty caused by neoliberalism which entrenches class inequalities. What attracts SEL to policymakers is that it finds the root causes of poverty in the social-emotional deficits of working families rather than demanding the kind of interventionist, economic models that will redistribute wealth and sustain public services. Bryan and Mochizuki are concerned that the growing alignment of development education with SEL will have a 'major depoliticising effect that forestalls political dialogue and undermines an appreciation of the material and economic determinants of various local and global injustices'. Research by Fricke (2022: 77) indicated that the development education and international development sectors in Ireland already 'give little attention to engaging the public in educational processes that attempt to explore, discuss, reflect on and respond to such structural economic issues'. Sectoral alignment with SEL will only deepen that inertia.

The foreboding created by the prospect of a second Trump presidency has already been realised with multiple assaults on democracy and human rights at home and overseas including: putting USAID through the 'wood chipper' (Giorno, 2025); sanctioning Israel's ethnic cleansing of Gaza (Reiff, 2025); the mass deportation of immigrants (Ward, 2025); and cancelling $400m in federal contracts and grants to Columbia University as a warning to other universities to stay in line on Palestine and other issues (Conroy, 2025). As Henry A. Giroux writes in a tribute to his friend and colleague, Paulo Freire, in this issue of *Policy and Practice*: 'Right-wing politicians and authoritarian regimes are not merely attacking the classroom - they are waging an all-out war on critical education'. He adds that: 'These forces understand, as Freire did, that whoever controls education holds the power to shape the future'. As a sector that has been plagued for too long by inertia (Stein, 2024), development education needs to respond to Giroux's call to 'see education not as passive consumption but as an active, revolutionary process - one that involves critically reading both the word and the world and taking collective action to dismantle the conditions of oppression'.

Laurie Macfarlane's Viewpoint article also reflects on the implications of a Trump presidency in a new era of 'authoritarian capitalism'. He considers how Trump is likely to react to the threat posed by China to the United States' (US) technological supremacy which has underpinned US hegemony. Given China's transformation into one of the world's largest and most dynamic economies, Trump's reactive use of tariffs in an economic trade war could potentially destabilise the global economy. Macfarlane considers the implications of Trump 2.0 for 'peace, prosperity and the planet'.

Finally, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Policy and Practice*, the Centre for Global Education circulated a special call for 500-word articles from academics and educational practitioners on 'The Future of Development Education'. It has resulted in a collection of fifteen short articles from authors representing a range of education sectors that offer rich and reflective perspectives on how the sector can approach the future. These articles are published in the Viewpoint section of the journal under the title 'My 500 on "The Future of Development Education"'.

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Focus

Examining the Legacies of the Colonial Racialised Class Formation of the Education System in Jamaica: Towards an Anticolonial and Reparative Development Education Praxis

Giselle F. Thompson

Abstract: This article uses racial capitalism (Robinson, 2020; 1983) and an anti-colonial discursive framework (Dei, 2000; Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001) to delineate the raced-classed ontological formation of schooling in Jamaica that exists in the wake of African slavery (Sharpe, 2016). The legacies of racial-colonial-capitalism shapes educational inequality and discrimination as it pertains to rural, poor, unemployed and precarious working-class Afro-Jamaican children. The implications of this for racially ordered class formation are discussed, particularly for poor and rural dwelling students who, if they have the opportunity, matriculate through grades one to six primary schools that are often under-resourced. These students are less likely to attend more rigorously academic traditional high schools that were founded during the colonial era to serve the children of the white planter and upper middle classes. I argue that the government of Jamaica's (GOJ) efforts to disrupt the legacies of colonialism in schooling are undermined by a collision of neoliberal economic forces that are external to Jamaica and the country's maintenance of a colonial tiered structure of schooling. Invoking a reparative justice framework, this article calls for a movement towards a development education practice, education policy and a race-class praxis that is liberatory and empowering.

Key words: Education; Schooling; Race; Class; Colonialism; Capitalism; Anti-colonial Theory; Racial Capitalism; Reparations; Jamaica; Caribbean.

Introduction

Jamaica is a predominantly African-descendent society and a clear example of how the 'development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions' (Robinson, 2020: 2), directions that fuelled and justified the violence and horror of the Maafa that brought stolen Africans to the island, and other regions of the 'New World' to cultivate its lands. Modern Jamaica exists in the wake of this (Sharpe, 2016). So, too, does its education system which is also an integral part of the ongoing legacies of colonial racism and shapes educational inequality and discrimination as it pertains to rural, poor, unemployed and precarious working-class Afro-Jamaican children. I delineate the implications of this for racialised class formation because rural dwelling and poor students who either fail to, or manage to, matriculate through under-resourced primary schools are not attending or are less likely to attend the more rigorously academic traditional high schools whose foundations were laid in the colonial era. These institutions existed to serve the children of the plantocracy and the upper middle class exclusively and not the enslaved (Davis, 2004).

Contrary to Cook's (2021) assertion that there are more direct policy-based interventions to disrupt the legacies of colonialism in schooling in the twenty-first century, using racial capitalism (Robinson, 2020; 1983) and an anti-colonial discursive framework (Dei, 2000; Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001), I argue that these policies are not always being operationalised because they are actively being undermined by a composite of neoliberal economic forces that have reinforced colonial class divisions in schooling and Jamaican society. Such an anti-colonial interruption in the development education literature is necessary as it pertains to Jamaica, and the broader Anglo-Caribbean, to subvert the colonial racial-class legacy of schooling that pervades the society. I call for a movement towards a development education practice, education policy, and a race-class praxis that is liberatory, empowering, and reparatory justice-oriented in service to *our* children (Freire, 1968; Rodney, 1969; hooks, 1994).

Racial capitalism and anti-colonial theory: a necessary intervention in development education

Reflecting on Cedric Robinson's (2020; 1983) seminal text *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Bedour Alagraa remarked: 'In order to

accomplish the compulsory "fixing" of the working class within their subordinate position in the "lower orders", Biblical articulations of difference … were invoked' (Alagraa, 2018: 305). According to Alagraa, Robinson offered a historiographical corrective to the emergence of race that signalled its intimate ontological entanglement with social class. I raise this point here to trouble the notion that the phenomenon of class is raceless. Too often race is not taken up in discussions about class because it is dismissed as a form of 'identity politics' – as though the identities that define human beings are not important or somehow irrelevant for class formation and the ways in which people experience class (Meade, 2024).

The raced formation of class is vital to understanding the emergence of capitalism. Robinson delineates this in *Black Marxism* where he extends South African anti-Apartheid scholars' Martin Legassick and David Hemson's (1976) concept of 'racial capitalism'. Legassick and Hemson used racial capitalism to critique a widely held liberal belief that increased flows of international capital to South Africa would subvert Apartheid and replace it with a multiracial democracy and fair and efficient capitalist relations. Their work implied that dismantling Apartheid without overthrowing capitalism would maintain the embedded structures that produce and reproduce racial inequality and worker exploitation (Kelley, 2020). Robinson would later adapt racial capitalism, taking it further conceptually to indict the system of capitalism for gestating the racism that made its emergence possible (Alagraa, 2018).

Orthodox Marxism limits our understanding of conflict to an undifferentiated – in racial terms – 'proletariat' that is unified by his (and *not* her) struggle as a labourer and does not acknowledge that racism and racialisation were first perfected in the European continent. The European racialism ideology produced proletariat classes (Irish, Jewish, Roma, Slavic, and other peoples) who were victimised by dispossession, colonialism, and forms of enslavement (Kelley, 2020). This prototype, that required racialised Others (Kapoor and Thompson, forthcoming) for success was then exported, modified, and deployed to suit the various contexts of colonial conquest and occupation through genocide, administered to Indigenous peoples, and African chattel slavery, thereby expanding capital accumulation. Therefore, racial capitalism as a framework keeps race in full view and inscribes it as a constitutive feature of the rise,

expansion, and flourishing of modern capitalism (Dantzler, 2021). Importantly, through his use of racial capitalism, Robinson interrupts the West's obfuscation of the epistemic contributions of the Black Radical Tradition. These contributions were/are produced because of, in spite of, and in opposition to, the ongoing violence of Empire, giving birth to a global Black radical consciousness movement for justice (Biko, 1978; Alagraa, 2018).

Relatedly, and yet distinctly, anti-colonialism, which is a response to all things colonial – past, present and future – invites us, colonised people in particular, to think and reflect on the historical problem of colonialism and its legacies (Biko, 1978). As a discursive framework, it is less concerned about a traditional fixation with/on 'particular intellectual orthodoxies' (Dei and Asharzadeh, 2001: 299) that are ill-equipped to understand and explain the social realities of marginalised and subordinate people. The anti-colonial discursive framework is attuned with changing academic and political questions; thereby, making it a counter oppositional discourse to coloniality (Fanon, 1963). As an intellectual and material praxis, anti-colonialism calls us to understand:

1. The alien and imposing forces of colonialism and neocolonialism and their innerworkings so that we may challenge them;
2. The ontology of dominant-subordinate relationships must be theorised; and colonisation, decolonisation and imperialism must be analysed intersectionally and in an integrated manner, paying keen attention to how/when their modes of operation change over time;
3. Spiritual ways of knowing are axiologically important;
4. Anti-colonialism is an epistemological creation of colonised people because it captures our experiences as subjects of the colonial and neocolonial and it puts forward a 'literacy of resistance' (Kempf, 2011);
5. Colonisers must be called to consciousness and encouraged to acknowledge their complicity and take responsibility for the remediation of oppressive colonial systems in partnership with colonised people; and;

6. Colonialism is a transhistorical, and *not* a historical phenomenon, persisting in myriad forms throughout time and space.

To achieve these, anti-colonialism requires a dialogue with the past so as to engage the historical determinants of the here and now, and the possible future (Simmons and Dei, 2012). This requires a decolonial orientation because when one talks about anti-colonialism, they are automatically talking about decolonial praxis (Dei and Jaimungal, 2018). And, this necessitates one to consider who the producers of dominant knowledges are within the contexts of history, social location, identity, and politics. Second, the intrinsic link between anti-colonial theory and decolonisation implores a keen understanding of the reality that remedies to the problem of colonialism cannot solely be produced by academicians, particularly those who occupy space in institutions in the West; and third, there must be an acceptance that there is no panacea to fix the world's complex injustices. As such, multiple epistemologies and politics need to be invoked in order to address them.

Racial capitalism and anti-colonialism are conjointly applied here because, I view them as both taking on interlocking systems of domination and control; and these are capitalism, racism, and colonialism (Gerrard, Sriprakash and Rudolph, 2022). Although racial capitalism more explicitly attends to race, class, and capital accumulation, the fluidity of the anti-colonial discursive framework, imbues it with the ability to speak to these phenomena because of its counter-opposing orientation to all things that are colonial, i.e., anything that is imposing, violent, dispossessive, or the like. Both racial capitalism and anti-colonialism are radical intellectual projects, derived from the blood, sweat, tears, deaths, afterlives, and lives of the oppressed (Kapoor and Thompson, forthcoming) who have existed under the 'downpressions', as the Rastafari put it, of racial-colonial-capitalism in the 'New World' and in the broader terrain of the 'darker nations' (Prashad, 2007). Applying these concepts to the study and praxis of development education is not only prudent, but necessary because coloniality, racism, and classism continue to shape what occurs in schools and in other sites of learning and education around the world (Andreotti et al., 2018; Rose, 2019).

The legacies of the colonial racialised class formation of the education system in Jamaica

The logics of race ordered colonial society in Jamaica, elevating the lives of members of the white plantocracy and relegating the enslaved to zones of non-being where they had no 'human' status (Fanon, 1967). In this state of exception, they possessed no political life (*zoe*), only a biological-animal life (*bios*) that was exploited in the service of capital accumulation (Agamben, 1998; Mbembe, 2003; 2019). Justifications for the perverse ideology that Africans were natural born slaves and, therefore, possessing of an inherent propensity for merciless utility were held by the Christian church, which clung to the belief that God not only mandated slaveocracy, but predestined Black people to be a 'slave race' (Eltis, 1999; 2007). This religious and moral dogma – that was also believed to be necessary for Africans' 'soul salvation' (Cannon, 2008) – concomitantly gave rise to the 'mis-education of the negro' (Woodson, 1933). That is to say, (mis)education, was utilised to advance and sustain the system of triangular trade (Williams, 1944). For example, enslaver, Bryan Edwards (1789) documented that many of the Africans that he 'owned' were literate and numerate. As a result, he strategically organised them to avoid an intellectual cross pollination that might lead to their developing a plot to gain their freedom, or worse, overthrow slavocracy itself. Even African American abolitionist, Fredrick Douglass's 'master' remarked, an enslaved person having learned to read and write was an enslaved person 'running away with himself' (Givens, 2021: 12): away with his 'owner's' property. In contrast, the elite white families of the planter class educated their children at home until they were of age to be sent to Britain to complete their studies (Nugent, 2002). Poor white families sent their children to schools that were constructed using charitable endowments from benefactors, and the enslaved barred from formal schooling (Miller, 1987; Schneider, 2018).

Prior to official Emancipation on August 1, 1834 – although the Declaration did not take effect substantively until 1838 – the Negro Education Grant was implemented by the British House of Commons to assist missionary groups who endeavoured to proselytise – but not free – Black people by schooling them on Sundays. Although the Negro Education Grant was supposed to be available from 1835 to 1845 in yearly increments of thirty-thousand pounds, it was progressively reduced over a five-year period until the colonial government

announced its cessation in 1841. This halted the missionaries' education expansion projects, proving that 'nothing resembling a universal education provision could result from the Negro Education Grant' (Gordon, 1958: 45).

The colonial ethos towards education was to extend the opportunity to learn to Black people for the purpose of maintaining the existing colonial social hierarchy and the plantation economy in the post-Emancipation years. Critically important to achieving this objective was the bifurcation of the grades one through six elementary school system that made way for the children of the gentry to attend private preparatory ('prep') schools, making publicly funded primary schools the domain of the Black masses (Davis, 2004). This created the divergent pathways to post-secondary education. Prep school graduates typically went on to attend 'traditional high schools', whose foundations were laid in the colonial era for elite white children. And despite their being roughly the same age and also having matriculated through grades one through six, primary school graduates were more likely to attend 'technical'/ 'non-traditional' high schools that were established by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation in the early 1940s (Miller, 1999). According to Bourne et al. (2015: 1):

> "The traditional high school … represents, 1) excellent academic performers, 2) competency and highly knowledgeable students, 3) students who are more likely to meet the requirements to attend universities, colleges and nonskilled professions. On the other hand, the non-traditional high school students are those who are less knowledgeable, more fitting for skilled professions and least likely to enter universities or colleges, which surmounts additional psychological stress on students at the primary school [level] … to perform in keeping with success, knowledge, competence and societal expectations …".

From Bourne et al.'s (2015) description, we ascertain that embedded in the 'hidden curricula' of traditional and non-traditional high schools is tacit preparation for relating to the productive economy in particular ways (Anyon, 1980). The differences in structuration in the two streams of schooling, i.e., pedagogical, evaluative, etc., emphasise the development of certain cognitive and behavioural skills in relation to work, capital, authority, and societal expectations

(Ibid.). Today, 'the Jamaican education system continues to reflect the dual system of the nineteenth century, and the socioeconomic structure [of society] corresponds to the segregation within the education system as the country progresses' (Cook, 2021: 153). In other words, the racialised and classed foundations of Jamaican society are reflected in classrooms and will likely remain a fixture therein as the island-nation advances into the future, with white and Brown (mix-raced) Jamaicans maintaining higher levels of educational achievement than Black Jamaicans (Gordon, 1991; Evans, 2001; Kelly, 2020; Cook, 2021).

The fact that there was no fundamental break away from the education of colonial times has not been without significant challenges. According to Miller (1999), the State made an implicit judgement that the model was inherently good and only needed to be 'Jamaicanized' / 'Caribbeanized' and expanded to reach a broader base of people. From an anti-colonial perspective, these challenges stem from a collision of historical colonialism and neocolonialism (Nkrumah, 1966). By this, I mean, the colonial tiered structure of schooling, which emerged out of the classificatory logic of race (Wynter, 1994), was met by new economic imperialisms that have made the provision of education difficult in the current time-space weakening its capacity to serve as a mechanism for upward class mobility. In addition to the social consequences of this, there is a deep theoretical meaning behind the insidious ongoing legacy of colonialism in schooling. It is implicated in Jamaica's post-colonial mimicry (Bhabha, 1994) of the raced-classed colonial society that preceded it, further separating the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and advantaging a small group of elite people 'who were really the beneficiaries of colonialism … and of [the colonial] period's process of economic exploitation' (Manley, 2011) as Michael Manley, the former People's National Party (PNP) leader, remarked in a 1977 interview. Manley's words not only signal a continuum of the colonial in Jamaican society, but a fixedness of a racial capitalist hierarchy that made the metaphorical playing field uneven in the country's post-independence years.

Attempting to break colonial patterns of racialisation and classism and move towards an egalitarian society, Manley declared 'free education for all' in 1973, promising the removal of secondary and tertiary school fees. Upper class

Jamaicans, who were comfortable with the existing social arrangements, were vehemently opposed to this and believed that the-then prime minister was mismanaging the economy and leaning towards communism (Haughton, 2022). Critiquing this declaration, Keith (1978: 47) postulated that it 'enlarged ... marginal educational benefits to the working class without altering the elite bias of the secondary grammar [traditional] schools themselves', making it a 'pseudo rather than real' (Ibid.) kind of educational reform. There were limits to the state's ability to deceive the Black masses into thinking that the reforming of the education system was tantamount to re-making it to suit the diverse economic and social needs of the population (Ibid.). In light of the un-addressed ubiquity of class, race, and colour divisions in Jamaican schools, Hyacinth Evans (2001: 150) called for a 'radical reorientation' and 'new consciousness' in education praxes on the part of schools, teachers, and society on a whole, that would critique and work to uproot coloniality and the enduring legacies of racial capitalism.

Despite efforts to increase education's bandwidth in the years following adult suffrage (1944) and independence (1962) (Miller, 1999), stratified and skewed resources were, and still are a consistent problem (Evans, 2001; Stewart, 2015; Thompson, 2020, 2021, in press). This is not only because the two-tiered prep school-primary school divide remains in-tact, but because new imperialisms that have infiltrated the country via the loan agreement conditions of international financial institutions (IFIs), in particular the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have deeply impacted education spending and resourcing (Miller, 1992; 1999; Thompson, 2020, 2021). Hence, the Jamaica Labour Party's (JLP) concluding the PNP's socialist-democratic free education for all programme in 1986. When Manley returned to office in 1989, he would uphold the JLPs decision, announcing that new thinking on the matter determined that those who had the means to pay school fees should so not to burden the public sector budget and the increasingly volatile Jamaican economy (Burke, 2012).

IMF structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which exist to 'help' heavily indebted countries restructure their debt to external creditors, have worsened existing colonial divisions in schooling and engendered new ones. This is because, SAPs not only require loan recipient nations to open their economies to foreign exchange and devalue their currency to make the cost of doing business

cheaper, but they must also diminish their public spending. Since 1977, the year that SAPs took root in Jamaica, education has been on the chopping block, thus, the Ministry of Education and Youth's (MoEY) capacity to provide an accessible and effective public-school programme was further compromised, causing schools – and by extension the State – to rely on the international community for support, including members of the Jamaican diaspora (Thompson, 2020, 2021).

As an active Jamaican diasporan and researcher, I am intimately aware of this phenomenon and know first-hand the challenges that austerity in education cause (Thompson, 2020, 2021, forthcoming). Overcrowding; old, decrepit, and inaccessible buildings; unsafe play conditions; near defunct and barely operable bathroom and sanitation facilities; understaffing; and inadequate teaching, learning, and clerical materials are some of the obstacles that I have witnessed in the last decade at the invitation of dedicated principals and teachers at the primary school-level (Thompson, 2020, 2021). These educators were seeking help for their schools because their meagre MoEY-issued budgets were not enough to make ends meet. Their willingness to clean and maintain their institutions, fundraise, and spend their own money on school supplies, and sometimes, food, bus fare, and clothing for students who are the most in need signal that stark inequities are a historical and contemporary reality in schooling. Hence, the deep dependency that the Jamaican education system has had on charitable support from organisations such as the Carnegie Foundation (as mentioned above); the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (now, Global Affairs Canada); the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), British Development Division (now, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)); and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to fund schooling at all levels (Thompson, 2020).

It is important to note that these welfare-like relationships pre-date the SAP-era (Ibid.). And they have also been forged with international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs), and government agencies that rarely acknowledge or take the time to explore the historical and structural causes of the problems that they seek to remedy (Fricke, 2022). INGOs, NGDOs, and government agencies' failure to cultivate new perspectives about the ontological existence and persistence

of oppression under racial capitalism remains glaringly absent, and therefore, limits the transformative possibilities of their initiatives (Ibid.). The same can be said about IFIs' involvement in education projects (Rose, 2019). This critique is timely given the signing of the Jamaica Education Project (JEP) loan agreement between the World Bank and the government of Jamaica (GOJ) to address the country's post-COVID-19 learning crises in 2023 (Ministry of Finance and Public Service, 2023).

The solicitation of funds from the international donor and IFI communities to support the delivery of public schooling has reincarnated old colonial dependencies that are reminiscent of the paltry Negro Education Grant, discussed above, that was administered from the metropole of Britain to educate enslaved Africans. Similarly, charitable giving to Jamaican schools has resulted in failed and incomplete projects and it has also reified colonial divisions in schooling. Nowhere has this become more visible than through the money and gifts-in-kind that schools receive from their alumni who reside in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, where the vast majority of the Jamaican diaspora is based. Traditional high schools typically receive more support because their alumni tend to organise formally by obtaining charitable status and hosting elaborate fundraising events (Thompson, 2021). Transnational-diasporic alumni giving to traditional high schools widens the resource gap amongst schools, leaving technical high schools as well as primary and basic schools (pre-schools) and the students that they serve behind (Ibid).

Taking note of this, and seeking to capitalise on the Jamaican diaspora's sense of responsibility and attachment to their schools, a registered charity called the National Education Trust (NET) was founded by the GOJ in 2010 to mobilise 'financial and quality resource investments for the education sector … to bring transformative impact to underserved areas in the education system [and] achiev[e] greater levels of access to education and learning' (NET, 2024). The NET's efforts to solicit funds on behalf of the GOJ both locally and internationally is an articulation of a public-private philanthropic partnership (PPPP) (Maxwell et al., 2023). In many states, PPPPs and public-private partnerships (PPPs), that draw on investments from corporations, have become go-to policy responses to the deleterious impact of neoliberalism on education (Fricke, 2022). In this respect,

the very existence of the NET is an admission – without explicitly stating it – that the GOJ is incapable of delivering a public-school programme without help from donors. In a personal communication, this was confirmed by a representative from the MoEY who remarked:

> "We just want persons to know that we are truly grateful for all the help that the schools receive from [the] Diaspora, from any organization as a matter of fact. Because we are cognizant of the fact that the [MoEY] cannot provide all the resources that our schools really need on a daily basis. So, any help that we can get, any external help, is greatly appreciated" (Thompson, 2021: 302).

Ruminating on this sobering reality, it is difficult to ignore that under-resourcing appears to be a feature of school systems globally (Dei and Jaimungal, 2018). However, this is particularly harmful to African-descendant children, and other racialised students, who live in the afterlife of slavery and an incomplete emancipation project that structures the present-day (Manjapra, 2022).

Therefore, the racialising and colonising logics that sought to enslave both minds and bodies during 'official' colonisation cannot be divorced from their current contexts. Poignantly, Best (1968), Perry (2023), and others have argued that the IMF and other IFIs, such as the World Bank's, control over Jamaica, and other Caribbean countries' economies, is an extension of the plantation economy that is an encumbrance on their sovereignty as nation-states. A spatial construct that evolves and takes on new forms over time, the plantation was 'pure' under slavocracy, 're-modelled' in the post-Emancipation era, and 'further re-modelled' in the post-colonial era (Best, 1968; 2012; Perry, 2023). And it remains a constant feature that limits Caribbean nations' decision-making power and actions after independence (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). In Walter Rodney's (1981: 216) seminal monograph *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, he wrote:

> "It is obvious that capitalists do not set out to create other capitalists, who would be rivals. On the contrary, the tendency of capitalism in Europe from the very beginning was one of competition, elimination,

> and monopoly. Therefore, when the imperialist stage was reached, the metropolitan capitalists had no intention of allowing rivals to arise in the dependencies".

What Rodney described is the strategic making of underdevelopment that began in the racial and classed enclaves of Eurocentrism. In no uncertain terms, former colonies' hands – and feet – were tied by these hierarchising logics that were not meant to disappear when they achieved their independence but hold them firmly in 'their place' today. For this reason, I submit that the GOJ's inability to deliver adequate public services to its population because of IFI involvement, including appropriately resourced schooling, is not a matter of happenstance. Nor is the country's maintenance of a polarising colonial structure of schooling. The metaphorical wheels of the sugar machine, that refined 'white gold' for export and sale through the triangular trade route (Muhammad, 2019), are still turning in the Caribbean, reproducing colonial race-class formations in schooling and society; especially as it pertains to rural, poor, unemployed and precarious working-class Afro-Jamaican children.

Towards an anticolonial development education policy/praxis: Epistemic and material reparations, now

Sriprakash (2023: 783) asked: 'what forms of reparative redress are needed to make future systems of schooling just?'. I further probe seeking to ascertain how reparations from Britian, and other Western countries who benefitted from enslavement, can pay the 'education debt' (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed to Afro-Jamaican children? How can we, not only reimagine schools, but *build new schools* founded on both educational and intersectional justice (Love, 2019; Neal and Dunn, 2020)? How do we reject the ravages of racial-colonial-capitalism in educational spaces and centre healing, love, joy, and flourishing? There are no easy answers to these queries. However, appealing to the descendants of Africans whose mis-education fuelled the system of triangular trade and whose duty it is to seek redress for the violences wrought against them (Shepherd, 2019), I argue, in a similar manner as Brissett and jules (2023), that both epistemic and material reparations are needed to counter educational injustices.

In an epistemic sense, to lay hold of reparative futures in education and schooling requires a Sankofa moment. One that calls us – perpetrators and injured parties – to look to the past, with its atrocities, for wisdom to look ahead. For this reason, Brissett and jules (2023: 11) called for 'the formal and explicit recognition by global powers within the modernist development structures that historical trauma has affected the descendants of enslaved peoples beyond materialist ways'. In other words, countries that carried out, and expanded their empires, via the Maafa should acknowledge and affirm that mental slavery is one of its enduring legacies in the twenty-first century (Longman-Mills, Mitchell and Abel, 2019). And as discussed throughout this article, the process of schooling reinscribed racial colonial violence. This occurred through the deployment of a 'plantation pedagogy' to simultaneously hold captive the minds of enslaved Africans, and freed Africans in the post-Emancipation era, to reinforce their role as human machinery in the cultivation of lands and the refining of natural resources for trade (Marquez, 2024).

For epistemic reparations to occur, a movement away from the plantation pedagogy model, which today is manifested in Caribbean classrooms through 'command-and-control' and 'knowledge transfer' approaches to teaching and learning that centre Western ways of knowing as per 'global standards' in education (Brissett and jules, 2023), is needed to make classrooms spaces liberatory (hooks, 1994). Spaces where a critical consciousness can emerge that requires us to think historically about our collective future (Rodney, 1969; hooks, 1994; Thompson and Tong, forthcoming). A 'Reparative Pedagogy' (Smith, 2019) – so to speak. One that will incite a 'revolution of awareness through teaching and learning' and be 'reflective, promote … critical thinking, [be] culturally keen, and grounded in the language and history of the region (Murrell 2002: 59)' (Ibid.). One that calls upon students – both in and outside of classrooms – to challenge all oppressive systems, even the ones that Jamaica, and the wider-Caribbean, depend on (Ibid.). And, finally, one whose teleological goal is to produce another politics that transcends the realm of racial capitalism and coloniality (Thompson and Tong, forthcoming). This is a much-needed anti-colonial intervention in development education policy and praxis that often reinforces assumptive frameworks that construct education as only a path to upward social mobility or a force of social reproduction (Sriprakash, 2023).

Education can and *must* do more than this. More than sustain 'educated'-'uneducated' and 'literate'-'illiterate' hierarchies (Hickling-Hudson, 2002; Moon, 2022; Sriprakash et al., 2020). And more than produce labourers for the existing racialised, classed, and gendered productive economy.

Thinking about the need for material reparations to counter educational injustices, requires an acknowledgment of existing calls for reparatory justice in the Caribbean (Beckles, 2013; Beckles, Shepherd and Reid, 2019; Eugene, 2024, and others). These calls have been met by both silence and contestation from European metropolises, especially Britian, who benefitted from African slavery, as well as Indigenous genocide, and Asian indentured labour (Beckles, 2013). And the vast majority of Caribbean citizens, who are the most impacted by the legacies of British colonialism – and I aver that these are African-descendent people – believe there is an ethical, legal, political, and moral reparation case to be answered for the crimes against humanity that were committed through slavocracy, and the subsequent system of racial apartheid (Ibid.).

To prepare and formalise the case for material reparations, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) established the Caricom Reparations Commission (CRC) in 2013. The CRC proposed a pathway to justice, truth, and reconciliation through its articulation of a 10-Point Plan for Reparatory Justice. Point 6 of the Plan calls for 'Education Programmes' (CARICOM, no date) to make recompense for the 'flawed education system, inadequate schools, high illiteracy, and … [colonially instituted] structural discrimination' (Ibid.) that pervades Caribbean learning institutions. According to the CRC, 'European States which presided over this system have a responsibility to build on the laudable efforts of the CARICOM post-colonial regimes, build educational capacity, and provide scholarships' (Ibid.) to the victims and descendants of historical and contemporary racial-colonial-capitalism.

The CRC asserts that the development of the Caribbean region requires an educated population. From a structural functionalist perspective, point 6 of the 10-point plan is pragmatic and a good starting point for thinking about reparatory justice within the context of education in the Caribbean. In theory, it may widen access to education and schooling so that bearers of the legacy of

enslavement, and other forms of racialised oppression, can access basic and advanced technical knowledge to contribute to the productive economy, and consequentially, national and regional development. However, it would be remiss not to point out that point 6, and the CARICOM reparations campaign en masse, is a neoliberal policy construction that does not provide a critique of, or solution for, the ongoing problem of racial capitalism to which the problem of educational injustice is attendant. Instead, reinforcing – and inadvertently reproducing modernisationist approaches to development which are rooted in the logics of racial capitalism – the Caricom Reparations Justice Program (CRJP) invites the participation of European governments in 'prepar[ing] … victims and sufferers for full admission …' (Ibid.) into the global capitalist system (Eugene, 2024).

I argue that an anti-colonial orientation towards *taking* reparations is needed in the Caribbean (Wittmann, 2013; O'Marde, 2019). 'Take' in this respect means a mass mobilisation of impacted African-descendent, and other racialised peoples, and their organisations and activist groups, standing on the legal entitlement of the claim to reparations, whilst launching 'initiatives of a moral, diplomatic and political nature … to … force them [perpetrator countries] to the negotiation table' (O'Marde, 2019: 248). At this table, or series of table meetings, the terms for the distribution of material reparations can be laid out in a manner that transcends the existing neocolonial order of late capitalism, which includes the paternalistic international development industry that positions perpetrator countries as benefactors and not the historical and contemporary plunderers of the 'developing world' / 'global south' / 'majority world' whose natural resources and labour built their nations (Hickel, 2015).

Bearing this in mind, material wealth must be returned to the Caribbean, but not in the form of official development assistance (ODA) (Richards, 2019; Brissett and jules, 2023) or foreign direct investment (FDI) (O'Marde, 2019) programmes. These entities are riddled with conditionalities that favour donor countries and have, in many instances, been proven to have no (positive) qualitative impact (Kesar and Kvangraven, 2024). Although only a starting point, all post-colonial country debts held by IFIs and banks in the West should be cancelled to allow Caribbean nations to redirect the exorbitant amounts that they pay in debt servicing fees to public purveyances, including public

schooling which requires much more resourcing than it is currently afforded in the SAP-era. As discussed earlier, under-resourcing has reified historical colonial divisions in schooling, and therefore, increased the education debt to Afro-Jamaican/Caribbean children.

An amalgamation of racial, capitalist, colonial, post-colonial, neocolonial, and neoliberal forces have shaped, and are shaping, Jamaica and the rest of the contemporary Caribbean's societies and education systems. Moving towards a development education practice and policy that attends to this reality is imperative, making epistemic and material forms of repair a matter of intergenerational justice (Sriprakash, 2023). This is a charge to fulfill moral and ethical obligations to past, present, and future people in the spirit of *world(re)making*. I have attempted, in this article, to emphasise the need to continue this conversation to achieve this end.

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Giselle F. Thompson is the Assistant Professor of Black Studies in Education at the University of Alberta, where she teaches in the Social Justice and International Studies in Education graduate specialisation and the Bachelor of Education programme. Her award-winning research exists at the nexus of critical studies in the sociologies of race, education, gender, diaspora, and international development and seeks to understand how colonialism, racial capitalism, white supremacy, and modernity operate globally and are implicated in the ongoing (mis)education of Black people. She is particularly concerned with how anti-Black racism in its various iterations including, but not limited to, lack of accessibility, under resourcing, and curricular deficits impede holistic learning for Black school-aged children and youth and diasporic groups in both local and transnational contexts. Her current research project examines the ways in which the transhistorical phenomenon of Black motherwork is deployed in school settings and in other sites of learning to resist these social maladies, whilst transmitting ethics of love, care, and concern. In 2023, she launched the University of Alberta's first Black Studies course where she used Walter Rodney's 'groundings' as a pedagogical tool to immerse graduate students in paradigms of transnational Black/Africentric thought.

SURVIVAL OF THE EDUCATED? POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION – BETWEEN STABILISING AND CHALLENGING 'CLASS APARTHEID'

SANDRA ALTENBERGER

Abstract: A common goal of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) concept of global citizenship education (GCE) is to educate learners for greater responsibility and engagement in promoting (gender) justice, sustainability and solidarity. From a feminist postcolonial perspective, it can be argued that specific colonial continuities persist in the formulated needs for action, approaches to solutions and subject positions. With reference to my dissertation research, specific truth spaces on gender and education as well as different gendered* subject positions in UNESCO documents on GCE could be analysed. The article begins by contextualising the study and some basic reflections on Spivak's concept of class apartheid (2007). The findings are then presented, with a focus on the gendered mapping of subjects. Finally, the article considers the extent to which GCE stabilises class apartheid as defined by UNESCO, and what is needed to counter this continuation/reactivation of class apartheid. In addition to demonstrating the extent to which the production of hierarchical and binary subject positions reinforce class apartheid, the article aims to highlight the need for a postcolonial education that recognises its underlying ambivalence and seeks to disrupt the reproduction of colonial patterns and their hierarchical subject construction. In the sense of Spivak's *affirmative sabotage*, it becomes clear that it is necessary to scandalise historical, present and future relations of domination and power, however subtly and benevolently they may be formulated, and to understand them as changeable through political practice.

Key words: Postcolonial-Feminist Theory; Class Apartheid; Critical Global Citizenship Education; Global Class.

Introduction

> "we must repair the past which is far from
> being repaired, we must repair the present, and
> already prevent the future from becoming the past"
> (Vergès, 2020).

In the context of global citizenship education, global space is described as space for all or the globalised world as our home. This one world, which as a logic of identity follows an economy of 'sameness', runs the risk of repeatedly reproducing the division and hierarchisation of geopolitical spaces 'between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged' (Spivak, 2004: 523). The need to grapple with the complexity that underlies the multiple postcolonial conditions of the world seems to be diminishing by the day. Against this backdrop, global citizenship education (GCE) seems to play an important role in imparting and reflecting on knowledge that has become colonial in post-colonial capitalist realities. Issues of global justice, sustainability and peaceful coexistence are emphasised in GCE. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2007) pointed out, there is a deep linkage between class apartheid and the system of education in the postcolonial world. GCE examines the pedagogical challenges that arise from a globally networked world and aims to find a solution-oriented approach to them. As Vanessa Andreotti and Lynn Mario de Souza (2008) described, the concept of global citizenship has currently become quite prominent in Europe and the Americas for nation-state actors, civil society and, above all, educational discourses. Despite its prominence as a catchphrase (Pais and Costa, 2020) in both education policy and practice, the concept of GCE remains a controversial one and is still open to a variety of interpretations.

Postcolonial theorists question whether the educational efforts of GCE stabilise rather than challenge the division and hierarchisation of geopolitical spaces 'between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged' (Spivak, 2004: 523). Those who right wrongs and those whose wrongs are righted are separated by a certain class line. In large parts of the post-colonial world, 'class apartheid' (in the sense of strong social segregation) is caused by the education system that has existed since formal decolonisation (cf. Dhawan, 2012).

Education produces subjects who are either prepared to perform intellectual work or are produced for the performance of manual labour. According to Spivak (2008a), in order to reverse this process, the subalterns must be introduced to hegemony through the activation of democratic habits. One of the central aims of global citizenship education is to activate the democratic habits of the 'others'. In doing so, however, a global citizen is conceived as one who stands for a European (universal) subject (cf. Gamal, Hoult and Taylor, 2024: 12). A citizen who:

> "must work to encourage a liberal democratic notion of justice on a global scale by 'expanding' or 'extending' or 'adding' their sense of responsibility and obligation to others through the local to national to global community" (Pashby, 2011: 430).

This article focuses on the intersection of postcolonial subject formation, gender and class apartheid in the context of GCE. I build on the findings of my study 'To Do - To Be - To Become: A Postcolonial Feminist Subject Cartography of the UNESCO Concept of Global Citizenship Education' (Altenberger, 2024a) and ask how the production of different subject figures tends to stabilise class apartheid. These reconstructions make it clear how specific moments of political education (e.g. subject, citizenship and agency) function as markers for inclusion and exclusion (be-longing/not belonging). This cosmopolitan moment and its inscribed universalism has been at the centre of a postcolonial critique of GCE (Andreotti, 2006). Postcolonial analyses of GCE, such as those developed in the volume *Postcolonial Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education* (Andreotti and de Souza, 2012) or *Decolonizing Global Citizenship Education* (Abdi, Shultz and Pillay, 2015), support important power-critical approaches to and perspectives on GCE. Marta da Costa, Chris Hanley and Edda Sant (2024) have recently shown the need to challenge the liberal humanism, often expressed through cosmopolitanism, that is interwoven in global citizenship education. However, there are also gaps in postcolonial research on GCE: there is a lack of thematisation of gender issues and (queer)feminist informed postcolonial perspectives on GCE. This study attempts to expand this critical field of research on GCE by analysing UNESCO documents from a feminist-informed postcolonial perspective.

Contextualisation and localisation

The contemporary global (postcolonial) crises, the permanent intensification of global capitalism, and the urgent responsibility that this entails, demand a response. Against this backdrop, efforts have been underway for more than ten years to emphasise the need for global education initiatives to empower learners to engage as global citizens for global justice.

The following are cited as positive examples of the process of realising global/transnational citizenship: the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), the United Nations system, the World Social Forum/Education Forum or the founding of the European Union (cf. Wintersteiner et al., 2015: 13). It is precisely these institutionalised achievements that Ulrich Beck describes as 'cosmopolitan realpolitik' (Beck, 2007: 368). As was declared in 1948: 'All human beings are born free and equal, born free and equal in dignity and rights' (UDHR, 1948) - a declaration that, when it was proclaimed in 1948, was met with justifiable scepticism in the colonised countries of the time. Sceptical because, firstly, many colonised countries did not yet have formal independence at the time and, secondly, the Declaration was proclaimed in a place and at a time when racial segregation (still) prevailed until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This massive gap in the UDHR's narrative still exists today and is particularly evident in the assumption that contemporary human rights violations are predominantly committed by former colonised countries.

> "While crimes against humanity were mainly committed by Europe, even today the majority of people in the global North do not think of human rights violations when they think of Europe, but of those countries that Europe has 'civilised'" (Castro Varela and Dhawan, 2020: 33, translated by author).

Since 1948, UNESCO has made education one of its core themes. Education has been present in the context of the UN and UNESCO since their inception in the form of human rights education, democracy education and peace education. The *Global Education First Initiative* (UNSG, 2012), launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, marked an important turning point for

UNESCO as GCE was elevated to the status of a UNESCO educational guideline. This had a significant impact on international attention and thus on the direction and quality of GCE (cf. Altenberger, 2020: 173). Therefore, the UNESCO concept of GCE plays a discourse-defining role as the superstructure of all critical and uncritical practices of GCE, especially for the development education discourse.

The central point of reference of this article is my doctoral analysis of online accessible textual and pictorial material of relevant UNESCO GCE documents in the period 2012-2019. A total of 25 documents (reports, policy papers, guides, brochures, and meeting reports) were structurally analysed (multi-stage research and sorting process) and coded. This structural analysis made it possible (1) to gain an overview of the discourses, (2) to group the UNESCO documents on GCE thematically and (3) to determine which statements appear significant for the present research subject. (cf. Altenberger, 2024a: 142). Inductive and deductive coding therefore served, in particular to, classify and bundle text passages, and to work out regularities in order to draw conclusions about the rules of discursive meaning constitution (cf. Glasze, Husseini and Mose, 2012: 294). The material was analysed in terms of the production of gendered* subject positions (i.e. how subject positions are constituted) and the associated perpetuation of colonial discourses and dynamics of epistemic violence. The gender asterisk is used here to indicate that gender* is seen as a multidimensional concept and is therefore always intertwined with other structures of inequality. Using an interpretative-reconstructive research design, I have interwoven postcolonial theory and feminist critique with deconstructivist and sociologically informed discourse analysis. Interpretative-reconstructive methods of qualitative social research make it possible not only to decode, describe and understand content, but also practices, knowledge representation and systems of meaning and relevance.

In addition, feminist postcolonial approaches make it possible to consider gender and sexuality under the conditions of colonial continuities. 'The imperial/colonial dominance (which became enforceable through education, among other things) over the so-called Third World is/was based on the construction and production of specific and seemingly unambiguous (gendered*)

subject constitutions' (Altenberger, 2024a: 6). To this end, a deconstructively orientated postcolonial reading was used to find out to what extent this production of gendered* subject positions in the context of UNESCO's GCE-documents is linked to the continuation of colonial power dynamics. Overall, as the analysis of the documents shows, class apartheid can be seen as a legacy of colonial power that continues to structure postcolonial societies, and the dominant narrative of achieving gender equality through GCE education reveals a modern narrative of emancipation and enlightenment that is inescapably intertwined with colonialism. GCE documents neglect the ambivalent power entanglements of education and individualise, depoliticise and culturalise gender political issues. But in the sense of *affirmative sabotage* (Spivak, 2012), GCE discourse can also be seen as a field of political possibility. Spivak applies the strategy of affirmative sabotage to the ideals of the Enlightenment. Spivak thus emphasises two important aspects in dealing with the ideals and practices of the Enlightenment (such as cosmopolitanism, tolerance, equality, universality and freedom): the affirmative and the sabotaging aspect. These ideals cannot be unwanted - they must be affirmed, but at the same time their violent entanglement with colonialism must be sabotaged. 'Spivak supplements the term sabotage with the adjective, "affirmative", devising a strategy in which the instruments of colonialism are turned around into tools for transgression, poison turned into medicine' (Dhawan, 2014: 71).

In the sense of affirmative sabotage, the findings of the study use the gendered* subject cartography of GCE to illustrate the need to sabotage historical, present and future power relations (and one's own entanglements in them), however subtly and benevolently they may be formulated, but also to understand them as changeable through political practice. (cf. Altenberger, 2024a: 289).

Global class and class apartheid

If we define the present as the global age of capitalism, as Spivak (2013) has done, it seems necessary to define the reversal and displacement of the capital relation, in the search for social justice, as a never-ending political task. The global space is often described in the GCE discourse as a space for all, a home for all. The creation or formation of a global society based on solidarity is formulated as a central goal. Anil K. Jain opens his article *The global class* (2000) as follows:

‘The global class knows no borders. How else could it be called “global”?’ (Jain, 2000: 51, translated by author). With Jain, the global society can be understood as global class. The global class is at home everywhere and nowhere and is characterised by its (expansive) ‘openness to the world’ (cf. Jain, 2000: 1).

Beck (2007) spoke of a global risk (e.g. consequences of climate change, pandemic situation, etc.) society in the context of the increases in prosperity and individualisation processes that characterise contemporary societies. Like Castro Varela and Dhawan (2009), Jain also emphasised that the extent to which risks can be responded to depends very much on capital resources and thus class affiliation. For example, certain people and regions with the necessary capital resources can insulate themselves from certain risks more effectively than others. This means that the global space is by no means equally global for everyone, but rather that global class structures can be observed (for example the mobility of goods and people - the ability to move across geographical, economic and political borders). So here we can ask who dominates the global space, who can be a global citizen. To maintain this possibility and privilege, Jain argues that the global class must constantly reach out to the world. ‘Whoever is “present” in the world, whoever dominates global space, dominates the world of the global age’ (Jain, 2000: 10, translated by author).

Against this background, the endeavours of GCE, especially within the framework of UNESCO, could be seen as a form of power over global space. In the context of GCE, the localised classes represent the beneficiaries who need support in the form of education and who do not have the privilege of dominating the global space. Jain describes the other side as the ‘losers of globalisation’ or as the localised ‘proletariat’, the marginalised of this earth. They stand in front of closed doors, are confined to their local structures, cut off from the global space. Shackled to their locality, they have to deal with the processes that break over them with the ‘force of nature’ of globalisation - perceived as such - without having any means of evasion or influence (Ibid.: 10f).

From a postcolonial perspective, an intellectual bridge can be made from Jain’s description of the emergence of a global class and a localised proletariat to Spivak’s concept of class apartheid (2008b). Spivak described class apartheid as

postcolonial perspectivisation of class rule. This class rule is defined as the 'social mother of all injustices' (Spivak, 2008b: 14). It is primarily the drawn class line that is responsible for the structuring of class apartheid. According to Spivak, this line is drawn primarily within educational processes. As the Education First Initiative (UNSG, 2012) shows in its basis for UNESCO's further statements on GCE, it stabilises a neoliberal discourse (see Pais and Costa, 2020: 5) on education that follows a neoliberal agenda and the global economy. As the following excerpt from the document shows: 'No education for girls = economic loss' (Ibid.: 12). It promises that the skills, knowledge and values enabled by education are the human capital of the nation (cf. Ibid.: 5). The aim of such an education model, as Brown shows, is to educate people to become more competitive, entrepreneurial and individualistic (Brown, 2015). In their article *A meta-review of typologies of global citizenship education*, Pashby et al. (2020) have shown the interface between neoliberal, liberal and critical discourses. As critical discourses include postcolonial perspectives, this article shows how a specific idea of gender and gendered* subject formation in UNESCO documents reproduces demarcations not only between positions of coloniser and colonised, but also between modern and colonial imaginaries (Ibid.: 146).

The formation of structures of desire through education is an important component of class and gender-specific subject formation and thus of the reproduction of precisely these colonial continuities.

Gender (in)equality and postcolonial subject formation

In critical and postcolonial discourses on global citizenship education, a queer-feminist perspective is often not taken into account. The elaboration of the phenomenal structure of gender (in)equality and gender subject formations attempts to close this gap. This not only shows the extent to which colonially grown universalist and capitalist logics are reproduced, but also how a phenomenon structure *gender (in)equality* and a process of *othering* (Spivak, 1985: 252) form a gendered*, educationally distant subject that serves as the basis for a social mission such as GCE. This construction of seemingly homogeneous Others perpetuates a narrative of subjugation and a 'narrative of imperialism' (Spivak, 2008b: 42), whereby the knowledge of Others constructed as deficient is also negated, appropriated or ignored.

In relation to the research question(s), the phenomenon of gender (in)equality was recorded in open coding processes on the textual research material. The concept of phenomenon structure refers to the 'way in which facts are constructed [...], i.e. what is grasped in relation to a phenomenon' (Keller, 2008: 86). The focus here is on similarities and discursive attributions in the construction of a public topic. The way in which gender is spoken about (naming practice) in the context of GCE, and which terms and concepts are used, has a considerable influence on the discursive setting of gender in GCE (cf. Altenberger, 2024a: 119f). Naming practices subsequently have an influence on how gender relations are shaped. The following elements were identified for the *gender (in)equality* phenomenon structure: dimensions, concepts, need for action, problem solving, objectives, (gendered*) subject positions and value references. (cf. Ibid.: 159f).

By capturing this structure, it is possible to identify and name the articulations that create a specific gender truth space, organised as a space of possibility, of what can and cannot be said about gender, but also of what feminism is and is not tolerable in these spaces (cf. Hark, 2001: 30). The following excerpts from the document are examples of how the construction of a specific gendered subject also creates a space for the truth of education (education as panacea): 'Women with higher levels of education are less likely to get married or have children at an early age' (UNESCO, 2013: 16) or 'Education empowers women to overcome discrimination' (Ibid.: 16). As critical discourses on GCE (Pashby et.al., 2020; Andreotti and de Souza 2012; Pais and Costa 2020; Stein et al., 2020; Gamal, Hoult and Tayler 2024) and this critical postcolonial, intersectional feminist analysis show - there are pitfalls and contradictions in an uncritical GCE conception (in this case UNESCO-framed), particularly in relation to the continuity of colonially generated racist, heterosexist and classist logics.

The discursive production of subject positions is an important element of the phenomenon structure described. These subject positions could be reconstructed in a specific way during the detailed analysis and subsequently discussed and interpreted from a postcolonial feminist perspective. It is assumed that subjects are produced not only by the educational processes themselves, but

already in the educational concepts that are fundamental to the educational processes, i.e. in the discursive practices (papers, documents, objectives, educational policy principles, curricula, etc.), which in turn frame the resulting educational processes. Certain regularities have become recognisable in the addressing and naming and un-naming – in the discursive formation (Foucault, 1981: 48,128) – of subject positions. In order to reconstruct the subject positions within the structure of the phenomenon, the following *regularities* (as distribution of the statements) (Ibid.) were identified:

- Hierarchisation: There is a hierarchisation of subject positions along the lines of education, maturity and agency.
- Totalisation: It creates an equal engagement of all disciplines with key global issues and presents education as the dominant solution.
- Binary and dichotomisation: The definition of content and the central ordering scheme of the phenomena are characterised by binary oppositions and dichotomous patterns of interpretation.
- Universalisation and essentialisation: The production of subject positions is based on a liberal-universalist claim to education and on essentialist discourses of global (gender) justice and women's rights (cf. Altenberger, 2024a: 194, translated by author).

In Table 1, the subject figures and their characterisations are presented in tabular form and then explained in more detail.

Table 1: subject positions (Altenberger, 2024b: 8, translated by author)

	To-Do subject position	To-Be subject position	To-Become subject position
Characterisations	Giver of education	Receiver of education	Product of education
	Active	Passive	Active
	Subject of action	Subject of legitimisation	Utopian subject
	Individual subject of responsibility	Object of responsibility	Supra-individual subject of responsibility
	Imperialistic subject	Postcolonial subject of imperialism	Cosmopolitan subject

To-Do subject position

To-Do subjects are those people who are addressed by the GCE documents, those who are called upon to actively engage in global citizenship education, i.e. readers of the documents who work on the implementation of GCE. These are primarily addressed and produced as donors of education and thus called upon as subjects of action. The mechanisms through which To-Do subject positions are integrated as subjects of responsibility establish concrete responsibility relations 'in which actors or groups of actors are subjectivised as bearers of responsibility' (Buschmann and Sulmowski, 2018: 282). With reference to Buschmann and Sulmowski, the To-Do subjects are addressed here 'as an autonomous subject capable of action [...] who has the knowledge and resources to align their actions with this responsibilising invocation' (Ibid.: 290, translated by author). Specific educational privileges are ascribed to them. Accordingly, To-Do subjects are everything that To-Be subjects are not (yet). The characterisation of To-Do subject positions as imperialist subjects is based on Spivak's political theory of subalternity (Spivak, 2004: 2008a). According to this theory, an imperialist subject formation is linked to righting the wrongs of others as is the case of GCE

with education. Spivak (2012) emphasises that an intervention (in the form of re-arranging, unlearning or 'productive undoing') in this very subject formation must necessarily take place in order to initiate epistemic change.

To-Be subject position

In contrast to the To-Do subjects, To-Be subjects appear in the GCE documents as distant from education and are produced as recipients of education. The To-Be subject position reveals an essentialist production practice through a powerful figuration and representation of the other woman. It is a female, vulnerable (because distant from education) subject of the so-called global South that is produced here. To-Be subjects, in contrast to To-Do subjects, are confronted with instructions on how to be a subject. From the perspective of education-related responsibilisation, the To-Be subject position can be characterised as an object of responsibility. The To-Be subject position becomes the deficient object of GCE (education serves as a normative frame of reference in this responsibility relation). According to the documents, this subject must fulfil certain characteristics: to-be educated, to-be informed, to-be empowered, to-be literate, etc. To-Be subject positions are encouraged to free themselves, with the help of To-Do subjects, from their own marginalisation through humanistically informed education – as education can empower them to overcome discrimination (UNESCO, 2013: 16).

The characterisation as a subject of legitimation results from the (gendered) deficit subordination of the To-Be subject position. This deficit assumption appears to be fundamental for the legitimisation of GCE interventions and thus the addressing of To-Do subjects. Queer or LGBTIQ+ related subject positions are largely ignored/dethematised. If they are thematised at all, then they are staged exclusively as to-be tolerated subjects. In this context, LGBTIQ+ hostility is staged as an educational problem of others. A racialising categorisation is evident in the thematisation of (racialised) male* (To-Be) subject positions read as the desired addressees of extremism prevention or human rights workshops. (cf. Altenberger 2024a). Overall, To-Be subjects are constructed above all in relation to what they are not, to what is left out (deficit). The imperialist (To-Do) subject endowed with educational privileges thus stands in a hierarchical relationship to the educationally deprived (To-Be) subject of imperialism, which is reproduced and secured by the production practices in the GCE documents.

To-Become subject position

The subject position characterised as To-Become in turn refers to the global citizen. This imagines the subject of a more just future - a utopian subject. This subject position is endowed with active attributes such as active, responsible, ethical, productive, informed, engaged, empathetic, etc. (cf. Altenberger 2024a). In an ethics of action, the citizen of the world is defined as someone who helps an unfortunate other and behaves responsibly and actively in doing so (cf. Jefferess, 2012: 27). The goal is an altruistic cosmopolitan subject as the end product of global political education. This cosmopolitan subject, characterised as a supra-individual subject of responsibility, is given a collective responsibility to engage ethically with the world. The way in which the global citizen is invoked and labelled in the UNESCO documents suggests both a position of identity and an ethical position of global responsibility. The question of responsibility is primarily linked to the declaration of an education crisis (UNSG, 2012: 6), which gives the impression that education is a matter of life and death.

Survival of the educated? Stabilising or counteracting class apartheid through global education?

The question of *Survival of the Educated*!? refers to Spivak's (2008b) comments on the instrumentalisation of human rights policies, in which she sees the continuation of a kind of social Darwinism. She argued that human rights benefits, which she describes as a social Darwinist-informed 'burden of the strongest' (Ibid.: 8), can be both empowering and hurtful and contain a colonially grown gendered logic. In addition, gender inequality is formulated as a problem and therefore a need for action (education), while race and cultural differences are cited as obstacles and classist structures are not labelled as a problem at all. Class, therefore, remains largely unconsidered in the analysed UNESCO GCE documents. If, as Spivak emphasised, the system of class apartheid is maintained through a specific educational format that has been in place since formal decolonisation, and if education is seen as producing desire as an important part of subjectification (Castro Varela, 2015), then the subject figures described (to-Do, to-Be and to-Become) in particular have something to do with stabilising or counteracting class apartheid. The decisive factor is who is on which side of the class line. Because that decides which education is granted to whom. As Spivak argues:

> "Above a certain line, education takes place to explain what the material is; below a certain line, the purpose of education is simply to memorize without understanding and to take exams so that the answers replicate *exactly* what has been memorized. This is completely in place and ubiquitous below a certain class line" (Spivak, 2007: 172).

What Spivak identified as the biggest and most important impact of class apartheid, is the fact that there can be no democracy. If the people below this class line only learn by heart, they are not able to understand the public sphere - because they are not allowed to think. The only weapon with which the extremely disadvantaged could defend themselves is therefore taken away from them at a young age (cf. Ibid.: 172). In this context, the constant reproduction of the hierarchical, essentialising and victimising relationship between To-Do and To-Be subject positions in the GCE documents is seen as a contribution to the stabilisation of class apartheid. Through the construction and specific labelling of To-Be subject positions and the invocation of To-Do subjects, a colonial discourse is largely reactivated and an 'unverifiable universalism' (Spivak, 2008a: 41) is perpetuated rather than interrupted. This not only leads to a consolidation of dominant groups, which is represented here by the imperialist subject of a global elite (To-Do subject position), but also to the stabilisation of a global class and thus a structure of class apartheid. Spivak problematised the fact that the instrumentalisation of poverty for global educational purposes, which in turn are part of a culture of economic growth, can reinforce class apartheid (Spivak, 2008a).

But if class apartheid can be stabilised through education (or educational concepts like GCE), then it is also possible to challenge class apartheid through education, because according to Gramsci (2012) and Spivak (2012), education also plays an important role in intervening in hegemonic relations. Education in Gramsci's sense must always be regarded as ambivalent; education can have both a stabilising and a challenging effect on power, which contradicts the consistently positive understanding of education in GCE. Pashby emphasises in a Gramscian manner that we as educators must remain vigilant and active:

> "Yet, as educationalists, though some of us theorizing GCE work hard to recognize the double bind wherein education is both an apparatus of colonial power and the tool to move the masses to resist and to open up new discourses and political spaces, we cannot rest our hands or our minds" (Pashby, 2012: 21).

As Bernhard (2006: 16) explains in his comments on Gramsci, the educational subject is to be regarded as a historical-social being that represents a network of 'subjective and objective, natural and social, material and ideal elements'. To destabilise class apartheid, the entanglement of teachers and learners in historical-social relations should be reflected in Gramsci's sense. It is Spivak, above all, who here emphasises the entanglement of class apartheid and the international division of labour. The international (formerly colonial) division of labour benefits from the above-mentioned separation of manual and intellectual. But it is education that has the potential to reweave the fabric torn by colonisation. Education must go beyond the mere transmission of information and aim to weave democratic habits into its subjects (cf. Spivak, 2008b: 76).

Therefore, intervening in class apartheid would require the training of To-Be subjects to do intellectual work and, on the side of the To-Do subjects, a focus on unlearning privilege and recognizing / reflecting on their own complicity. Because 'attacking the educational privileges of a few' (Ibid.: 22) also appears necessary. This could be included in a critical GCE pedagogy that reflects the entanglements with problematic historical patterns, as Andreotti summarised in 'HEADS UP (i.e. hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticisation, uncomplicated solutions, and paternalism)' (Andreotti, 2012). To challenge class apartheid, it is therefore important to: 1) interrupt the educational privileges of a few (To-Do subjects) and train To-Be subjects to do intellectual work; and 2) to examine not only capitalist interdependencies, but also problematic patterns (HEADS UP) – in the spirit of a thinking template. For a critical feminist postcolonial discourse on GCE, the proposals already formulated by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in 1997 for an effective attack on capitalist hegemony are also required (3); a new alliance formation across multiple borders for an education for critical and collective consciousness.

Conclusion

> "Postcolonial education is
> not an answer to be read as definitive"
> (Delille, 2021: 51, translated by author).

As we can summarise, global education in particular plays a central role in the creation, maintenance and destabilisation of class apartheid. Spivak formulated an important responsibility for education: we need an education that 'must ensure a break with the creation and perpetuation of class apartheid' (Spivak, 2008b: 73). Such an education must go beyond 'informal education' and 'functional literacy'. For, as long as those who are at best destined for physical labour - *gatar khatano* - cannot train their imagination and receive no training in mental labour - *matha khatano* - the division between rich and poor (…) will persist (Ibid.: 74, translated by author). Education as a *uncoercive rearrangement of desires* (Spivak, 2012) serves to bring about an epistemic transformation in the sense of opening access to delegitimised knowledge. Spivak's appeal here is particularly directed at the training of teachers and their imagination. But as has also become clear, the pedagogical endeavour that could bring about long-term epistemic change among the oppressed is never flawless and must be constantly rearranged.

I conclude as I started – with the question raised by Francoise Vergès (2020): how can we prevent the future from becoming the past? On the one hand, it is necessary to interrupt the reproduction of problematic patterns (as shown in HEADS UP) within uncritical conceptions of GCE, to interrupt the reproduction of the narrative that essentialises the poverty and struggles of the former colonies (and hides the fact that both are the direct result of colonial exploitation) which serves to justify the civilising mission (cf. Vergès, 2020; also see Wynter and McKittrick, 2015) or liberal educational mission. On the other hand, it is about a constant complication of critical discourse on GCE. This means an implementation of queer-feminist perspectives to post- and decolonial discourses on GCE.

To make postcolonial education productive for GCE, it is also essential to re-arrange the current rhetoric of a globalised world society as a world for all.

In principle, therefore, it would be significant if GCE documents (and subsequently practice) were to characterise the conditions of world society as postcolonial. This would also mean identifying the dynamics of globalisation as a postcolonial phenomenon. Spivak also suggests overwriting the concept of the globe with that of the planet.

The 'planetary concept' that she develops under the sign of alterity does not represent a contrast to the globe, but rather a different spectrum of perception of the planet as a habitable place. Habitable, if only on credit (Spivak, 2013: 47). According to Spivak, globalisation stands for the introduction of an exactly equal system of exchange across the entire planet. With this understanding of a planet that is habitable on credit, and in the face of an ever-worsening climate crisis, the idea of development in the concept of education for sustainable development (sustainability and commitment to the climate are central themes of the GCE) could be questioned. Given the current global situation, shouldn't development in the linear sense be questioned altogether? Stein et al (2020), in their article entitled 'From education for sustainable development to education for the end of the world as we know it', turned the question around.

The claim of postcolonial theories, in Andreotti and de Souza's sense, is to create tools for thinking: 'We define postcolonial theories as tools-for-thinking rather than theories-of-truth' (Andreotti and de Souza, 2012: 2). Thinking tools can therefore open new perspectives, while at the same time being cautious and considering the impossible. Still, as postcolonial theories do not offer concrete solutions, the question of how an ethical imperative of responsibility (Spivak, 2008b: 48) can be activated through global oriented political education like GCE remains a constant struggle for a more anti-heterosexist, anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist present and future. This means creating a decolonial feminist stance that scandalises historical, present and future power relations (and one's own entanglements in them), however subtly and benevolently they may be formulated (as in UNESCO documents), but also understands them as changeable through political practice and thus disrupts the ongoing stabilisation of class apartheid.

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Rethinking Education and the Political: Challenging Neo-Conservative Discourses on Neutrality

Abdellatif Atif

Abstract: Neo-conservative movements increasingly claim to restore the neutrality of education to politics through an ultra-politicisation that masks its ideological agendas in a language of apolitical moralism and a militarisation of schools that censors politically engaged curricula and teachers. Focusing on Brazil's *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without a Party) movement, which opposes politically engaged education such as Freirean pedagogy, this article reveals how such movements politicise education under the guise of neutrality. It describes how this movement distinguishes between what is political and what is not through a self-referential violent act, where political antagonisms are labeled with moralist terms between good and evil. This framing delegitimises critical and democratic pedagogies, presenting them as ideological threats rather than educational approaches, and redefines the role of education in ways that prioritise conformity and control over critical engagement and pluralism.

This article argues that these claims of neutrality inadvertently coincide with the dominant trend of educational theory, which defends education as autotelic. This contribution challenges both the neo-conservative claims of educational neutrality and the divide that several educational theories mark between education and politics. Drawing on the concept of antagonism, it argues that education is always inherently political, not as a pathology to be avoided but as a constitutive feature of its practice. Education should neither be entirely absorbed by politics nor freed from it but must embrace a democratic vision of the political as defined by antagonism. According to this theoretical vision, the article gives policy recommendations for resisting right-wing populism's use of 'neutrality' in education.

Key words: Neutrality of Education; Ultra-politics; Political Antagonism.

Introduction

Educational research has long critiqued the instrumentality of education, particularly in the context of neoliberal policies in education (Carusi, 2021; Kristiansen, 2015; Säfström, 2022). Many educational policies are viewed as post-political as they follow economic rationality, masking their underlying ideologies (Knutsson and Lindberg, 2020; Sund and Öhman, 2018). However, after over three decades of dominance, neoliberalism has started to metamorphose into terms that defy some of its founding principles, such as globalisation or free trade, creating a chaotic void increasingly filled by populist hegemonies. This challenges the traditional debates on education's instrumentality, which are no longer confined to the hidden politics of life-long learning, skilling, or human capital. Instead, the debates on the instrumentality of education emerge in new issues that the conservative backlash articulates in an advocation for removing topics such as sex education, multiculturalism, and climate change education with the excuse of restoring educational neutrality from political influence (Atif, 2024).

In this context, neo-conservative movements, while claiming to depoliticise education by restoring its neutrality, paradoxically intensify its politicisation in what is called ultra-politics (Žižek, 1999a: 193). This means that under the guise of neutrality, there is a combination of looking at political rivals as accused of using education to advance political agendas, such as leftist ideologies or progressive values. Simultaneously, neoconservatives, to embed their ideological control, propose violent and corrective measures like snitch lines to report perceived 'ideological' biases of teachers. This contradiction - suppressing politics through exaggerated politicisation - is an example of the joint strategy of ultra-politics where education is claimed to be depoliticised by adopting a moralising discourse between evil 'instrumental agendas' and good 'neutral education'.

This article focuses on such a case: Brazil's *Escola Sem Partido* movement (ESP). The article shows that the ESP movement's claims of educational neutrality aim to de-politicise education while re-aligning it with a conservative agenda.

Case study: School Without a Party (ESP)

The *Escola Sem Partido* (ESP, 'School Without a Party') movement in Brazil is a conservative initiative that seeks to reshape the role of education by opposing what it perceives as ideological indoctrination in schools, particularly from progressive and left-leaning perspectives. It also defines itself as a nonpartisan and anti-ideological movement that seeks to stamp out party politics from Brazilian classrooms. ESP was founded in 2004 by Miguel Nagib, a Brazilian attorney, who launched a website allowing parents to report teachers and professors for allegedly indoctrinating their children with political views. The movement gained visibility over the years, particularly during Brazil's political polarisation in the 2010s, and became a major force with the election of far-right president Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. ESP is heavily backed by far-right politicians, particularly those promoting an ultra-liberal economic ideology and religious fundamentalism linked to neo-Pentecostal evangelicals and the Brazilian Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The movement has positioned itself as nonpartisan and anti-ideological, though in practice, it primarily targets progressive and leftist perspectives in education.

While the movement's main objective is to eliminate perceived political bias in education, it also aims to: restrict discussion on gender and sexuality in the classroom; enforce a supposed political neutrality among teachers; remove critical perspectives on Brazilian history and society, particularly those addressing social inequalities, racism, and colonialism; and defend conservative family values as the foundation of education. Since its inception, multiple legislative proposals (*Projetos de Lei*) inspired by ESP have been introduced at municipal, state, and federal levels. One such bill was approved in Alagoas in 2016. These laws attempt to: prohibit teachers from expressing political or ideological opinions; ban discussions on gender identity and sexual orientation; and allow parents and students to monitor and report teachers suspected of engaging in 'indoctrination'. ESP has been particularly strong in recent years, fuelled by Brazil's deepening political divide. Under Bolsonaro's presidency, it gained national attention and led to a broader conservative push against progressive education policies. Although most ESP-inspired bills have not been passed into law, the movement has influenced public debate and created a climate of fear and self-censorship among educators.

Resistance to *Escola Sem Partido* (ESP) has been widespread through legal challenges, grassroots activism, scholarly critique, and political opposition. The Brazilian courts have repeatedly ruled against many ESP-inspired laws, citing constitutional protections for academic freedom and freedom of expression. At the same time, teachers, students, and educational organisations have mobilised through protests, public petitions, and advocacy campaigns, highlighting the threats posed by ESP to democratic education. Scholars in Brazil and internationally have also critically engaged with the movement, arguing that it undermines the very principles of pluralism and open inquiry that education should uphold (da Silva, 2023; Giorgi et al., 2018; Knijnik, 2021). Moreover, although ESP found strong support during Bolsonaro's presidency, opposition politicians at various levels actively worked to counter its influence.

The ESP movement articulates a distinction between the political and the neutral, which has also been a centre of departure for many political philosophies in the last decades (Marchart, 2007). For instance, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2014) make the same distinction between the political and the social (neutral) to explain societal stability and contestation. The social refers to sedimented practices and norms that appear natural and fixed, representing a closure of meaning where stability prevails thanks to obscured power relations. In contrast, the political emerges in moments of antagonism and contestation that reveal the contingent and constructed nature of society and enable struggles over meaning and identity. While the social reflects the temporary stabilisation of hegemonic articulations, the political disrupts this order, exposes its fragility, and creates opportunities for re-articulation.

This theoretical strand stresses that political struggles maintain and transform the contingent foundation of all social arrangements in a circular relation where every political moment happens on contesting a social one, and vice versa; every social moment is a stabilisation of a political moment. However, for neo-conservative movements such as School without a Party, there is a gap between both as the political is seen as a 'dirty game' where their opponents engage against a natural traditional social order, where values such as family, religion, and cultural heritage are central, romanticised and unquestioned. Neo-

conservatives wish to naturalise the dominant social order. Being against politics is a strategic mask to maintain a certain *status quo ante*. To avoid such misleading discourses, Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2007) build on Ernesto Laclau and Mouffe's distinction between the social and the political to explore how discourses and practices, such as those by this movement present their articulations as socially neutral and then look at their political dimension and the fantasies that sustain them. This can be operationalised by asking the following questions:

1. **For the social logics: *What*** are the shared and sedimented assumptions about the relationship of education to politics that ESP presents?
2. **For the political logics: *How*** is the distinction between political education and a neutral one established in the discourse of ESP?
3. **For the fantasmatic logics: *Why***, or through which ideological narratives does the movement sustain its vision of education as neutral or political?

The main materials for this analysis are three key legislative proposals - Law Projects nº 867/2015, Senate Law Project nº 193/2016, and nº 246/2019 - often collectively referred to as the *Escola Sem Partido* law projects. In Brazil, a *projeto de lei*, or 'law project', is a proposed bill that must pass through debate and approval in Congress before becoming law. These specific bills, introduced at different times in the Brazilian National Congress, aimed to implement the principles of the *Escola Sem Partido* movement by restricting teachers from expressing political, ideological, or religious views in the classroom and limiting discussions on topics such as gender and sexuality. While none of these bills were passed at the national level, they have significantly influenced educational debates, leading to similar proposals at state and municipal levels. These legislative texts serve as the primary empirical materials for this study, providing insight into how the movement has attempted to shape Brazilian education policy. The study employs a retroductive approach, moving between an empirical review of the law project texts and a theoretical analysis based on the works of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Carl Schmitt, and Slavoj Žižek on the concept of the political. The article builds an alternative approach to the relationship of education to the political after understanding the internal logics that sustain this discourse of ESP. This broadens the discussion to show that even within

educational theory, the question of education's autotelic nature or instrumentality poses theoretical impasses.

The social logic: education is not political

The discourse of the ESP movement relies on a distinction between what is deemed political (the existing education in Brazil) and what is not (the education it advocates). This dichotomy reflects a broader distaste for politics, which Schmitt (2008: 20) notes as characteristic of the political in regard to other fields. Schmitt argues that 'the word (the political) is most frequently used negatively, in contrast to various other ideas, for example in such antitheses as politics and economy, politics and morality, and politics and law' (Ibid.). Within the ESP discourse, one might add education to this list, as the movement portrays any connection between education and politics as corrupting education's intrinsic purity and value. Instead, education is often idealised as neutral, apolitical, or purely moral, while politics is seen as contentious, ideological, or corrupt. This distinction is the core on which the movement builds itself and can be sensed in almost all the iterations of its projects of law. As we can read in the Senate Law Project nº 193/2016, and nº 246/2019:

> "Faced with this reality – known by everyone's direct experience those who have gone through the education system in the last 20 or 30 years ... We believe that it is necessary and urgent to adopt effective measures to prevent the practice of political and ideological indoctrination in schools, and the usurpation of the right of parents to have their children receive moral education that is in accordance with their own convictions" (Brasil, 2016).
>
> "5) The freedom to teach, obviously, does not grant the teacher the right to take advantage of his position and the captive audience of students to promote his own interests, opinions, conceptions or ideological, religious, moral, political and partisan preferences; nor the right to favor, harm or constrain students due to their political, ideological, moral or religious convictions; nor the right to make political-partisan propaganda in the classroom and incite his students to participate in demonstrations, public acts and marches; nor the right to manipulate the content of his

> discipline, with the objective of obtaining the adhesion of students to a certain political or ideological current; nor, finally, the right to tell other people's children what is right and wrong in matters of religion and morality" (Brasil, 2019).

The ESP movement was founded against a state of Brazilian education which sees it as being manipulated by an ideological indoctrination summed up under the name of Brazil's main education philosopher, Paulo Freire. Freire views education as a means of achieving social justice and liberation. For him, education should not simply aim to transmit knowledge, as in a 'banking model', but should enable students to transform their world and overcome oppression (Freire, 2000). The ESP movement claims that Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness and social justice is not neutral but could lead to the teaching of Marxist or leftist ideas, which they see as problematic for the neutrality of education towards the different political opponents in Brazil.

The way Paulo Freire's teachings are often presented by the ESP suggests that he was opposed to the Catholic faith, but in reality, he maintained a strong connection to his Christian beliefs. In the 1960s, Freire became involved in 'liberation theology', a movement within the Catholic Church that focused on social justice and urged the church to take a more active role in fighting poverty and oppression (McLaren, 2022). However, this interpretation of Catholicism was viewed by some as heretical. In a telling account, Miguel Nagib, the founder of the ESP movement, once expressed his frustration with a history professor of his daughters who compared the revolutionary Ché Guevara - whom he sees as a symbol of ideological fallacy - to Saint Francis of Assisi, a revered religious figure (Bedinelli, 2016). To avoid such a presumed misconception, Nagib thinks parents should stand against 'ideological indoctrination' in schools by clearly demarcating the boundaries of education and politics. The ESP movement looks at Paulo Freire's teachings as unconstitutional because of their partisan dimension. As Miguel Nagib states:

> "What we defend is that some of Paulo Freire's teachings clash with the Constitution. Our criticism is of a legal nature because the use of the classroom for the purpose of transforming society, as he defended it,

> depending on how it is applied, violates the freedom of students and the political and ideological neutrality of the State" (Souza, 2017).

The movement critiques educators inspired by Freirean pedagogy for rejecting a presumed neutrality in education and engages in this debate as if neutrality would be a shame for Paulo Freire. Instead, Freirean educators argue that all education carries ideological influence, as Richard Shaull writes in his introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

> "There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 2005: 34).

The answer to such neo-conservative discourses claiming education's neutrality is usually done in other contexts through normative or evidence-based answers. For instance, Bialystok (2018) argues, using the recent controversy over the sex education curriculum in Ontario, Canada, that being overly respectful of the parental choice that refuses the enrolment of their kids in sex education risks reproducing the illiberal paradigms that the curriculum is intended to erode and thus subverts its own liberal intentions. Similarly, Overwien (2019), in the context of the Neutral Schools movement led by the German right-wing party Alternative fur Deutschland, emphasises that education in schools cannot and should not be politically neutral. Instead, it needs to address critical societal issues such as populism, racism, and discrimination in educational settings. Neutrality in this context would undermine the democratic and human rights-focused values that schools are meant to promote. Instead, educators should foster critical engagement, equip students with knowledge and competencies for democratic participation, and confront anti-democratic tendencies explicitly and thoughtfully.

Even an answer grounded in Chantal Mouffe's theoretical contributions, as outlined in the introduction, would assert that the political is inherently

irreducible. This suggests that claiming to be apolitical is, in itself, a political strategy. Hence, even the call for neutrality in education through pluralism without antagonism is itself a political strategy (Mouffe, 2011). However, this explanation has theoretical limitations. Neo-conservative movements like the ESP do not promote pure universalism with an uncontested view of the world, which would be in this case, a conservative, neutral education. Instead, their strategy is one of violent particularism. For example, the universal right of parents to choose is framed as enabling different particularities. However, once the right of the parents represented by the movement is open, the same right is closed by an act of violent exclusion. ESP shuts out other particularisms (such as other parents' choices that are pro-critical pedagogies) by creating a sharp divide: one side is deemed political and corrupt, while the other is portrayed as natural and legitimate. In the next section, I argue that this approach is known as ultra-politicisation, and it represents the political logic of this movement.

The political logic: a violent decisionism

The political logic of ESP lies in combining depoliticisation with ultra-politicisation. Despite their claims to be against politicisation, the ESP movement selectively combines depoliticisation (of critical visions) and ultra-politicisation (of conservative visions). This paradox aligns with Schmitt's notion that all politics is ultimately about defining the enemy (Schmitt, 2008). For ESP, the enemy is an imagined collective of various enemies and ideological manipulators - leftists, queer activists, or progressive educators - who supposedly corrupt education. Yet, this pretension to neutrality is political in itself. In the ESP, the paradox of neutrality lies in their decision to eliminate Freirean pedagogy or decolonial curricula, which is not a withdrawal from politics but a radical assertion of control over the inherent political content of education. Hence, by excluding an education that promotes democratic participation, liberatory intent, and gender equity in particular, the movement strives to naturalise the sovereignty of coloniality, gender hierarchy, and Catholicism.

Carl Schmitt's concepts of sovereignty and decisionism can help us understand the political strategy of the ESP movement. For Schmitt, sovereignty is defined by the ability to decide on the exception - what lies inside and outside the norm. The ESP performs this sovereign act by drawing the boundary between

‘neutral’ and ‘political’. The ESP seems to understand, in the guise of neo-conservative movements, that it is impossible to pass from a pure single normative order and ideal of school to the actuality of life where we have endless contingent particularities without this act of *self*-imposition. As Žižek (1999b) explains, this basic decision on what is political and what is not hinges on an abyssal act of violence. Violent in the sense that it articulates a vision of education as neutral from all politics but then inscribes this same decision through a political act. In a sense, it grounds itself in itself (in its *own* decision), and everything it does is self-referential to this act itself. This is, for instance, what we see in article number 6 of the Senate Law Project nº 246/2019:

> “Art. 6 Private schools that follow specific religious and ideological orientations may broadcast and promote religious, moral and ideological content contractually authorized by the parents or guardians of students, and the students’ right to education, freedom to learn and pluralism of ideas must be respected with regard to other content” (Brazil, 2019).

This is the main distinction between modern populism and old traditionalism: recognising that the dissolution of traditional values can no longer be reset. Therefore, the project does claim a re-foundation of an educational model that encompasses all the different ideologies in Brazilian society or that it will end up absorbing them.

Hence, decisionism becomes paradoxical, as the moment to decide what is political and what is not is a political act. According to this, the ESP frames Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy as inherently political and contrasts it with an ostensibly apolitical and neutral model of education that the movement claims existed in the past. The narrative erases the contingency of this ‘original’ model, presenting it as a return to a natural state of education, free from ideological contamination. Therefore, teachers are labeled cultists of Paulo Freire, and their approach is dismissed as a political surplus. According to ESP, students are harmed by being forced to remain in the classroom while teachers benefit from this condition. Teachers are portrayed as taking advantage of this circumstance, not to speak in a balanced way, but to promote their own preferences and violating the students’ freedom of conscience and belief.

What follows this is an authoritarian shift of schools where the movement encourages broader surveillance and control mechanisms, such as encouraging students to record classes and anonymously report teachers who promote ideologies. Articles number four and five of the law project nº 246/2019 detail some of these measures:

> Art. 4 In the exercise of his/her duties, the teacher:
> I – shall not take advantage of the captive audience of students to promote his/her own interests, opinions, conceptions or ideological, religious, moral, political and partisan preferences;
> II – shall not favor, harm or constrain students due to their political, ideological, moral or religious convictions, or lack thereof;
> III – shall not engage in political-partisan propaganda in the classroom nor incite his/her students to participate in demonstrations, public acts and marches;
> IV – when dealing with political, sociocultural and economic issues, shall present to students, in a fair manner, the main versions, theories, opinions and competing perspectives regarding the subject;
> V – shall respect the right of the students' parents to have their children receive the religious and moral education that is in accordance with their own convictions;
> VI – will not allow the rights guaranteed in the previous items to be violated by the actions of students or third parties, within the classroom.
>
> Art. 5 Basic education institutions shall post posters in classrooms and teachers' rooms with the content set out in the annex to this Law, measuring at least 420 millimeters wide by 594 millimeters high and using a font size compatible with the dimensions adopted (Brazil, 2019).
>
> Art. 7 Students are guaranteed the right to record classes, in order to allow better absorption of the content taught and to enable the full exercise of the right of parents or guardians to be aware of the pedagogical process and to evaluate the quality of the services provided by Art (Ibid.).

> Art. 11 The Public Power will have a communication channel for receiving complaints related to non-compliance with this Law, ensuring anonymity (Ibid.).

If the political is understood as ontological and unavoidable, how does it manifest or find expression within the discourse of ESP when that discourse actively negates it? Schmitt (2008: 26) argues that the political, unlike other spheres such as aesthetics, religion, or economics is 'independent, not in the sense of a distinct new domain, but in that it can neither be based on any one antithesis or any combination of other antitheses, nor can it be traced to these'. Similarly, Arditi (1995: 13) highlights that 'the advantage of this concept of the political is that it does not tie political phenomena to a particular institutional setting, and allows us to think the political as a mobile and ubiquitous field. Thus, the political's omnipresence raises the critical question: where does it surface or become displaced when it is ostensibly excluded? The answer lies in exploring the fantasmatic logic underpinning this displacement.

The fantasmatic logic: cuius religio, rius educatio

In movements such as ESP, while the political is rooted in distinctions between adversaries, these distinctions are reframed through a moral lens, often tied to religious values. The neutrality claimed by ESP becomes a fantasy, sustained by moralism that supplants political debate with moral imperatives. For example, critiques of Freirean pedagogy are framed not as political disagreements but as moral concerns which aim at protecting children and families. This moral discourse obscures the inherently political nature of education and introduces a conservative vision of society under the guise of neutrality. The fantasmatic dimension of the ESP project reveals its ideological operation. Rather than outright denying the political, ESP displaces political conflict onto moralising grounds. Morality becomes a substitute for political contestation, filling the void left by the denial of explicit political struggle. This dynamic is evident in the repeated invocation of morality alongside education in the ESP Law project nº 246/2019, which includes provisions such as:

> Art. 4: Teachers will not use their captive audience of students to promote personal opinions or ideological, religious, moral, or political preferences (Brasil, 2019).
>
> Art. 15: A secular state cannot use the education system to promote values hostile to the morality of any religion (Ibid.).
>
> Art. 16: Allowing the government to promote a particular morality through education undermines the religious beliefs of students (Ibid.).

ESP constructs a moralistic 'us vs. them' narrative, where 'we' represent traditional values and 'they' embody ideological corruption. The movement obscures its political agenda and projects an image of neutrality. The movement's critique of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy underscores this tension. Freire's pedagogy is explicitly political which contrasts with the ESP's claims of an apolitical and neutral educational model rooted in a mythical past. This narrative erases the contingency of this supposed 'original' model, framing it as a natural, balanced state of education free from ideological influence. Yet, such a framing denies the inherently political nature of education. As Carl Schmitt (2008) observed, in early modern nation-states, the political was initially confined to external relations during religious wars and, internally, to policing. Over time, however, politics permeated all aspects of life, including family and religion. The ESP Law project reflects a similar trajectory, seeking to depoliticise family and gender by framing them as neutral and relegating authority over these domains to the family. This is evident in articles of the Law Projects nº 867/2015:

> Art. 2º The Public Power will not meddle in the process of sexual maturation of students nor allow dogmatism or proselytism in addressing gender issues.
>
> V – (teachers) will respect the right of students' parents to have their children receive religious and moral education that is in accordance with their own convictions (Brasil, 2015).

The project's attempt to depoliticise these spaces masks their political dimension. It does not remove politics but rather reconfigures it through a moral and privatised framework that effectively reinstates a form of policing in these spheres.

Schmitt noted that, historically, the political was synonymous with the sovereign, encapsulated in the phrase *Cujus regio, ejus religio* 'whose realm, his religion'. By redefining family, religion, gender, and education as apolitical, ESP reinstates control and authority over these spaces, disguising its actions as neutral while enforcing a return to hierarchical and militarised structures. In contrast, Laclau (1994) challenges the notion of a 'first originality', arguing that every origin is shaped by prior constructs. ESP disavows this, insisting that education can be stripped of politics and reduced to mere knowledge production and dissemination. By framing this reduction in moral terms, ESP perpetuates the illusion of an apolitical educational framework, failing to acknowledge the inescapable entanglement of education with the political. In a way, the fantasmatic logic of ESP becomes *Cujus religio, ejus educatio* 'whose religion, his education'.

What is to be done theoretically?

This debate on the neutrality of education, far from representing only pathological discourses, also represents an aporia within the educational theory regarding the instrumentality of education (Atif, 2021). If we examine the discourse of the ESP movement, we find some overlaps with broader educational theories with ambivalence in the reasons or consequences of their positions on education's instrumentality. For instance, while Biesta (2018) advocates for education's separation from politics and economy to prevent its reduction to mere learning, the ESP movement paradoxically uses the same anti-instrumentality argument to reduce education to learning. Similarly, post-critical pedagogy rejects any relationship between education and politics by claiming that education is predicated on love, while politics is rooted in hate (Hodgson et al., 2018). ESP adopts a comparable stance, critiquing critical pedagogy on the same grounds. On another level, Masschelein and Simons' (2013) suggestion that education should be independent of any instrumentality seems to unintentionally represent the same conservative approach that asks for a return to the roots of an elitist

cultural heritage as in the speeches of ESP or the controversial work of Bloom (2008). Furthermore, attempts have been made to argue for the autotelic nature of education by comparing it to the experience of art, entirely divorced from any calculation or instrumentality (Ruitenberg, 2022). However, such efforts run the difficulty of being complicit in perpetuating power structures in an aestheticization of a status quo (Vardoulakis, 2024).

These examples invite us to rethink the relationship between education and politics as more than a pathological discourse performed by populist movements and hence has to be dismissed. Instead, we must conceptualise education and politics in new terms that respond to the dilemmas of education's instrumentality and its distance from political actors, as educational theory itself seems difficult. This vision should be more than a simple approach that confirms the relation of education to politics and hence its full absorption by political projects (democratic or not); similarly, it should not negate any relation of education to politics.

We must reconceptualise the very notion of the political to adopt such a new approach. Rather than viewing politics as merely a collection of competing procedures, institutions, or policies, we should, following Laclau and Mouffe (2014), understand the political as ontologically inherent to every identity. It unfolds through a dual, interrelated dynamic of associative and dissociative operations - what they term antagonism - operating on two levels. First, internal antagonism which refers to the inherent negativity within any claim to neutrality or instrumentality in education, and recognises the radical contingency and incompleteness that underpins all educational and political projects. And, second, external antagonism that arises from conflicts between competing visions of education, reflecting the tensions between neutral and instrumental approaches and their differing interests and objectives.

The undemocratic tendencies of neo-conservative movements often manifest in reducing antagonism to the external competition between different instrumental projects while overlooking their internal antagonism, which is their inevitable incompleteness. By refusing to recognise the contingency of each instrumentality and how it ontologically fails to achieve its goals fully, the

democratic opposition of different instrumental projects of education becomes a war between absolute, unquestionable enemies - much like moral debates that divide things strictly into good and evil.

By contrast, accepting the political as external and internal to every project acknowledges the radical negativity ontological to all instrumentalities of education. It creates the conditions for continuous and diverse educational projects without imposing definitive closure through forms of neutrality. By recognising the internal negativity inside every educational project, we can have a productive force for evolving educational and political practices (Atif and Fitzpatrick, 2024). Ultimately, this understanding of antagonism emphasises that the legitimacy of any relation of education to political actors lies in its acknowledgment of the dual nature of antagonism. Education can affirm its democratic potential by acknowledging the inherent gaps in every attempt to define it and in the identities of the goals it seeks to shape as an instrument. Recognising this, education and politics are no longer seen as opposing forces, as ambivalently educational theory and neoconservative movements defend for different reasons, but as interconnected dimensions of a shared ontological reality, where the success of any project remains provisional (Szkudlarek, 2017).

Practical implications for resisting right-wing populism's use of 'neutrality' in education

First, we should challenge the myth of neutrality in public discourse by actively questioning and exposing how claims of educational neutrality often mask ideological agendas that serve conservative and neo-liberal interests. On the curriculum level, we should avoid presenting education as purely neutral or non-instrumental; instead, we should emphasise its role in fostering a critical inquiry into democratic engagement. Second, we can embrace open and plural educational spaces in policy advocacy by pushing for policies that recognise multiple perspectives rather than ones that enforce a single dominant narrative under the guise of neutrality. Pedagogical practice can encourage educators to address political questions in a way that highlights their complexity rather than reducing them to binary oppositions.

Furthermore, we can recognise the inevitable incompleteness of educational projects in teacher training by equipping educators with frameworks that accept education's evolving and contingent nature, resisting attempts to impose fixed, 'final' curricula. Institutional strategies should echo this by designing reflexive educational programmes, allowing room for ongoing revision and critique. We should shift the debate from 'good vs. evil' binary to democratic negotiation in classroom discussions by framing political and social issues as matters of ongoing debate rather than battles between absolute right and wrong. On a community engagement level, we can create forums where students, educators, and policymakers negotiate different perspectives without falling into antagonistic extremes. With the continuous rise of right-wing populism, it would also be essential to expose the political strategy behind right-wing populism in education. Media literacy is important in this matter to educate students on how political actors use the rhetoric of neutrality to delegitimise engaged, critical education. The policy can resist this trend when right-wing populists push for 'neutral' education policies by revealing how these policies enforce a conservative bias rather than true openness.

Finally, we should promote education as a site of democratic struggle to overcome the accusations of indoctrination by reframing debates. For instance, we should shift the narrative from 'education should be free from politics' to 'education is always political, so the question is *how* it engages with politics'. Similarly, institutional policies should advocate for educational institutions to explicitly recognise their role in fostering democratic values and pluralism rather than claiming false neutrality. By implementing these strategies, education can resist the right-wing populist tactic of using neutrality as a weapon against engaged, democratic learning while fostering a more open and evolving educational space.

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Perspectives

Getting to the Roots of it: A Global Youth Work Approach towards Meaningful Change

Fiona Creedon and Sally Daly

Abstract: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2023) underpins recent Irish government policy commitments to children and young people: 'Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024-2028' (DCEDIY, 2024) and 'Young Ireland: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028' (DCEDIY, 2023). This article explores how a global youth work approach, within a youth work context, supports young people in understanding how their rights are impacted by inequality, with a particular focus on poverty. This approach recognises that inequality is rooted in oppression and encourages young people and youth workers to explore how categories like class and race are affected by oppressive systems. This raises critical consciousness and fosters resistance to oppression, paving the way for solidarity and change.

Key Words: Human Rights; Inequality; Poverty; A Decolonial Approach; Anti-oppressive Practice; Youth Work; Critical Thinking; Critical Consciousness; A Global Youth Work Approach; Development Education.

Introduction

In February 2023, in 'concluding observations' on Ireland's periodic reports regarding progress under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN recommended that the forthcoming document, 'Young Ireland – National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028' (DCEDIY, 2023) 'includes a focus on mainstreaming children's rights and a child rights-based approach to decision-making affecting children and on addressing inequality and discrimination' (UNCRC, 2023: 2). Consequently, the vision statement for 'Young Ireland' is 'an Ireland which fully respects and realises the

rights of children and young people' (DCEDIY, 2023: 2). The language of human rights is also present in subsequent relevant policy documents, with the exception of the Programme Plan (July 2023 - December 2025) of the newly established Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office (Department of Taoiseach, 2023) which does not mention inequality, discrimination or rights.

This is important because despite economic growth, Ireland remains deeply unequal (Social Justice Ireland, 2024). The Community Platform, an alliance of Irish organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, highlights the need for a systemic, rights-based approach to poverty reduction, emphasising the need to 'prevent all forms of discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights' (O'Connor, 2023: 27).

The increased take-up of food banks and the stigma associated with poverty underscore the issue. The emergence of food banks and the expanded role they have played as inflation continues to rise, is well documented in recent years (Barnardos, 2024; Murray, 2022). Along with this, comes the issue of shame and stigma as part of the visible manifestation of poverty. 'When people first come into us, there's a lot of embarrassment because there's so much stigma around food poverty', according to Sharon Mullins, volunteer coordinator at Feed Cork (Sheridan, 2023). Meanwhile, for young people who are labelled under a criminal justice category, there are complex reasons that are often related to socio-economic status, including the impacts of childhood adversity (Kilkelly et al., 2022). Yet, the propensity to conflate poverty with other social issues such as unemployment, welfare receipt or criminality, or to refer to these conditions as explanations of poverty, is often linked to the tendency to portray poverty as a problem created by those experiencing it. It is also indicative of a more general tendency to downplay the significance of poverty altogether (Shildrick and Rucell, 2015). Without a systemic analysis, and without understanding poverty as a political choice and the outcome of a specific policy focus, the shame factor keeps poverty in the shadows.

This article argues that poverty, particularly its intersection with class, is under-represented within a non-formal education context in Ireland. To

counteract the epistemic inequality associated with class (Meade, 2024) it proposes that a global youth work approach, utilising development education tools, can empower young people to reflect on class as a site of struggle, challenge their own experiences of oppression, and connect with the experiences of others facing similar challenges, in proximate and more distant locations.

A crisis of politics and democracy?

While policies often emphasise rights and equality, the impact of their implementation can vary considerably for young people and children. This is particularly poignant in the context of today's challenging economic and political climate, where neoliberal and oppressive tendencies prevail. It's crucial to critically examine who is responsible for understanding and ensuring their rights are upheld in practice. According to Balakrishnan and Heintz (2015), it is the state which has the primary obligation to protect, respect and fulfil rights, but this depends on a state that operates with full democratic participation and transparency. Inequality, both in terms of income and wealth, affects formal and informal political processes in ways that dictate people's access to education, healthcare, jobs and social security.

Giroux argues that 'a crisis of politics and democracy has turned into an impending catastrophe' (2022: 178). It is a time of frustration and powerlessness for young people, compounded by inequality and discrimination, war and violence, and the climate crisis. As a consequence, they are either debilitated and frozen with anxiety, or ripe for the destructive influence of extremist ideas. In relation to poverty and the rights of children and young people, a dilemma presents itself. Commitments related to socially constructed groups, such as gender or race, are strongly incorporated into the human rights framework and so take priority, however, economic inequality which directly informs rights impacted by discrimination associated with class, is less of a priority.

In Ireland, inequality and high levels of poverty exist despite having the highest annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita growth in the European Union in 2022 (Central Statistics Office, 2024). The *Children's Rights Alliance Child Poverty Monitor 2023* reminds us that almost 90,000 children in Ireland are living in consistent poverty (Children's Rights Alliance, 2023: 3). This is

bolstered by a 2023 report by Barnardos relaying their concern that 'cost-of-living increases are pulling more children in Ireland into deprivation and negatively affecting their health, wellbeing and development, particularly those living in low-income families' (Barnardos, 2023: 4). Poverty has long-term and far-reaching consequences for children and young people. For example, 'The Impact of Childhood Poverty Experiences on Adult Life 2023' (CSO, 2023) states that an adult who has experienced poverty during their teenage years are at risk of continued poverty, their educational attainment and employment status are affected, and are more likely to report fair or bad health.

Class and the dominant narrative

Lynch (2020:2) maintains that social class is a taboo subject in Ireland, 'unlike in England and mainland Europe where class inequalities are part and parcel of the political debate, "social class" is rarely used in Ireland'. Social class is generally understood to refer to an individual's occupation, income or status, though, in Ireland, upper or lower class usually equates to rich or poor, powerful or ignored. The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 prohibit discrimination on the basis of the following nine grounds - gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community. Recently, efforts to include socio-economic status as a tenth ground for discrimination in Irish equality legislation are intensifying. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC, 2024:3) has called on the state to urgently update equality law, to make it illegal to discriminate against a person based on their socio-economic status, stating that 'a lack of economic equality affects all marginalised groups and prevents the realisation of many fundamental rights, which Ireland is obliged to protect'. Poverty as a 'moral failure' directly informs the narrative propounded by an unequal system, a system of oppression. According to De St. Croix (2016: 22):

> "Market mechanisms and values are coded as enterprise and 'choice'; this rhetoric tells us that we can all be successful if we knuckle down, take risks, network, improve ourselves and aim for the top. The implicit message here is that we have only ourselves to blame if anything goes wrong".

These assumptions were explicit in the narrative surrounding the Dublin riots, which broke out on November 23rd 2023, following the stabbing of three children and a care assistant outside a city centre primary school (Moore, 2024). Far-right groups used the stabbings to incite violence through social media accounts which resulted in one of the worst nights of public disorder and looting witnessed in the city. The critical concern that emerged in mainstream political and policy discourse following the 2023 riots was that of blame, and on individual responsibility (O'Brien, 2023).

A correlation of this narrative is to move the problem into an 'other' space, to emphasise the difference of those 'responsible'. Sabanova and Stout (2023) state that othering can be considered a process of boundary making using symbolic differences that compound and reproduce positions of control and subordination. The sense of the problem being understood as happening in an 'other' space is also evident where poverty has been normalised as the problem of a distant other in the cultural imagination, read through images shared as part of fundraising for international non-government organisations (INGOs). These images contain neo-colonial stereotypes about Africa as a primitive place dependent on Western aid, displaying continuity with the 'Black Baby Phenomenon' (Sheridan, Landy and Stout, 2019: 859). Such images have shaped a collective understanding of poverty, and arguably represent a poignant example of cultural hegemony, impacting the cultural imagination. Gramsci is best known for his theories of cultural hegemony, which effectively refers to 'how the state and ruling class instil values that are gradually accepted as "common sense"' (Garza, 2020: 224). For decades, images depicting poverty and destitution as part of a reified African identity have shaped an understanding of poverty as something that is relativised and dismissed at a domestic level (Sheridan, Landy and Stout, 2019).

In *Pedagogy of Resistance*, Giroux (2022: 22) states that a poverty narrative is told using a 'thinner' language that 'contributes to a political and civic illiteracy wedded to the forces of racism, neoliberal capitalism, anti-intellectualism, militarism, consumerism, sexism, cultism and the corporate state'. Neoliberalism seems to have conquered by stealth, and those who are most impacted by its consequences are the least likely to be aware of its impact. Meade (2024: 19)

states 'if one does not have the epistemic insights to identify neoliberalism as the problem, then they can be more easily persuaded that the problem lies elsewhere', providing another opportunity to reinforce the perspective of oppressive systems.

Counteracting epistemic injustice

The portrayal of poverty as a moral failing, young people as problematic and requiring targeted interventions, refugees as 'unvetted males' (Begley, 2024), and Africa as merely a recipient of aid for helpless poor people are all examples of narratives that sustain an oppressive system in need of fundamental change. We have arrived at a tipping point and the compass is pointing in the direction of radical change. There is an opportunity for development education to challenge the neoliberal interpretation of poverty within the context of globalisation and systems of oppression. For example, at the local level, information gathered through monitoring the use of foodbanks in Ireland and tracking the needs of those who avail of foodbanks should inform the practice of development educators. Poverty is present locally, as well as globally, and tackling it means drilling down to its root causes. McCloskey (2021: 110) maintains that:

> "the foodbank is the current canary in the coalmine of neoliberalism and the foodbank network is sending out worrying evidence of a widening local contagion of poverty. We would be foolish to ignore it".

When poverty is ignored or 'othered', disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories fill the knowledge void. A recent report entitled 'Uisce Faoi Thalamh – An Investigation into the Online Mis- and Disinformation Ecosystem in Ireland' (Gallagher, O'Connor and Visser, 2023:4) demonstrated how social media has been 'successfully co-opted by far-right actors who…have diverted attention towards targeting vulnerable communities'. This supports the claim made by Giroux (2022: 177) that the current political, social and economic climate:

> "makes all the clearer the need for critical thinking, collective resistance, and a notion of hope that inspires and energizes opportunities to rethink the connection between education and social change, and to deepen our

understanding of politics as part of a broader attempt to redefine and struggle for a future that does not repeat the present".

Young's (1999: 81) synopsis of critical thinking is the capacity to:

"identify and challenge assumptions; [to] recognise the importance of the social, political and historical contexts of events, assumptions, interpretations and behaviour; [to] imagine and explore alternatives; [and to] question claims to universal truths or ultimate explanations".

It is vital that young people develop their critical thinking muscle in order to understand their own positioning and identity while grappling with the influence of dominant discourses about what is 'right', 'appropriate', or 'normal' (Tilsen, 2018: 16). This facilitates a realisation that social reality is: 'a process of constructing and deconstructing' in order to understand 'their reality as a site of struggle' and in order to come to terms 'with oppression as a false consciousness, through which 'inequality and neoliberal orthodoxy are normalised' (Sallah 2014: 75).

This is also relevant to the concept 'learning to unlearn' (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008: 4) where the young person and their educators must learn 'to perceive that what one considers as neutral and objective is a perspective and is related to where one is coming from socially, historically and culturally'. In *Learning to Read the World Through Other Eyes*, Andreotti and de Souza (2008) propose a framework for global citizenship education which categorises perspectives into four levels: Egocentric (individual); Ethnocentric (group-centric); Humancentric (other groups); and Worldcentric (diverse global perspectives). Similarly, Sallah's anti-oppressive framework, understands that oppression and discrimination can take place 'at the personal, local, national and global level and must be understood in this way' (2014: 75), but also with an interactive global level that works in symbiosis with all the other levels.

By contrasting the narratives and representations at each level, these anti-oppressive frameworks encourage young people to critically examine how different perspectives shape roles and expectations. This analysis allows them to explore

and question existing systems like poverty, racism, discrimination, globalisation, and neoliberalism, ultimately reflecting on how these systems impact their own lives.

Anti-oppressive practice

Anti-oppressive practice is the means by which 'blinkers' can be removed in order to clearly see the impact of discrimination such as young people in poverty, even if they have never had that experience. Similarly, anti-oppressive practice supports young people who face discrimination, and the effects of inequality, to understand the roots of these injustices. Such a practice empowers them to advocate for the changes they believe are necessary to address inequality, rather than those changes that outsiders or activists, without their lived experience, may assume should be implemented. In the absence of an anti-oppressive practice we are destined to 'suffer reality, not change it…to accept the future, not invent it' (Galeano, 1998: 8).

For Sallah the potency of a global youth work approach within youth work is now more urgent than ever. The educational context here combines the core values and principles of youth work with development education, and displays a commitment to anti-oppressive practice (Sallah, 2014). Using an anti-oppressive framework as articulated by Andreotti and de Souza (2008) and Sallah (2014), the youth worker can support young people to deconstruct and construct their own reality and challenge oppressive systems. Youth workers, as educators, need to be cognisant of the idea proposed by Strier and Binjamin (2010: 1910), that 'the understanding of poverty as oppression is related to the analysis of larger power relations in society'. According to this perspective, poverty is both the expression and the consequence of political, economic, ethnic or gender oppression. Poverty leads to 'a partial or general deprivation of basic human and social rights. In this sense, poverty may be defined as a system of domination' (Ibid.: 1910).

The 'definer' of the 'problem' of poverty, informs the systems and its structures, and the 'definers' are, likely, those with the power. In these circumstances, anti-oppressive practice embraces deliberative democratic methodologies, where those affected by the 'problems' co-produce the solutions,

consistent with Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992). To achieve the highest level of participation, 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults' (Ibid.: 8), it is essential to support young people in becoming critically conscious, informed about systems of oppression, and empowered to identify ways to address the impact of inequalities and discrimination in their lives.

The potency of a global youth work approach

The impact of globalisation and its link to poverty is most effectively understood when examined through a human rights perspective. In the words of Duffy et al. (2022: 16), looking through a human rights lens gives youth workers the opportunity to focus on rights rather than needs, and consider 'rights holders rather than charity seekers, and human rights violations rather than individual pathologies'. This perspective can help reframe pervasive narratives and is a key element in the development of a critical consciousness.

As an informal and nonformal education arena, youth work is ideally positioned to support young people to safely navigate new ideas, new ways of thinking, and new ways of negotiating their place in society. A global youth work approach offers a critical pedagogical tool in youth work. Youthwork provides the space where young people can safely question the origins of poverty and class-based discrimination and where they can be supported to challenge oppressive systems and become activists for local and global change. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (Department of Education, 2022) makes only limited reference to youth work, and doesn't engage with the transformative capacity of youth work as a pedagogical space. In addition, it does not centre the need to decolonise an ESD practice as indicated in this article. While the new youth work strategy, *Opportunities for Youth*: *National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services* (DCEDIY, 2024), references the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs), this SDG framework is not enough in itself, without being linked to an anti-oppressive practice, that challenges the root causes of inequality. The 2024 youth work strategy (DCEDIY, 2024) reflects a low prioritisation of efforts to cultivate a critical and questioning consciousness among young people. It points also to a clear opportunity to apply a decolonising approach to poverty in the non-formal

education context, and in a policy context. Dunford (2023: 195) explains a decolonial approach to poverty in the following way:

> "with attention paid to the multiple ideas, worldviews and practices of people who have borne the brunt of colonialism and its continued presence, and a broader decolonisation through which wealthy regions, states and people cease from the practices of exploitation that condemn others to poverty".

Meanwhile, an understanding of the application of a decolonial approach to poverty and anti-oppressive practice is already evident in the work of practitioners in the field. Sarah Kelleher (2023), CEO of Lourdes Youth and Community Service, argues that global citizenship education in a youth work setting 'can affect most change in people's thinking, it can give them agency and get them to feel that their voice can be heard'. The capacity for critical thinking is the engine of personal transformation, even for people with disproportionate experiences of disadvantage, who 'can find ways to transform their lives that can be deeply and profoundly meaningful' (hooks, 2005: 3: 52). This is an approach through which, in the words of Paulo Freire (1970: 53), youth worker and young person 'become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow'.

The young people are the 'educators' in the documentary entitled 'Active Youth Breaking Down Stereotypes,' instigating dialogue by asking questions such as 'if your country is always represented negatively in the media to the general public, how proud will you feel to be identified as coming from there?' (Love and Care for People, 2023). In this particular process, it is the young people themselves, in a north Cork-based youth group, who examine and challenge stereotypes. They identify the indelible association with poverty which compounds the idea of a racial other and therefore limits their capacity to be seen and for the issues to be addressed. Similarly, the National Youth Council of Ireland Young People's Committee (2022-23) analysis of poverty was created because they wanted to bring the topic of poverty into the light so that it is named, and the shame associated with it addressed (NYCI, 2023).

Promoting the active engagement of young people in directly challenging issues of systemic inequality is also evidenced in the work of Nafula Wafula-Gitonga (2024) and Benjamin Mwape (2024). For Wafula-Gitonga, it is imperative to speak in the language of the community, to spend time in building relationships and acknowledge the value of community experience. All of this should shape the research agenda towards challenging inequality (2024). For Mwape, based in Zambia, his work aims to make policy issues more youth friendly, using a highly interactive methodology to engage the young people with their duty bearers. Mwape advocates that when young people are engaged in policy, it must be through the whole cycle, and they are engaged because of the substance of what they are saying. In advance of this, they are supported with mentoring, critical thinking skills and public speaking skills, that allow them to engage meaningfully with duty bearers (Mwape, 2024).

These successful examples of youth work exemplify the ideal of youth participation, placing the youth voice at the core of all their campaigns. In this way raising critical consciousness is an act of resistance to oppression and can create pathways to solidarity and to change, and should be at the centre of a GCE/GYW commitment, as well as policy commitments in this area.

Conclusion

With rising inequality as one of the legacies of globalisation because of an unequal distribution of economic power (Duffy et al., 2022), the related phenomenon of epistemic inequality has contributed to an understanding of poverty as something to which moral judgement is attached. Yet, class is a site of struggle and systemic poverty requires us to seek out insights to make visible that which has been rendered invisible. Updating equality law, to make it illegal to discriminate against a person based on their socio-economic status is a way to situate pervasive narratives on poverty away from moral judgement, and towards systemic failure.

A global youth work approach is a critical component of youth work, with its focus on critical thinking, human rights, and decolonisation, it offers a powerful framework for supporting young people to understand and address the root causes of poverty and inequality. Furthermore, a global youth work approach offers a path towards shaping youth workers' understanding of poverty as a

systemic issue, and the result of policy decisions. Centring *class as a site of struggle, offers young people* the tools to challenge their own experiences of oppression, while also supporting connections with differently situated young people. In her address at the launch of the National Youth Council of Ireland *Dear Poverty* resource in 2023, Sarah Kelleher (2023) spoke about the power of the work, describing how a global youth work approach can impact the participant, as follows:

> "a person from a point of thinking poverty will always be with us and there isn't anything you can do to change that, to a point where they see it for what it is, that it's actually…deliberately caused and that the only way to change it is if more people speak out about it".

In the context of provoking critical consciousness, through applying a global youth work approach, and being intentional about a human rights lens in the practice of youth work, it is a clear commitment to centring people in the stories of their lives. Challenging the stereotyping of the poor as lacking in individual moral worth (McCloskey, 2011), is a commitment to anti-oppressive practice, empowering young people to advocate for the changes they believe are necessary to address inequality. There is currently a missed opportunity to make this explicit in policy documents that inform educational outcomes for young people.

Meanwhile, the cultural imagination continues to be shaped by a neo-colonial understanding of poverty, and an association of poverty with a distant other. A global youth work commitment that has an intentional decolonising approach to poverty, offers an opportunity for critical engagement, and supports young people to become curious about a wider neo-colonial discourse on the world around them. Young people are tomorrow's empathetic, collective, future thinking, solution focused, critical thinking and innovative leaders, who have the potential to operate as global citizens in solidarity with their peers across the world. Macy (2021) maintains that we must bring all our efforts and resources to the 'transition to a life-sustaining society' in order to implement the necessary radical change *and* to support the development of the future leaders described above. Incorporating a global youth work approach acknowledges youth work as

a pedagogical space, a space of inquiry, learning and change. Consequently, the tools to challenge the current reality of inequality and persistent poverty can be developed and nurtured in these spaces of praxis facilitated by youthwork.

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Global Alumni Networks and Social Class: Epistemic Communities and the 'Thought Collective' Towards Voluntary Impact on Local Civil Society

Maria Gallo

Abstract: National governments and agencies worldwide have developed global alumni networks to stay connected with former international students, including scholarship recipients from the global South. This article presents research across six countries (Czechia, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Denmark, and Ireland) on global alumni networks as a development education practice that enables an intersection between local community impact and social class. The case studies are part of funded research on global alumni networks. This article highlights models of global alumni networks, emerging as a social class 'thought collective' or epistemic community. These qualities create a new definition of social class, especially for the alumni who are scholarship or fellowship returnees to global South communities.

There remains a dearth of research on global alumni networks. Rincón and Rutkowski (2015) suggest that global alumni networks are instruments of public diplomacy, addressing collective actions for equality, social justice, and environmental action. This article argues that alongside career development as the purpose for pursuing their studies in the first place, alumni are motivated to lead social change in their communities. Skovsted Hansen (2015) presents global alumni networks as epistemic communities, drawing on the Haas (1992) definition of international relations: a diverse group with knowledge-based expertise and shared beliefs. For global alumni networks the 'thought collective' serves as a heuristic device to draw on network characteristics. National agencies steering the global alumni networks use incentives, such as activity grants or awards, to steer local voluntary alumni action focused on global awareness, and civil society activism. Establishing global alumni networks focuses on the alumni intersection between local community impact with social class and mobility. The research question considered in this article is: *what influences the emerging*

models of global alumni networks towards impact on local civil society and a redefinition of social class?

Key words: Alumni; Global Alumni Networks; International Higher Education; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Public Diplomacy.

Introduction

Over the last decade, national governments and government-supported agencies worldwide have developed global alumni networks to stay connected with former international students. The article presents case study research on global alumni networks across six countries (Czechia, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Denmark, and Ireland), and the role of alumni in leading local community impact related to the United Nations Global Goals to 2030 (UN General Assembly, 2015), also called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related public diplomacy efforts. The research question considered in this article is: *what influences the emerging models of global alumni networks towards impact on local civil society and a redefinition of social class?* A summary of these six global alumni network case studies is presented in Table A:

Table A: Global Alumni Network Case Studies

Alumni Network name	Country	Coordinating government agency or organisation	Web site
Czechia Alumni	Czechia	DZS (Czech National Agency for International Education and Research)	https://www.studyin.cz/alumni/
AlumniPortal Deutschland	Germany	Federal Foreign Office, Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung and DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service	https://www.alumniportal-deutschland.org/de/
Sweden Alumni Network	Sweden	Swedish Institute	https://si.se/en/how-we-work/alumni/
Alumni UK	United Kingdom	British Council	https://alumniuk.britishcouncil.org/
Danida Alumni Network	Denmark	Danida Fellowship Centre	http://alumni.dfcentre.com/danida-alumni-network
Kader Asmal Alumni	Ireland	Alumni volunteer-led network with funding from Department of Foreign Affairs (Emigrant Support Programme)	https://ka-alumni.org/

The case studies were constructed as part of funded research on global alumni networks. Through interviews and documentary analysis, the case studies highlight the features from each country working with global alumni. Showcasing the local and global impact of international alumni is a common aim for

establishing global alumni networks aligned to national internationalisation strategies. However, the approach to alumni voluntary action is diverse. This article highlights the extent to which public diplomacy, epistemic communities or 'thought collective' characteristics emerge within these models of global alumni networks. International alumni are highlighted as a collective network, as defined by the national agency developing the global alumni programme.

Traditional alumni networks, coordinated by higher education institutions, largely work from a nostalgia and philanthropic model, focused on career networking, social events, and philanthropic activities (Gallo, 2021). However, the global alumni network case studies demonstrate collective alumni voluntary action and an appetite for social impact. This aligns with Ellison's (2015) concept of citizen alum, looking beyond alumni as 'donors' to 'doers', thus creating space for meaningful alumni voluntary action. Case studies show global alumni deeply engaged in their communities to impact on the SDG agenda. At the same time, global alumni networks recognise, especially more recently, that to mobilise alumni to engage in this public diplomacy and internationalisation agenda, there needs to be a strong individual alumni incentive, such as supporting their career or leadership development.

There remains a dearth of research on global alumni networks. Rincón and Rutkowski (2015) suggest that global alumni networks are instruments of public diplomacy, promoting equality, social justice and environmental action aligned to the SDGs. Why would alumni get involved in global alumni network activity? This article argues that alongside career development, alumni are also motivated to lead SDG-based awareness in their communities upon their return to their country of origin. Skovsted Hansen (2015) presents global alumni networks as epistemic communities, drawing on the Haas (1992) definition of international relations: a diverse group with knowledge-based expertise and shared beliefs. 'Thought collective' (Fleck, 1979) is a community with exchanging ideas and intellectual interactions at its core. For global alumni networks the 'thought collective' serves as a heuristic device to draw on network characteristics. Global alumni networks use incentives, such as activity grants, marketing support, or awards, to steer the direction of local voluntary alumni activity addressing themes of sustainability, global awareness, and civil society activism.

What are Global Alumni Networks? The research context

Nationally-led, international alumni networks (referred to throughout as global alumni networks) are emerging as a global trend, with recent growth in Europe, established as an initiative of government or in partnership with government-funded agencies. The research highlighted in this article was completed in two parts: first, investigating these networks in 2019 and then again in 2024. The five-year span between these research periods shows the maturation of the existing global alumni networks. In addition, other countries including Austria, Estonia, Poland, Spain, United Arab Emirates and Canada are considering the implementation of such networks. The main purpose of global alumni networks is for national agencies or governments to stay connected with former international students, including scholarship or fellowship recipients from the global South. Existing global alumni networks included in this research are based in: Czechia, Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), Denmark, and Ireland. Additional networks also exist in Hungary, France, and Canada. The 2019 research also highlighted the global alumni networks in The Netherlands and Australia, which are no longer active as of December 2024.

Initially, the 2019 research was designed to draw on the learning from national models and key leaders to inform the potential for a global alumni network for Ireland. Through Ireland's diaspora strategies, including the most recent *Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020-2025* (DFA, 2020), global alumni are part of Ireland's affinity diaspora. This qualitative research study was conducted in two parts. First, research was undertaken over a six-month period in 2019. Alongside extensive desk research, the primary data collection included 42 interviews and observer status at the gathering of European global alumni networks in The Netherlands in May 2019. The second part of the research was conducted over a four-month period in 2024, including documentary analysis and 18 interviews with agencies supporting global alumni networks, experts working in the field of alumni relations with experience working or consulting with these networks.

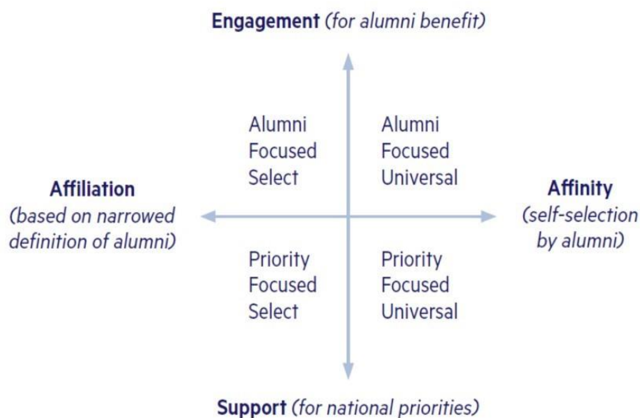
The initial research study identified four key themes that form the impetus for establishing the networks and ongoing public sector investment namely:

- Building a reputation for internationalisation and education;
- Supporting talent for economic development;
- Sharing knowledge for research and innovation opportunities;
- Fostering public diplomacy for values, culture, and sustainable development (Gallo, 2019: 31).

It can be argued that all four themes are national priorities for governments, described in the research as 'state-focus'. Equally, these themes offer an alumni-focused benefit to participation in a global alumni network, including for career advancement (linked to the talent for economic development theme). While this article may focus on the public diplomacy theme, the research suggests that the state benefit of a global alumni network is to increase the country's reputation and brand within international prospective students and broader global audience, which also addresses the other key themes. Alumni networks that adopt an ambassador or public diplomacy role embrace Ellison's (2015) 'doer' ideal, with international students-turned alumni engaged in volunteering - as mentors, supporting student recruitment efforts, organisers of sustainability focused events - is well documented (Rincón and Dobson, 2021). Therefore, global alumni networks enable higher education to have a social class mobility role, shifting alumni from individuals only seeking their own professional development to volunteers that act as civic actors, leaders and advocates for the country of study's values, including addressing SDG targets.

To fully understand the nature of global alumni networks, this research offers a typology, to understand the scope and the breadth to the six countries at the centre of this study: Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the UK. The research presents an overall matrix (Gallo, 2019) for the initial placement of global alumni networks. Figure 1 presents the matrix, which draws on research on alumni-institutional relationships as a cycle starting with affiliation, affinity, and engagement, ending with support (Gallo, 2012).

Figure 1: (Gallo, 2019: 23)



On the X-axis is the network scope: on one side is affiliation, whereby the government decides on a narrow alumni definition for the network, such as a group of international alumni who received a government-supported scholarship or fellowship. On the other end of the spectrum is affinity, where the global alumni network is open to any alumni - from international alumni returned to their country of origin, who reside in a third country along with domestic alumni who live abroad. The Y-axis represents the network focus that is the purpose for the network. On the top of the axis is engagement, defined as the direct professional or personal benefit for alumni. On the bottom of this spectrum is support, with the purpose of the global alumni network focused on national priorities or policies, which may include any or all of the four themes highlighted above.

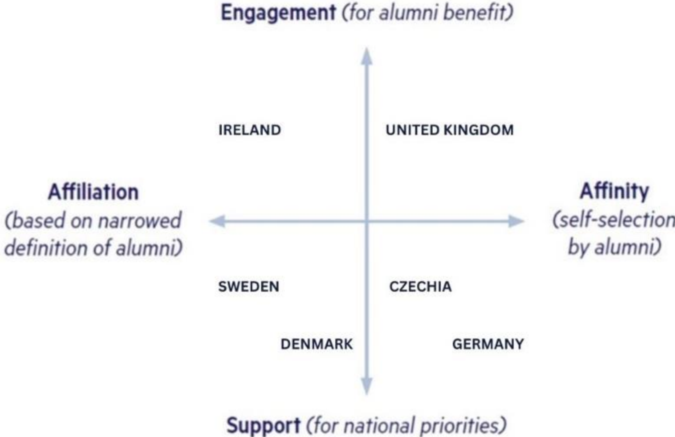
This typology is significant to this article because it allows a mapping of these global alumni networks and an understanding of the breadth of difference in their ethos and composition, before focusing on public diplomacy, social class, and activism. The caveat shown in the research argues that the four quadrants are not definitive: 'The model for a global alumni network is not entirely a

polarised one … Many networks may sway across multiple points on the scale' (Gallo, 2019: 23). The bottom half of the matrix focuses on national priority focused networks, with the left side as a select group and the right a more universal alumni group. The two top quadrants of the matrix (Figure 1) focus on alumni that can join the network: the top left-hand quadrant is for a select group of alumni, such as scholarship winners, whereas the top right side is for networks open to any alumni who studied in the country to join and participate in the network.

Global alumni network case studies

This article considers case studies from six countries: Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, and the UK. These case studies were selected to illustrate their relevance to social class mobility, especially on their role in creating groups of alumni civic actors that work towards collective action. Figure 2 is a reconceptualised visual representation for this article, offering the initial mapping of these six global alumni networks based on their alumni scope and purpose.

Figure 2: Global Alumni Network Model Design Matrix – Mapping Countries



Those countries at the bottom of the matrix in Figure 2, namely Sweden, Denmark, and Germany, offer a prioritised reference to the SDGs and public diplomacy as part of their work. Czechia, also at the bottom of the matrix, established Czechia Alumni with a role to mediate international cooperation and '…support the internationalisation of Czech higher education institution and to promote the good image of Czechia abroad' (DZS, 2024). Czechia is also open to all international alumni of Czech higher education, offering social events (called meet-ups) for international alumni all over the world, often in partnership with a local embassy. The events also encourage current and prospective students to attend these events, showcasing Czechia as an excellent place to study, research and live.

The AlumniPortal Deutschland for Germany alumni, established in 2008, is the oldest global alumni network. An entirely online and virtual network of over 120,000 alumni, it is open to alumni who studied or researched in German higher education. While the AlumniPortal offers career support with webinars and blog posts, the primary purpose of the work is to support measures linked to German public diplomacy. Engaging alumni in SDG-related collaborative online workshops and activities, such as the community challenge, invites alumni to submit their innovative social entrepreneurship ideas on a given theme. In 2022, the community challenge theme was sustainable agriculture and environmentally friendly food systems, promoted in an article on the AlumniPortal using icons from SDG 2 focused on eliminating hunger and offered updates on the alumni who received support to realise their projects (Pfänder, 2023). Sweden and Denmark's response to global alumni networks are narrow in scope, focusing on those that received scholarships or fellowships from the global South to study at postgraduate level in the respective countries. The focus of the alumni volunteer-led chapters in countries of origin is to encourage these groups to advance work that addresses the SDGs and embodies the country's values.

While the UK organises alumni networks for prestigious scholarships, such as the Chevening Awards alumni, the focus of this study is the British Council supported Alumni UK programme, open to former UK international students. The focus of this entirely online network is alumni career support and

skills development through virtual professional development events, such as the annual Alumni UK Live festival as '…an unmissable opportunity to upskill and stay competitive in today's job market' (Alumni UK a, 2024). As of December 2024, Ireland supports smaller global alumni efforts, including the Kader Asmal Alumni (KAA) highlighted here as part of this study. The KAA is a network of South African alumni who studied in an Irish higher education institution (HEI) on a postgraduate scholarship supported by the Irish government, as part of the Ireland Fellows Programme (Gallo, 2019). As a volunteer-led alumni network, the KAA focuses on career development and networking between members.

Epistemic communities and thought collective – a framework to view the social class positioning of global alumni networks

This article employs the concept of epistemic communities as a heuristic device to explore and interrogate the potential and the existing operations of alumni volunteering efforts in global alumni networks. A concept for international relations, epistemic communities can be defined as:

> "networks - often transnational - of knowledge-based experts with an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within their domain of expertise. Their members share knowledge about the causation of social or physical phenomena in an area for which they have a reputation for competence, and a common set of normative beliefs about what actions will benefit human welfare in such a domain" (Haas, 2001: 11579).

This draws on Peter Haas' seminal definition of epistemic communities as networks with the four components:

> 1. "A shared set of normative and principled beliefs which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members;
> 2. Shared causal beliefs which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes;

3. Shared notions of validity, that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and
4. A common policy enterprise, or a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence" (Haas, 1992: 3).

These four components act as a framework to analyse the case study global alumni networks, with activity defined to support public diplomacy and creating this collective social class. Drawing on these definitions they are reconceptualised for this study as:

1. values for social action;
2. shared problems and exploring shared solutions;
3. shared understanding of knowledge within the group;
4. shared focus to enhance local communities and global society.

As it is recognised that global alumni networks have a place to actively engage in public diplomacy (Rincón and Rutkowski, 2015) and 'citizen activism' (Campbell and Baxter, 2019), this article is an opportunity to put a conceptual shape on the trend for these networks as a platform for civic action and interrogating social class.

Values for social action – the case of AlumniPortal Deutschland

Global Goals, Powered by Alumni was the title of the report published by the funders of the AlumniPortal Deutschland (AlumniPortal Deutschland, 2018). This report featured alumni vignettes that show the ways alumni are contributing to the delivery of the SDGs. With the SDGs as a key national priority, the AlumniPortal Deutschland offers collaborative online events using design thinking to consider some of these shared problems related to sustainability to begin to collectively identify possible solutions. These events are open and promoted to all Germany alumni in order to gather a transdisciplinary group of alumni from engineers to project managers to art practitioners to those with business development or marketing expertise to consider solutions drawing on

SDG targets. These initial collective project ideas demonstrated the AlumniPortal global reach and projects that involved the AlumniPortal industry partners aligned to German values. For example, the AlumniPortal promoted the Alumni Network and Support for African Participation (ANSAP) project as part of the 'Green People's Energy for Africa' project (Grüne Bürgerenergie Für Afrika) in partnership with Renac-Renewables Academy, an AlumniPortal partner, GIZ - the German Development Agency and financed by the BMZ - the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Renac-Renewables Academy, 2025). These projects offer a collective view of shared values, and the social class positioning of shared influence - regardless of academic discipline or country of origin - to participate as the shared status of Germany alumni.

Shared problems and exploring shared solutions – the case of Kader Asmal Alumni

The Ireland Fellows Programme (IFP) has three aims: to nurture future leaders; to develop in-country capacity to achieve the SDGs and to build positive relationships with Ireland (Irish Aid, 2024). Alumni returning to South Africa after completing the Kader Asmal Fellowship as part of the IFP, self-organised into a network to solve a problem. After returning from Ireland, the small group of alumni recognised the shared challenge of finding employment in South Africa that aligned to their educational experience in sustainable development, agriculture, gender equality and other social impact fields. In 2018, to solve this problem, the group created a KAA directory, an online booklet that offered individual biographies of each alum featuring their Irish postgraduate study, interests, and work experience (Gallo, 2019). This directory enabled alumni to be advocates for each other, offering referrals and helping to find meaningful work linked to social impact. As the network grew and formalised, the KAA also extended this support with skills development workshops, mentorship, and professional development. The KAA network created a community focused on a shared social class. They offer peer support for social impact opportunities in South Africa, even involving current Kader Asmal Fellows to connect with the KAA so that they know what to expect in being part of the network post-graduation.

Shared understanding of knowledge – the case of Danida Alumni Network, Denmark

Denmark alumni are a narrow group of former scholarship recipients supported through the Danida Fellowship Centre (DFC) (2021). The DFC strategic plan that focuses on collective knowledge in action and fostering active global citizens, drawing on the SDGs and themes including green solutions, inclusiveness, and durability, which they summarise as 'inspire, connect, act' (Ibid.). The Alumni Network is viewed as an integral part of achieving the aims of the DFC strategy, a '…platform for cross-sector and cross-country connections and knowledge sharing as well as for fostering multidisciplinary approaches to solving complex problems. Local alumni networks within the global network connect in-country members' (Ibid.). The focus of alumni networks is on building capacity and energising alumni volunteer leaders to build country networks, thematic learning circles and ultimately communities of practice (CoP), defined as: '…groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

To motivate deep volunteer involvement, two alumni leaders from each regional or country chapter networks participated in the Danida Alumni Network Community of Practice Workshop (CoP workshop) held in Tanzania in February 2024 (Vlemmings, 2024). The emphasis of these country alumni networks is to harness their energy to identify projects and initiatives that bring about learning and community change. Therefore, DFC staff consider themselves as participating members of these CoPs; the DFC aims to be less of a 'gatekeeper', moving away from the DFC as donor to one of enabler for the global alumni networks at local level. The CoP Workshop was described as '..a platform for cross-cultural exchange and inspiration, transcending geographical boundaries in pursuit of common goals.' (Ibid.) To evaluate the impact of this new alumni strategy, DFC intend administering an annual alumni survey to assess how the alumni-led format remains mutually beneficial for alumni and Danish public diplomacy. Knowledge-sharing between alumni - on sustainability issues and on local event success - creates a shared social class amongst the Danida alumni.

Shared focus to enhance local communities and global society – the case of the Swedish Institute Alumni

For years, the Swedish Institute (SI) has certified volunteer-led alumni networks around the world comprised of former international students, primarily from the global South, who received scholarships to study in Sweden, 51 in total in 2024 (Swedish Institute a, 2024). In this model, the purpose of certification was initially to enable these recognised alumni networks to apply for funding to organise events. Upon review, SI no longer offers project funding directly to local alumni networks, as the work was highly administrative (for each event or project) for little funding. Instead, SI alumni networks facilitated a process where local alumni networks and embassies work together to create a plan of actions and events, with the embassy then applying for the funding to realise these initiatives.

Unlike traditional alumni reunion or social occasions, these alumni events focus on an alignment to Swedish values such as sustainability or equality and for multiple purposes. First, solidifying the shared focus of Swedish values and educational experience among alumni in their country of return. Second, these local events showcased the experiences of alumni post-graduation, highlighting the global impact of Swedish education. Finally, events offered a platform to initiate a collective alumni social action within local communities. For example, Sweden alumni in Mumbai India organised a plogging event – picking up litter and jogging – at a local beach, while alumni in Ethiopia held a #GlobalGuyTalk event, bringing alumni together with a SI supported script of questions to discuss issues of gender equality (Swedish Institute b, 2024).

SI alumni local leaders who operate local networks are invited to participate in an annual alumni leader meeting event in Sweden to share experiences and be updated on the latest SI activities. This serves as stewardship and gratitude for alumni leadership, and the collective nature of sharing a 'think global, act local' mindset. Each local alumni network chooses one board member to travel to Sweden for the meeting which is held in advance of SI's Inspiration Day where diplomas are awarded to current scholarship winners, thus enabling alumni to attend this important occasion. This creates a leadership skills development event for alumni, and an event to showcase the alumni impact to the most recent SI scholarship winners. In 2023, SI launched the alumni

academy, offering online programming for SI alumni including professional development, capacity building, mentorship and 'career boost sessions' (Swedish Institute c, 2024). This extended programming offers SI alumni with an anchor of Swedish education to imprint values to bring further influence on local communities.

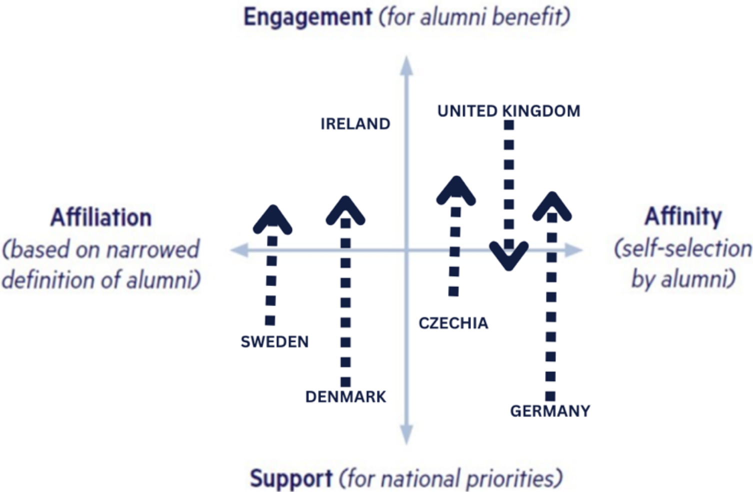
Rethinking Global Alumni Networks: national priorities, mutual benefits, and a question of social class

Activating global alumni networks that focus on national priorities as the driver for their work post-COVID, recognise the importance of developing activities that have a mutually beneficial value proposition for the country but also for the alumni themselves. Higher education, especially for scholarship or fellowship awardees from the global South, may have social action drivers at their heart, but students also recognise the value of advancing and benefitting from social mobility that comes through higher education (Ingram et al., 2023).

Figure 3 presents the most recent research on global alumni networks from 2024. While the case studies continue to be anchored in national priorities, there is a movement for the networks to offer initiatives that contribute to social class mobility, such as through career support and professional development programmes. The research suggests that global alumni networks have shifted from their anchor location on the Global Alumni Network Matrix, as depicted in Figure 2 and with the country name in Figure 3. The arrow in Figure 3, moving a country from one quadrant of the matrix to another, shows how the alumni network's programming is shifting from broad-based priority work to supporting individual alumni with social class mobility, such as with alumni career, leadership and professional development opportunities. The networks have recognised that by supporting individual alumni development the result is that these alumni are in an even better position to advocate for the anchor values and national priorities of the global alumni network. As a further extension, these alumni - demonstrating their voluntary action and impact as accomplished leaders and experts in their respective fields - become social mobility role models, encouraging others from their community to consider studying in the same country.

The Alumni UK in Figure 3, original to this article, offers the converse of other networks. First, Alumni UK focused on supporting international alumni in their early career aspirations, moving in 2024 to a call for alumni ambassadors by region and to advocate for the SDGs. These ambassadors contribute to supporting networking events and British Council international student recruitment promotional activities (Alumni UK b, 2024).

Figure 3: The Shift in Global Alumni Networks Aims Supporting Social Class Ideals



As these global alumni networks mature, they become more fluid in their purpose. They move from a focus on national priorities to one building of social class of higher education alumni who, by virtual of this individual support, become a collective group of advocates and ambassadors for their country of study and social changemakers in their local communities.

Summary: Global Alumni Networks as a Thought Collective

In his seminal book, originally published in German in 1935, *Genesis and Development of Scientific Fact,* Ludvik Fleck presents the concept of the thought collective. Fleck defines the thought collective as:

> "a community of persons mutually exchanging ideas or maintaining intellectual interaction, we will find by implication that it also provides the special 'carrier' for the historical development of any field of thought, as well as for the given stock of knowledge and level of culture" (Fleck, 1979: 39).

This definition offers a heuristic device to view global alumni networks and its alumni-led social impact collective activity driven through global alumni networks. As cited by Fleck and consistent with the purpose of the global alumni networks is: 'the end goal is always for the betterment of society, rather than self-gain of the communities themselves' (Ibid.). In the 2024 research on global alumni networks there was a recognition of the cohesive potential of these networks to respond to some of the greatest challenges on the planet by addressing the SDG targets. The research suggests the global alumni networks create the conditions for this thought collective, encouraging an exchange of ideas that align to a country of study's values, such as gender equality, addressing climate change through sustainability measures and other SDG-aligned ideas. In this research, one KAA alum described the potential of the global alumni network as a 'thinking community' that is, a collective group open with shared values to think and act on the needs of the local community.

Global alumni networks are a collective that embody the aspirations of a country's higher education system: to create ambitious, engaged and mobilised graduates. These alumni collectively organised through the alumni network (and regional alumni chapters in cities and countries worldwide) are motivated to promote key country-of-study values, raise awareness of global issues and act locally as global alumni citizens. For instance, the Danida Alumni Network is drawing its work on alumni leadership from *Knowledge in Action*, the Danida Fellowship Centre's Strategic Plan, that embodies the ambition 'to prepare individuals to act as change agents who contribute to transforming their

organisations and communities through new knowledge, skills, motivation, inspiration and networks' (DFC, 2021: 2).

As global alumni networks mature, the research suggests that the new focus on capacity building and leadership development of alumni enables them to be equipped with a country's development education values - such as investigating the root causes of inequality. Alumni engaged in these networks create local epistemic communities to raise awareness of global issues through local actions, events, debates and platforms for discussion. The thought collective nature of global alumni networks enables alumni from different academic disciplines to contribute to different topics and find convergence and even consider ways to tackle SDG-related targets in their local communities contributing from their own perspectives and areas of expertise. While the set-up of global alumni networks may come from a different starting point, for a specific group of alumni or with a national focus in mind, the convergence in the collective social class and mobility that comes from this shared educational experience.

As governments and key national agencies continue the trend of building global alumni networks, this article shows the importance of a balanced purpose in its approach. On one hand the design of a global alumni network needs to reinforce the country's national priorities including internationalisation of education. On the other hand, national priorities of showing how international education (and in some cases scholarship alumni from the global South) is having an impact on sustainability and equality agendas aligned to the SDGs. This delicate balance is only fruitful for global alumni networks when the dimension of professional development and leadership support allow alumni to be better informed, equipped, build their careers to be recruitment ambassadors, change agents, equality champions and sustainability leaders. Global alumni networks create a cascade effect: offering lifelong support to alumni contributes to social class mobility, thus leading to the building of 'thinking communities' of active global alumni citizens.

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Viewpoint

Class Divided: Social-emotional Learning and the Erosion of Solidarity

Audrey Bryan and Yoko Mochizuki

Abstract: This Viewpoint article addresses the implications of social-emotional learning (SEL) for development education as an educational process concerned with illuminating the structural and political dimensions of social and global injustices. Recent years have witnessed a growing policy preoccupation with SEL - a movement that stresses the learnability and malleability of non-cognitive skills such as 'achievement motivation', 'well-being', 'curiosity', 'empathy', 'compassion', 'self-regulation', 'grit' and 'resilience'. Having briefly traced the economisitic, productivist, and human capital underpinnings of SEL, we then draw on the OECD's recent assessment of social-emotional skills to demonstrate how the framing of 'disadvantaged' students as lacking in social-emotional skills has a dehumanising and solidarity-eroding effect that positions them as undeserving and a threat to society. We urge those working in the development education sector to actively resist SEL and the wider neuro-affective turn that is increasingly evident in global citizenship education policy and practice.

Key words: Development Education; Global Citizenship Education; Social Class; Social- Emotional Learning; Social-Emotional Skills; Neuro-affective Turn; OECD; Solidarity.

Introduction: Education's neuro-affective turn

This Viewpoint article offers a critique of the growing influence of biological and neurologically-inflected perspectives on educational policies and practices, with a particular emphasis on the implications of this neuro-affective turn (Yliniva, Bryan and Brunila, 2024) for development education's socially transformative agenda. Education's neuro-affective turn is being facilitated by medical and technological advancements in *inter alia* genetics, brain imaging and the neurosciences, the 'big data' revolution, digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI), the so-called 'learning

sciences' and allied approaches (Williamson, 2023). One of its clearest manifestations is the emergence of social-emotional learning (hereafter SEL) as a 'zeitgeist' that has been capturing the imagination of academics, policymakers and practitioners alike since the new millennium (Humphrey, 2013: 1), including in development education circles (Bryan, 2022; Mochizuki, 2023). SEL is an umbrella term for an ever-expanding set of 'non-cognitive' or 'human-centric' capacities or 'skills' that are believed to be critical to the development of 'well-rounded citizens who are equipped to tackle 21st century challenges' (OECD, 2024a: 4).

SEL stresses the learnability and malleability of non-cognitive skills such as 'achievement motivation', 'well-being', 'curiosity', 'empathy', 'compassion', 'self-regulation', 'grit' and 'resilience'. Whereas SEL's roots lie in economisitic, productivist, and human capital arguments (Michel, 2013), the SEL community is far from monolithic and is 'constituted by an expanding infrastructure of technologies, metrics, people, money and policies' (Williamson, 2021: 129). Reflecting this heterogeneity, different individuals or organisations that promote SEL may prioritise specific social-emotional skills that align with their values, mission and ontological perspectives about education's purpose.

Despite the SEL community's heterogeneity, SEL advocates often speak with similar missionary zeal about the potential of SEL to transform educational experiences, outcomes and systems, as well as major societal or global-level transformations. A recently published UNESCO policy guidance document on 'mainstreaming SEL in education systems', for example, is designed to '[provide] policy-makers with …guidance to facilitate their conceptualization and integration of SEL in all facets of their education systems to build long-lasting peace and sustainable development' (UNESCO, 2024, n.p.). It 'highlights the impact of SEL in improving academic achievement, reducing drop-out rates, and improving overall mental health and well-being, and…in strengthening emotional and relational dynamics of classrooms, schools, communities, and societies' (Ibid.).

Whereas SEL advocates often frame SEL as a magic bullet that has the potential to improve academic performance, mental health and prospects for peace and non-violence, the more pernicious effects of this zeitgeist remain under-

explored. SEL is closely aligned with global citizenship education, and is often equated with 'values education', 'character education', and explicitly to democratic and collective priorities, such as peaceful co-existence and stable democratic society based on diverse identities (OECD, 2024b). This article builds on our earlier published work illuminating the depoliticising effects of SEL for global citizenship education, whereby structural analyses are being displaced in favour of decontextualised, brain-based understandings of social and global injustices (e.g., Bryan, 2024; Mochizuki, 2023). In keeping with the theme of the current issue of *Policy and Practice* on 'Development Education and Class', we ask: what are the consequences of portraying poor and low-income children as universally less socially and emotionally competent than their peers from more socio-economically advantaged backgrounds? Unpacking the ontological assumptions underpinning SEL, we consider the role of the OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) in mobilising pseudoscientific discourses which universally denigrate and dehumanise children and families from low socio-economic backgrounds (e.g., Busso and Pollack, 2014; Mochizuki, Vickers and Bryan, 2022; Skourdoumbis and Rowe, 2024). Taking inspiration from Banting and Kymlicka (2017), who identify relations of civic, democratic and redistributive solidarity as necessary conditions for a socially just society, we argue that the denigration of the moral character of children and families from poor and working-class backgrounds erodes solidaristic principles of mutual acceptance, cooperation and support for equality of socio-economically marginalised groups.

'The scarce resource is love and parenting - not money'

Once regarded as a private matter and thus largely irrelevant to education, the cultivation and measurement of specific emotional capacities has become a major policy preoccupation in recent years (Bryan, 2022; Williamson, 2021). This is evidenced by a proliferation of programmes concerned with the promotion of wellbeing, mindfulness, and SEL, as well as the advocacy of AI-enabled personalised learning and advanced technologies that measure students' affective states and capacities using physiological or 'bio' data. SEL's roots can be traced to wider political efforts of the 1960s to address social issues and undesired behaviours associated with economically disadvantaged and racially minoritised groups. Education came to be viewed as central to the delivery of preventative programming for 'at risk' groups in order to 'help them develop socially acceptable

skills they were perceived to be deficient in' (Dalrymple and Phillips, 2024: 345). As neoliberal globalisation intensified in the 1990s, policymakers became increasingly concerned with how best to prepare students for an increasingly completive global marketplace, which paves the way for non-cognitive or social-emotional skills to become a major field of inquiry.

One of the most vocal proponents of SEL is the Nobel Laureate Professor James Heckman, world renowned economist and founder of the Centre for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago. Heckman effectively operates as a 'one-man institute' (Michel, 2013: 368) extolling the benefits of noncognitive skills and preschool education on efficiency and productivity (rather than intrinsic or social justice) grounds. Central to Heckman's advocacy is the case for 'predistribution not redistribution', a pay now versus later scenario resulting in greater productivity and reduced social spending via early intervention (Heckman, 2012: n.p.). As Heckman (2012, n.p.) puts it:

> "There are many calls to redistribute income to address poverty and promote social mobility. .....*[P]redistribution* - improving the early lives of disadvantaged children - is far more effective than simple redistribution in promoting social inclusion and, at the same time, at promoting economic efficiency and workforce productivity. Predistributional policies are both fair and economically efficient".

Heckman's website - like his writing more generally - reflects a considered effort to make his findings amenable, relatable and engaging to policymakers and non-scientific audiences. The use of catchy titles (e.g., 'hard evidence on soft skills'), memorable phrases and slogans (e.g., 'skills beget skills'), simplifying models (e.g., 'The Heckman Equation'), dramatic visualisations (e.g., 'neglected brains'), etc. is designed to predispose decision-makers to prioritise early intervention and the cultivation of non-cognitive or 'soft skills', over redistributive approaches to social inclusion. His website contains an abundance of resources on how to make the case for early intervention, including sample content for those seeking to 'make [their] case on social media' (Heckman, 2024, n.p.).

Influenced by neuroscientific discoveries about the criticality of the first three years of life for brain development and the importance of 'enriching environments' for nurturing the brain's synapses (Heckman, 2008), Heckman maintains that '[g]iving families more money is not the same as enhancing the quality of the environments of disadvantaged children' and that '[t]he scarce resource is love and parenting - not money' (Heckman, 2012: n.p.). The claim that parents living in 'disadvantaged' circumstances do not sufficiently love or effectively parent their children has a pathologising and dehumanising effect. It perpetuates a deficit discourse, reminiscent of the culture of poverty thesis, which defines children from disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of what they lack, and ultimately responsibilises them for their children's underachievement.

Heckman's advocacy of focused resource allocation in the earliest years of a child's life downplays the role of social institutions in shaping the life chances of children (Lareau, 2011). Specifically, it overlooks the cumulative advantages afforded to middle-class children, whose class privilege gives them a competitive advantage over poorer families from an early age, not least because their parents' childrearing practices are aligned with institutional norms, standards and values (Ibid.). Focusing on distributive early intervention measures while failing to address the unequal distribution of material, social and cultural capital or to implement redistributive policies in other domains (such as employment, health and housing) (Cantillon and Van Lancker, 2013) arguably sets poor and working-class families up to fail.

Despite the limitations of Heckman's social investment paradigm, his research has been widely deployed to legitimise a paradigm shift away from welfare-based policies based on principles of shared responsibility, universal protection and equality of outcome, towards early years' interventions concerned with identifying and prioritising individual risk factors and equalising opportunities (Gillies, Edwards and Horsley, 2017). It has further helped to generate a consensus among international organisations such as the UN (United Nations) and World Bank about the importance of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) - and on what parents can do to 'optimise' their children's development - in order to level the playing field and create equal opportunities for children (Morabito, Vandenbroeck and Roose, 2013).

The World Bank has been particularly active in extending Heckman's policy recommendations to the global South, as part of its wider investment in human capital strategy, with a view to improving young children's school readiness and laying the foundations for academic success and participation in the global economy (Mahon, 2016). In a recent *Background Paper for the International Congress on Brain Sciences, Early Childhood Care and Education*, UNESCO invokes Heckman's research as a 'groundbreaking economic framework that transformed how ECCE is valued globally' and attributes his work with having shifted 'public policy and increasing investment in ECCE, framing it as a developmental necessity and an economic imperative with far-reaching societal benefits' (UNESCO, 2024: 7). This instrumentalist framing of education is remarkable for an agency whose distinguishing feature has been its recognition of the 'intrinsic' value of education and its role in realising human potential and human emancipation, dialogue and international cooperation (Elfert, 2018). As Michel (2013: 380) puts it:

> "[W]hile stigmatizing and instrumentalizing the poor, [the social investment] rationale appeals rather baldly to the self-interest of the middle class - the taxpayers - by assuring them that investment in [Early Childhood Education and Care] will protect them from the harm and expense of crime and social deviancy. Such a rationale degrades social politics and widens the gap in an already class-divided polity".

The remainder of the article considers the role of recent attempts to assess SEL in exacerbating social divisions along class lines, and what this means in terms of development education's role in forging relations of solidarity and social justice.

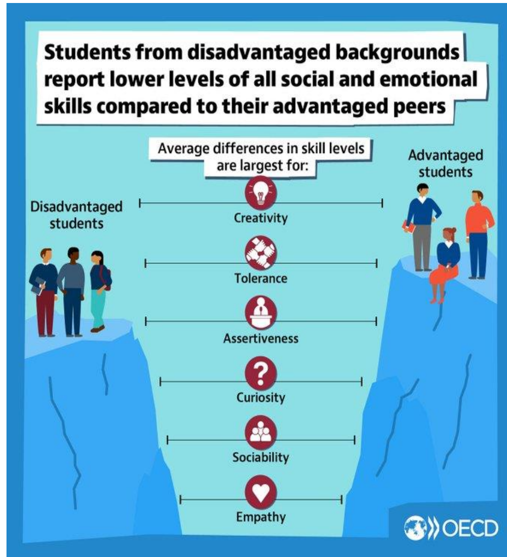
The OECD's Survey of Social and Emotional Skills: 'Social and Emotional Skills for Better Lives'?

First conducted in 2019 in 10 cities from around the world, the OECD's survey on social and emotional skills (SSES) represents 'the largest global initiative to gather comparable data on the development of social and emotional skills - including creativity, empathy, achievement motivation, responsibility and

collaboration skills - among 10- and 15-year-old students' (OECD, 2024b: 155). A key report outlining findings from the second round of the survey, which was carried out in 2023, entitled *Social and Emotional Skills for Better Lives,* explains that '…students' social and emotional skills - or 21st century skills - are linked to better life outcomes, including academic success, greater life satisfaction, healthier behaviours, less test and class anxiety, and more ambitious career plans' (OECD, 2024a: 156). Reflecting the fact that new media technologies have become a core element of the policy pipeline in education, providing reach for international organisations' ideas, findings from the survey have been widely circulated by the OECD on social media (Barnes, Watson and MacRae, 2022).

One such infographic that has been repeatedly circulated on platforms such as Twitter/X and LinkedIn, visually depicts 'lower levels of all social and emotional skills compared to their advantaged peers' accompanied by the text 'What's the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on social and emotional skills? Not good. Having a disadvantaged background can take a toll on creativity. Other skills are also impacted: tolerance, curiosity, sociability and empathy' (see Figure 1). The designation of dis/advantaged status is based on a crude measure comprising parental occupation, educational attainment and possession of certain items in the home. The image depicts 'disadvantaged students' and 'advantaged students' positioned on their respective cliff edges separated by a vast chasm. The caption, which reads 'students from disadvantaged backgrounds report lower levels of all social and emotional skills compared to their advantaged peers', reinforces this binary by defining students from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' in terms of the social-emotional skills they lack, relative to their advantaged peers.

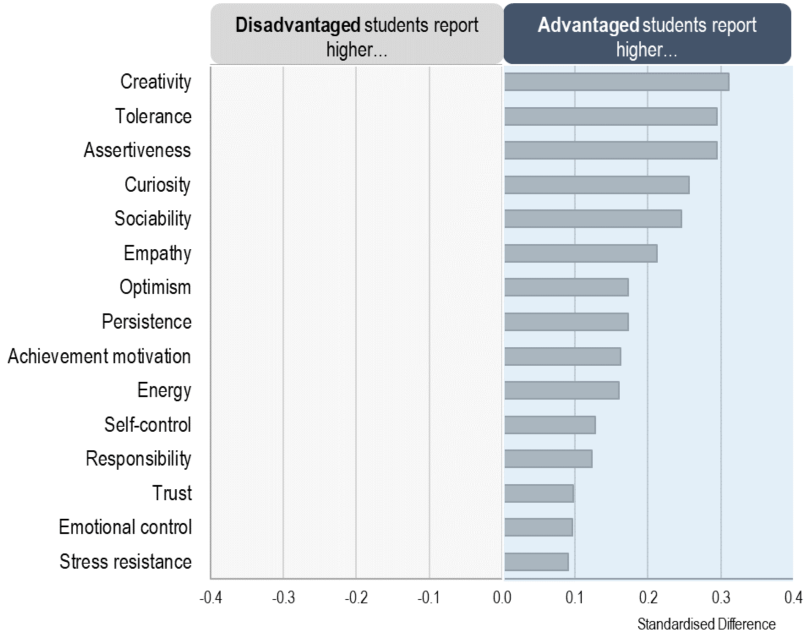
Figure 1: OECD Survey of Social and Emotional Skills Infographic posted on Twitter by OECD Education, 28 August 2024.



As shown in Figure 2, a similarly stark pattern is depicted in the visual representations of how social emotional skills are distributed by socio-economic status in a written report outlining these findings. The text of the report presents a more nuanced picture of the disparity between advantaged and disadvantaged students, stating, for example, that '…it is not inevitable that disadvantaged students will have poorer outcomes. Behind the averages, there are many disadvantaged students who report high levels of skills, comparable to how many disadvantaged students achieve academic success' (OECD, 2024a: 47). The OECD attributes the gap to 'different access to social and emotional learning opportunities both in and outside school' (OECD, 2024b: 25). From a policy perspective, the OECD report recommends such measures as 'support[ing] students' extra-curricular engagement' (OECD, 2024b: 62) by 'integrating extracurricular activities in school structures' (Ibid.: 33) as well as giving them an 'extra boost of social and emotional skills outside schools and homes'; improving school experiences for those who report less sense of belonging at school and

'cultivating optimism' to improve student well-being and health outcomes (Ibid.: 57).

Figure 2: 'Standardised differences between the scores of the advantaged and disadvantaged 15-year-old students, average across sites' (OECD, 2024a: 45).



While recognising that 'students with less advantaged backgrounds have more challenges to overcome and fewer opportunities…to develop these skills' (OECD, 2021: 4), the ontological assumption underpinning SEL maintains that the causes of educational underachievement reside *inside* poor and working-class students themselves. Against the backdrop of a logic which presupposes that all learners can acquire the requisite social-emotional skills needed to thrive in the 21st century, findings of this nature arguably implicitly position those from lower socio-economic backgrounds as undeserving of care, rights, or justice. Sociological research consistently highlights the impossibility of equalising educational

outcomes in the absence of more fundamental re-distributive measures which tackle unequal opportunities at their source (e.g., Lynch, 2000). SEL programming, however, is focused on altering mindsets and changing culture (see e.g., Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2017) rather than the social structures and institutions that maintain inequality in the first instance. This approach ignores far messier social and contextual realities, such as an uneven distribution of educational and societal resources that produces differential outcomes and results in very different experiences of the education system for students from different social class backgrounds (Gruijters, Raabe, and Hübner, 2024). For example, as McDermott and Nygreen (2013) suggest, no amount of SEL programming for children from poor and working-class backgrounds will prevent middle- and upper-income parents from acting in ways that preserve their children's relative advantages. In other words, the logic underpinning SEL perpetuates existing dynamics of social power and privilege by undermining the role that structural forces play in shaping different educational experiences and outcomes (Zembylas, 2024).

Moreover, with an ever-increasing number of character traits and affective capacities being added to the list of human-centric skills believed to distinguish humans from artificial forms of intelligence such as tolerance, empathy, compassion, responsibility etc., those who lack these 'skills' are implicitly framed in deficit terms as *less* human or *less than* human. As Popkewitz (2023: 1) informs us, accounts of student performance and characteristics are not merely descriptive; rather '[t]hey embody desires as normative inscriptions of who students are, should be, and the dangerous populations threatening the imagined future'. While enabling the OECD to expand the scope of its measurement and bolster its moral legitimacy (Auld and Morris, 2019; Kim, 2024), the production of 'evidence' and 'facts' about the character traits of particular population sub-groups has material consequences for people's lives. These 'facts' are especially pertinent against the backdrop of neoliberalist societal re-stratification, with its attendant emphasis on workfare, welfare conditionality, self-help and charity (Powell, Scanlon, Leahy, Jenkinson and Byrne, 2024). The use of evidence that frames an entire sub-group as substantially *less* creative, *less* empathetic, *less* tolerant etc. reinforces a problematic dichotomy between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' populations and

normalises ideologies of '(un)deservingness' where access to resources, rights, and entitlements are concerned (Toši and Streinzer, 2022:2). This ideology in turn legitimises the hollowing out the welfare state and excuses the social consequences of inequality (Powell, Scanlon, Leahy, Jenkinson and Byrne, 2024).

Conclusion: reclaiming development education

Animated by rapidly evolving EdTech and AI industries and a shifting global governance landscape that is challenging the traditional role of governments and international organisations in educational policy-formation, education's neuro-affective turn has the potential to fundamentally reshape understandings of education, teacher-student relationships and conceptualisations of the ideal learner. Existing research suggests that global citizenship education's increasing alignment with SEL is concerning, not least because it has a major depoliticising effect that forestalls political dialogue and undermines an appreciation of the material and economic determinants of various local and global injustices (Bryan, 2022; Bryan and Mochizuki, 2023). Global citizenship education scholars who are critical of SEL maintain that it is fundamentally incompatible with development education because it promotes individualism over collectivism, privileges civility over conflict, advances personally responsible citizenship, and conditions learners to adapt to existing socio-ecological realities, leaving them ill-equipped to take action to address the root causes of social and global injustice (Bryan and Mochizuki, 2023; Clark, Chrisman, and Lewis, 2022; Keegan, 2023; Yliniva, Bryan and Brunila, 2024).

This article extends this critique to address the othering and stigmatising effects of SEL for development education's radical agenda of cultivating politically engaged, self-reflexive global citizens who have a deep understanding of power and politics and who are firmly committed to working collectively toward fundamental change. Specifically, we argue that the portrayal of 'students from disadvantaged backgrounds' as universally lacking in key twenty-first century competencies and capacities has a dehumanising effect that destabilises collectivist values and normalises ideologies of (un)deservingness to societal resources and entitlements (Toši and Streinzer, 2022). Stated another way, this deficit-based framing of disadvantaged students exacerbates exclusion by undermining solidaristic attitudes of mutual concern, acceptance and support for socio-

economically marginalised groups that are vital to building and sustaining a just society and fulfilling the demands of justice. Specifically, this polarising logic - which discursively positions disadvantaged and advantaged students on opposite sides of a social-emotional cliff face - creates the conditions for a hardening of attitudes towards 'disadvantaged' groups and promotes the view that they deserve their lot in life (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017). The ideology of (un)deservingness that it reflects intersects with a range of other beliefs about the extent to which 'the disadvantaged' actually belong in a shared society, the extent to which they are seen as likely to help others in need, and the extent to which they are perceived as grateful for what they receive.

Whereas deficit framings of working class and minoritised students have a lengthy history, they are taking on much greater significance in an era of AI wherein skills such as empathy, tolerance, compassion etc. are increasingly identified as the very things or qualities that distinguish humans from machines. To portray students from disadvantaged backgrounds as universally possessing *less* of the distinguishing capacities that make people human perpetuates a demonising and othering logic that sows the seeds of class division, rather than the solidarity so desperately required to meaningfully address the problems that define the twenty-first century, such as worsening ecological crises, mass displacement, rising inequality, authoritarian populism, civil unrest and war. In other words, this dehumanising logic militates against the forging of relations of solidarity which would enable people to work across *inter alia* racial, ethnic, class divisions to act collectively towards social transformation. To prevent further deradicalisation of the development education sector (Bryan and Mochizuki, 2023), we must pay close attention to how SEL is being operationalised, weaponised and invoked in the name of global citizenship education and ensure that all forms of solidarity - including solidarity with poor and working-class communities - remain at the forefront of our pedagogical efforts to bring about social and global transformation.

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Paulo Freire's Legacy and Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times

Henry A. Giroux

As democracy trembles on the edge, its foundations battered across the globe, education rises as the heart of the struggle - a pulse that beats with the promise of freedom and the resilience of knowledge and empowerment. It is no coincidence that education, both within schools and through the powerful currents of culture, serves as a seedbed for fostering engaged citizens, cultivating critical thought, and sowing the hopes of a more just and compassionate future. Democracy breathes through the presence of such citizens - a radical notion, particularly in a world where manufactured ignorance shores up authoritarian might. To think freely has become an act of defiance and danger, and the very spaces that sustain this freedom are besieged by the relentless advances of fascist forces. In these dark times, we are called to draw deeply from the wellspring of history, reclaiming its legacy of struggle and its audacious visions of hope. This call brings us back to the enduring work of Paulo Freire, one of the most prophetic educators of the last century, whose teachings remain a beacon for those who dare to imagine and build a world beyond oppression.

Paulo Freire, the radical Brazilian educator, was not just an academic but a revolutionary, a fierce advocate for the oppressed, whose lifelong struggle for economic, educational, and social justice has left an indelible mark on generations of teachers, students, and cultural workers worldwide. His seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), written under the brutal political repression of 1960s Brazil, resonates even more today amid the global rise of authoritarianism and attacks on critical thought. Freire understood that education is never neutral; it is inherently a political act. It either liberates or domesticates, empowers or subjugates.

Born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil, Freire's experiences of poverty and inequality shaped his commitment to the oppressed. Deeply influenced by liberation theology, he pioneered an emancipatory pedagogy rooted in critical literacy - a tool not only for understanding the world but for transforming it. After the military coup in Brazil in 1964, Freire was imprisoned for 70 days and exiled

for nearly two decades. Even upon his return to Brazil in 1980, his activism persisted, making him a tireless voice for the marginalized until his death on 2 May 1997. As a close friend and collaborator of Paulo for fifteen years, starting in 1980, I saw firsthand his steadfast belief that democratizing education is at the heart of political resistance. Today, as neoliberal and authoritarian regimes worldwide seek to suppress critical thought and destroy public and higher education as a crucial public good, Freire's ideas have become more vital than ever. In these perilous times, his work is not merely relevant - it is a radical call to action. As fascism resurges globally and civic culture collapses under the weight of manufactured ignorance, merely remembering Freire is insufficient. We must reclaim his legacy as a rallying cry for resistance and rebellion (Giroux and DiMaggio, 2024).

Freire understood that education and politics are inseparable; teaching critically is an act of defiance and a direct challenge to oppression. He envisioned pedagogy as a practice of freedom - one that is deeply egalitarian and aims to overthrow capitalism, not simply reform it (Freire, 2000). He opposed not only the repressive pedagogies of his time but also the broader political and economic systems that imposed authoritarian ideologies on society. Freire's vision of pedagogy as a practice of freedom embraced dissent as a fundamental right, challenging dominant norms while promoting social and economic equality and human liberation (Aronowitz, 2008).

Freire's pedagogy is a living project of freedom, not a sterile method or a simple set of classroom techniques. He saw critical pedagogy as a deeply theoretical, intellectual, and ethical project, intertwined with larger struggles for educational, economic, and political transformation. Unlike many critics who reduced Freire's approach to a method, his vision extends far beyond technical skills. It is rooted in a radical democratic humanism where the process of education aligns with the broader goal of achieving equality, justice, and freedom. He believed that genuine transformation requires democratic practices, involving participatory engagement between teachers and students. This perspective contrasts sharply with dominant educational models that prioritise hierarchical relationships, banking forms of education, teaching for the test, and repressive forms of discipline. Freire's notion of pedagogy was not only egalitarian, it took

matters of history, contexts, and the voices of the oppressed as a starting point for a liberatory pedagogy (Leonard and McLaren, 2015).

Freire's early work in Brazil's rural northeast region exemplified his belief in the capacity of semi-literate people to possess meaningful knowledge, rather than be trained in methods. Rejecting an unquestioning notion of teacher authority, he developed a model where the teacher was not an authoritarian figure but a co-investigator alongside students. This model emphasised a dialectical relationship between teacher and student, where both parties contributed to the production of knowledge. The teacher brought theoretical and philosophical insights, while students offered rich insights from their lived experiences. Freire argued that education, in this sense, is a dialogic process that involves a reciprocal exchange of ideas aimed at uncovering and challenging the socio-political conditions that maintain inequality and diverse forms of oppression.

In the realm of critical pedagogy, Freire demanded that educators do far more than transmit knowledge; they must ignite a fire of critical consciousness in students, a passion for confronting the urgent social injustices of their time, and a readiness to become active, fearless agents of change. Freire's vision was revolutionary - empowering students to see through the veils of power that shape their lives and to seize this awareness as a weapon to reshape their own realities. He championed informed dialogue and critical consciousness as the very essence of liberation, rejecting the suffocating dictates of top-down education, where knowledge is imposed upon allegedly passive minds. For Freire, the classroom was a space where knowledge is collectively constructed and where students learn to question the ideologies that sustain their oppression.

Freire was more than an intellectual - he was a revolutionary whose work provides both a profound analysis and a concrete path to liberation. He recognised that justice requires informed action and that education, inherently political, is the key to empowering individuals to reflect, take control of their lives, and critically engage in the struggle for power, agency, and a more just world. Freire's message was unequivocal: an informed, critically engaged populace is the most formidable force against tyranny, with education serving as the bedrock of this transformative power. He believed that radical change must be both

democratic and participatory, recognising that subjectivity, identity, and consciousness are central to any meaningful political and economic transformation.

For Freire, education was a vital aspect of politics because it addressed how people think, what they value, and the desires and knowledge that shape their actions. He believed that education was always political because it was not only a battle over ideas, knowledge, social relations and a particular conception of the future, it was also a battle over agency, identity, and how students came to narrate themselves - tell their own stories. Freire observed that education in the broadest sense was eminently political because it offered students the vision, language, and practices for self-reflection, a self-managed life, and particular notions of critical agency. He understood that politics follows culture, emphasising the need for educators to engage with how individual and collective needs are shaped, legitimised, and lived within specific economic, political, and everyday contexts. Freire saw culture as a form of power - an influential pedagogical force and a potent machinery of persuasion and belief.

Paulo Freire claimed that informed citizens are essential to the pursuit of justice. He rejected the notion of education as mere training or neutral transmission of knowledge. Instead, he saw pedagogy as a political and moral practice that equips students to become critical citizens, deepening their engagement with democracy. Freire's vision was radical because he knew that only an informed populace could act in the name of economic and justice. An often overlooked aspect of Freire's pedagogy is its emphasis on subjectivity and the crucial role it plays in social transformation. Drawing on thinkers like Erich Fromm, Freire recognised that people's willingness to challenge oppression is often constrained by deeply rooted fears and desires for material security (Fromm, 1994). He believed that without confronting these internal barriers, revolutionary efforts would remain superficial, unable to effect real change. This understanding shaped his pedagogical approach, which emphasised the interplay between individual consciousness and the material conditions of society - how a critical awareness of these mutually informing forces can both shape and be shaped by the world.

For Freire, education, civic literacy, and critical pedagogy were valuable only when they directly improved lives, inspired a sense of possibility, and built a path toward a more just, empowering, and socialist future. He argued that true social emancipation requires not only a reshaping of economic and institutional structures, but also a meaningful transformation in people's attitudes, consciousness, and ways of living. Freire believed that critical education could equip the oppressed and young people to challenge injustice, take bold risks, and envision a future of genuine hope and possibility. His radical faith in education's power was not merely a conviction - it was a commitment to restructuring society, grounded in the inseparable connection between identity, power, and the political struggle for liberation. Freire understood that theory is born out of real struggles, not the other way around. He insisted on starting with the concrete problems people face in their everyday lives, using theory as a tool for addressing and solving those problems. For Freire, theory was never an abstract exercise; it was a weapon for liberation, drawn from the lived experiences of those in struggle. By linking the transformation of individual consciousness to collective resistance, Freire's pedagogy becomes a blueprint for genuine social change (Patton, 1995: 227).

In the current historical moment, education is under siege by the forces of fascism. Right-wing politicians and authoritarian regimes are not merely attacking the classroom - they are waging an all-out war on critical education. They seek to ban books, erase history, and crush dissent. These forces understand, as Freire did, that whoever controls education holds the power to shape the future. That's why the battle for education is inseparable from the larger struggle for democracy and social justice. Education is not simply a path to individual advancement - it is the foundation of collective liberation. Freire's pedagogy is a rallying cry against authoritarianism. He exposes the ways in which those in power seek to turn education into a weapon of oppression. In contrast, Freire teaches that education must be a practice of freedom - a dynamic space where students and educators engage in critical dialogue, question power structures, and dare to imagine a world beyond the chains of domination. His work compels us to see education not as passive consumption but as an active, revolutionary process - one that involves critically reading both the word and the world and taking collective action to dismantle the conditions of oppression (Shor and Freire, 1986).

The rise of fascist politics across the globe has revealed the latest stage of gangster capitalism in all its brutality, which includes systemic inequality, a culture of cruelty, white nationalism, and assaults on the environment. It has also laid bare a toxic anti-intellectualism that derides critical education - an education that teaches individuals to think critically, engage in dialogue, learn from history, and hold power accountable (Giroux, 2020). At the same time, the failures of global capitalism - its broken promises of upward social mobility, endless wars, and staggering concentrations of wealth - have become impossible to ignore. It is worth repeating that it is hard to imagine a more urgent moment for taking seriously Freire's ongoing attempts to make education central to politics. At stake for Freire was the notion that education was a social concept rooted in the goal of emancipation for all people. This is a pedagogy that calls us beyond ourselves, and engages the ethical imperative to care for others, dismantle structures of domination, and to become subjects rather than objects of history, politics, and power.

This was a political project infused with a language of critique and possibility while simultaneously addressing the notion that there is no democracy without knowledgeable and civically literate citizens. Such a language is necessary to enable the conditions to forge a collective international resistance among educators, youth, artists, and other cultural workers in defence of public goods. Such a movement is important to resist and overcome the tyrannical fascist nightmares that have descended upon the United States, Hungary, Turkey, Argentina, and several other countries plagued by the rise of right-wing populist movements. In an age of social isolation, information overflow, a culture of immediacy, consumer glut, and spectacularised violence, it is all the more crucial to take seriously the notion that a democracy cannot exist or be defended without civically literate, informed and critically engaged citizens.

Education both in its symbolic and institutional forms has a central role to play in fighting the resurgence of anti-democratic cultures, mythic historical narratives, and the emerging ideologies of white supremacy and white nationalism. Moreover, as far-right extremists across the globe are disseminating toxic racist and ultra-nationalist images of the past, it is essential to reclaim

education and critical pedagogy through the lens of historical consciousness and moral witnessing. This is especially true at a time when historical and social amnesia have become a national pastime matched only by the masculinisation of the public sphere and the increasing normalisation of a fascist politics that thrives on ignorance, fear, the suppression of dissent, and hate. Education as a form of cultural work extends far beyond the classroom and its pedagogical influence, though often imperceptible, is crucial to challenging and resisting the rise of fascist pedagogical formations and their rehabilitation of fascist principles and ideas (Mayer, 2019).

Cultural politics since the 1970s has turned toxic as ruling elites increasingly gained control of commanding cultural apparatuses turning them into pedagogical disimagination machines that serve the forces of ethical tranquilisation by producing and legitimating endless degrading and humiliating images of the poor, immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and others considered excess, dismissed as wasted lives doomed to terminal exclusion. The geographies of moral and political decadence have become the organising standard of the dream worlds of consumption, privatisation, surveillance, and deregulation. Within this increasingly fascist landscape, public spheres are replaced by zones of social abandonment and thrive on the energies of the walking dead who are the embodiment of a culture of manufactured ignorance, cruelty, and misery.

Under a global gangster capitalism, the destruction of the public good is matched by a toxic merging of inequality, greed, and the nativist language of borders, walls, and camps. It is crucial for educators to remember that language is not simply an instrument of fear, violence, and intimidation, it is also a vehicle for critique, civic courage, resistance, and engaged and informed agency. We live at a time when the language of democracy has been pillaged, stripped of its promises and hopes. Paulo was right in insisting that if right-wing populism and authoritarianism are to be defeated, there is a need to make education an organising principle of politics and, in part, this can be done with a language, form of critical literacy, and pedagogy that exposes and unravels falsehoods, systems of oppression, and corrupt relations of power while making clear that an alternative future is possible. Language is a powerful tool in the search for truth and the condemnation of falsehoods and injustices. Moreover, it is through

language that the history of fascism can be remembered and the lessons of the conditions that created the plague of genocide can provide the recognition that fascism does not reside solely in the past and that its traces are always dormant, even in the strongest democracies. Paulo was keenly aware of Primo Levi's warning that 'Every age has its own fascism, and we see the warning signs wherever the concentration of power denies citizens the possibility and the means of expressing and acting on their own free will' (Levi, 2005: 34).

James Baldwin was certainly right in issuing the stern warning in *No Name in the Street* that 'Ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have' (Morrison, 1998: 437). Thinking is now viewed as an act of stupidity, and thoughtlessness is considered a virtue. All traces of critical thought appear only at the margins of the culture. Ignorance is not innocent, especially when it labels thinking dangerous while exhibiting a disdain for truth, scientific evidence, and rational judgments. However, there is more at stake here than the production of a toxic form of illiteracy celebrated as commonsense, the normalisation of fake news, and the shrinking of political horizons. There is also the closing of the horizons of the political and pedagogical coupled with explicit expressions of cruelty and a 'widely sanctioned ruthlessness' (Mishra, 2018).

Under such circumstances, there is a full-scale attack on thoughtful reasoning, empathy, collective resistance, and the compassionate imagination. As Toni Morrison has noted we live at a time when language is censored, reduced to a kind of narcotic narcissism, and cannot tolerate new or critical ideas (Morrison, 1993). As a tool of domination, it becomes a dead language that erases history, used to promote menace, subjugation, and violence. For one current example, think about how the mainstream media undermines or ignores language in support of Palestinian freedom has been censored, disabled, and hollowed out under the claim of being antisemitic.

Given the current crisis of politics engulfed in a tsunami of disimagination machines, educators need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources - financial, cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological - to exercise powerful

and diverse forms of control. If educators and others are to counter global capitalism's increased ability to separate the traditional sphere of politics from the now transnational reach of power, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject a collapse of the distinction between market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society. Resistance does not begin with reforming capitalism but abolishing it.

In this instance, critical pedagogy becomes a political and moral practice in the fight to revive civic literacy, civic culture, and a notion of shared citizenship. Politics loses its emancipatory possibilities if it cannot provide the educational conditions for enabling students and others to think critically, realise themselves as informed and engaged citizens willing to fight for social change in the name of a socialist democracy. There is no radical politics without a pedagogy capable of awakening consciousness, challenging common sense, and creating modes of analysis in which people discover a moment of recognition that enables them to rethink the conditions that shape their lives.

Freire was clear in arguing that as a rule, educators should do more than create the conditions for critical thinking and nourishing a sense of hope for their students. They also should assume the role of civic educators within broader social contexts and be willing to share their ideas with other educators and the wider public by making use of new media technologies. Communicating to a variety of public audiences suggests using opportunities for writing, public talks, and media interviews offered by the radio, Internet, alternative magazines, and teaching young people and adults in alternative schools to name only a few. Capitalising on their role as public intellectuals, faculty can speak to more general audiences in a language that is clear, accessible, and rigorous. More importantly, as teachers organise to assert both the importance of their role as citizen-educators and that of education in a democracy, they can forge new alliances and connections to develop social movements that include and expand beyond working with unions.

In the current historical moment, it is all the more crucial to embrace critical pedagogy as a political and moral practice as well as a crucial site of power in the modern world. If teachers are truly concerned about safeguarding

education, they will, as Paulo suggested, have to take seriously how pedagogy functions on local and global levels. Critical pedagogy has an important role to play in both understanding and challenging how power, knowledge, and values are deployed, affirmed, and resisted within and outside of traditional discourses and cultural spheres. In a local context, critical pedagogy becomes an important theoretical tool for understanding the institutional conditions that place constraints on the production of knowledge, learning, academic labour, social relations, and democracy itself.

One of the most serious challenges facing teachers, artists, journalists, writers, and other cultural workers is the task of developing a language, discourse and pedagogical practices that connect a critical reading of both the word and the world in ways that enhance the creative capacities of young people and provide the conditions for them to become critical agents. In part this means educating them to become aware of the conditions that shape their lives, learn from history, learn how to overcome the forms of oppression that bear down on them, and learn how to think comprehensively by translating private troubles into broader systemic considerations.

In taking up this project, educators and others should attempt to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, values, and civic courage that enable them to struggle in order to make desolation and cynicism unconvincing and hope practical. Hope in this instance is educational, removed from the fantasy of an idealism that is unaware of the constraints facing the struggle for a radical democratic society. Educated hope is not a call to overlook the difficult conditions that shape both schools and the larger social order nor is it a blueprint removed from specific contexts and struggles. On the contrary, it is the precondition for imagining a future that does not replicate the nightmares of the present, for not making the present the future. As Freire noted, educated hope at best is a form of active social hope that dignifies the labour of teachers, offers up critical knowledge linked to democratic social change, affirms shared responsibilities, and encourages teachers and students to recognise ambivalence and uncertainty as fundamental dimensions of learning. Such hope offers the possibility of thinking beyond the given. Without hope, even in dire times, there is no possibility for resistance, dissent, and struggle. Agency is the

condition of struggle, and hope is the condition of agency. Hope expands the space of the possible and becomes a way of recognising and naming the incomplete nature of the present.

For Freire, the merging of politics and pedagogy is rooted in the dream of a collective consciousness and imagination fueled by the struggle for new forms of individual and collective identity that affirm the value of the social, economic equality, the social contract, and democratic values and social relations. Democracy should be a way of thinking about education, one that thrives on connecting pedagogy to the practice of freedom, learning to ethics, and identity to the imperatives of social responsibility and the public good (Giroux, 2022). For Paulo, education was not just a tool for defending democracy, it also enabled it. The fact remains that without hope there is no agency and without collective agents, there is no hope of resistance. In the age of nascent fascism, it is not enough to connect education with the defence of reason, informed judgment, and critical consciousness; it must also be aligned with the power and potential of collective resistance. We live in dangerous times. Consequently, there is an urgent need for more individuals, institutions and social movements to come together in the belief that the current fascist regimes of tyranny can be resisted, that alternative futures are possible and that acting on these beliefs through collective resistance will make radical change happen.

At a time when democracy is under relentless assault, Paulo Freire's work is not just necessary - it is a revolutionary imperative for survival. We must reclaim education as a radical act of resistance, a space to nurture critical consciousness, collective power, unyielding civic courage, and collective change. We must confront and dismantle the authoritarian forces that seek to transform education into a weapon of domination, embracing instead Freire's vision of education as an emancipatory force - one that ignites the oppressed to reshape their world and forge a future anchored in justice, radical equality, and genuine democracy. Moreover, we must call not for reform but for structural change. This is a call not to lessen the horrors of capitalism but to replace it with a form of democratic socialism, while recognising that capitalism and democracy are not synonymous.

In the face of rising fascism, Freire's pedagogy demands that we see education for what it truly is - a fight for freedom. He showed us that education is either an instrument of liberation or a tool of tyranny. Most of all it must be a practice of freedom and a project of collective emancipation. In an age starved of vision, Freire offered a revolutionary pathway, insisting that education, critical pedagogy, and civic literacy must be bound to a fierce responsibility to resist the unspeakable and unthinkable.

Freire called upon educators and cultural workers to act with unyielding conviction, audacity, and the fierce courage required to challenge the forces dragging us back into a dark past - a past marked by fear, terror, and submission. He taught us not only to learn from history but to transform it, to stand defiantly against oppression, and to devote ourselves fully to the struggle for justice, liberation, and radical joy. Today, more than ever, we must seize this moment as defenders and enablers of critical education and embody the spirit Freire invoked. We must rise with the fire he lit within us - confronting those who would shackle us to a history of fear and submission - and instead, boldly carve out a future grounded in justice, equality, and collective emancipation.

Freire's legacy is not just a memory; it is a revolutionary flame, blazing in the call for both individual and collective resistance. In this era of intensifying authoritarianism, we must break free from the confines of traditional education and the narrow, simplistic notions of empiricism and repression. Education must be reimagined as a radical act - alive in every space - as defiance, as a weapon for liberation, as a relentless force for emancipation. To forge a truly democratic socialist society, every corner of our world must become a battlefield of critical inquiry, a space of organised resistance, where people are empowered to confront oppression and envision a world built on justice, equity, and freedom. Freire's vision is ours to keep alive, fueling the struggle for a future where learning itself becomes an act of courage, hope, and rebellion.

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How Trump 2.0 could Herald a New Age of Authoritarian Capitalism

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After four years of narrowly avoiding prison, Donald Trump is back in the White House. For many observers outside the United States (US), the re-election of a convicted felon (Sisak et al., 2024) who tried to illegally overturn an election is baffling (Smith, 2024). But Trump's second victory was no fluke – and nor was it merely the result of Russian interference or 'deplorable' voters. Although Trump left formal politics in 2021, the forces that brought him to power did not. This time, he is entering office far better organised, far stronger, and with a more diverse political base (Molski, 2024). Trump is also not alone: across the West, right-wing populism is on the march, while progressive parties continue to find themselves on the back foot. In an increasingly unstable world, the rising tide of the authoritarian right poses huge challenges for the global economy. Left unchecked, it has the potential to imperil peace, prosperity and the planet.

To fully assess the threat this right-wing populism poses, and how to counter it, we must carefully assess the conditions under which Trump is assuming power – as well as the plans he has for wielding it. Like all political developments, Trump's dramatic return has not happened in a vacuum. Instead, it must be viewed in the context of a series of profound political and economic shifts that are reshaping the face of Western capitalism. The first shift – and by far most significant – is the rise of a rival economic superpower that could potentially threaten the technological supremacy that has long underpinned US hegemony.

Red dragon rising

Following China's entry into the global trading system in 2001, many economists in the West assumed that China's state-capitalist model would deliver some catch-up growth, then quickly run out of steam. The theory (Krugman, 1994) was that while state-led systems can be effective at rapidly mobilising existing resources, they struggle to drive productivity growth and innovation. This, it was thought, would eventually force China to open up its economy and embrace liberal

democracy. However, China's achievements to date have made such pronouncements look remarkably naive. Not only has liberal democracy not arrived in the People's Republic, but the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has developed a distinct economic model (MacFarlane, 2020a) that has lifted nearly a billion people out of poverty and transformed the country into one of the world's largest and most dynamic economies. Somewhat ironically, it is Western governments that have had to adapt to China's model – not the other way around. In recent years, China's successes have forced Western governments to pivot away from free market orthodoxy and resuscitate muscular industrial policy (Ilyina et al., 2024), which had long been banished from Western policy toolkits.

The importance of China's spectacular rise to Trump's victory in 2016 cannot be overstated. At a time when most Americans felt the economy simply wasn't working, Trump offered a clear albeit false diagnosis of the problems – China and immigration – and an aggressive strategy for dealing with them, when the Democrats were doing neither. His aim was to stand up to China, bring back jobs and put 'America first'. His weapon of choice, tariffs, marked a major break with the neoliberal consensus of recent decades. Protectionism was back, spearheaded by the world's largest economic and military power. But in reality, Trump's 'trade war' was never about trade or jobs. It was primarily a response to US fears of losing technological supremacy in the face of successful Chinese industrial policy (MacFarlane, 2020a). From the very beginning, the 'trade war' was less about trade, and more about constraining Chinese development and preventing China's rise as a rival technological power (MacFarlane, 2020b).

Since Trump's exit from the White House in 2021, this 'return of the state' (Millot and Rawdanowicz, 2024) in Western economies has accelerated, fuelled by two other forces. The first has been a global ramping up of action to tackle the climate crisis. As a growing number of countries have embraced net zero targets, many have enacted new industrial policies to try and bolster capabilities to compete in emerging green supply chains. The second factor was the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw governments intervene in economies on an unprecedented scale. In order to contain the economic fallout, Western countries ripped up the neoliberal playbook in favour of widespread state planning and cash transfers. While the promises to 'build back better' inevitably rang hollow,

many governments and businesses did act to bolster domestic supply chains (Szczepa ski, 2021) in an attempt to address the chronic lack of resilience the pandemic exposed. Acutely aware of these challenges, in 2021 the incoming Joe Biden administration sought to break with the economic consensus of his Democrat predecessors. Not only did Biden keep most of Trump's tariffs on China, he increased them (Lobosco, 2024a). His administration then embarked on the US's most significant experiment with industrial policy for decades.

The key pillar of so-called 'Bidenomics' (Fertik et al., 2023) was the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Despite its name, the IRA was not primarily about reducing inflation. Instead, it launched the biggest investment programme in modern American history to revitalise the economy, enhance energy security, and tackle the climate crisis. The package included large tax breaks and subsidies to bolster US manufacturing capacity, and wean the US away from Chinese imports. In practice, the IRA was a significantly watered-down version of Biden's initial 'Build Back Better' agenda, which, in addition to ambitious climate spending, also proposed trillions of additional dollars on social spending (Sarlin, 2022) in areas such as housing, childcare and healthcare, as well as more progressive tax hikes. This agenda was blocked by Republicans and conservative Democratic senators, who also secured big giveaways to the fossil fuel industry. Nonetheless, the IRA represented a significant step change in the ideological outlook of the world's largest economy. It also posed new challenges for China, particularly as some policies were explicitly designed to discourage companies from using Chinese components. In a remarkable role-reversal, in May 2024 China lodged a complaint against the US at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (AP News, 2024), arguing that IRA subsidies 'distort fair competition'.

On the basis of conventional economic metrics, Bidenomics appeared to be working. Following the pandemic, US economic growth outperformed peer nations (Financial Times, 2025), business investment soared, and unemployment remained low. The problem was that Americans simply weren't feeling it (Blanton, 2025). A big reason for this was inflation, which surged across the world as economies reopened after the pandemic, and Russia invaded Ukraine. Although in the US, inflation had fallen to less than 3 per cent by the time of last year's election, the damage had been done. Under Biden's leadership, real

earnings had fallen (Jacobson, 2024) and satisfaction with the economy tumbled (Brenan, 2024). Months before the presidential election, more than half of Americans wrongly believed the US was experiencing a recession, according to a poll for *The Guardian* (Aratani, 2024). The consequences of this disconnect between buoyant economic statistics and peoples' lived experiences were fatal. As economist Isabella Weber (2024) put it in the *New York Times*: 'Unemployment weakens governments. Inflation kills them'.

As for Biden's programme of green reindustrialisation, it didn't quite live up to its promise. Although the IRA successfully catalysed billions of investments in clean energy, the immediate impact on jobs and living standards was modest. Since 2020, the number of manufacturing (FRED, 2025a) and construction (FRED, 2025b) jobs in the US economy has increased by around 800,000. While this might sound impressive, it amounts to less than 0.5 per cent of the total workforce. This does not mean the IRA should be seen as a failure – far from it. Investment takes time to deliver returns, and ironically it will be Trump who reaps the political rewards when they start to materialise. But these statistics also reveal a significant flaw in Biden's approach to industrial policy. In the 21st century, most Americans do not work in manufacturing and construction, and likely never will. They don't care much for semiconductors, nor do they pay much attention to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and business investment. What they care about is whether their life is getting better or worse. The initial 'Build Back Better' agenda recognised this, while the watered-down IRA did not.

Trumpism 2.0

While Bidenomics failed to get its namesake re-elected, it played a crucial role in putting industrial policy back on the global agenda. Though this is long overdue, it is a mistake to think that a more interventionist state always pushes politics in a progressive direction. What really matters is who wins and who loses from these interventions. In other words: who are these interventions really designed to serve? Seen through this lens, Trump's vision for the role of the state looks rather different. He has already vowed to kill the IRA's climate measures, referring to the act as 'the greatest scam in the history of any country' (Milman and Uteuova, 2025). In its place, Trump has a new plan for industrial

policy: 'drill, baby, drill' (Carlson, 2025). He has also pledged to deliver 'the largest deportation operation in American history', targeting millions of undocumented migrants whom he says are 'poisoning the blood' (Gibson, 2023) of the US – and using the military to do so if necessary. The long-term economic impact of such a move would be severe, with some analyses estimating it could reduce annual US GDP by up to 7 per cent, or nearly $1.7trillion (American Immigration Council, 2024).

As a means of flexing American economic muscle globally, Trump has also promised to double down on tariffs, pledging to impose blanket 10-20 per cent duties on all US imports and 60 per cent on goods from China. In a sign of creeping paranoia that some countries may act to reduce their reliance on US trade, he recently threatened to impose 100 per cent tariffs (Honderich, 2024) on the ten nations that form the BRICS bloc – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates – if they create a currency aiming to challenge the US dollar's dominance in global trade. In order to collect the billions in expected tariff revenues, the incoming president also recently announced the creation of a new 'External Revenue Service', stating: 'Through soft and pathetically weak trade agreements, the American economy has delivered growth and prosperity to the world, while taxing ourselves. It is time for that to change' (Tait, 2025). Whether these sharply higher tariffs represent a hard commitment or merely a negotiating tactic remains to be seen. However, it is clear that Trump intends to weaponise the US's economic clout to strong-arm allies and adversaries alike. 'America first' is the aim, while economic warfare is the game, it would appear.

This again would not come without an economic cost (Saussay, 2024) – both to the US and its trading partners. Despite being Trump's flagship policy, it remains unclear whether he knows how tariffs actually work (Atkins, 2024). He has repeatedly insisted that they are paid by 'other countries' (Lobosco, 2024b), when in reality they are a tax on American companies paid when foreign-made goods arrive at the US border. Perhaps most alarmingly, Trump has taken state interventionism to a whole new level by threatening to seize territories belonging to other sovereign nations (The Economist, 2025). One prime target is Greenland, where the aim is to control its trove of natural resources to guarantee

the US's 'economic security', with a particular focus on rare earth metals. Another is the Panama Canal, which the US ceded control over to Panama in 1977 under President Jimmy Carter. Perhaps most ambitiously, Trump has floated the idea of annexing Canada (Reuters, 2025), describing the two countries' shared border as an 'artificially drawn line' and vowing to use 'economic force' to make Canada the 51st US state. The US projecting its power overseas to secure its economic interests is far from new. But rarely has a president been this direct and explicit about it.

The focus on Greenland's rare earth metals is no accident. China currently dominates global rare earth metal production and has recently restricted the export of critical minerals and associated technologies ahead of Trump's second term (Lv and Munroe, 2024). These elements, which play a critical role in the manufacturing of batteries and countless high-tech products, are quickly becoming one of the most important geopolitical battlegrounds. With China and the US each taking increasingly aggressive measures to limit the trading of key resources and components, the drift towards a new 'technological cold war' – as well as a military hot war (Matthews, 2025) – between East and West looks set to accelerate under Trump's second reign. A partial decoupling of US and Chinese technology ecosystems is already well underway (Bateman, 2022) – with the extreme pressure the US applied to the UK government in 2020 to ban Huawei from the UK's 5G network providing one example (MacFarlane, 2020b). Not unrelatedly, today the UK has among the worst-performing 5G signal in Europe (Popov, 2024). The recent US clamp down on the Chinese social media app TikTok provides another such example, with US lawmakers moving to ban the app on national security grounds (BBC, 2025). However, just before taking office Trump – who had previously backed a ban – pledged to delay implementation of the law to allow more time to 'make a deal to protect our national security' (McArthur, 2025).

If these trends continue to accelerate, it is possible to imagine a world that is bifurcated into distinct technological 'zones'. In this scenario, countries would be able to use US technology or Chinese technology – but not both. Each country must pick a side.

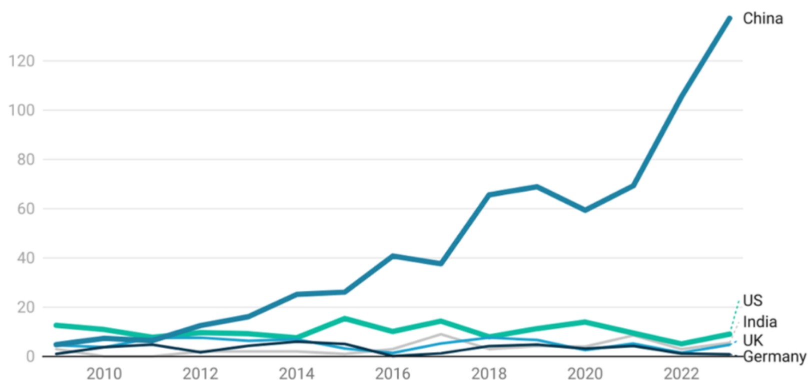
A technological arms race

Any further slide towards technological bifurcation between East and West would pose huge challenges for the US and its allies. Whether it is clean energy, electric vehicles or radio communications such as 5G, Chinese companies are rapidly coming to dominate many critical 21st-century markets, in some cases to an extraordinary degree (IEA, 2022). As such, any further attempt to restrain Chinese technology or exclude Chinese goods from Western markets would have serious economic consequences, while also heightening military tensions. It would also pose existential challenges for China's economic model, which has long relied on exporting to the US and other Western economies to drive economic growth.

Evidence indicates that China is also rapidly racing ahead to dominate many advanced technologies of the future. It is winning the technological race against the US in 37 of 44 advanced technology fields assessed in the report spanning defence, space, robotics, energy, biotechnology and artificial intelligence, according to a recent study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (Gaida et al., 2023). The study also found there was a high risk of China establishing an effective monopoly in eight technologies – including supercapacitors, 5G and 6G communications, electric batteries, and synthetic biology – while the US enjoyed no such monopoly opportunities. For some technologies, all of the world's top ten leading research institutions are based in China, which are collectively generating nine times more high-impact research papers than the US. Perhaps unsurprisingly, China's rapid advancements also extend to deadly weapons technology. While recent Chinese advances in nuclear-capable hypersonic missiles allegedly took US intelligence agencies 'by surprise' (Sevastopulo and Hillie, 2021), China has generated over 60 per cent of the world's high-impact research papers into advanced aircraft engines (Critical Technology Tracker, 2023) and hypersonics over the past five years, and currently hosts seven of the world's top ten research institutions.

China is leading the world in research on advanced aircraft engines and hypersonics

Number of papers that were among the 10% most cited globally on advanced aircraft engines



Source: Australian Strategic Policy Institute

China has produced over 60% of the world's high-impact research papers into advanced aircraft engines and hypersonics over the past five years | Chart by openDemocracy using da from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

While China's rapid advancements have confounded its critics, its economy is far from invincible. Despite the best efforts of the CCP's latest five-year plan (NDRC, 2022), Chinese economic growth is slowing considerably (Yao, 2025) and is widely expected to fall short of its target this year. Among the reasons for this has been China's fragile real estate sector, which after decades of debt-fuelled speculation has finally started to unravel. In 2021 China's largest property developer, Evergrande, defaulted on its debt (BBC, 2021), with multiple other major developers following closely behind. These defaults forced Beijing to announce an emergency package of support measures to stabilise the sector, which accounts for about a fifth of the country's economic activity. In many ways, the sector's woes – soaring debt and slowing growth – have become emblematic of the challenges facing the wider Chinese economy. Sustaining growth in the face of an escalating trade war would require a radical reorientation of China's economic model, lessening dependence on exports and real estate speculation towards substantially boosting domestic demand.

China's looming demographic crisis poses another major threat to its economic future. The CCP's 'one-child policy', which was enforced between 1980 and 2015, means its population is currently ageing faster than any other country in modern history. Over the next decade, about 300 million people currently aged between 50 and 60 are set to leave the Chinese workforce (Bicker, 2024). In 2020, there were five workers for every retiree, by 2050 this is expected to fall to 1.6 workers per retiree. The compounding effect of a rapidly contracting labour market, and the associated shrinking tax base, poses huge challenges for future growth and fiscal policy, as well as the provision of pensions and care in old age. The challenge facing Beijing is therefore stark: can China continue to drive growth and technological advancement in the age of Trumpism 2.0, while staving off financial contagion and a demographic time bomb? China has confounded its critics before – but never before has its outlook looked so uncertain.

Europe's predicament

Caught in the crossfire between China and the US, Europe stands at a critical juncture. Lacking the technological dynamism to compete with the world's two economic superpowers, and with many key industries in decline (Richter, 2024), European leaders have struggled to respond effectively. To date, its strategy has amounted to a tepid foray into industrial policy through the Green Industrial Plan, which aims to counter the EU's import dependency for key commodities and technologies (Florence School of Regulation, 2024). In a grudging admission that the free-market dogma underpinning the single market might be a barrier to an industrial revival, the European Commission has also relaxed state aid rules, enabling states to provide more generous subsidies for green industries (Euroactiv, 2023). While these necessary reforms to the single market are long overdue, the ongoing failure to reform the eurozone's fiscal architecture makes it difficult to see the EU posing a serious threat to US and Chinese technological dominance anytime soon.

For EU leaders, the most pressing issue is the prospect of new tariffs and threats to sovereign European territory. While Europe cannot compete with the US technologically or militarily, as the world's largest trading bloc it can compete on trade. Reports suggest the European Commission is exploring a 'carrot and stick' approach (Rankin, 2025): implementing its own retaliatory

tariffs while also pledging to buy more US goods. A trade war between the US and Europe is unlikely to end well for either party, but would be particularly painful for Europe (Martuscelli, 2024). Even if transatlantic tariffs are avoided, there is still the question of what to do in relation to China. If Trump follows through with imposing 60 per cent tariffs on Chinese goods, should the EU do the same? If it doesn't, Europe may face a flood of cheap Chinese goods dumped on its doorstep, further harming domestic producers. Then there is the question of how Europe should respond to the accelerating technological decoupling between East and West. While the EU has taken various steps to try and turbocharge research and innovation in recent years, it still lags significantly behind the US and China. In theory, there is a strong case to be made for Europe to forge its own path, neither bowing to US or Chinese authoritarianism (Torreblanca and Verdi, 2024). However, this ambition may be thwarted by challenges closer to home.

In recent years, far-right parties have seen a dramatic surge in support across the continent. Last year France came inches away from electing Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (Caulcutt, 2024), while in 2023 the Netherlands elected an Islamophobic populist (Kirby and Holligan, 2023). Far-right parties continue to make considerable inroads in Germany, Spain, Italy and elsewhere. Many of these parties are in direct contact with Trump's wider networks and have also received glowing endorsements from billionaire and Trump fanboy Elon Musk, the owner of X (formerly Twitter) (Parker, 2025). As well as being Trump's largest donor (France 24, 2024), Musk has quickly positioned himself as one of the president's most influential aides. The prospect of escalating transatlantic coordination between the authoritarian right and billionaire egomaniacs represents one of the biggest threats to Europe's future.

Britain's alignment problem

The challenges faced by the EU are perhaps even more acute in the UK. Brexit was supposed to unleash Britain as a great, swashbuckling trading nation once again. But this fantasy was always rooted in a failure to come to terms with the UK's rapidly diminishing power in the world (Macfarlane, 2018a). While the EU lacks technological leadership but has considerable trade power, the UK has neither. At a time of growing geopolitical tensions over technology and trade, the

UK is a sitting duck. In the event that Trump does escalate a global trade war, Keir Starmer's government will likely have to pick a major bloc to align with – or absorb considerable economic pain. This was always the deep irony of Brexit; while it was supposed to be about 'taking back control', the UK was always going to be forced to align with decisions taken by one of the world's major power blocs, albeit having no control over the rules (Ibid.). This reality was recently bluntly spelt out by Stephen Moore, one of Trump's closest economic advisers. 'The UK really has to choose between the European economic model of more socialism and the US model, which is more based on a free enterprise system', Moore told the BBC last year (Gecsoyler, 2024). Moving towards the US model of 'economic freedom' would significantly increase the likelihood of securing a US trade deal, he added. However, this would also likely involve bowing to US demands to open up key British markets – such as agriculture and pharmaceuticals – to American competitors. Given the gulf in bargaining power and Trump's notoriously aggressive deal-making, this would almost certainly not end well for the UK.

Starmer's government therefore faces an unenviable lose-lose dilemma. Align with the US to avoid tariffs and secure a trade deal, and suffer the deeply unpopular consequences of Trump's trade conditions, from chlorinated chicken (Schraer and Edgington, 2019) to significantly higher NHS drug prices (Luney, 2020). Or align more closely with the EU once again, and risk plunging the country into civil war over Brexit all over again. Given the present political dynamics in Britain, this could be disastrous for the Labour Party. While, on paper, the landslide victory Labour secured at last year's election victory appeared decisive, looks can be deceiving. In reality, the party's majority was built on incredibly fragile foundations (Eijsberg and Hazell, 2024) – and the UK is far from immune to the threat of right-wing populism. Since then, election support for the party has plummeted, while support for Nigel Farage's pro-Brexit Reform party has surged. With the two parties neck and neck in the polls (YouGov, 2025), any attempt to align more closely with the EU would be capitalised on by Reform, likely to devastating effect. Even without this, Reform could be on track to upend British politics in the next election, subverting the traditional two-party system, perhaps with help from an increasingly unhinged Musk (Taylor, 2024).

Global fractures

China's global ascendency, combined with the US's political fracturing, has led some to speculate that we may be witnessing the 'end of the American century'. Back in 2020, I argued that such premonitions were premature (Macfarlane, 2020a). The two pillars of the US's global power – military and financial – remained rooted in place. However, it was clear that the election of Trump in 2016 was eroding the US's soft power, and its ability to act as the paragon for liberal democracy. Trump's subsequent attempt to overturn the result of the 2020 election only put this on steroids. Far from being viewed as a successful model to emulate, the US began to resemble a cautionary tale to avoid. Biden made a conscious effort to repair US prestige on the world stage. 'America is back', he vowed at his first address to world leaders from the State Department in February 2021 (Wright, 2021). 'We are a country that does big things. American diplomacy makes it happen. And our Administration is ready to take up the mantle and lead once again' (Ibid.). However, polling undertaken in 2021 found that while most people in Europe were happy to see Biden elected, they believed that the US political system was 'broken' (Ibid.). Perhaps most alarmingly for US strategists, a majority also believed that China would be more powerful than the US within a decade – and said they would want their country to stay neutral in a conflict between the two superpowers. In the years since, Biden's international standing has been further stained by his resolute support for Israel's brutal assault on Gaza, which has generated intense animosity towards the US in many parts of the world.

Despite Biden's efforts, it is likely that a second Trump term will fracture relations in the West further, as tensions relating to tariffs, Ukraine and NATO start to bite. How this plays out remains to be seen, but any prolonged souring of relations among Western countries would likely benefit China, and hasten the transfer of global power from West to East. Meanwhile, the much-vaunted 'rules-based international order' looks more fragile than ever before. Under Trump's first reign, the US pulled funding from multiple UN agencies (Pinto, 2022), withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change, and even pulled out of the World Health Organisation (WHO) during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chorev et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Trump and his allies severely criticised institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (Kruck et al., 2022), long a critical tool for projecting

US power. At the same time, the number of countries turning to Chinese-backed alternatives (Keju, 2024) to fund development projects and joining China's Belt and Road Initiative has continued to grow over the past decade (Jie and Wallace, 2022).

In recent months, the ongoing war in the Middle East has exposed the feebleness of international law, with multiple signatory countries openly defying the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrant for Israel's prime minister and former defence minister (Sharp, 2024). The US has never become a signatory to the ICC, but Trump previously sanctioned two ICC prosecutors after they began investigating whether US forces committed war crimes in Afghanistan – with secretary of state Mike Pompeo declaring it as a 'kangaroo court' (BBC News, 2020). At the start of this year, the US House of Representatives voted once again to sanction the ICC in retaliation for its arrest warrants against Israeli leaders (Aljazeera, 2025). What Trump's stance towards such international institutions will be in his second term remains to be seen. But with his 'America first' stance unlikely to soften anytime soon, the so-called 'crisis of multilateralism' looks set to deepen (Pinto, 2022).

A global wake up call

Overall, it is clear that Trump's re-election represents a critical turning point for the West. While his first victory represented a high-risk gamble into the unknown, this time Americans fully knew what they were voting for. Far from softening the autocratic tendencies he was widely criticised for, he has doubled down on them. Towards the end of Trump's last reign, I argued that the West was being haunted by the spectre of 'authoritarian capitalism' (Macfarlane, 2020a). The analysis identified three profound economic and political shifts that were reshaping Western economies: a China-induced pivot away from free-market orthodoxy, a clampdown on democratic freedoms, and a rise in state surveillance. Together, these shifts represented a distinct political economy that, if not contained, could usher in a new age of more authoritarian governance. Thanks to the emerging transatlantic alliance between Trump, the European far-right and billionaire social media moguls, this is a reality we now face. Exactly what Trump will do in power, and whether his far-right allies in Europe will succeed in following his footsteps, is impossible to predict. But we should be under no

illusions about the threat that this alliance poses. This is not the same Trumpism that won the election in 2016: it's an altogether different – and more dangerous – project. How should progressives seek to counter the ascendance of a new authoritarianism?

One thing is clear: stoking anti-China sentiment will not cure the ills of Western capitalism. The roots of these problems, and therefore their solutions, can be found much closer to home. Simply trying to ban or censor voices on the authoritarian right won't work either. When the voices in question include the US president and the second most popular party in the beating heart of Europe (Walker, 2025), silencing them isn't an option (although that hasn't stopped hundreds of German politicians from trying) (Dahlinger, 2024). Instead, the roots of these problems need to be dealt with at the source. In reality, it is not China or immigrants that are screwing over ordinary working people, but an extractive and unequal economic system.

The world's richest one per cent today owns more wealth than 95 per cent of humanity (Oxfam, 2024). Last year total billionaire wealth increased by $2trn, growing three times faster than the year before (Oxfam, 2025). The wealth of the world's five richest men has more than doubled since 2019, soaring from $506bn to over $1.1trn (Ibid.). That list includes Trump's cheerleader-in-chief, Musk, who paid a true tax rate of just over 3 per cent in the US between 2014 and 2018, according to an investigation by ProPublica (Eisinger, Ernsthausen and Kiel, 2021). The average worker in advanced economies, meanwhile, has typically seen their real pay fall or stagnate (OECD, 2024). The contrasting fortunes of the mega-rich and everyone else are not unconnected. Despite what our leaders claim, capitalism in the 'developed world' has primarily become an engine for redistributing wealth upwards – both from its own citizens (Macfarlane, 2022) and the rest of the world (Hickel et al., 2022). Skyrocketing inequality is also inextricably linked to the climate and environmental crisis (Macfarlane, 2021). As well as hoovering up much of the world's wealth, the richest one per cent emit as much carbon pollution as the poorest two-thirds of humanity (Oxfam, 2023). As such, tackling the climate crisis and reducing inequality must go hand in hand.

But by deflecting legitimate economic grievances towards external bogeymen and migrants, it is the authoritarian right – not the progressive left – that has most successfully capitalised on this broken system. If we are to address the central economic and environmental challenges we face, this urgently needs to change. Progressive forces have transformed Western political economy before, and the task before us is to do so again. The goal must be to tackle inequalities, raise living standards and address the environmental crisis – while standing with migrants and other minoritised groups against persecution and oppression. This will inevitably involve a more proactive role for the state. The key question is: in whose interests will it act (Berry and MacFarlane, 2022)? The lesson from Bidenomics is that focusing primarily on industrial sectors such as renewable energy and manufacturing won't work unless it is accompanied by policies to rein in corporate power and redistribute wealth. This means challenging the power of vested interests head-on, not cowering to them.

This project must also aim to strengthen democracy and protect civil liberties at a time when both are increasingly under threat. In recent years governments across the US (Page, and Greer, 2024), Europe (Amnesty International, 2024) and the UK (Amnesty International, 2022) have cracked down on the right to protest with draconian legislation. Given Trump's terrifying track record (Flaherty, 2024) – including calling for the military to quash peaceful protests by 'radical left lunatics' – we should expect the assault on the right to protest to intensify, alongside a curtailing of civil liberties more broadly. Peaceful protest will be absolutely critical for resisting the authoritarian right across the world, which is exactly why it is likely to be suppressed. At the global level, lessons can be learned from Trump's own playbook. In power, Trump has not shied away from breaking international norms or shaking up global institutions. Progressives must be willing to do the same – albeit for very different ends. While this may make some uncomfortable, it is a necessary prerequisite to delivering the kind of global transformation needed. The existing 'rules-based international order' is meaningless when some of the most powerful actors are not playing by these rules. Global cooperation is needed more than ever, but the existing multilateral order is fundamentally broken. It must undergo sweeping reforms to promote a more prosperous, peaceful and sustainable world (Gallagher and Kozul-Wright, 2022).

Perhaps most importantly, however, there needs to be a clear focus on who the real enemy is – and the goals that need to be achieved to defeat them. For decades, the left has viewed its enemy as neoliberalism (MacFarlane, 2018b), and its main task as building an alternative to it. But if neoliberalism is not dead yet, it is slowly dying (Meadway, 2021). Instead of fighting the last war, progressives must start grappling with the distinct political economy of a new authoritarianism. In practice this requires developing a completely new set of strategies, tactics and policies. We are not only losing – we are losing *badly*. More of the same simply will not cut it. The challenge now is therefore much greater than when Trump last took office. The spectre of authoritarian capitalism is not just haunting the West, it is already here, and it is actually quite popular (Walker, 2025). Now it must be resisted from the ground up.

The key question is: can we build the power needed to challenge it? Right now, it's not looking promising. We can only hope that the arrival of Trump 2.0 provides the wake-up call the world so desperately needs.

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MY 500 ON 'THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION'

NEIL ALLDRED, BENEDICT ARKO, APRIL R. BICCUM, ANNE M. DOLAN, CLAIRE GLAVEY, AIMEE HALEY, JESSICA HARRISON, GERRY JEFFERS, SU-MING KHOO, STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY, ELIZABETH MEADE, CAROLINE MURPHY, JOE MURRAY, MARGARET NUGENT AND ASHLEY WESTPHELING

The following authors contributed 500-word articles in response to a call for contributors on the theme "The Future of Development Education".

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

NEIL ALLDRED

Development education (DE) could begin to develop a much-needed new perspective by recognising some of the errors and silences of its past history. Dependency theory was posited by mainly Latin American economists and sociologists in the late 1960's and 70's but DE ignored its radical, challenging implications. Similarly, DE never really brought on board leading figures in academic and research economics, so while the neoliberal orthodoxy unleashed during the Reagan and Thatcher years grew ever bolder, we had no worked out alternatives that could help us map out more appropriate strategies to the outmoded idea of development.

Today, we have Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) which debunks much of the nonsense in orthodox economics, so we should be arguing now not for 'developmental' incrementalism but for radical global redistribution of wealth, assets and opportunities. Reparations have been paid out in other historical circumstances - to slave owners in the nineteenth century, or Germany's payments to both Israel and different Jewish communities, following the Second World War Holocaust, and Japan's payments in recognition of the treatment of 'comfort

women' - so reparations, as redistribution of wealth from the global North to the global South, should be a major target of our praxis.

The United Nations' 196 member states and their citizens have no effective means of influencing decision-making and legislation that affects their lives, so a World Parliament is a necessity, along with a global open borders policy to allow people to share freedoms and opportunities without being victims of climate breakdown or petty nationalisms. Indeed, the climate crisis is an existential threat - to other species and to the planet itself, as well as to human beings - so focussing on a just transition to more equitable and sustainable behaviours and lifestyles should be a hallmark of forthcoming DE initiatives, syllabi and curricula. Most people in DE are familiar with the extremely modest progress made under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000-2015) and that the subsequent endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015-2030) failed to recognise key requirements of both sustainability and equity. Surely there is here a key theme for DE work in the coming decades.

Degrowth - or, preferably, post-growth - is a theme that needs to be highlighted by the DE community in order to combat the reheated arguments espoused by most governments that economic growth is the be-all and end-all of human existence. Thoughtless economic growth on a finite planet will inevitably entail the end-all of human existence. System change, alternative strategies and a radical, combative championing of plausible options that will lead to planetary stability, social and economic equity, and global justice are what the sector needs to define and embrace.

'Development' has for too long been seen as measurable improvements to people's lives and livelihoods, but has been predicated on the unhelpful metric of GDP (gross domestic product), and implemented within a narrow perspective of neoliberal economics that suggests that wealthy people create jobs and prosperity, and that capitalism is the only appropriate framework to work within.

Time for change!

Neil Alldred spent half his career pursuing development initiatives in the global South, and the other half in Ireland where he researched, taught and critiqued development issues, practices and perspectives. Now fully retired, he is seeking new avenues of pensioner activism!

THE NUMBERS TRAP: DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AS SOLUTION TO DEVELOPMENT'S LEGACY OF INFLATED BENEFICIARY METRICS

BENEDICT ARKO

For decades, the international development sector has equated success with numbers, prioritising the sheer volume of people reached over the depth of impact. Reports celebrate thousands trained, millions assisted, and entire communities transformed. Yet behind these figures, the reality is often far less impressive. Many beneficiaries see little lasting change, while structural barriers to poverty remain unaddressed. This obsession with scale over substance is not new; it has shaped development practice since the mid-twentieth century when international aid efforts first expanded.

From 1960s modernisation to 1980s microfinance and today's digital initiatives, the same flawed approach persists. Governments and donors seek quick results, pushing agencies to prioritise outreach over lasting impact. A single training session is counted as a success, even if participants never apply the skills. Instead of fostering public engagement for social change, the focus is on fundraising through impressive but superficial statistics. Development education is needed to provide the citizenry with the skills, knowledge and understanding to support sustainable and meaningful change.

This numerical obsession has led to a development model that favours short-term visibility and revenue raising over real impact. The more people a programme can claim to have reached, the more successful it appears. As a result, interventions are designed to be broad but shallow, offering minimal engagement

rather than deep, sustained support. Instead of meaningful transformation for a few, programmes focus on broad reach with little follow-up. The logic of scale drives decisions, shaping projects that are easy to quantify but difficult to sustain. Yet true development takes time. Livelihood interventions need time to show impact, yet short donor-driven cycles rarely allow for long-term follow-ups. Development education provides the skill sets needed to sustain real progress and also effectively assess the progress made.

Alongside the numbers game is a reliance on selective success stories, a practice that has been part of development narratives for decades. Reports highlight the exceptional cases - the farmer whose yield doubled or the entrepreneur who built a thriving business. These stories, while real, often obscure the reality that many others who received the same support saw little change. The failures and setbacks that define most development work remain largely invisible, creating a misleading sense of progress. Without a full picture, international development keeps repeating mistakes, prioritising appearances over real impact. International development needs development education that addresses poverty's root causes - neoliberal economics and market-driven demands - through a systemic approach.

If international development is to break free from this decades-old pattern, it must redefine success. Measuring impact should go beyond counting participants and instead focus on whether interventions lead to lasting improvements to people's lives. Programmes must invest in long-term tracking, following beneficiaries for years rather than months to understand real effects. The sector must also embrace honest reflection, shifting away from exaggerated numbers and curated success stories to a more transparent and evidence-driven approach. Until international development shifts from numbers to meaningful education, it will keep counting beneficiaries without truly helping them.

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Development Education's Roots in Interwar Liberal Internationalism and the Crisis of the Liberal Order

April R. Biccum

Critical Scholarship in development and global education has long indicated the colonial inflection of education aiming to contribute to poverty reduction that originates in the global North and imbricated by western epistemologies and metaphysics which are demonstrably part of the European colonial project. The policy and practice of development education (DE) has taken on these critiques and there have been productive moves to global South epistemologies and pedagogies.

At the same time, a recent publication by Global Education Network Europe (GENE) contains an article which acknowledges that global education in the United Kingdom (UK) does have colonial roots by virtue of its antecedents in the interwar Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC). Founded in 1939 to create distance from the League of Nations Union, the CEWC lasted decades after the war, increasingly turned its attention to inequality, racism and global development issues and folded only in the early 1980s because it was outcompeted by development education centres. The crisis we face in the global (neo)liberal order bears a striking resemblance to the circumstances that pertained in the interwar period. The time is ripe for development educators to assess this history in light of advances in scholarship in the areas of political science, international relations and international political economy.

In these fields there has been a growth industry in scholarship that re-examines continuities between the British imperial world order and the multi-

lateral world order that emerged after the Second World War. The architects of the League of Nations and the League of Nations Union were part of a (at the time) new cohort of liberal imperialists who saw in the League of Nations an opportunity to resuscitate the British empire on more multi-lateral terms. Importantly, among these lobbyists and institution designers were avid educators, in both theory and practice, who elaborated a succinct role for an education in international relations in creating capacity among the public to participate in a more democratic foreign policy.

While I completely reject the patronising imperialism of these thinker/activists, there is something in this original formulation of education for world citizenship that development educators in contemporary times may want to return to. If DE is about global social justice in its fullest sense, then development educators need to have a better understanding of the international system, and an historical sense of the current crisis in the liberal international order. There needs to be more cross fertilisation between development educators and the discipline of political science. In addition to an understanding of our shared imperial history and a decolonial epistemology, recipients of DE need to have a sense of global 'real politique' if we are to educate for the capacity to resist the rise of global fascism. Development educators need also to have a greater historical sense of DE's connections to global education and its roots in interwar liberal internationalism, because 2025 is strikingly similar in geopolitical terms to 1925.

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THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: A FRAMEWORK BASED ON JOANNA MACY'S THREE STORIES

ANNE M. DOLAN

Joanna Macy's work on transformative thinking and action is deeply rooted in her concept of the 'Three Stories of Our Time'. The story of *Business as Usual* reflects the dominant narrative of industrial growth, economic expansion, and technological progress. Macy's second story, *The Great Unravelling*, describes the breakdown of ecological, social, and economic systems. It is a narrative that acknowledges the severity of global crises, from climate change to rising inequality, and recognises the fragility of the systems underpinning contemporary life. The third story, *The Great Turning*, is the most hopeful and transformative of Macy's narratives. It describes a shift from a society based on exploitation and domination to one rooted in sustainability, justice, and interconnectedness. This story envisions a future where humans live in harmony with the Earth and with each other, guided by values of compassion, equity, and collective well-being.

For development education, *The Great Turning* offers a roadmap for transformative change. It challenges educators to go beyond raising awareness of global issues and actively engage learners in the co-creation of solutions. This involves reimagining curricula, pedagogies, and institutional practices to align with the principles of ecological sustainability, social justice, and participatory democracy. One of the key aspects of *The Great Turning* in education is the emphasis on collective action. Learners are not only encouraged to think critically but also to act courageously. For instance, schools and universities can integrate community-based projects that address real-world challenges, such as developing local food systems, advocating for policy changes, or designing renewable energy initiatives. By engaging directly with their communities, students develop a sense of agency and responsibility as global citizens.

While Macy's Three Stories are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the future of development education lies in the ability to integrate these narratives in a way that acknowledges the complexities of our world while offering pathways for hope and action.

- **Acknowledging Business as Usual**: Development education must critically examine the limitations of the current system and the importance of working to transform its underlying structures.

- **Confronting The Great Unravelling**: Educators must create spaces for honest dialogue about the crises we face, while also providing the tools and support needed to cope with the associated grief and anxiety. This involves integrating emotional and psychological dimensions into learning, recognising that addressing global challenges requires not only intellectual engagement but also emotional resilience.
- **Embracing The Great Turning**: Development education should prioritise transformative practices that empower learners to envision and create a just and sustainable future. This includes fostering creativity, collaboration, and systems thinking, as well as emphasising the values of empathy, solidarity, and stewardship.

Joanna Macy's Three Stories offer a powerful framework for rethinking the future of development education. By moving beyond the narrow confines of *Business as Usual*, embracing the challenges of *The Great Unravelling*, and actively participating in *The Great Turning*, educators and learners alike can contribute to the creation of a more equitable and sustainable world.

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REFLECTIONS ON DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND THE NEW PRIMARY CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

CLAIRE GLAVEY

The new Primary Curriculum Framework for the Republic of Ireland and the anticipated publication of finalised curriculum area specifications prompt reflection on how these curriculum changes may shape the future of development education (DE) in primary schools. The current Primary School Curriculum identifies 'the European and global dimensions' as one of fifteen key issues for primary education. Elements of DE are found in subject strands and strand units for history (Ireland, Europe and the world, 1960 to the present), geography (people and other lands; trade and development issues), science (environmental awareness and care) and social, personal and health education (developing citizenship; media education). Teacher agency and curriculum flexibility provide further opportunities for DE, for example in the selection of poetry, novels, music and art with social justice themes, and in the use of participatory methodologies which foster skills such as critical and creative thinking, empathy, reflection and cooperation.

The new curriculum demonstrates greater recognition of DE, with 'being an active citizen' one of seven key competencies set out to support children's development, the description of which closely aligns with many descriptions of DE. It includes, for example, helping children 'to question, critique, and understand what is happening in the world within a framework of human rights, equity, social justice, and sustainable development'. It is anticipated that the finalised specifications, along with professional development for teachers in the roll-out phase of the new curriculum will provide guidance on how each key competency can be woven through cross-curricular and subject-specific teaching and learning. For those working to support primary teachers to integrate DE across the curriculum, these changes provide a natural reflection point. The greater emphasis on citizenship as a core component of primary education is welcome and suggests more curriculum space to draw upon for DE. The prominence of teacher agency in the new curriculum provides more potential still.

In harnessing the opportunities provided by these curriculum changes, and to continue, expand and strengthen the engagement of primary schools with DE, learning can be gained from a recent national survey of 288 Irish primary teachers on the topic of global citizenship education (GCE). The commonly

identified obstacle of insufficient time for GCE planning and teaching may be tackled by supporting curriculum planning at individual teacher and whole school levels, using examples of how to thematically integrate DE/GCE across the curriculum. The identified gap between teachers' much higher rating of the importance of GCE, compared to their rating of their own confidence, knowledge and pedagogical skills, suggests a need to actively foster teacher confidence. This can be done by supporting the development of teachers' knowledge and skills in DE/GCE and making explicit the links between the curriculum and GCE.

Specific topics for professional development may be found in the relatively low frequency of human rights and sustainability in teachers' own word descriptors of their understanding of GCE, and in the relatively low rating by teachers of their pedagogical skills in supporting pupils to engage in action. These findings show that there is work to be done on exploring the root causes of global issues and on supporting understanding of the interdependence and interconnectedness of frameworks, structures and issues that are core to DE.

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A New Generation of 'Responsible Internationalists' are Crucial to the Future of Development Education

Aimee Haley

Development education within the higher education sector has traditionally promoted awareness-raising of inequalities in international development cooperation, and scholars have responded by drawing attention to coloniality in education partnerships and proposing transformative modes of collaboration. Such efforts are admirable but will become a concern of the past if international

cooperation is halted. Powerful actors from the global North have begun emphasising higher education's responsibility for national interests and security over its social responsibility for global society. For example, in January 2025 the United States paused foreign aid, and between 2022 and 2024, the Swedish government halved funding for development aid and withdrew funding that was earmarked for development research. Calls from the European Commission for a policy-driven approach to 'responsible internationalisation' have also contributed to universities in the global North closing themselves off from international cooperation. These are dangerous developments as it puts responsibility for collaboration in teaching and research on the global South while those in the North ignore that cooperation is a necessity for addressing poverty, inequality, and injustice.

While the full consequences of these actions remain to be seen, the future of development education is dependent on a new generation of 'responsible internationalists' to combat these trends. Responsible internationalists are educators and scholars who understand the need for a nuanced approach to international development cooperation. They acknowledge that cooperation includes balancing a social responsibility for society with the practical realities of geopolitical strife.

Responsible internationalists are not limited to the higher education sector – they include educators at all levels, in communities, and workplaces. They are crucial to shaping public understanding and fostering critical engagement with global issues, and they are needed now more than ever. A recent report shows a decline in public understanding about the effectiveness of international development cooperation and whether it leads to a better world. Now is the time for responsible internationalists to step forward and counter misinformation and educate the public on the importance of international cooperation to tackling global challenges and the tangible benefits of development education.

Scholars must do more than publish about international cooperation; they must actively resist isolationist pressures within their universities that threaten its very essence. Young people between 18 and 29 years old are the

demographic most eager to learn more about international development cooperation, making it impertive for university educators to support and nourish this curiosity. Consequently, scholars have a duty not only to equip the next generation of responsible internationalists with the competences needed to advocate for and participate in meaningful international cooperation, but they also have a duty to lead by example. Without this commitment, development education risks becoming obsolete and the progress made in addressing poverty, inequality, and injustice may be undone.

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Development Education Needs Sharper Talons for Better Sustainability Approaches

Jessica Harrison

Development education (DE) needs to sharpen its talons and embrace a different kind of approach towards sustainability that is more critical. It is time for DE to release its grasp on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which serve to uphold our violent world systems that harm the environment and society. We are seeing wealthy men in positions of power gutting agencies that provide foreign aid and rolling back policies designed to help the world. This may only be the beginning of actions like these that will negatively impact most of the non-humans and humans on this planet resulting in further unsustainability and chaos. DE already works to provide meaningful responses to issues such as genocide, racism, class inequalities and climate breakdown. It is undeniable that these are complex issues that go beyond knowing facts and information, and that real sustainable change is not going to occur if current harmful human actions continue as normal. Collectively, humans need to start recognising where responsibility for unsustainability lies and be better at being uncomfortable with these realisations.

In response to this, DE should give less time to the SDGs and commit to sustainability approaches that encourage deeper criticality and dialogue.

A way to encourage more criticality for sustainability is to dedicate more time in educational spaces for learners to think, sit and reflect on how these complex issues make them feel. This offers opportunity for exploration on what they might be holding onto that could be more harmful than good for sustainable change for the planet. There is important work being done that DE may draw upon to help implement this deeper thinking approach. More opportunity for dialogue would deepen criticality as well by encouraging a collective approach to determining what sustainability can mean for non-humans and humans alike. If DE can facilitate more discussion around these issues, then it can support a wider understanding of the barriers to sustainable change and highlight how the SDGs themselves may act as barriers. Deeper thinking and dialogue may already be happening in educational spaces. However, in the face of complex issues rather than leaving ten minutes at the end of a lesson or workshop for reflection time, these activities should be embedded and used to encourage people to learn and explore these challenges together.

To sharpen its talons, DE should commit to reducing its grasp on the SDGS and take a more focused and critical approach to sustainability issues. More time needs to be given to deeper thinking and dialogue that explore barriers to sustainable change, who or what is responsible and to embrace the discomfort of these complex issues. DE is rooted in principles of reflection and action for change, and this is needed now and for the future especially when it comes to sustainability challenges that threaten the environment and society.

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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: A FOUNDATION FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

GERRY JEFFERS

For many teachers there can be an uncomfortable mismatch between the ambitious narratives of development education (DE) / global citizenship education (GCE) and classroom realities. When research suggests that students understand GCE in multiple and contradictory ways and as a vague construct unrelated to their daily lives, the temptation to draw attention to the challenges is strong: low and marginalised status in schools; insufficient time, dependent on individual champions rather than a whole-school approach; inadequate teacher preparation/confidence/courage leading towards 'soft' activities such as 'fundraising, fasting and fun' rather than critique and activism including a tendency to avoid sensitive and controversial issues. In my experience as a teacher and a teacher-educator, many feel overwhelmed by the cultural and structural constraints. This in turn can lead to varied responses: defeatism, relative disengagement, lowering of expectations, increased determination to carry on, more intense engagement with issues and resources, and a strengthened motivation to change the culture of the school and even the system.

The key suggestion in this short piece is that a stronger GCE foundation for students in classrooms can be built by closer alignment of DE/GCE with children's rights. If, recalling John Dewey's contention that education is a process of living *now* and not a preparation for future living as well as Paulo Freire's focus on education as giving 'a voice to the voiceless', GCE that begins by treating those under 18 years of age as valued citizens and educating them about their rights, can become very relevant, engaging and of practical benefit.

The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) offers one framework for such exploration. For example, realising differences between the rights to survival, to protection, to development and to participation can become a valuable schema for interrogating numerous issues. For example, for many students, Articles 3 (adults making decisions relating to children should do so in the best interests of the child) and 12 (children have the right to give their

opinions freely on issues that affect them) can be especially empowering. Furthermore, Laura Lundy's development of Article 12 that links voice, space, audience and agency can become a model for examining the situation of any marginalised, oppressed or under-represented group.

Conceptually, John Wall asserts that current understandings of global citizenship do not respond adequately to children's age and needs. His case for some re-imagining appears to have validity and could prompt a fresh starting point for GCE. The UNCRC is also a useful lens for schools to interrogate their policies and practices. Teachers sometimes find that a frank engagement with the Convention can become a surprising introduction to 'teaching controversial issues' as students pose questions about specific school practices! Indeed, the Teaching Council version of GCE as aiming to empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies, might be refined by stating that this can begin, using the UNCRC, to support students and teachers construct more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure schools.

Gerry Jeffers has worked as a teacher in Ireland and Kenya. He has also been a guidance counsellor, deputy principal, leader of the team involved in the national mainstreaming of Transition Year in the 1990s, and a lecturer and researcher in Education at Maynooth University. From 2013-2019 Gerry served as the independent chairperson of Ubuntu, a network of those in initial teaching education committed to integrating development education / global citizenship education into initial teacher education.

Disrupting Assumptions

Su-ming Khoo

My reflection begins with a sense of disrupted background assumptions, provoking fundamental questions about the global order and the purposes of learning. Our assumptions about 'critical thinking' reflect continued expectations about the forward directions of social progress. Following Freire, we expect critical reflection to lead to 'conscientisation', and mobilisation of social action against injustice and oppression. The large number of recent articles in Issue 39 of *Policy and Practice* exposed concerns about development and global education's non-response to many actual global issues. The question of silences pulled to the surface challenging questions about how our sector deals with the present (or not).

How can we embody the core ideals, approaches and aspirations of development and global citizenship education when citizenship and the global order seem to be melting into a chaotic vortex? Our field claims to offer an educational response to multidimensional global issues. Yet the present global scenario encompasses an existential crisis for the entire enterprise of education itself, from de-funding, financial crisis threatening entire sectors, to scholasticide as a face of genocide. How are critical development and global educators drawing on this present, and what futures can we point towards? How do we teach for positive change when the possibility of secure futures seems to be replaced by dread, a prospect of futureless futures?

Have we engaged sufficiently critically with the order that we take for granted, as well as the threats it currently faces? Most of us are still working with the assumption that the foundations of 'development', 'education', 'global' and 'citizenship' are holding. Yet the liberal international order that we assume to exist in the background is itself both outcome and cause of brutal imperial wars, conflict and repression. Imperial histories are revenant in current problems of genocide, invasion, occupation, protracted conflict, authoritarianism, nationalism, chauvinism, and attacks on rights and equality. Deepening global and national inequalities, disinformation and mistrust are adding to tensions and conflicts that replay violent pasts.

Education is constantly tasked to foster capacities in people to solve global problems that they didn't create. What can we learn from this basic paradox? Perhaps development and global citizenship education need to go

further, moving beyond technical interests in teaching improvements, or fads like the SDGs, and beyond descriptive approaches, towards a broader critical interest in the purposes of learning in times of political, social and economic crisis, taking in broader understandings of what constitutes agency. Our theoretical assumptions imply that we are doing this, but our practices should follow suit, addressing concrete questions of what international 'development', education and globality are for, and how these relate to broad objectives of peace, cooperation, rights, and justice.

A broader take requires generative challenging conversations, not only between ourselves, the development and global citizenship education specialists, but with others educating in related fields such as sociology, politics, philosophy, environmental and development studies, to jointly debate the role of education as a space of critical thought and global diagnosis, to mobilise understanding, energy, hope and creativity in the face of multiple crises.

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LET'S END THE INERTIA

STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY

In 2002, Dóchas commissioned academics Michael Kenny and Siobhan O'Malley from NUI Maynooth to 'provide an overview and analysis of the current level of activity for development education (DE) in Ireland'. The research consultation involved 115 organisations and sought to make strategic recommendations for enhancing the sector's strengths, addressing weaknesses and seizing

opportunities. The research report reflected a sector that lacked strategic direction, enjoyed great diversity of practice but was unfocused, and struggled with over-worked staff and short-term funding. The report preceded, and undoubtedly fed into, the formation of a national network for development education and the sector has unquestionably benefited from the professional development, communications, and strategic focus offered by the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) since it was formed in 2004. The past twenty years has been a period of consolidation in the sector with the emergence of key sectoral leaders partnering with Irish Aid in the delivery of successive development education strategies. One suspects that this is the kind of scenario that Kenny and O'Malley envisaged for the sector.

But amid this strategic and organisational progression, the sector has forfeited much of the radical impulse and diverse practice captured by Kenny and O'Malley. In 2002, they found that 'over the years development education has matured, diversified and expanded to become a force of social justice and a foundation for the development of civic society'. Can we say as much today? Evidence of the sector's inertia is all around us. It has sat out the genocide in the Gaza Strip which it can't bring itself to call a genocide. It has largely ignored the systemic origins of poverty, injustice, privatisation and the consumerisation of society in neoliberal economics. It has ignored the mounting crises in Irish society including: 15,000 homeless citizens; rising levels of xenophobia and far-right activity; and 559,850 people living below the poverty line. All of this is in a country with tax receipts of €108 billion in 2024.

Joe Muray, the former Director of Action from Ireland (AfI), posed this question of development educators: 'Are you prepared to take the unpopular position, to make your education real?'. Too many in our sector are not willing to risk the discomfort that comes from challenging the inequities and injustices that envelop us locally and globally. Rather than supporting radical action for social change, development education strategic plans are straightjackets impeding invention, imagination and radicalism. I've been told that sectoral actions on Gaza need to fall within the parameters of development education but what is that if not a critical intervention in reality? The interpretation of education as an impediment, rather than a mainspring to radical action, is an indication of how

far the sector has lost its bearings. If our sector is to have a meaningful future, it must show some agency and independence of spirit, chart its own path, build horizontal links, and start operating on the basis of social need rather than ploughing a depoliticised furrow comfortably detached from the frontlines of injustice.

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THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE FUNDED: A CALL TO RETURN TO GRASSROOTS

ELIZABETH MEADE

It is difficult to try and plot a future course for development education (DE). In our current global context, it is often difficult to look towards the future with any sense of hope at all. We can no longer assume that *a* 'future' for humanity, even a dystopian one, is a certainty. The scales of the challenges we face are indeed massive. Oxfam have recently published their annual analysis of global economic inequality. It clearly demonstrates that the continuation of business as usual, the imposition of neoliberal globalisation and the many intricately connected systemic injustices that are historically woven into the very fabric of neoliberalism, continues to amplify obscene levels of global inequality.

The obscenity of our global predicament is perfectly illustrated in the spectacle of the current United States' (US) administration. In some perverse way perhaps there is a certain opportunity in the overt, unambiguous, boastful grandstanding of Trump and his circle of white male billionaires that surround him. The oligarchs are no longer pulling the strings from behind the curtain but have a prominent visible seat at the table. Trump, and his like that threaten to take power around the world, are burning the play book and abandoning the pretence of political democracy that has long been a smokescreen to cover the reality of who really holds global power. The veil has been dropped. The ugly

truth that was always hiding in plain sight is coming out from behind the mask of decency, fairness and equity and exposing the true motivations of absolute power, greed and egotism. I suggest that in the midst of this nightmare lies an opportunity for DE.

Perhaps it is also time for DE to no longer play by the rules that have been set by those who benefit from them. Perhaps the future direction lies in a return to the past. In a return to the spirit of radical analysis and action, demonstrated in the work of Freire, from which the sector emerged. To community based, community inspired and community-led movements to address the many often seemingly unsurmountable challenges that mire the window through which we seek to see a better future. Angela Davis argued that grassroots activism is 'the most important ingredient of building radical movements'. One factor that has hampered the potential of DE to mobilise such grassroots activism has been the mainstreaming of DE. The important analysis presented in *The Revolution will not be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex* illustrates how rather than being a catalyst for radical change, states' facilitation of the non-profit sector added credence to the lie that the system is committed to the pursuit of a better future for all, whilst also depoliticising movements and blunting political goals and analysis. The future of DE must involve a return to movement building outside of the non-profit model.

In some respects, the worsening of global injustice demonstrated by the unconcealed support for genocide and ethnic cleansing, or the failure of states such as Ireland to take any meaningful action to try and suppress it, makes the work of DE easier, as the choice for or against social justice values and actions is made more blatant. No longer confused by false rhetoric that says otherwise, people can more easily see what they do not stand for. But capitalising on this potential clarity may also require that DE stands apart. Apart from the apparatus of the state that has served to curtail dissent.

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HOW CAN THE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION SECTOR RE-CONNECT WITH ITS RADICAL ROOTS?

CAROLINE MURPHY

This article asks how does the development education (DE) sector move forward and reconnect with the radical impulse central to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, the dominant influence on our policy and practice? In an article for *Policy and Practice*, Eilish Dillon offered insights into how DE has shifted from its radical roots to a professionalised and depoliticised form, aligning with institutional and 'safe' reformist frameworks. This trajectory has distanced DE from the transformative pedagogies that once defined it, raising the questions: Why have we disconnected from DE's radical foundations? Is it acceptable to uphold political neutrality while settler-colonial violence, oppression, and ecological destruction unfold?

As we consider the reification of DE into a professionalised, institutionalised, and depoliticised system, we must recognise that this system is beyond reform. By remaining within it, we risk doing little more than softening the edges of injustice while leaving its core structures intact. This is evident, for example, in DE's alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the SDGs promote reform, they fail to challenge the fundamental structures of colonialism, settler colonialism, resource extraction and ecological destruction. If we accept that the current system is beyond reform, then efforts to radicalise it from within may only sustain its oppressive structures. Instead, DE must seek approaches that do not merely work within the system but actively disinvest from it, making space for decolonial, land-based, and Indigenous-led pedagogies.

To facilitate this, DE should look to expand its theoretical and pedagogical positioning. While Freire's critical pedagogy is fundamental to DE,

we must question whether it imposes limitations on our ability to imagine and enact transformative education. In fact, works like, Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought, critique Freirean pedagogy for assuming universal applicability and failing to address settler colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty. In Decolonization is not a Metaphor, and Decolonizing Education - Nourishing the Learning Spirit, we see how Freire's approach is limited by its focus on class-based analysis, neglecting land, identity, and colonial structures. Overall, the above-mentioned works emphasise a collective approach to educational practices intertwined with anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist resistance, highlighting the need for a broader pedagogical framework that does not stop with Freire.

Hence, while this article asked: how does the DE sector move forward and reconnect with the radical impulse central to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy? it is clear that, although Freire's pedagogy provides an important foundation, simply revisiting and reconnecting with his radical roots is insufficient for addressing today's systemic violence and oppression. Rather than looking solely to Freire, we must engage in a critical reimagining of DE's pedagogical approach. DE must embrace decolonial and Indigenous-led pedagogies that do not merely seek to reform existing systems but actively work to disinvest from them. Only by opening space for these approaches can DE foster an education that truly meets the needs of the oppressed and addresses the complex interconnections of settler-colonial violence, land and identity.

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DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: ACTION FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

Joe Murray

The success or otherwise of development education (DE) in the future depends, I believe, on the extent to which it is no longer a separate 'sector' but becomes instead a partnership entity, collaborating with those working 'at the coalface': tackling poverty, climate change and resisting war and militarism. DE needs to emerge from its isolated silo and be part of the range of groups working towards the same goal of creating a peaceful and more equitable world. Action and campaigning should be a central element of DE otherwise it is in danger of becoming just words and theories, using the right language but making little or no real impact.

When I look back on more than four decades of involvement in DE, the most significant educational experiences over that time would most likely not be called DE at all: for example, the young workers in Dunnes Stores who took part in the inspirational anti-apartheid strike in 1984. When Mary Manning refused to handle 'the fruits of apartheid' she wasn't adhering to the principles of DE, she just saw an injustice and responded to it with her heart and her head and her feet. This was a prime example of linking local and global in a meaningful way. For the international non-governmental organisation, Action from Ireland (Afri), to be involved in supporting the strikers was not only a privilege but also a unique learning experience; real development education – and something that became a touchstone for how we worked from then on.

Then the people of Rossport in County Mayo, stood up to Shell when it was planning to lay a dangerous pipeline through the heart of their community. Afri had been involved in supporting the Ogoni in Nigeria and quickly saw the parallels with the situation in Rossport. Why were we one of the very few NGOs who made this connection and stood by the community – walking with them, protesting with them and organising our annual Hedge School together with the community? This community response was development education in practice: we clearly saw how power works, how the government used every agency of the state – the Gardai, the navy, the courts, the media to vilify and harass the community while standing shoulder to shoulder with a multinational corporation.

But for me, the biggest omission from the DE sector is its relative silence around issues of war, militarism and even genocide. How can we be relevant if we cannot speak out on such major issues as these? Surely, the DE sector should be arm in arm with the peace/anti-war movement but this is not the case. Many organisations work on the issue of climate change but militarism's contribution to this is rarely included. All the areas motivating DE are affected, even undermined, by the mentality, and the material waste and damage, of militarism. And there is almost total silence around our own government's policies on war and peace.

As I write this, the Irish government is in the process of framing legislation to dismantle the 'Triple Lock', which was enacted to guarantee that Irish troops can go overseas only on missions approved by the United Nations. This government is also continuing the process of developing a weapons' industry, also pursued by the previous government. Yet I would suspect that many people in DE wouldn't be aware that this is happening or, if they are, don't see any need to take a stand on the issue.

That our government's apparent abandonment of Ireland's role of peacekeeping and peace promotion – which emerged from our own experience of colonisation - and opting instead to join the former colonial powers and the world's leading war-makers, is not an issue of concern to everyone involved in education is a manifestation of a too prevalent 'play-it-safe' attitude. Unfortunately, government funding is a major factor in ensuring silence and quieting dissent but is there any point in our 'doing DE' if we are not standing up and speaking out on the most critical issues that face our country and our world?

Joe Murray has been involved with Afri since 1980 and became Coordinator in 1994. He stepped down in August 2024. He believes that DE is not the preserve of any particular group or entity and can sometimes be found, in its most powerful form in the most unlikely of places. This article is written from a personal perspective.

The Future is Vegetarianism: Development Education's Role in Radically Transforming the Food Industry

Margaret Nugent

Recently, Professor Leo Casey wrote about the banality of our collective response to climate change, and the need for a radical transformation of our values. Casey notes that 'properly structured, non-coercive dialogue can help people see other perspectives. In this way, it can be harnessed to promote collaboration and support a cohesive response to the climate challenge'. Casey suggests 'A big advantage of transformative learning is that it changes our fundamental perspectives and therefore will always lead to changes in the way we act'.

In partnering with progressive social movements, including ones supportive of vegetarianism, veganism and animal rights, a creative dynamic merger could emerge to transform practices within the food industry. The overall aim of radical transformation of the food industry is possible, but first a radical paradigmatic shift is needed in how we think about, teach about, and promote evidence based independent research across the food industry. According to the UN

> "Understanding the impact of our food system on the planet is both an area for awareness and an important opportunity for mitigating climate change. Our food systems generate one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, higher than the global aviation sector".

Switching to a plant-based diet can reduce an individual's annual carbon footprint by up to 2.1 tons with a vegan diet or up to 1.5 tons for vegetarians. The role of development education is to support the conceptualisation of radical emancipatory thinking that asserts animal rights within the capitalist, human rights trope. At a time of crisis, diet and food security requires critically reflective practices, and a pedagogy that intervenes, and cuts through the banality. Carnivorous consumption has and will decrease further. Linda McCartney, of vegetarian food fame, predicted that by 2050, 95 percent of inhabitants would be vegetarian. Development education can help us to reimagine the food industry, and how we

eat. An article in Old Moore's Almanac explores scientific approaches to protein production.

What about the farming and fishing industries, surely practices must radically change, in a way that secures and enhances farming and fishing livelihoods and the quality of life and wellbeing for animals, farmers fish and the fishing industry. The banality that Casey posited is painstakingly obvious, with widespread non-compliance of EU member states, including Ireland, with the ban on discarding fish. Equally important is the need to engage in non-coercive dialogue with populist theories that object to vegetarian values and goals. Those advocating for the culling of badgers for example. According to the Anglo Celt, 37,000 badgers have been culled nationally over the past three years. What impact is that having on the ecosystem, and what is the research evidence that supports such eradication?

Development education's role is to create a space for dialogue, developing an agreed language, a defining of what constitutes coercion and what constitutes non-coercion, within the human rights, animal rights, and food industry nexus. Until a curriculum emerges that is inclusive of and cognitive of all species, we remain in Plato's caves whilst the shadows of capitalism, carve up the planet.

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Scrolling for Change: How Social Media Can Shape the Future of Global Citizenship Education

Ashley Westpheling

As a youth-focused global citizenship education (GCE) practitioner, I was recently looking to expand our organisation's communications on projects in the global

South and educate young people about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I initially explored traditional educational methods, such as print resources distributed to teachers or a youth-friendly website. However, I soon came across a completely free platform that offered the ability to host original GCE-focused video content. This platform has recently become the single biggest news source among our target age group in the UK and provides unparalleled levels of cross-cultural connectivity and real-time engagement. It enables our Irish participants to connect with their peers worldwide. You might see where I'm going with this - the seemingly perfect platform that met all my educational needs was none other than TikTok.

Social media is not without its challenges, but it offers accessibility and reach that will ensure the continued relevance of GCE, particularly for youth audiences. At a time when young people have historically low levels of trust in mainstream media and are actively avoiding news altogether, social media allows us to engage them where they already spend increasing amounts of time. Interestingly, many young people cite social media as their preferred news source, particularly for its authenticity and diversity of voices.

The presence of GCE methodologies on social media has the potential to foster global dialogue, where marginalised voices contribute directly to discussions on poverty, environmental justice, and systemic inequality. Interactive features such as polls, live streams, and comment sections transform passive consumption into active participation. These tools enable educators to engage learners dynamically, sparking discussion. By amplifying voices from the global South and strengthening critical thinking skills, social media allows development education to reconnect with its radical roots in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, emphasising dialogue, empowerment, and action.

Speaking of action, social media has often been criticised for promoting low-effort participation, also known as 'slacktivism'. However, recent movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, #EndSARS, and Ni Una Menos originated and spread widely through social media. This proves that while simply retweeting or sharing a post focused on global justice may be the first step, it can ignite a

long journey of learning and unlearning about intersectional, globally connected issues that many young people might not otherwise encounter.

Utilising social media as an educational tool is not for the fainthearted. It presents challenges such as media literacy, safeguarding, digital divides, and algorithmic biases controlled by increasingly authoritarian tech oligarchs. However, refusing to bring our sector's expertise on the root causes of poverty, inequality, and injustice to the very space where so many young people spend their time is akin to insisting on handwriting texts instead of using the printing press - it severely limits reach and impact in an age of mass communication. In keeping with the radical impulse central to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, educators must meet learners where they are, fostering dialogue and empowerment in the digital spaces where young people are already engaging with the world.

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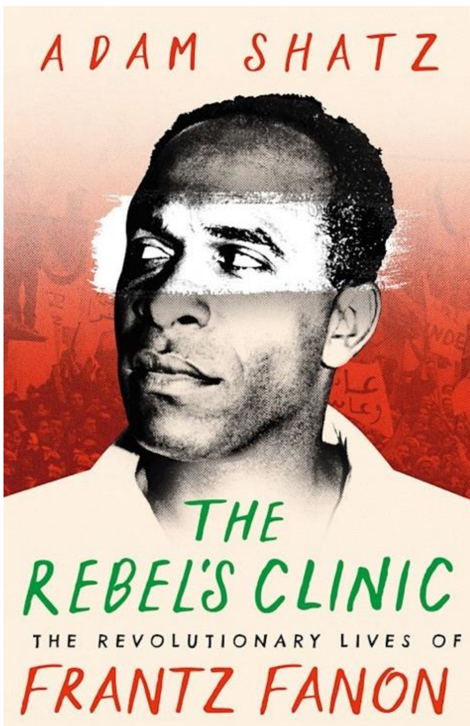
Resource reviews

The Rebel's Clinic: The Revolutionary Lives of Frantz Fanon

Stephen McCloskey

Shatz, Adam (2024) *The Rebel's Clinic: The Revolutionary Lives of Frantz Fanon*, London: Head of Zeus.



This welcome new biography of Frantz Fanon revisits his life and work, and considers his enduring influence as a clinician, revolutionary, and perceptive analyst of the psychological impact of colonisation and racism on both the coloniser and colonised. His biographer, Adam Shatz, argues that 'Few writers have captured so vividly the lived experience of racism and colonial domination, the fury it creates in the minds of the oppressed – or the sense of alienation and powerlessness that it engenders' (2024: 8). In his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that 'the Third World finds *itself* and speaks to *itself* through his voice' (emphasis in original) (Sartre, 1963: 10). Fanon's books have added currency today in supporting analysis of Israel's settler-colonialism of

Palestine. While he did not address Israel's occupation of Palestine directly, Fanon wrote with great insight on the lived experience and violence of colonisation, both physical and mental. The Palestinian psychiatrist, Samah Jabr (2021), said about Fanon that his 'prophetic insights are a source of inspiration to Palestinians', citing his 'quest for justice in the face of oppressive control of one population by another' and 'his understanding that this subjugation is not only political, economic or military, it is also profoundly and inherently psychological'. It is remarkable that Fanon continues to enjoy such recognition and influence having lived a truncated life that was taken by leukemia in 1961 when he was only 36.

And, yet the title of this biography refers to the 'revolutionary lives' of Fanon which reflects a prodigious working life and prolific output as an author, clinician and journalist. He was also a decorated soldier in the Second World War, a clinical psychiatrist who practiced in France and Africa, a supporter of the Algerian independence movement, and a roving ambassador for the Front de libération nationale (FLN) in Africa, which brought him into contact with leading figures in the anti-colonial struggle at the time. We can add to these lives, a profound interest in philosophy, literature and politics which drew him to Sartre and his partner, Simone de Beauvoir, the distinguished philosopher, feminist and social theorist, both of whom he met toward the end of his life.

There is also in Fanon, a very obvious influence on Paulo Freire and development education which makes his work of great importance and relevance to the readers of *Policy and Practice* (Freire, 2000: 62). Freire quoted Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1963) in his own seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2000). For Freire, the oppressed 'cannot perceive clearly the "order" which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized' (Ibid.: 62). This submergence is evident in the fatalism of the oppressed who regard their suffering as the 'will of God' rather than rooted in exploitative social and economic oppression that attends colonisation. (Ibid.: 61-62). Other manifestations of alienation identified by Freire, include 'a type of horizontal violence, striking out at their own comrades for the pettiest reasons' and, particularly among the bourgeoisie, 'an irresistible attraction towards the oppressors and their way of life' (Ibid.: 62). These are ideas drawn from *The*

Wretched of the Earth, which Freire attached to his radical pedagogy that regards critical thinking as a pre-condition to unveiling reality and supporting action toward transformation of that reality (Ibid.: 54).

Between the métropole and the periphery

Fanon's anti-colonial analysis not only emerged from his clinical practice but his lived experience in both France, the métropole, and its colonial satellites. He was born in the French colony of Martinique and was acutely aware of the brutality of colonisation as well as its mental subjugation. He was also exposed to the racial hierarchies in the French army during the war as West Indians like himself were considered honorary *toubabs*, Europeans, not Africans (Ibid.: 34). Although he received a Croix de Guerre for his military service Black colonial soldiers, who made up most of the French army, were excluded from the 'triumphal march into the capital' (Ibid.: 36). After the war, he studied medicine in Lyon, before specialising in psychiatry, and took his first steps into psychology and mental illness while working with North African labourers. He attended lectures by the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who advanced the idea that we experience the world through our bodies. This aligned with Fanon's awareness of the physical oppression suffered by the colonised in Martinique. He also believed that Black people lacked physical anonymity which Merleau-Ponty considered an essential element of human freedom.

Fanon was beginning to situate racism in the context of colonialism which he considered 'a system of pathological relations masquerading as normality' (Ibid.: 58). Racism, according to Fanon, 'was not merely the incidental expression of a pathology; it *was* a pathology, born of slavery and colonization' (Ibid.: 72). For example, Fanon observed that his colleagues spoke to North Africans in an infantilising French called *Le petit nègre* and chapter one of his first book *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1986: 18) debates the cultural assimilation of the colonised into the 'culture of the mother country'. It follows, therefore that 'The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards' (Ibid.). Shatz argues that in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon 'took apart the French myth of color blindness … in the language of psychiatry' (2024: 86-87). The 'white mask',

argues Shatz, is the 'prism - or prison - through which West Indians see, and misrecognize themselves' (Ibid.: 87).

In 1952, Fanon married Josie (Marie-Josèph) Dublé who was of Romani-Corsican descent with a strong trade union background and a passionate supporter of left-wing politics. The dominant intellectual influence on Fanon was Aimé Césaire, who was born on a plantation in northern Martinique and became one of the founders of the Négritude movement, later representing Martinique in the French National Assembly. He wrote *Discourse on Colonialism* (Césaire, 2000), one of the key anti-colonial texts in the post-war period. Négritude was concerned with 'emancipation of Black humanity not only from political and economic domination but also from the tyranny of assimilation to white values' (Shatz, 2024: 19). The founders of Négritude shared, according to Césaire 'a stubborn refusal to alienate ourselves, to lose our attachment to our countries, our peoples, our languages' (quoted in Shatz, 2024: 40).

Psychiatry as politics

Despite his experiences of racism in France, Fanon spent a year and a half at Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole asylum in southern France learning new methods in 'institutional psychiatry' (Ibid.: 105) where he worked under the mentorship of the Catalan psychiatrist François Tosquelles who regarded psychiatry as 'an extension of politics' (Ibid.: 112). In 1953, Fanon became interim head of a hospice in Pontorson in northwest France before accepting the post of director of Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria. This was not a consciously revolutionary move as he was a colonial subject and the Algerian war of independence did not start until the following year, but his tenure at Blida was to catapult him into anti-colonial struggle. One of the innovations he introduced at Blida - drawing upon Tosquelles' institutional psychotherapy - were forms of 'sociality', including a traditional Moorish café for Muslim males and an 'Oriental salon' for Muslim females. These methods gave patients a 'growing sense of selfhood and dignity' (Ibid.: 133) and for Fanon reinforced the idea that 'the incidence of mental illness among his Muslim patients directly related to their experiences of dehumanization under colonialism' (Ibid.: 132).

Fanon began providing medical treatment and psychological support for wounded resistance fighters in the armed wing of the Algerian independence movement, the ALN (Armée de liberation nationale) at Blida which earned him the trust of combatants and a means of communication with the leadership. However, he could not assume a decision-making role in the independence movement as he was neither a Muslim nor Algerian, and could not speak Arabic which meant a dependence on translators. Although he offered to join the military struggle, the role assigned to Fanon by the FLN was as a roving ambassador 'to represent the movement: to give expression to its goals, especially for foreigners' (Ibid.: 183-4). At the end of 1956, Fanon had to leave Algeria for Paris as the Blida clinic's role in assisting resistance fighters was discovered and he as director was vulnerable to arrest and execution. Fanon relocated to Tunis and adapted to the revolutionary regimen of 'secrecy, silence and denial' with great discipline (Ibid.: 201). At the same time, he continued practicing psychiatry at the Centre neuropsychiatrique de jour (CNPJ), Africa's first psychiatric day clinic, where he 'advocated a more dynamic, confrontation approach to care, in which patients were forced to reckon with the "violence of the conflict, the toxicity of reality"' (Ibid.: 204).

The clinic did not seek the institutional confinement of patients but rather treated them on a day care basis that allowed them to return home in the evening, rather like a job, and maintain contact with their families. He also treated anti-colonial rebels and gained an insight into their psychological symptoms caused by exposure to conflict including depression, fatigue, anxiety and hallucinations. In 1959, Fanon published *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (*L'An V de la révolution algérienne*) in which he condemned coercive attempts at 'assimilation' and the lifting of the veil (Ibid.: 225). While the 'defense of Islam had been an important rallying cry in anti-colonial struggles in Muslim-majority countries' (Ibid.: 225-26) Fanon saw Islamic identity as a 'stop along the way, not an ultimate destination' (Ibid.: 226). Shatz interestingly describes describes *L'An V* as 'modernization theory for radicals, presenting revolution as a kind of shock therapy for a traditional society' (Ibid.: 234) and one of the pleasures of his biography is the fresh appraisal of Fanon's books in historical and contemporary terms.

The mimicry of colonial rule

The position taken by leading members in the Négritude movement toward the metropole disappointed Fanon who attacked it for what Shatz describes as its 'race essentialism and political cowardice' (Ibid.: 243). Léopold Sédar Senghor, who would become president of Senegal supported French President de Gaulle's 1958 referendum on a constitution for the Fifth Republic that would offer neo-colonial status to 13 sub-Saharan African colonies. And when France introduced special powers in 1954 to give the military a free hand in fighting the FLN, including increasing the French forces in Algeria to 500,000, the measures were supported by Fanon's mentor, Aimé Césaire, who would later resign from the Communist Party and regret his vote. By contrast, Fanon found friendship with Patrice Lumumba, prime minister of independent Congo, who represented a 'repudiation of the tribalism that Western leaders had promoted under colonialism, and now exploited to keep the continent divided, and under their control' (Ibid.: 247). He was also drawn to Jean-Paul Sartre's 'Critique of Dialectical Reason' and its analysis of scarcity as 'the defining condition of political struggle' (Ibid.: 300). Sartre's discourse on dominant issues in the global South, including colonialism, racism, violence and scarcity had a significant impact on Fanon and his final book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) described by Shatz as a text that:

> "brought together piercing analytic insights and militant theatrics, apocalyptic warnings and wildly utopian projections, a passionate faith in violence as a means to achieve freedom, and a lucid awareness of the dangers that violence posed to mental health and psychiatrist's painstaking task of disalientation" (Ibid.: 316).

Much was made about the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* called 'Concerning Violence' and its assertion that 'decolonization is always a violent phenomenon' (Fanon, 1963: 35). But Shatz argues that 'The violence of the colonized was a *counter*-violence, embraced after other, more peaceful forms of opposition had proved impotent' (Shatz, 2024: 9-10). Fanon was scathing in his depiction of the 'nauseating mimicry' of colonial rule in post-independent states (1963: 311) in which the bourgeoisie sought to quickly fill the roles left by the settler bourgeoisie. The leader of the national party becomes an autocratic

interlocutor between the former colonial power and the colonised people using the trappings of 'independence' to maintain a neo-colonial regime. Fanon anticipates 'Third World' autocrats such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe or the Democratic Republic of Congo's President Mobutu.

Shatz is critical of the book's 'broad-brush depiction of a monolithic Third World' (2024: 317) but *The Wretched of the Earth* remains an essential analysis of settler-colonialism and decolonisation. A reader today will be drawn immediately to its relevance to Israel's colonisation of Palestine. For example, Fanon tells us that 'when the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary' (Fanon, 1963: 42). Who can read that sentence and not think of former Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant's description of Palestinians on 9 October 2023 as 'human animals' while implementing a 'complete siege of Gaza'? (ICJ, 2023 :142). Shatz summarises *The Wretched of the Earth* as a warning about 'the obstacles to post-colonial freedom: corruption, autocratic rule, the lingering injury of colonial violence, and the persistence of underdevelopment and hunger - a "bloodless genocide" that consigns "a billion and a half men" to oblivion' (2024: 336).

Legacy

The final chapter of *The Rebel's Clinic* is a fascinating dive into Fanon's legacy and the continuing influence he exerts on culture, politics, decolonisation, disalienation and clinical psychiatry, particularly in the global South. He died shortly after the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* and didn't get to witness its impact on Cuban revolutionaries, the African National Congress in South Africa and Palestinian resistance. When Sartre sided with Israel in the 1967 occupation of Palestine, Josie, Fanon's widow, demanded that Sartre's preface be removed from *The Wretched of the Earth* (Ibid.: 361). The Palestinian academic, activist and critic Edward Said drew upon Fanon's optimism to believe that the 'oppressed could put forward counternarratives, take their destiny into their own hands, and contest systems of domination' (Ibid.: 368). In the United States, the Black Panthers drew upon Fanon's writings on medicine to 'set up free health clinics in poor urban communities and assigned readings by Fanon to the doctors who partnered with them' (Ibid.: 365). Ironically, Fanon became a casualty of decolonisation in Algeria given his 'lack of interest in Islam, Algerian

traditions and the history of Arab nationalism' (Ibid.: 375). Fanon would have mourned the emergence of radical Islam in Algeria and the ten-year civil war from 1992-2002 that claimed 100,000 lives (Ibid.: 376).

From a clinical perspective, the Centro Frantz Fanon in Turin treats migrants and refugees who are 'victims of trafficking or torture' (383). The entrance warns staff that 'representations and stereotypes become masks, imagos, that can fix and trap us, and others; that representations efface people, objects, practices and experiences' (Ibid.: 384). Fanon would have undoubtedly welcomed Israeli and Palestinian psychiatrists collaborating and drawing upon his work to support the inseparable struggles for justice and mental health (Ibid.: 382). The Israeli psychiatrist, Ruchama Marton and her Palestinian colleague Samah Jabr, have condemned Israeli psychiatry's complicity with the Israeli army and 'its racist assumptions about the Arab mind' (Ibid.: 382). Mentally ill Palestinians in Israeli military courts are diagnosed as 'impostors and manipulators' and so denied the 'right to madness' (Ibid.).

Although Fanon's 'project for the postcolonial world lies in ruins' given the West's continued, more insidious control of the global South through the 'coercions of the market' (Ibid.: 387), his 'critique of power and international relations retains much of its force' (Ibid.: 388). This new appraisal of Fanon's life and work has been published at a time of resurgent racism, economic polarisation, acute class inequality, a climate emergency and mass migration, war in Europe and deepening destabilisation in the Middle-East. Fanon would have quickly identified the root causes of these problems and the necessity for political education of the people as a means toward 'opening their minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence' (1963: 197). For development educators, with the remit of creating critical understanding of global problems as a preface for action and social change, Fanon remains an essential touchstone for our work. This excellent biography could support a greater alignment of Fanon's work within development education practice as it introduces and situates his work in today's world with clarity and insight.

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THE INVISIBLE DOCTRINE: THE SECRET HISTORY OF NEOLIBERALISM (& HOW IT CAME TO CONTROL YOUR LIFE)

BENJAMIN MALLON

Monbiot, George and Hutchison, Peter (2024) *The Invisible Doctrine: The Secret History of Neoliberalism (& How it Came to Control Your Life)*, London: Allen Lane.

Set against a backdrop of rising inequality, the erosion of democracy, and ecological collapse, this book provides a succinct yet insightful introduction to neoliberalism, illustrating its key dimensions, foundational theories, and its deep connections to the fundamental issues at the heart of development education.

Monbiot and Hutchison begin with an introduction to neoliberalism as ideology, rooted in philosophies of individualism, competition, consumerism, and meritocracy. Indeed, they argue that whilst neoliberalism is pervasive, the concept has become opaque, and increasingly, unnamed. In conceptualising neoliberalism, they consider its connections to capitalism (going beyond dictionary definitions) as colonisation and violence, as the practices at the heart of a project of individualisation and commodification. Drawing on Jason W. Moore's (2009; 2010) work on the exploitation of Madeira (which itself would make a compelling enquiry through a framework of critical development

education and history education, see O'Connell et al., 2021), in tandem within broader African exploitation, they connect these events as the beginning of rapacious cycles of 'boom', 'bust', and 'quit', leading to social, ecological and political crises. Later, this system was reinforced by systems of debt, applied through programmes of 'structural adjustment', in a wider network of financial mechanisms which perpetuated global inequality.

The work of Ludwig Von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, (popularised, for example, through cartoons and children's books), served as the theoretical foundations for neoliberalism, before its mainstreaming in national and international policy. The former reflected in the policies of United States' (US) president Reagan and British prime-minister Margaret Thatcher (underscored by the work of economist Milton Friedman), then the 'third way' of the opposition parties in the US and the UK (United Kingdom). Friedman's ideas were reflected in the globalisation of neoliberalism through 'structural adjustment' programmes, employing privatisation, deregulation, fiscal austerity and the removal of capital controls to further neoliberal ends, alongside widespread resistance of decolonial projects in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.

Monbiot and Hutchison then illustrate the ongoing 'network of influence' through which neoliberalism operates, in corporate, political and media spheres. Case studies from the UK and US offer compelling illustrations of how the central tenets of the ideology play out in practice. They consider the levers of power shaping decision making processes, and the stark implications for individuals and societies. What is particularly telling in these sections is that despite significant 'flaws in the model' being recognised, the ideology appears bulletproof, even considering the huge human and environmental toll, particularly in the global South. Against this evidence, Monbiot and Hutchison argue, conspiracy theories and individualisation of responsibility (for example, through the concept of the personal carbon footprint), serve as problematic distractions.

For those working within the field of development education, Monbiot and Hutchison's book offers a manageable introduction to neoliberalism as a concept, and through an examination of its philosophical foundations and

political lineage, a clearer picture of (a) how neoliberalism is deeply connected to the most pressing global issues with which we are faced, and (b) a brief, yet important signposting of how education has been shaped by neoliberal ways of thinking. Regarding the former, the book provides brief snapshots of detailed and important work exploring key global challenges (e.g. Piketty, 2014). Regarding the latter - from the outset the position of education within a neoliberal framework is made clear; namely, the 'slow degradation' of education as a public service. Throughout Monbiot and Hutchison's chronology of extractive capitalism, there are several signposts to the connection between neoliberalism and the manipulation and hollowing out of education. The book recognises the privatisation of school management in the UK in the late 1990s as part of a broader privatisation of public schools, and policies of rent extraction through user fees. The drive towards the knowledge economy and how this shapes how subjects are understood and valued is noted. The financialisation of universities through student loans is also recognised. Given the succinct nature of the volume, little space is given (or indeed available) to develop these connections, but for those undertaking an inquiry into the relationship between neoliberalism and education, such connections might include exploration of: the impact of neoliberal structural adjustment programmes on education systems and children's lives (Carnoy, 1995; Vavrus, 2005); how neoliberal processes of market, management and performance have shaped teaching (Ball, 2016); the failure of neoliberal educational responses to societal issues (Brathwaite, 2017; Hursh, 2007); and, importantly, the work of others in this journal, exploring the challenges of development education in a neoliberal age (for example, Khoo, 2017; Madden, 2019).

Monbiot and Hutchison end the publication with a consideration of alternatives to the story of neoliberalism and suggest the potential of a counter story grounded in social values and belonging, underpinning participatory, deliberative democracy. In keeping with the rest of the book, this final section raises a number of questions about the nature and mechanisms of change, and how social, political and economic systems might be transformed for the benefit of all. In doing so, the book offers those working within the field of development education an opportunity to reflect on how development education, and education more broadly, might not only challenge the ideologies and practices of

neoliberalism, but might support the creation of alternative stories of hope grounded in the social values of empathy and community.

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ENOUGH: WHY IT'S TIME TO ABOLISH THE SUPER-RICH

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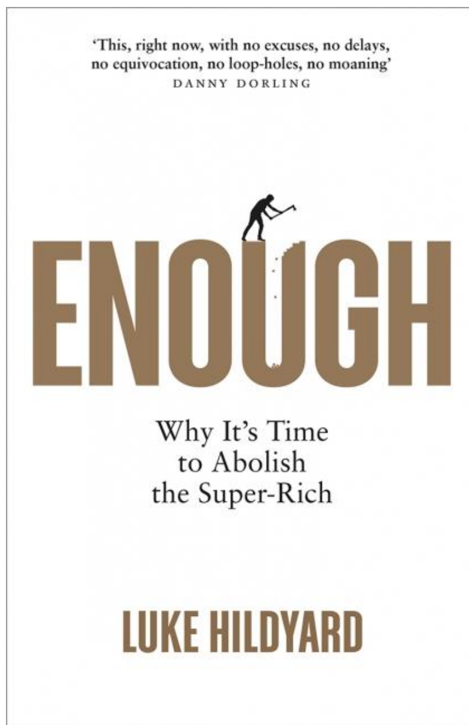
Hildyard, Luke (2024) *Enough: Why It's Time to Abolish the Super-Rich*, London: Pluto Press.



Issue 40 of *Policy and Practice* is on the theme of class as a determinant of social status, life opportunities and expectations, and level of economic income and wealth. In an era increasingly characterised by culture wars and a pre-occupation with identity, the role of class in either opening or closing doors to higher education, employment, housing and a comfortable retirement is often overlooked. As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues 'social class and processes of class reproduction remain important, particularly for the continuity of poverty over time and across generations' (Shildrick and Rucell, 2015: 1). The post-Cold War era of globalisation was to herald a classless society driven by market-led solutions to poverty and inequality. Frances Fukuyama famously argued that we were witnessing post-1989 the end of history having reached our ideological endpoint and exhausted 'viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism' (1989: 1). But time and again since that 'endpoint', we have witnessed catastrophic failings by the liberal order, most notably the 2008 global financial

crash, which exacerbated class inequalities 'with poorer people suffering worst and the middle classes squeezed while the income of the top 1% soared' (Harvey, 2020). Crises in capitalism hit the poorest hardest as we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic which the IMF (International Monetary Fund) acknowledged 'disproportionately hurt the poor, both within and across countries' (Dizioli, Andrle and Bluedorn, 2020).

So, class is still central to debates on poverty, inequality and injustice particularly in an era when global wealth inequalities between rich and poor have become so pronounced. The richest 10 percent of the global population currently receives 52 percent of global income, compared to 8.5 percent for the poorest half of the population. Global inequality is even greater when it comes to wealth with the richest 10 percent of the global population owning 76 percent of all wealth compared to just two percent for the poorest half (Chancel et al, 2022: 10). The post-Second World War period of 1945-1980 was characterised by shrinking inequality but the Reagan-Thatcher implementation of neoliberal economics from the 1980s onward triggered a period of rapid inequality between 1995 and 2021, with billionaire wealth soaring (Ibid: 3). It is this accelerating concentration and accumulation of extreme wealth in fewer hands and how we address it, that is the focus of Luke Hildyard's timely and persuasive polemic for a 'major re-balancing of income and wealth' (2024: 13). Hildyard is the Director of the High Pay Centre, a think tank that carries out research on 'economic inequality, employment rights and responsible business' (Ibid.: 1). He makes a compelling and entirely rationale argument for redistributing wealth from the super-rich to wider society and finds it extraordinary that 'there is no real discussion of rebalancing income and wealth significantly' (ibid.: 5).

The publication of *Enough* preceded the election of a Labour government in Britain in July 2024 which has accepted the previous government's economic rationale for austerity by withdrawing a winter fuel allowance for millions of pensioners (Behr, 2024). Labour has also maintained the Conservative government's 2017 application of a two-child benefit cap which cuts-off child-related social security support to 440,000 low-income families after the second child costing them £3,455 per child per annum (Raj, 2024). Human Rights Watch has described this policy as 'a needless, cruel rule that harms

children and society' (Ibid). The Labour government cites fiscal rules, an inherited spending deficit and the need for financial probity as driving the need for these cuts, but there is another way. The Tax Justice Network (2024), for example, has proposed a suite of taxes on wealth and measures to close tax loopholes that could raise as much as £60 billion for public services and a more balanced economy. These are the kind of economic reforms set out in Hildyard's book that are not only costed but come with a high social value for the majority of citizens as a more balanced economy generates the revenue to invest in public services, welfare, housing and mitigation measures to address global heating.

The alternative, as Hildyard points out, is wage stagnation, record foodbank use, personal debt, record waiting lists for the National Health Service (NHS) and declining life expectancy rates. A startling statistic from the United States (US) is that 210,000 Americans died 'deaths of despair' in 2021 from alcohol abuse, drugs or suicide as the number of US citizens living in deep poverty was estimated at 20 million (Hildyard, 2024: 5). What cuts through the statistics in *Enough* is that citizens of the US, Britain and other so-called 'developed countries' are being fed a false dichotomy: we all need to tighten our belts and absorb the pain of austerity to get the economy back on track *or* the economy will stagnate, unemployment will rise, debt will accumulate and services will decline. This nonsense was de-bunked by the IMF in 2016 when it argued that austerity increased inequality and choked off growth (Ostry, Loungani and Furceri, 2016: 39). What is worrying from a political perspective is that alternatives to austerity and the case for greater fiscal targeting of wealth are not being presented to the electorate in most of the world's largest economies.

A slim volume of just six chapters, *Enough* begins with a clear presentation of current income and wealth inequalities with the top one percent in the UK receiving a pre-tax income of £183,000 that is seven times the median income which is half-way between the richest and poorest on the income distribution scale (Hildyard, 2024: 20). The top 0.1 percent of earners have an estimated income of £500,000 with 2,500 income tax-payers earning pre-tax incomes of £3.5 million (Ibid.: 25). The Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the one hundred biggest companies on the stock market receive a median salary of £3.9 million (Ibid.). And, at the very summit of income and wealth are

billionaires; there are 171 in Britain and 735 in the US with the combined fortunes of the latter amounting to $4.5 trillion. This is not just a matter of economic injustice but one of existential crisis as the luxury lifestyles of the super-rich are accelerating the climate emergency and putting lives at risk. As Oxfam reports, 'the world's super-rich 1% are causing economic losses of trillions of dollars; contributing to huge crop losses; and leading to millions of excess deaths' (2024: 2). Another Oxfam report, *Survival of the Richest*, found that since 2020, the super-rich have captured two-third of all new wealth which is six times more than the bottom 90 percent of humanity (2023: 5). This is the result of stock market activity that drove up asset prices and wealth, particularly during the pandemic. The same report found that 1.7 billion workers worldwide have seen their wages over-taken by inflation, while billionaires have been increasing their fortunes by $2.7 billion a day (Ibid.: 4).

Chapter two of *Enough* presents data on the share of wealth and income captured by the one percent from the 1940s to the current decade in Germany, France, the US and UK. It shows their share of wealth declining to 15-20 percent until the early 1980s and then rising inexorably to as high as 35 percent in the US. It also discusses the potential benefits of redistribution and pre-distribution in transferring wealth from the rich to the poor. Redistribution includes progressive taxation measures that go directly to the poor in, for example, increased welfare payments or, indirectly, through the funding of public services free at the point of delivery. Pre-distribution is designed to stop inordinate amounts of money or assets reaching the wealthy in the first place by, for example, capping salaries or increasing the minimum wage. Strengthening the employment rights of workers through trade union membership is also key in ensuring negotiating rights and preventing casualisation or redundancy. Chapter three makes the economic case for equality by setting out the need for public investment in critical areas such as housing, climate, health and social care. This chapter quotes the University of Glasgow in directly relating cuts in services to 350,000 excess deaths in Britain between 2010 and 2018; a lost decade of austerity (Hildyard, 2024: 57). It also puts the price for the UK to reach net zero greenhouse gases by 2050 at £100 billion in investment beyond existing spending commitments (Ibid.: 55). There is a compelling moral as well as economic and

environmental case for redistributing wealth and preventing the super-rich from evading taxation through the use of loopholes and tax havens.

Chapter four questions the mis-placed deference afforded the super-rich by governments and policymakers on the assumption that increasing their tax burden will result in capital flight and the loss of their business acumen and leadership. Hildyard argues that 'status, influence, expertise and intellectual stimulation' are all factors that incentivise the super-rich as well as money (Ibid.: 64). He rejects the timidity of policymakers when it comes to applying commensurate levels of taxation on the wealthy and suggests that the threat of emigration is exaggerated based on the example of Norway which introduced a wealth tax in 2022 (Ibid.: 68). He also cites a 'Patriotic Millionaires' campaign of super-rich individuals in the US who are committed to paying higher taxes for the betterment of society (Ibid.: 70). Just as the threatened emigration of the super-rich on the basis of higher taxes is often over-stated so is their capacity for hard work discussed in chapter five. Fifteen percent of the highest earners in the UK receive their wealth without working at all from share dividends and property portfolios. Top executives in leadership positions work an average of 60 hours a week but are highly remunerated and many of them have inherited their wealth or businesses and been privately educated. Moreover, many top companies such as Tesla have benefited from public money at critical stages of their development and receive public contracts often in dirty extractive industries such as mining, gas and oil. And, many completely incompetent CEOs have been royally rewarded for catastrophic failure including Fred Goodwin (RBS) and Dick Fuld (Lehman Brothers) who contributed to the financial crash of 2008 (Ibid.: 91).

Chapter six presents practical suggestions for changing the work cultures that regard executives as the drivers of business success based on returns to shareholders. The lack of recognition and adequate remuneration of workers could be addressed by electing worker directors on to company boards ensuring that employees have a voice at the highest level of decision-making. This would also help ensure that companies recognise trade unions and take seriously workers' concerns about wages and conditions. Worker share ownership and profit-sharing schemes could help to pre-distribute income and wealth, and recognise the critical role of workers to company success. It would also off-set the

extreme concentration of wealth and dividend payments that prioritise shareholders and CEOs, and neglect workers. Another measure designed to re-balance wealth is a statutory maximum wage to reduce the excessive gaps between highest earners and the majority of workers. Some charitable organisations, like Christian Aid for example, have a CEO-worker salary ratio of 4 to 1 ensuring fairness and proportionality in the workplace.

In terms of targeting extreme wealth, Hildyard proposes a reform of existing taxes, particularly capital gains tax on the sale of assets which are currently taxed at a lower level than income from work (Ibid.: 113). Increasing capital gains tax to the same level as income tax would raise £16 billion for public services (Ibid.). And another tax proposal is to apply National Insurance Contributions to investment income such as that of landlords rather than just work income which could raise an additional £15 billion. The problem of ensuring the re-distribution and pre-distribution of wealth from the super-rich to the poor is not a lack of tax mechanisms and government schemes that could close loopholes and havens; it is a lack of political will. This demands that the call for wealth redistribution becomes loud and irresistible to the point that politicians see it as essential to their election. Creating that public consciousness for wealth equality should be part of development education's mission for social and economic justice. There is a clear narrative of injustice that could be employed by the development education sector to move the dial on public awareness of wealth hoarding by the super-rich at the expense of wider society. As Freire told us: 'to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognise its causes' (1996: 29). Unveiling the source of economic despair and unearned wealth should be central to development education's practice and advocacy work to 'build a fairer, happier, more prosperous society' (Hildyard, 2024: 124).

Enough is a tightly argued and accessible work that is guided by a compelling logic based on social, economic and environmental imperatives. What is missing from book is a systemic analysis of the economic model that has propelled the grotesque levels of inequality he so eloquently reveals. The deregulation of the financial sector, low taxation, welfare cuts, reduced public spending and privatisation are all central tenets of neoliberalism that have enabled the super-rich to prosper while the rest of society has fallen behind. Hildyard

does not apply his analysis of the super-rich to the systemic failings of neoliberalism which prevents his book from addressing the root causes of the problems he presents. He does succeed, however, in problematising extreme wealth and questioning its very existence as evidence of a broken economy (Russell-Moyle, 2019).

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