

Policy & Practice

A Development Education Review

Issue 43:

Development Education: Learning for Transformation

ISSN: 1748-135X
Editor: Stephen McCloskey

*"The views expressed herein are those of individual authors and can in no way
be taken to reflect the official opinion of Irish Aid."*

© Centre for Global Education 2026

The Centre for Global Education is accepted as a charity by Inland Revenue under reference number XR73713 and is a Company Limited by Guarantee Number 25290. The Centre is also registered as a charity with the Charity Commission Northern Ireland (number NIC104991).

Contents

Editorial

- Development Education: Learning for Transformation
Stephen McCloskey 1

Focus

- Freire in European Global Citizenship Education: Critical Aspirations,
Coloniality and the Work of Supplementation
Ana I. Benavides Lahnstein, Marta Da Costa and Gonzalo Peñaloza 15

- Discourses of Climate Change Denial and Obstruction in a North American
Petrostate: Does Climate Change Education Stand a Chance?
Lynette Schultz and Carrie Karsgaard 36

- Towards Critical and Transformative Global Citizenship Education: Mezirow's
Transformative Learning Theory and the Challenge of Deep Change
Anne M. Dolan 69

- The Future of Development Education: Designing Transformational Learning
Ecosystems in an Age of Polycrisis
Michael Walimbwa 89

- Get Critical: Framework Adaptation for Critical Global Learning as Freirean
Praxis and Pedagogical Inquiry
Brigid Golden, Charlotte Bishop and Nina Sachau 113

Perspectives

- An Emergent Teacher Community of Praxis: The Dia-logics of Practical Hope and
Radical Love
Jaime Alvaro Paredes Paez 137

Global Education as a Defence Against the Harmful Impacts of Artificial Intelligence in Education

Barry Peak 155

Viewpoint

Higher Education Can't Be Neutral in an Age of Brutality: It Must Choose Democracy

Henry A. Giroux 173

Mobility Privilege as an Epistemic Filter: Passport Hierarchies and Transformative Development Education

Giulia Filippi 186

Resource reviews

Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism

Review by Marta da Costa 199

The Antidote: How People-Powered Movements Can Renew Politics, Policy and Practice

Review by Su-ming Khoo 205

Education for Social Change: Perspectives on Global Learning

Review by Gertrude Cotter 211

(Re)purposing 'The Critical': A Review of *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework*

Review by Dalila Pinto Coelho 218

Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of Revolution

Review by Gerard McCann 227

When the World Sleeps: Stories, Words and Wounds of Palestine

Review by Stephen McCloskey 231

Editorial

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: LEARNING FOR TRANSFORMATION

STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY

Citation: McCloskey, S (2026) 'Development Education: Learning for Transformation', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 1-14.

The theme of Issue 43 of *Policy and Practice*, 'Learning for Transformation', is a conscious evocation of the *Training for Transformation (TFT)* handbooks (Hope and Timmel, 2014) published in the 1980s and 1990s by Partners Training for Transformation (Partners TFP), a non-profit community organisation established in 1981. Partners TFP was created under the influence of Paulo Freire's (Freire, 1996) radical pedagogy by community educators, many of whom had worked in the global South, and explored 'the benefits of using experiential methods in community and development education' (Partners TFT, n.d.). For example, Sally Timmel and Anne Hope, authors of the *Training for Transformation* books drew upon their experiences as development workers in Kenya and South Africa where they gave a 'practical application to the Freirean methodology' (Ibid.). In writing about the Freirean influence on community development in Ireland using Partners TFT as a case study, Bernie Grummell argued that the *Training for Transformation* books created 'a temporary learning community using problem-posing and dialogic group processes to address the circumstances of marginalized communities in a politicized and empowering manner and to co-develop community-based resources' (Grummell, 2025: 78). The training courses written and delivered by Partners TFT looked at problems systemically and how they impacted wider society by offering 'opportunities to better understand social, political and cultural systems and how we can constructively engage with them' (Partners TFT, n.d.).

This community-led, bottom-up, radical, politically engaged and systemic practice appears to be missing from contemporary development education (DE)

which has impeded the sector's capacity for transformational thinking and action (Fricke, 2022; 2025). As Bernie Grumnell (2025: 79) concluded from her case study on Partners TtT, the 'shift from a process-oriented approach to an outcome and measurement orientation means community development groups, including Partners TtT, increasingly struggle to get their transformative, process-oriented approach recognized'. This is the result of neoliberal processes, like Results-Based Approaches, imposing 'performative criteria' on 'development discourses of conscientization and transformative action that lies at the heart of Freire's approach' (Ibid.). Previous issues of *Policy and Practice* have discussed the deradicalisation of development education as the sector has become more professionalised, managerialist and accommodating of government agendas (Bryan, 2011; Selby and Kagawa, 2011). Drawing upon the GENE (2026) peer review of development education in Ireland and studies by Cannon (2023) and Gaynor (2025), I discuss the sectoral shift from DE to global citizenship education (GCE) and whether it can support transformative learning or instead signals the further deradicalisation of DE. I'll then introduce the Focus, Perspective and Viewpoint contributions to Issue 43 of the journal.

The shift from development education to global citizenship education

Three of the five Focus article contributions to Issue 43 use the term GCE to describe our sector. Two of them have GCE in the title and another employs the term to describe their practice in the article. While some practitioners use GCE and DE interchangeably, the 2026 GENE peer review suggests (2026: 32) 'the two predominant terms in use in Ireland today are ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) and GCE' with the former used in the education sector and the latter featuring more prominently in Irish Aid-funded work. So, why has GCE mostly supplanted DE in how we describe our work? When did it happen and was the sector consulted on this change in terminology? Does it matter or is this just a meaningless exercise in semantics with no real bearing on what we do as practitioners?

We can narrow the sectoral take-up of GCE to around 2021-2022. In a content analysis of the use of citizenship terms in Irish Aid and Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) documents between 2003 and 2022, Niamh Gaynor (2025) found a sharp increase in GCE usage as Irish Aid launched its

new GCE Strategy in 2021 (Irish Aid, 2021). The use of ‘citizenship’ in Irish Aid documents increased from two in 2003 to 105 in 2021 and in IDEA documents from three in 2012 to 128 in 2022 (Gaynor, 2025: 32). Irish Aid’s previous strategy was titled ‘Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023’ (Irish Aid, 2017) and it unsurprisingly carried fifteen references to GCE compared to 301 references to DE. IDEA’s 2017 document called ‘Development Education in Ireland Report’ had 372 DE references and just ten to ‘global citizenship’ (IDEA, 2017). By 2025, in its ‘Vision 2030’ document, IDEA used GCE 76 times compared to 27 references to DE (IDEA, 2025).

‘Despite this marked shift’, Niamh Gaynor found ‘no definition of citizenship or any of its related framings’ in the documents examined (2015: 33). ‘Overall’, she found that ‘the analysis of Irish Aid strategies points to a narrowly circumscribed understanding of what citizenship entails which appears to draw largely from civic republican and neoliberal traditions’ (Ibid.: 34). While she found ‘a more active form of citizenship’ in the IDEA documents, the ‘Discourse and framing of both citizenship and DE are more watered down in the documents from 2021 and 2022’ (Ibid.: 34). Gaynor concludes that ‘broader citizenship literature’ points to ‘theories and practices of citizenship’ that ‘remain highly contested’. ‘As such, they offer both opportunities and limitations to GE (global education) policy and practice’ (Ibid.: 36).

Pragmatists, agnostics and sceptics

This highly contested view of ‘global citizenship’ was also evident in a study carried out by Barry Cannon from Maynooth University, Ireland in 2023 compiled in partnership with the Irish international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), Centre for Global Education, Comhlámh, and Suas. The research was framed by the complexity of citizenship in the context of globalisation which eroded the power of the state as the traditional guarantor of citizenship. It grouped research respondents into three categories: pragmatists, agnostics and sceptics with responses suggesting a ‘relatively superficial attachment’ to GCE among professionals (Cannon, 2023: 7). The study was also responding to a perceived deficit in sectoral discussions on global citizenship and to the importance of language in articulating goals to learners. The study considered the pragmatic position to be one which evinces no strong opinions on global

citizenship but finds it useful to advance working objectives such as securing funding from donors conversant in the term GCE. Agnostics have reservations about the concept and believe that more discussion is needed to ‘flesh it out in theory and practice’ (Ibid.: 7). Sceptics are ‘suspicious’ of global citizenship’s ‘ideological underpinnings’ (Ibid.). For example, the perceived ‘Eurocentricity of the concept’ and the ‘depoliticised, technocratic and individualised biases in dominant conceptualisations of it’ (Ibid.: 5). The findings and conclusions of the Maynooth study strongly suggested that the debate on global citizenship is unfinished and more sectoral discourse needed given the contested nature of the concept and contrasting views of research participants who were mostly drawn from the DE sector in the north and south of Ireland.

GENE peer review

With this study in mind, it was interesting to note that the GENE peer review of global education in Ireland found that: ‘A few years ago, a switch in terminology took place where Irish Aid went from using the term Development Education to instead using Global Citizenship Education’ (GENE, 2026: 36). It suggests that the ‘switch has seemingly worked well with stakeholders and fits with international trends in terminology use, particularly Agenda 2030 and UNESCO frameworks’ (Ibid.). It goes on to point out that:

“The peer review could not find information regarding how this switch came about – e.g. a policy rationale, a dialogue with stakeholders or partners resulting in this change, or an exploration of what the change in terminology meant in terms of ethical and pedagogical underpinnings” (Ibid).

The content analysis by Gaynor and study by Cannon seem to confirm the observations by GENE as to the lack of consultation with the sector on the introduction of GCE. Cannon goes further by suggesting an unease and under-developed understanding of what GCE means and how it relates to the DE sector’s radical Freirean origins. The GENE report’s definitions of DE and GCE seemingly point to significant differences to the purviews of DE and GCE. The report proposes that development education ‘highlights the *structural* (my emphasis) causes of poverty and inequality between the Global North and South,

often foregrounding colonial legacies, trade rules and debt' (GENE, 2026: 32). Global citizenship education, however, 'places stronger emphasis on shared global challenges, citizens as agents of change and moving away from the "development abroad" perspective towards a shared global responsibility' (Ibid.). According to these definitions, development education is more clearly concerned with the root causes of inequalities, particularly within a colonial context and, therefore, more attuned to Freire's transformational learning. GENE's observations suggest that the differences between DE and GCE are substantive and amount to more than an exercise in semantics. As Gaynor wrote in conclusion to her study: 'My own content and discourse analyses of Irish Aid strategies and Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) submissions reveals an increase in neoliberal framings over time' (2023: 23). While GENE proposes that 'This (the switch to GCE) might be an interesting topic to explore, perhaps in connection with future strategy development' (2026: 36), there appears to be some urgency in exploring the DE/GCE nexus as part of the roll-out of the 2027-2031 Irish Aid strategy.

Although the GENE report suggests that GCE fits well within the Agenda 2030 and UNESCO framework, Bryan and Mochizuki (2023: 70) found 'considerable ideological convergence' in the 'contemporary education polycscape' that settled on a global citizenship 'which reflects a way of belonging and being in a globally-competitive market society and economy' (Ibid.). They also argued that DE/GCE's 'de-radicalisation agenda has accelerated in a post-2015 context driven by an SDG framework that espouses contradictory and fundamentally incompatible goals' (Ibid.). GCE's seemingly comfortable convergence with UN policy architecture and the Global Goals will not allay sectoral concerns about the kind of global citizenship advanced by the UN and SDG agendas. It would seem that, at the very least, the DE/GCE/ESD sector(s) need to re-open the debate on why we are using GCE, what it means, who confers it, what are its ideological underpinnings, and how does it relate (if at all) to our Freirean origins?

Models of transformative learning

All five Focus article contributions to Issue 43 invite readers to re-evaluate the transformative learning assumptions underpinning our practice, albeit from differing and most interesting perspectives and practices. Ana Benavides

Lahnstein, Marta da Costa and Gonzalo Peñaloza question how European development education scholarship engages with Freire's ideas, given the 'complexities, colonial legacies, and potential complicity in harm' that accompany their use. Anne M. Dolan considers how development education could benefit from a closer alignment with Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT) to address traditional weaknesses in the DE/GCE sector such as a lack of systemic thinking, Eurocentrism and inaction. Lynette Shultz and Carrie Karsgaard discuss the challenges of advancing climate change education (CCE) when vested interests in the fossil fuel sector align with media and government elites to exert 'discursive as well as legislative control over education'. As the title of their article asks, in those circumstances 'does CCE stand a chance?' Michael Walimbwa draws upon his practitioner experience in the higher education sector in Uganda to discuss the interface between DE, digitisation and artificial intelligence (AI) asking whether DE can sustain its 'radical and transformative purpose' in these new pedagogical environments? And, Brigid Golden, Charlotte Bishop and Nina Sachau discuss the outcomes of an effective Irish project partnership between a higher education institution (Maynooth University) and a non-governmental organisation (STAND) to create an 'educational framework for critical global learning' that centres 'systemic thinking and critical engagement with the root causes of global injustice'. These articles contemplate and re-evaluate how global learning can be positioned to effectively engage with the meta crisis when the pedagogical process itself is assailed and compromised by the forces of marketisation and competition that make transformational learning more challenging.

European framings of Freire

As the dominant theoretical and practical influence on DE in Europe, Freire's pedagogy is 'a cornerstone of critical approaches to GCE'. The Focus article by Benavides Lahnstein, da Costa and Peñaloza asks to what extent European scholars are appropriating Freire's ideas to enunciate their own positions which can reinforce ahistorical and Eurocentric perspectives in DE scholarship. Using a critical interpretative synthesis (CIS) method, the authors review European 'GCE' literature comprising twenty-nine articles from leading DE journals, including *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*. The most common practice identified in the findings was that of scholars selectively applying

key Freirean concepts to supplement their own approaches to DE/GCE, which may be implicated in Eurocentric or colonial relations. One of the examples drawn from their research by the authors is the blurring of Freire's critical consciousness, which analyses social and economic inequalities, with critical thinking which lacks the same 'political and transformative commitments'. Another common European practice picked up by the authors is the conflating of the 'distinct theoretical positions' of Freire and Vanessa Andreotti. The former emerged from a Marxist tradition whereas Andreotti's work is more firmly positioned in 'a postmodern and post/decolonial tradition'. 'Overlooking these distinctions', suggest the authors, 'may foreclose opportunities to examine the tensions, overlaps and synergies across the two theoretical positions'. The authors conclude that the most beneficial form of supplementation is to combine Freire's ideas with other theoretical tools that offer 'a more robust approach to address the complexities, tensions and difficult engagements that come with explicitly addressing coloniality and individual implication in harm'.

This article asks challenging questions about how Freire is mobilised by European DE scholars which makes it a valuable contribution to the sector's literature base. But does the DE sector also need to reflect on Freirean omissions from its practice? Has the Marxist analysis of class, artificial scarcity, global capitalism and austerity been sidelined from European DE scholarship? A CIS analysis of this critical component of Freire's pedagogy in European DE literature seems long overdue.

Perspective transformation

Anne M. Dolan's exploration of what Mezirow's transformative learning theory might offer the GCE sector focuses on perspective transformation which is the process that leads to a profound shift in how learners interpret their experiences and apply those experiences to effective action. In GCE, argues Dolan, 'learners receive information about global issues, but they lack the structured opportunities for critical reflection and dialogic engagement' that perspective transformation can provide. Her article asks: 'how does transformative learning theory illuminate the processes through which GCE can foster perspective transformation?'; what are the theoretical tensions between GCE and TLT?; and 'what implications can be drawn for the conceptualisation and enactment of transformative GCE?'. Dolan

concludes that the key ideas in Mezirow's TLT, which were further developed by post-Mezirow scholarship, explored concepts that included critical theory, decolonial scholarship, poststructuralist thought, and research on emotion and the body. Her article includes 'a theoretically grounded framework for transformative GCE' that effectively applies perspective transformation to GCE. Dolan's article pushes the boundaries of critical inquiry in GCE and tackles some of the sector's traditional weak spots such as reinforcing epistemic hierarchies, reducing transformation to an individual transformative event and the 'divide between the ambition of transformation and superficial or tokenistic delivery'. The TLT/GCE nexus opened by this article is clearly worth further and deeper exploration.

In their article on climate denial and obstruction, Lynette Shultz and Carrie Karsgaard provide a disturbing case study from the petro state of Alberta, Canada where a campaign of disinformation on the causes and effects of climate change has been mounted by the Government of Alberta's Canadian Energy Centre (CEC), or 'Energy War Room'. The Energy War Room is a publicly funded provincial corporation tasked with pushing back criticism of the oil and gas sector and undermine activism toward climate mitigation. Using a 'discourses of climate obstruction' framework, the authors analyse the CEC's posts on X/Twitter to discern four delaying and denying tactics described as: 'it's not us', 'it's not happening', 'it's not bad'; and 'it's taken care off'. These posts are a combination of: flat-out denial of the climate crisis; a denial of the role of fossil fuels in climate change; a denial of the need for action; and denial of the severity of the crisis. This is, of course, a scenario tailor-made for development education's critical consciousness and awareness-raising to confront the 'false communiques' of the CEC. But the authors report that Alberta's discourse of obstruction includes the curtailment of climate change education in a system in which 'educators are positioned as resistant'. Such is the petro-influence on government and education policy that climate change education in the formal sector is labelled as 'extremist'. However, what the petro-sector and the Government of Alberta can't obstruct is the lived experience of learners who are becoming increasingly exposed to the extreme weather events caused by climate change. This lived experience should provide greater impetus for the introduction of stronger climate education policies that are 'needed to better support education transformation'.

This article is a valuable addition to the discourse on how educators can effectively respond to the climate emergency.

Michael Walimbwa's Focus article is one of the first contributions to *Policy and Practice* on what is sure to be a burgeoning literature in the development education sector on the growing influence of digitisation and AI. It addresses an important question for practitioners: 'how should a field committed to justice and critical literacy respond to data-driven platforms, algorithmic mediation and digitally networked learning environments?' It raises concerns about how development education's participative methodologies and radical learning will be mediated through digital technologies. This could result in a compromise of 'DE's deeper ethical and political commitments'. Walimbwa frames his discussion within the Ugandan initial teacher education sector, which is being re-shaped by rapid and extensive policy-change, and his pedagogical experiences as a higher educator. Through his reflections as a practitioner, he interrogates his epistemic assumptions while remaining 'attentive to asymmetries between global North and global South contexts'. These asymmetries include reflections on epistemic hierarchies, Indigenous knowledge, curriculum localisation and decolonial approaches to education. Walimbwa concludes that the greatest risk to DE is not technological change but depoliticisation: 'the subtle drift towards framing global challenges as technical problems requiring managerial solutions'.

The fifth and final Focus article from Brigid Golden, Charlotte Bishop and Nina Sachau discusses 'Get Critical', a Research Ireland-funded project partnership between STAND, an NGO that 'mobilises third-level students to stand up for global justice, equality and sustainability', and Maynooth University. The aim of 'Get Critical' was to adapt an existing 'educational framework for critical global learning' to guide STAND's educational activities. The article describes the process through the framework was adapted and tailored to STAND's purposes by 'centring systemic thinking and critical engagement with the root causes of global injustice'. The newly adapted framework is presented in the article and the organisational and educational outcomes of its practical implementation monitored and discussed. The article also considers how the framework can support deeper engagement with Freirean praxis and assist global

educators in ‘dialogical reflection’, an ‘interrogation of assumptions and surface organisational values’, and a ‘critical analysis of their existing pedagogical practices’. The authors argue that the project’s valuable learning points include ‘the value of engaging in context-specific, collective inquiry as a means of translating abstract principles of critical GCE into grounded and meaningful pedagogical approaches’.

Creating a community of praxis

The first of two Perspective articles in Issue 43, is authored by Jaime Alvaro Paredes Paez, a doctoral candidate in the University of Calgary, and draws upon a study conducted over four months with six schoolteachers in Western Canada. This action research study draws upon teachers’ lived stories framed by dia-logics of ‘practical hope and radical love’ that animated the creation of a community of practice. The study finds ‘that teacher learning and professional development may need slower, more relational and ethically grounded conditions’ to thrive. The second Perspective article by Barry Peak, Education for Sustainable Development Officer at Dublin City University, is a warning about the perils of AI, particularly in its most common form of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), to education, specifically epistemology, pedagogy, human rights, and sustainability. Peak argues for the closer integration of global education into schools’ curricula and practice, to enable educators to mitigate against the harms posed by GenAI.

Henry Giroux is the author of the first of two Viewpoint articles that warn about epistemic injustice, silencing and erasure in higher education. Giroux writes about the ‘authoritarian restructuring of higher education’ as the sector ‘faces a coordinated assault unlike anything witnessed in generations’. Historical erasure, the criminalisation of dissent, dismantling of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes and ideological surveillance are some of the threats assailing universities in the United States. Under neoliberalism, universities operate more like businesses than communities of learning with the number of humanities courses contracting by a third in the US as evidence of a creeping corporatism in higher education. In this context, argues Giroux, the claim of institutional neutrality is a myth with universities deploying the concept of neutrality ‘as ideological cover for institutional silence in the face of assaults on

democracy, academic freedom, and human rights'. Giroux cites a wonderful speech delivered in 1974 by Stuart Hall, the Jamaican-born sociologist and cultural theorist in defence of the radical intellectual Walter Rodney. Rodney was the author of the classic text, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney, 2018) and denied a position in the University of Guyana because of direct interference by reactionary and neo-colonial Guyanese Prime Minister Forbes Burnham. Hall's speech challenged the idea that the role of the intellectual is separate from politics or subject to 'value neutrality' (Hall, 2025). 'This is a disastrous and crippling view', argued Hall. 'It utterly mistakes the role of the intellectual and the nature of intellectual work in its relation to politics' (Ibid.). Like Hall's speech, Giroux's article is an urgent re-assertion of the political and activist role of the intellectual as universities fall prey to neoliberalism.

Finally, Giulia Filippi's Viewpoint article discusses how passport hierarchies and visa restrictions deny access to academic spaces, opportunities for collegiality, and the international exchange of research-based knowledge. She cites the example of two scholars, one based in the UK and the other in Nigeria, who had contrasting experiences when invited to a workshop in Cape Town, South Africa. The Nigerian scholar received her visa after the workshop ended and the British scholar described her travel experience as 'fast and easy'. The passport and visa impediments to travel for scholars, particularly from the global South, invisibilises their work, prevent international collaborations and create epistemic hierarchies. The mobility privilege of scholars from the global North results in 'greater academic visibility' which is a platform for professional advancement. For Filippi, this issue 'goes to the heart of transformational learning' and demands from development education a 'more material account of solidarity' that ensures full collaboration with and participation of, colleagues from the global South.

References

Bryan, A (2011) 'Another cog in the anti-politics machine? The 'de-clawing' of development education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 12, Spring, pp. 1-14.

Bryan, A and Mochizuki, Y (2023) 'Crisis Transformationism and the De-Radicalisation of Development Education in a New Global Governance Landscape', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 36, Spring, pp. 51-77.

Cannon, B (2023) 'Going Global? Defining, Characterising and Constructing Global Citizenship'. Maynooth, Ireland: Maynooth University, available: <https://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/Going%20Global%20Report%20Final%20November%202023.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Freire, P (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin Books.

Fricke H-J (2022) 'Addressing "Root Causes"? Development Agencies, Development Education and Global Economics', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 35, Autumn, pp. 77-100, available: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-35/addressing-%E2%80%98root-causes%E2%80%99-development-agencies-development-education-and-global> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Fricke H-J (2025) 'Exploring the Elephant in the Room: Attention to Economic Neo-liberalism in Development Education and International Development on the Island of Ireland', Dublin: Centre for Global Education and Financial Justice Ireland, available: <https://www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/Exploring%20the%20elephant%20in%20the%20room%20report%20November%202025%20Final.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Gaynor, N (2023) 'What Does It Mean to be an "Active Citizen"? The Limitations and Opportunities Posed by Different Understandings and Deployments of "Citizenship"', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 37, Autumn, pp. 15-27, available: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-37/what-does-it-mean-be-%E2%80%99active-citizen%E2%80%99-limitations-and-opportunities-posed-different> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Gaynor, N (2025) '(Re)claiming Citizenship in Global Education' in E Dillon, N Gaynor, G McCann and S McCloskey (eds.) *Global Education in Ireland: Critical Histories and Future Directions*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 29-38, available: <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph-detail?docid=b-9781350380417&pdfid=9781350380417.0014.pdf&tocid=b-9781350380417-chapter3> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Global Education Network Europe (GENE) (2026) 'Global Education in Ireland: The European Global Education Peer Review Process National Report on Global Education in Ireland', Dublin: GENE, available: <https://www.gene.eu/ge2050-congress> (accessed 13 August 2026).

August 2026).

Grummell, B (2024) 'Freirean Influences on Global Education in Community Development and Higher Education in Ireland' in E Dillon, N Gaynor, G McCann and S McCloskey (eds.). *Global Education in Ireland: Critical Histories and Future Directions*, London: Bloomsbury Academic pp. 75–83, available: <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph-detail?docid=b-9781350380417&pdfid=9781350380417.0020.pdf&tocid=b-9781350380417-chapter8> (accessed 12 August 2026).

Hall, S (2025) [1974] 'When We Are All Enemies of the State', *Boston Review*, 12 June, available: <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/when-we-are-all-enemies-of-the-state/> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Hope, A and Kimmel, S (eds.) (2014) [1999] *Training for Transformation in Practice*, Rugby, England: Practical Action.

Irish Aid (2021) 'Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025', Dublin: Government of Ireland, available: <https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/IA-Global-Citizenship-Education-Strategy.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Irish Aid (2017) 'Irish Aid Development Education Strategy 2017 – 2023', Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, available: <https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/IA-DevEd-Strategy-English.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) (2017) 'Development Education in Ireland Report', Dublin: IDEA, available: https://irp.cdn-website.com/9e15ba29/files/uploaded/Development_Education_in_Ireland_Report_Final.pdf (accessed 13 August 2026).

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) (2025) 'Vision 2030: Towards a Society of Active Global Citizens', Dublin: IDEA, available: <https://irp.cdn-website.com/9e15ba29/files/uploaded/Vision+2030+Full+Document.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Partners Training for Transformation (TFT) (n.d.) available: <https://www.trainingfortransformation.ie/> (accessed 12 August 2026).

Rodney, W (2018) [1972] *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: Verso.

Selby, D and Kagawa, F (2011) 'Development education and education for sustainable development: Are they striking a Faustian bargain?', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 12, Spring, pp. 15-31, available: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-12/development-education-and-education-sustainable-development-are-they-striking> (accessed 13 August 2026).

Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education and Editor of *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*.

Focus

FREIRE IN EUROPEAN GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: CRITICAL ASPIRATIONS, COLONIALITY AND THE WORK OF SUPPLEMENTATION

ANA I. BENAVIDES LAHNSTEIN, MARTA DA COSTA AND GONZALO PEÑALOZA

Citation: Benavides Lahnstein, A I, da Costa, M and Peñaloza, G (2026) 'Freire in European Global Citizenship Education: Critical Aspirations, Coloniality and the Work of Supplementation', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 15-35.

Abstract: The legacy of Paulo Freire's work has significantly shaped educational discourses worldwide, including global citizenship education (GCE). In European contexts, Freirean pedagogy frequently grounds critical pedagogy commitments in GCE policy and practice. However, questions remain regarding how Freire's concepts are taken up, and whether their selective and ahistorical application may reinforce a Eurocentric perspective in GCE scholarship. This study employs critical interpretative synthesis, combining bibliometric and reflexive thematic analyses, to examine the uptake of Freire's work in recent European conceptualisations of GCE (2015–2025). We trace citations to Freire's published works to identify the function of Freirean pedagogy in conceptual frameworks and analyse moves to reinterpret, elaborate, critique, displace, and/or draw on other theories and concepts to reorient and complement conceptual arguments. Our findings indicate that Freire is frequently presented as a grounding and legitimising source for critical pedagogy; subsequent conceptual developments sometimes re-politicise debates and foreground approaches to GCE that are more attuned to questions of positionality, and that explicitly address colonial legacies in European contexts. We argue that these conceptual shifts expose tensions in the uptake and mobilisation of Freirean pedagogy within European GCE. The study calls for deeper epistemological analysis in drawing on Freire's work and interrogating European enunciative positions to understand oppression, transformation and social change.

Key words: Global Citizenship Education; Global Learning; Development Education; Paulo Freire; Critical Pedagogy.

Introduction

Living and working under Brazil's authoritarian regime in the 1950s and 1960s, Paulo Freire was concerned with the education of rural and urban workers, as well as with the widespread linguistic and political illiteracy in the country. Drawing on Marxist thought and the liberation theology movement (McLaren and Jandrić, 2018), Freire developed a groundbreaking pedagogical framework that transformed education globally (Ferreira et al., 2025; Ramalho, 2022). In Europe, Freirean pedagogy revolutionised global citizenship education (GCE) by offering an understanding of the political nature of knowledge while emphasising the emancipatory potential of education (Coelho, Caramelo and Menezes, 2018). To this day, the continued uptake of Freire's work sustains his influence in the field, informing policy (UNESCO, 2015), academic events (Reilly and Liddy, 2021), special issues (e.g. da Trindade, Robertson and Torres, 2024), edited books (e.g. Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023), and other academic publications (e.g., Bourn, 2020; Eten Angyagre, 2024; Torres and Yan, 2022). In a climate of deeply concerning global crises, this uptake has included efforts to recentre Freire's concept of hope within GCE in global North academic contexts (e.g. Bourn and Tarozzi, 2023; Bourn, 2023; Finnegan and d'Abreu, 2024; Römhild, 2023; Schwittay, 2023) and educational settings.

Freire's work is unquestionably a cornerstone of critical approaches to GCE. This prominence, however, warrants critical attention and reflection on how Freire's work has been taken up in Euro-Western contexts. Giroux (2024, paragraph 27) argued that scholars and educators can strip Freirean pedagogy of its transformative potential by stepping over their 'own complicity in producing and maintaining specific injustices, practices, and forms of oppression that deeply inscribe the legacy and heritage of colonialism'. Tuck and Yang (2012: 20), writing from Canada's settler-colonial context, argued that referring to Freire's work in contexts with a colonial history, without addressing it, represents a move to innocence that is unlikely to challenge deeper colonial legacies of stolen land and racial structures. Tuck and Yang explained that the broad categories of

oppressed/oppressor can be used to signal criticality and a concern with social justice without requiring (global North, white, middle-class) critical scholars to position our/themselves as the oppressor. These concerns draw attention to the specific historical and ongoing effects of colonialism that have been (re)produced through GCE in Europe (Coelho, Caramelo, and Menezes, 2018; Eriksen and Stein, 2022). As such, this article examines how European GCE scholarship engages with Freire's ideas. Specifically, it analyses the extent to which and how scholars engage with and supplement Freire's ideas in ways that attend to their own enunciative positions and acknowledge colonial legacies, complexities and potential complicity in harm. In doing so, the aim here is to contribute to the European Declaration on Global Education's call for a GCE that is concerned with supporting individuals to critically reflect on the world and their place within it, while also acknowledging the role of colonial legacies in shaping contemporary global challenges (GENE, 2022: 3).

We begin by outlining the theoretical framework informing the research, followed by the methodological approach to the data collection and analysis. We then present and discuss the findings, considering the implications for further research in the field aiming to address coloniality. For brevity, we use the term 'Freirean pedagogy' as a concise reference to the range of concepts and theoretical developments articulated across Freire's extensive body of work in education. This includes Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Pedagogy of Hope, Pedagogy of Freedom, Pedagogy of the City, and Pedagogy of the Heart, among others. Here, the term is used as shorthand to facilitate discussion within the limits of this article rather than simplifying or homogenising Freire's pedagogical thinking and the implications of his work in broader sociopolitical debates.

Theoretical framework

In an influential intervention in GCE, Vanessa Andreotti (2006) distinguished between soft and critical GCE in response to charity-based approaches and in an effort to centre coloniality in education about global issues. Soft approaches, she argued, position white, middle-class global North individuals as benevolent saviours, stepping over their/our implication in causing and sustaining the very issues they/we were meant to be 'resolving'. A critical approach, by contrast, explicitly recognises colonial legacies at the root of global problems and individual

complicity in harm as a starting point for conversations in education (Andreotti, 2006). We refer to these colonial legacies as coloniality, drawing on Mignolo's body of work (see e.g. Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Coloniality describes a system of oppression through a range of intersecting social structures (e.g. racism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, environmental destruction) established in Europe and globally imposed from the 14th century, rooted in and sustained by Euro-Western control over knowledge production. And individual complicity in harm refers to the ways in which individuals are not only implicated in causing and exacerbating global issues (Andreotti, 2006) but are also invested in and benefit from coloniality, which has historically privileged white, middle-class, heterosexual, global North males (see e.g. Wynter, 2003). These dynamics are particularly relevant to GCE, where efforts to address global inequalities may themselves remain implicated in the colonial relations they seek to challenge.

With the centrality of GCE in international policy (i.e. Sustainable Development Goals, target 4.7), scholars in the field became increasingly concerned with the ubiquity of soft approaches in practice, which felt increasingly inadequate to address the urgency of mounting global challenges (e.g. war, rise of the far right) and deepening social inequalities (e.g. Goren and Yemini, 2017). These concerns led to a proliferation of GCE typologies which sought to name and critique mainstream (soft) approaches and articulate an oppositional alternative that offered a critical understanding of GCE, informed by a concern with social justice and a commitment to challenging the status quo (Pashby et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Pashby et al (2020) found that critical GCE 'types' conflated what are quite different theoretical positions and methodological approaches within a single critical GCE category. This conflation appears to confuse the discourse around what critical GCE is, waning its conceptual strength when it comes to addressing coloniality and complicity in the system under critique.

More recently, and arguably to clarify the discursive orientations informing conceptualisations of critical GCE, Andreotti (2021) revised her seminal typology to include three approaches: soft, critical, and otherwise. In this new typology, Andreotti (Ibid.) reworked her definition of critical GCE as an approach that 'feels right' and is explicitly informed by a Freirean pedagogical approach, concerned with recognising systems of oppression and fostering

advocacy for, and solidarity with, marginalised groups. Andreotti (Ibid.) then defined GCE otherwise as starting from a recognition of systemic violence, unsustainability, complicity in harm, and colonial legacies. This approach is concerned with developing the maturity and stamina to sit in and with the complexities, tensions, and nuances that come with facing current global crises from a position of non-innocence and developing complex and contradictory advocacy relations. We find this distinction significant in that it appears to speak directly to the confluences that Pashby and colleagues (2020) identified in their meta-review of typologies and the concerns raised by wider education scholars around the limited ways in which Freire's work is taken up when it comes to addressing and responding to coloniality.

In framing this study, we recognise that no single theoretical lens can fully account for the complexity of situated GCE research and practice. Each perspective is inevitably partial and limited. Thus, we recognise that it is necessary to draw on multiple approaches to better capture the field's multifaceted nature (Stein, 2018). Nevertheless, and in line with Andreotti's GCE otherwise, we are committed to an approach to critical GCE that, from its situated and partial stance, explicitly addresses coloniality and individual complicity in its harmful systems of oppression (e.g. racism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, environmental destruction). From this position, we read references to Freire's work in GCE literature, seeking to capture how his pedagogy is mobilised and/or supplemented in ways that promote approaches to GCE otherwise.

Methodology

We adopted the critical interpretative synthesis (CIS) method (Depaepe et al., 2021; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006) to review European GCE literature citing Freire's published works. The CIS approach examines implicit assumptions and conceptual gaps in existing literature, thereby supporting theoretical and conceptual development of the topic or question being researched. In this case, we used a CIS to examine implicit assumptions and articulate the implications for conceptual frameworks in European GCE scholarship that draws on or intends to build on Freirean pedagogy. In contrast to systematic reviews, CIS prioritises flexible protocols and interpretive analyses over an aggregative approach that summarises evidence (Table 1). In our case, we aimed to deepen our

engagement and understanding of how and why conceptual frameworks in critical GCE literature situated in Europe cite Freire’s published works.

Table 1 - Essential Aspects of the Critical Interpretative Synthesis Process*

(a) Formulation of an open research question, which is refined as we engage in the process of producing a CIS, and it is finalised by the end of the review.
(b) Conducting a flexible searching strategy that combines a structured approach and an ad hoc search of records.
(c) Selecting records based on likely relevance and theoretical saturation.
(d) Appraising the quality of records based on content and theoretical contribution.
(e) Engaging in ongoing reflexivity of the literature through analysis and searching for the building blocks of a synthesising argument.

*Adapted from Depraetere et al. (2021)

We examined an extensive body of GCE literature from European contexts to identify scholarship that was fully or partially grounded in Freire’s conceptual framework. The research questions guiding the synthesis evolved in response to our analysis and emerging reflections: first, what is the function(s) of citations to Freire’s published work in conceptual framings of GCE literature situated in Europe? And second, in what ways do authors develop or supplement the theories and concepts supporting Freirean pedagogy through their conceptual frameworks?

Research positionality

As we look for the recognition of positionality, we ought to start with our own. The first author is a Mexican woman living and working in England, and she has full-time employment in the evaluation sector dedicated to appraising educational programmes. Her prior research and evaluation work predominantly employ Western onto-epistemological paradigms and traditions, sometimes finding the opportunity to critically explore their limitations. The second author is a Portuguese woman, who currently lives and works in England (both countries with devastating colonial histories and legacies) and has a permanent contract at a university. Her research has examined the possibilities/limitations brought by

centring coloniality in conceptualisation of GCE. The third author is a Colombian man living and working in Mexico. His research focuses on the relationships between science education, culture, and politics. Our ongoing interaction with Eurocentric onto-epistemological assumptions across personal and professional spheres has meant that we have benefited from its gifts and contributed to replicating systems of oppression. We also acknowledge that modern/colonial traditions inform the CIS method and the PRISMA-ScR guidance. With this piece, we aimed to mobilise these modern/colonial research tools to support efforts to challenge dominance of modern/colonial epistemologies in GCE. We also recognise that the languages we speak – English, Spanish and Portuguese – are entangled with colonialism and will necessarily leave out a vast body of work that remains unintelligible to us as researchers.

Search, screening, and selection protocol

To mark the influence of UNESCO's endorsement of GCE in target 4.7, we searched for and analysed research (i.e., articles and scholarly essays) between 2015–2025, piloting and conducting our study in line with the PRISMA-ScR framework for scoping reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). First, a researcher screened titles, abstracts, and full texts in two stages against predefined criteria (Table 1, b): the relevant field (i.e., GCE, development education, global learning, and other adjectival educations), publication period, cultural context, language (English, Portuguese, and Spanish), and citations to Freire's published works. We removed duplicates and inaccessible files. Two researchers refined the final sample (Table 2).

Table* 2 - The Critical Interpretative Synthesis process for the article selection

Process stages	Records selection	Selection criteria
Broad scope identification of records in journal databases	EBSCOhost (n=95) ProQuest (n=69) Scopus (n=70) Web of Science (n=40) Elicit (n=128*) Wiley (n=72) Sinergias (n=24) Policy & Practice (n=55) Total search results (n=553)	Journal articles in English, Portuguese, and Spanish were searched using phrases such as: ("global citizenship" OR "global learning" OR "development education") AND ("Freire" OR "Freirean pedagogy" OR "critical pedagogy") ("global citizen*" OR "education for develop*") AND ("Freire" OR "critical pedagogy") ("global citizen*" OR "global learn*" OR "develop* education") AND ("Freire*")
Screening and selecting	Records selected (n=62)	Records were screened based on title, abstract, keywords, and the body of the text. They were examined based on region, language, field of study, year of publication, citations to Freire's published work, and availability. Generic citing also functioned as a criterion for exclusion.
Sample for coding and thematic analysis	Records selected (n=29)	Records were included based on the availability of citations to Freire's published works that would allow an interpretative analysis.

* Table elaborated by Authors

**Since Elicit operates based on a credit system, we iteratively increased the number of credits allocated to article discovery until the retrieved results became irrelevant.

We initially included manual searches from *Sinergias: Educational Dialogues for Social Transformation* and *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review* to complement the traditional database search processes (i.e., Table 1, c). At this point, we also searched the database of the *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*; however, the platform's

limited search and filtering functionality would have required manual screening of a large unfiltered set of records, which was not feasible within the resources allocated to the review.

Analysis

Our analysis started with identifying citations to Freire's work in the sample and defining the function of the conceptual claim(s) attached to each citation (see prior application of this method in Benavides Lahnstein and Peñaloza Jiménez, 2022). The descriptive analysis continued by tracing whether Freire's contributions were contextualised, elaborated, reinterpreted, critiqued, or displaced. In doing so, we identified whether the citations to his work served as background information about the field, a legitimising voice or symbolic figure of critical pedagogy, and if they provided an ongoing conceptual foundation in the articles. Thus, when Freire's publications were cited to define transformation, oppression, praxis or other concepts, we followed the development of theoretical frameworks to understand how those concepts were contextualised, left unexplored, elaborated, reinterpreted, critiqued and/or displaced. We then examined if these developments functioned as supplements, recognising when the conceptual frameworks of studies in the sample described and applied additional theories or concepts to bridge gaps or meet goals that Freirean pedagogy could not achieve on its own, or not without creating epistemological tensions (Trifonas, 2000).

Findings and discussion

Overall, we examined twenty-nine GCE articles. The final sample is available from the corresponding author on request; please see the authors' biographies for contact details. The list includes empirical, conceptual, practitioner-oriented, and policy-focused articles from a range of education levels and contexts (e.g. teacher education and community-led projects). Sixteen articles were empirical, nine were conceptual or theoretical in nature, and four were classified as practice accounts. Twenty-four studies are qualitative, although two articles employed mixed methods, and three are meta-studies (reviews). Nearly all articles were written in English, with one written in Portuguese.

Enunciative geo-political context

Twelve articles are from Ireland. We had three articles situated in Spain and three in the United Kingdom. Two were from The Netherlands and two from Portugal. We also had a single article from Northern Cyprus and one from Italy. Three articles included various European Union (EU) countries, and two articles comprised the EU as a whole. Importantly, the studies did not generally situate Freire's ideas within the historical and political conditions from which they emerged, nor did they address the tensions that arise when applying his ideas in Europe. Except for one of the studies which stated that '... the implementation of Freire's pedagogy in the global North might be considered somewhat incongruous' (de Vries, 2023: 36). Although it is common practice in academic scholarship to adopt concepts without a full historical and geo-political contextualisation, de Vries' (2023) point interrupts this somewhat taken-for-granted practice. And, for us, it reinforced the need to be explicit about the tensions that arise in citing Freire's work from places of enunciation that shaped/are shaped by coloniality and uneven relations of power.

Interestingly, it is perhaps not only Freire's work that can appear as universally applicable across geopolitical contexts. In fact, Freire's own experiences can be presented as evidence of that applicability. Specifically, one article argues that GCE can challenge the 'we'/'other' dichotomy underpinning exclusionary migration discourses in Europe through the notion of 'oneness' (de Angelis, 2022: 59, drawing on Ramalho, 2020). Freire's experience as a political refugee and as a symbolic figure for oneness is used to advocate for harmonious relations between migrants and host societies: 'In this context, by adopting a Freirean perspective, the quality of tolerance is indispensable both for the host society and for migrants in order to welcome each other' (de Angelis, 2022: 59). However, the persuasive appeal of unity here, partly championed by an account of a period in Freire's life, deviates from the still pressing questions about how diversity is portrayed and taken up in GCE (Pashby, 2012). Furthermore, conceptualising GCE through lofty and universal principles, without attending to local and global colonial histories, can arguably risk romanticising Freire's experience of exile. And, at the same time, obscure the historically and geographically situated conditions that shape both the possibilities for hospitality

as well as the unequal power relations through which hospitality is granted, negotiated, or denied.

Theoretical and moral positioning

In curating the sample, we identified many peripheral citations to Freire's work that appeared to work as something of an epistemic password or a shorthand for social justice. A tradition can be foundational and critically interrogated; however, when Freire functions primarily as shorthand for social justice, citations can signal a critical orientation but without necessarily entailing critical engagement with the ideas being mentioned. We also noticed that the most common practice in the research reviewed was breaking down individual concepts and selectively applying Freire's pedagogical framework. While this might suggest a clear outline for using Freire's work, it can blur distinctions between concepts that have distinct roots and purposes. For example, *conscientização* (or critical consciousness), which involves reflection on one's position within socio-economic structures and is oriented toward autonomous engagement in political and transformative action, can become closely associated with critical thinking skills (e.g., Golden, 2023; O'Brien and Cotter, 2018). Critical thinking, in broad terms, is a common construct that travels across educational discourses and contemporary curriculum designs but does not necessarily carry the same political and transformative commitments. When these conceptual distinctions remain underexplored, authors risk depoliticising Freire's work and that of those who worked with or inspired him. We recognise that a deeper engagement and discussion of Freire's work is not always accessible, feasible, or relevant for every study. Our aim here is therefore not to prescribe the extent to which individual studies should engage with Freire, but to encourage greater reflexivity about how and why his work continues to be used in European GCE literature, especially when the global issues examined in GCE might also be explored through alternative conceptual frameworks.

The literature also points to efforts to engage Freire's work alongside other theoretical contributions. Authors drew on a range of other sources, and in some instances engaged in what we identify as acts of supplementation, discussed in the following section. Forty per cent of the articles reviewed referring to contributions by Vanessa Andreotti. While we understand that this

engagement can extend the conceptual resources through which Freirean ideas are considered, at times, authors conflated the potentially complementary yet distinct theoretical positions of the two scholars. In a few instances, Freire was also suggested or explicitly positioned as an important influence on Andreotti's work (e.g. Bourn, 2021). These findings were interesting in the context of our theoretical framework and Andreotti's (2021) own explicit demarcation between her theoretical positioning – emerging from a postmodern and post/decolonial traditions – and Freire's – emerging largely from critical theory, pragmatist and Marxist traditions (see e.g. Au, 2017; Beltrán-Llavador, 2024). Overlooking these distinctions may foreclose opportunities to examine the tensions, overlaps and synergies across the two theoretical positions.

Supplementing Freirean pedagogy in conceptualisations of GCE

Beyond instances of potential conflation between Freire and Andreotti's theoretical positions, engagements with other theoretical traditions also involved more explicit acts of conceptual supplementation. Over half of the authors (fifty-five per cent) in the sample relied on theories and concepts beyond a Freirean pedagogy to shape their argument. In some cases, these theoretical tools played a more prominent role than Freire's work. Such conceptual tools in GCE conceptual frameworks were usually introduced to encourage recognition of colonial legacies, Eurocentrism, structural marginalisation and taken-for-granted assumptions about social justice-related issues. For example, Daly and Farrelly (2023) describe a pedagogical bootcamp for youth workers which supplemented Freire's pedagogy of hope with pedagogy of ambiguity, pedagogy of discomfort, and pedagogy of compassion, mainly drawing on the earlier contributions of Vanessa Andreotti and her colleagues. Thus, Freire's work was often used as a starting point for discussions that were subsequently developed through other conceptual tools and traditions, including postcolonial and decolonial theory.

Across the studies that supplemented Freire's work, we identified two broad patterns: (i) conceptual extension, where additional frameworks were used to elaborate or deepen ideas already present in Freirean pedagogy, and (ii) conceptual reorientation, where supplementary frameworks shifted the analytical focus towards concerns, traditions and assumptions that sat beyond Freire's original and explicit theoretical commitments. The first shift – conceptual

extension - is exemplified in Beltrán-Llavador's (2024) study, where Paulo Freire's concept of 'inédito viável' ('untested yet feasible'), primarily drawn from pedagogy of hope, is supplemented through dialogue with Ernst Bloch's principle of hope and notion of the 'not yet', Hannah Arendt's ideas of thinking, action, and responsibility, Hartmut Rosa's concept of resonance, Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, and UNESCO policy discourses concerning the global commons and a renewed social contract for education. In this case, it seemed to us that detail and depth were provided without necessarily doing the additional work of addressing gaps (i.e. recognising coloniality and complicity in harm) or re-orienting the conceptual focus. Across similar examples, we sometimes found that this dialogue between theoretical perspectives still did not, however, elicit the tensions, assumptions and positionalities that shape these different intellectual traditions and those of the authors.

An example of the second kind of supplementation features in Saúde, Zarcos and Raposo (2018). The authors place the concepts of banking education and problem-posing/solving education within a 'pedagogy of intervention' and include the notion of reflexivity posed in the project 'Through Other Eyes' (TOE) by Vanessa Andreotti and Lynn Mario de Souza in 2008. This approach to reflexivity comprises four dimensions that can deepen the problem-posing approach: learning to unlearn - 'making visible the origins and hidden agendas of taken for granted concepts', learning to listen - 'perceive the effects and limitations of one's perspective', learning to learn - 'learning to situate oneself and others and to compare, contrast and juxtapose conceptual models', and learning to reach out - 'apply/adapt/situate/re-arrange this learning to one's own context' (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008: 4).

We observed another example in de Vries (2020), where conscientização and justice-oriented praxis are initially recognised as essential Freirean concepts in critical GCE before the focus shifts towards intersectional feminism and post/decolonial scholarship. Her argument problematises power structures and how mainstream GCE can neutralise intersectionality into 'diversity'. In this case, de Vries supplements popular elements of Freirean pedagogy with intersectional theory, elaborating on positionality, lived experience, counter-narratives, alongside a sophisticated web of theoretical developments and

pedagogical orientation. These examples of supplementation recognise what is missing (e.g. a focus on positionality and the need for alternative perspectives) or what may lack centrality in Freirean pedagogy. It is also a reorientation which favours a partial but necessary displacement of Freire's work, one that is open to alternative engagements with coloniality and alterity in European contexts.

A third example of the second kind of supplementation as re-orientation is presented by Walsh (2020) who, drawing on Jordan Flaherty's work, examines how GCE may reproduce saviourism and hero narratives. Walsh (2020) situates human agency within historical processes via Freire yet foregrounds reparational citizenship education as a pedagogical response. Walsh elaborates on Tim Huijgen et al.'s (2017) historical consciousness and perspective-taking, Nancy Fraser's theorisation of social justice, Vanessa Andreotti's critique of GCE and Michalinos Zembylas contributions to the pedagogy of discomfort. In this case, Walsh (2020) draws on Freire to establish a critical orientation for agency which is followed by argumentative trajectories that more directly interrogate saviourism, Western subject formation, and structural injustice in Europe.

While also not addressing the overlaps and tensions across theoretical positions, nor reflecting on Freire's theoretical limitations, the second form of supplementation moves closer to the kind of reflexive engagement that encourages us to question our continued reliance on Freire as a primary point of reference for social justice and change of the status quo. By drawing on a wider range of conceptual frameworks, these studies open additional ways of understanding GCE and its practices. They encourage greater attention to the assumptions that shape our conceptual choices and analyses. They prompt us to interrogate and seek to understand the forms of oppression and inequality that may be less visible in European GCE scholarship through a Freirean lens. In doing so, they invite us to engage with theoretical perspectives that speak more directly to the complexities of European GCE educational and policy contexts.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Freire's work is mobilised within European GCE scholarship and to explore if/how scholars supplement Freirean pedagogy with other theoretical tools. Our analysis suggests that Freire continues to

function as a foundational reference point for critical GCE, frequently serving as a source of theoretical legitimacy and a shared vocabulary around social justice in education. In reaching for this theoretical shorthand, however, the literature reviewed does seem to substantiate Giroux's (2024) concern about decontextualised, ahistorical, and peripheral references to Freire's work. While signalling a commitment to social justice, scholarship in the field can often step over reflections around what it means to adopt (and potentially adapt) Freirean pedagogy in geopolitical contexts with colonial histories and legacies, complexifying conceptualisation of hope and advocacy for the oppressed, by recognising our own (e.g. white, middle-class, European) implication in oppression. To be clear, we do not mean to negate scholars' commitments to challenging the status quo and promoting social justice, but to highlight how critical aspirations can coexist with limited interrogation of our enunciative position. In this way, our study shows that the adaptation of Freirean pedagogy in GCE situated in Europe is not simply a matter of theoretical uptake but an opportunity to recognise tensions and to productively engage with them through post/decolonial scholarship or otherwise.

As we recognise the important work Freire does in evoking social justice and the richness of his conceptual framework, we found that articles supplementing his ideas with other theoretical tools offered a more robust approach to address the complexities, tensions and difficult engagements that come with explicitly addressing coloniality and individual implication in harm. Supplementation was particularly helpful when it reoriented the focus of analysis to issues that are not central to Freirean pedagogy, e.g. through including concepts like intersectionality (recognising not only economic but also racial, gender, and other power structures) and positionality (recognising how one fits in/benefits from/is oppressed by the same structures). Still, rather than deciding on what kind of supplementation critical GCE should take, falling back into the trap of universally projecting one theory, the contribution of this article lies in showing how critical GCE scholars work within/extend/re-orient Freire's work through supplementation. As such, we reinforce that the question is not whether Freire should remain relevant to GCE, but how his work is mobilised, from where, by whom, and to what ends.

References

- Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus Critical Global Citizenship Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 3, pp. 40-45, available: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-3/soft-versus-critical-global-citizenship-education> (accessed 06 July 2026).
- Andreotti, V de O (2021) 'Depth Education and the Possibility of GCE Otherwise', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 496-509.
- Andreotti, V and de Souza, L M (2008) *Learning to Read the World Through Other Eyes*, Derby, UK: Global Education Derby, available: [https://developmenteducation.ie/media/documents/Learning to Read the World Through Other.pdf](https://developmenteducation.ie/media/documents/Learning_to_Read_the_World_Through_Other.pdf) (accessed 29 July 2026).
- Au, W (2017) 'The Dialectical Materialism of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy', *Reflexão e Ação*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 171-195.
- Beltrán-Llavador, J (2024) 'A Praxis of Hope: Lessons from the "Untested Feasibility" for Twenty-First Century Education', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 53-62.
- Benavides Lahnstein, A I and Peñaloza Jiménez, G (2022) 'Using Lucie Sauvé's Environmental Education Typology: A Systematic Synthesis of Citations', *Environmental Education Research*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 335-353.
- Bourn, D (2020) 'Educación Global y Desarrollo y Habilidades Globales', *EDUCAR*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 279-295.
- Bourn, D (2021) 'Pedagogy of Hope: Global Learning and the Future of Education', *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 65-78.
- Bourn, D (ed.) (2023) 'Global Citizenship as a Pedagogy of Hope', *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 1-3.
- Bourn, D and Tarozzi, M (eds.) (2023) *Pedagogy of Hope for Global Social Justice: Sustainable Futures for People and the Planet*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Coelho, D, Caramelo, J and Menezes, I (2018) 'Educação para o Desenvolvimento na Era Global: Possibilidades de uma Leitura Pós-Colonial', *Educação, Sociedade e Cultura*, Vol. 53, pp. 97-119.

Daly, S and Farrelly, A (2023) 'Youth Work as Transformative Education: A Reflection on the National Youth Council of Ireland's Pedagogical Bootcamp', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 37, Autumn, pp. 138-151.

da Trindade, A Robertson, S L and Torres, C A (2024) 'Introduction to special issue: Paulo Freire – global educator', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 1-6.

de Angelis, R (2022) 'Global Education and Migration in a Changing European Union', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 34, pp. 55-78.

de Vries, M (2020) 'Enacting Critical Citizenship: An Intersectional Approach to Global Citizenship Education', *Societies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 1-19.

de Vries, M (2023) 'Civic Action Within Global Citizenship Education as an antidote to Despair', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 37, pp. 28-55.

Depraetere, J, Vandeviver, C, Keygnaert, I and Beken, T V (2021) 'The Critical Interpretive Synthesis: An Assessment of Reporting Practices', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 669-689.

Dixon-Woods, M, Cavers, D, Agarwal, S, Annandale, E, Arthur, A, Harvey, J, Hsu, R, Katbamna, S, Olsen, R, Smith, L, Riley, R and Sutton, A J (2006) 'Conducting a Critical Interpretive Synthesis of the Literature on Access to Healthcare by Vulnerable Groups', *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, Vol. 6, Article 35.

Eriksen, K G and Stein, S (2022) 'Good intentions, colonial relations: Interrupting the white emotional equilibrium of Norwegian citizenship education. Review of Education', *Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 44(3), 210-230.

Eten Angyagre, S (2024) 'Development Education and Decolonising International Partnerships in Higher Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 39, pp. 87-100.

Ferreira, E B, Teixeira Garcia, M L, Sabadini, M de S and Delboni, T M Z G F (2025) 'Social-Environmental Crises and Critical Pedagogy in Brazil', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, pp. 1-12.

Finnegan, W and d'Abreu, C (2024) 'The Hope Wheel: A Model to Enable Hope-Based Pedagogy in Climate Change Education', *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 15, Article 1347392.

Giroux, H A (2024) 'Rethinking Paulo Freire and Postcolonialism in the Age of Disposability', *Counterpunch*, available: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/12/06/rethinking-paulo-freire-and-postcolonialism-in-the-age-of-disposability/> (accessed 06 July 2026).

Global Education Network Europe (GENE) (2022) 'European Declaration on Global Education to 2050', Dublin: GENE, available: <https://www.gene.eu/ge2050-congress> (accessed 06 July 2026).

Golden, B (2023) 'Promoting Democratic Values in Initial Teacher Education: Findings from a Self-Study Action Research Project', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 36, *Spring*, pp. 34–58.

Goren, H and Yemini, M (2017) 'Global Citizenship Education Redefined – A Systematic Review of Empirical Studies on Global Citizenship Education', *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 82, No. 1, pp. 170-183.

McLaren, P and Jandrić, P (2018) 'Paulo Freire and Liberation Theology: The Christian Consciousness of Critical Pedagogy', *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, Vol. 94, No. 2, pp. 246-264.

Mignolo, W D and Walsh, C E (2018) 'On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis', Duke University Press.

O'Brien, S and Cotter, G (2018) 'Critical researchers "of and for our times": exploring student teachers' use of critical multicultural and development education frameworks in their professional research papers (PRPS)', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 26, pp. 74-105.

Pashby, K (2012) 'Questions for Global Citizenship Education in the Context of the "New Imperialism": For Whom, By Whom?' in V Andreotti and L de Souza (eds.) *Postcolonial Perspectives in Global Citizenship Education*, New York and London: Taylor & Francis.

Pashby, K, da Costa, M, Stein, S and Andreotti, V (2020) 'A Meta-Review of Typologies of Global Citizenship Education', *Comparative Education*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 144-164.

Ramalho, R R (2022) 'Analytical model of the pedagogy of the oppressed: systematization of the Paulo Freire's Method', *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, Vol. 27, pp. 1-23.

Reilly, P and Liddy, M (2021) *Looking Back and Looking Forward: Conversations on Paulo Freire's Influence on Global Development Practice*, Maynooth: Maynooth University, available: <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/15913/1/Freire%20Conference%20FINAL%20040522.pdf> (accessed 06 July 2026).

Römhild, R (2023) 'Learning Languages of Hope and Advocacy: Human Rights Perspectives in Language Education for Sustainable Development', *Human Rights Education Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 9-29.

Saúde, S, Zarcos, A P and Raposo, A (2018) 'Empowering More Proactive Citizens through Development Education: The Results of Three Learning Practices Developed in Higher Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 27, Autumn, pp. 109-126.

Schwittay, A (2023) 'Teaching Critical Hope With Creative Pedagogies of Possibilities', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 85-103.

Stein, S (2018) 'Rethinking Critical Approaches to Global and Development Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 27, Autumn, pp. 1-13.

Torres, C A and Yan, L (2022) 'Paulo Freire and the State-of-the-Art of the International Journal of Lifelong Education', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 41, No. 6, pp. 651-665.

Tricco, A C et al. (2018) 'PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and Explanation', *Annals of Internal Medicine*, Vol. 169, No. 7, pp. 467-473.

Trifonas, P (2000) 'Derrida and Rousseau: Deconstructing the Ethics of a Pedagogy of the Supplement', *The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 243-265.

Tuck, E and Yang, K W (2012) 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1-40.

UNESCO (2015) *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives*, Paris: UNESCO, available: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232993> (accessed 06 July 2026).

Walsh, G M (2020) 'Challenging the Hero Narrative: Moving Towards Reparational Citizenship Education', *Societies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Article 34.

Wynter, S (2003). 'Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation - An argument'. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 3, No.3, pp. 257-337. Available: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/5163>

Ana I. Benavides Lahnstein works as an Evaluation and Research professional at STEM Learning and is a tutor at the Open University in the UK. Her research is spread across nodal points between science education, environmental and sustainability education, and global citizenship education. She has also explored how school curricula and educational programmes in formal and non-formal settings support science learning for educators and young people. Correspondence: Benavides.lahnstein@gmail.com.

Marta da Costa is a Senior Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, where she teaches in the School of Education. Her research aims to explore how post and decolonial theory can inform epistemic reflexivity in critical Global Citizenship Education research and teaching from within European education contexts.

Gonzalo Peñaloza is a researcher at the Centre for Research and Advanced Studies of the National Polytechnic Institute, México. He holds a PhD in Teaching, History and Philosophy of Sciences (Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil) and a PhD in Science Education (Universidad Distrital, Colombia). His research seeks to understand how science education contributes to critical thinking, and how biology education interacts with culture, politics and society.

DISCOURSES OF CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL AND OBSTRUCTION IN A NORTH AMERICAN PETROSTATE: DOES CLIMATE CHANGE EDUCATION STAND A CHANCE?

LYNETTE SHULTZ AND CARRIE KARSGAARD

Citation: Shultz, L and Karsgaard, C (2026) 'Discourses of Climate Change Denial and Obstruction in a North American Petrostate: Does Climate Change Education Stand a Chance', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 36-68.

Abstract: A growing international consensus on the importance of equipping citizens with the capacities to respond to climate crises has resulted in proliferating efforts to 'green' education, including by global policy bodies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). However, education does not occur in a vacuum; it is shaped, enabled, or constrained by the political and economic contexts in which it unfolds. This article examines how climate change education is curtailed in a petrostate context through a case study of Alberta, Canada, where the state exerts discursive as well as legislative control over education. The Government of Alberta's Canadian Energy Centre (CEC), or 'Energy War Room', has aggressively mobilised messages of climate denial and delay with the purpose of obstructing actions to limit fossil fuel development. By analysing the CEC's tweets through the 'discourses of climate obstruction' framework created by Kinol et al. (2025), we trace the particularities of the petrostate's climate denial and delay. By promoting fossil fuel-friendly discourses and casting climate advocacy as ideological or even unpatriotic, the CEC sidelines much of the climate change education taking place in schools and communities, making it difficult and increasingly politically dangerous. Only softened versions of climate change education, such as 'greening' or gardening as climate change mitigation, are palatable, as they divert attention away from petrostate hegemony. Rather than interrogating anemic forms of climate change education in isolation, we highlight the role of the petro-state in restraining resistance to fossil fuels in climate education. In this, we consider paths for

education to solidify the resistance needed to hold the fossil fuel industry and its agents accountable for their role in planetary destruction.

Key words: Climate Change Education; Climate Denial; Discourse; Education Policy; Energy Education; Fossil Fuels; Greening Education; OECD; Petrostate; UNESCO.

Introduction

“Climate change is here. It is terrifying. And it is just the beginning. The era of global warming has ended; the era of global boiling has arrived”. António Guterres, press conference on global temperatures (UN 2023).

A reasoned response to the intensification of climate change toward climate catastrophe would be to learn about its causes and to immediately implement all possible mitigation and adaptation actions. The vital contributions of climate change education in schools, universities, and via local, national and international civil society groups is supported by global frameworks created by bodies such as UNESCO and the OECD. One of the six priority areas for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Action for Climate Empowerment (n.d.), education has seen increasing commitment at the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) meetings on climate change since the 2022 COP27 meeting in Egypt, which launched the Greening Education Partnership, a whole-of-system approach to climate education. Initiatives such as the Greening Education Partnership support countries to tackle the climate crisis through ‘strong, coordinated and comprehensive action that will prepare every learner to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to tackle climate change and to promote sustainable development’ (UNESCO, n.d.). Education policy bodies have taken up these commitments by making specific recommendations for system-wide climate change education, including recommendations for curriculum, teacher training, and links to communities, as well as methods for monitoring and evaluating progress (e.g. OECD, 2022; 2024; Nusche et al., 2024; UNESCO, n.d.; UNESCO and MECCE, 2024). Focused on individual empowerment, these policies promote education that provides learners with the

knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to engage in climate action. To track country progress and ultimately support mainstreaming of climate education, global policy bodies are developing global indicators that link to Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal #4 on quality education (UNESCO and MECCE, 2024).

These policies highlight a growing international consensus on the importance of equipping citizens with the capacities to respond to climate crises. However, the implementation of climate change education does not occur in a vacuum (Aykut and Castro, 2017). It is shaped, enabled, or constrained by the political and economic contexts in which it unfolds. This article examines how climate change education, including formal and non-formal, basic, and higher education, is discursively curtailed in a petrostate context through a case study of the petro-state of Alberta, Canada and its current government, the United Conservative Party (UCP), a government that since 2019 has taken a very aggressive and ‘whole government’ approach to supporting the fossil fuel industry while challenging climate science and scientists as needlessly ideological. Canadians experience the climate crisis in intensified flooding, droughts, and some of the world’s fastest rising temperatures (see <https://natural-resources.canada.ca/climate-change/national-assessment-process>) and devastating wildfires (see <https://ciffc.net/>). At the same time, the contribution of fossil fuels to gross domestic product (GDP) continues to increase, averaging about 5 percent for Canada, 21 percent for Alberta, and 25 percent for Newfoundland and Labrador (Wang, 2021). The CEC reports that the energy sector’s revenue contribution to Canadian governments between 2000 and 2021 was \$755 Billion CAD (CEC, 2023a). Despite this wealth, Alberta demonstrated the characteristics of a petro-state including having the lowest per capita funding for public education of any jurisdiction in Canada (Milne, 2025). A petro-state is considered a nation that is economically dependent on fossil fuel industries. Karl (1997; 1999) and Ross (2012) highlight that petro-states experience weakened governance, economic instability due to the ‘boom and bust’ nature of the global fossil fuel economy, a turn toward authoritarianism to manage conflict between citizens’ needs and growth in fossil fuel development, and ultimately, a diminished focus on and funding of state funded health, education, and infrastructure.

In a petrostate context, the fossil fuel industry does not simply co-exist with education; instead, education is actively reshaped by an increasingly authoritarian petrostate with explicit goals to contain discussion of climate change or influence by non-government organisations or institutions engaging the public in climate or energy justice activities. The Government of Alberta's Canadian Energy Centre (CEC), referred to as the 'Energy War Room', has aggressively mobilised messages of climate denial and delay with the purpose of obstructing actions to limit fossil fuel development. The CEC has taken up social media channels like X/Twitter to actively promote Alberta's fossil fuel sector and counter climate policy by shaping public discourse. In this study, the interaction of this state generated anti-climate change messaging with education is of primary interest. If there is to be a liveable future on our shared planet, we must understand how petro-politics work to keep fossil fuel industries protected, while citizens are distracted and unable to get the knowledge they need to take action (see for example, King et al., 2023).

To make sense of the nature of CEC's efforts to influence public discourse about climate change, we conducted a critical policy analysis (Young and Diem, 2018; Diem et al., 2014) of the Alberta government's CEC through the 'discourses of climate obstruction' framework created by Kinol et al. (2025), which enables us to trace the particularities of the petrostate's climate denial and delay. Critical policy analysis explores power, ideology, and context of policy and policymaking. By analysing the Alberta government's policy, the CEC website information, and CEC tweets as a central activity in its communication strategy, patterns of discourses are made visible. By promoting fossil fuel-friendly discourses and casting climate advocacy as ideological or even unpatriotic, the CEC sidelines much of the climate change education taking place in schools and communities, making it difficult and potentially politically dangerous. Here, a softened version of climate change education, such as 'greening' or gardening as climate change mitigation, is more palatable than a critical examination of the role of fossil fuels in causing and exacerbating climate change, as it diverts attention away from petrostate hegemony. Interrogating anemic forms of climate change education, we consider what it means for education to solidify the resistance needed to hold the fossil fuel industry and its agents accountable for their role in planetary destruction.

Global policy and petro-influence in education

The move to ‘green’ climate change education is a global trend. Recently, COP28 strengthened global climate commitments through a ‘Declaration on the common agenda for education and climate change’ (UNFCCC, 2024), which embedded climate change within Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education. Goals for climate change education focus on fostering climate literacy (OECD, 2024), which is predominantly oriented around scientific knowledge of human-induced climate change and the ability to assess and communicate climate information. Recognising a need to move beyond knowledge to action, climate education policies also emphasise individual learner empowerment, including the development of key knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that foster confidence and motivation towards ‘student awareness, agency and empowerment for climate action’ (OECD, 2022: 2), including through practice of sustainable lifestyles and work within a green economy. Increased treatment of climate change education within global policy is mirrored in exponential growth in research on the topic, as is reflected through a proliferation of systematic literature reviews on climate change education (e.g. Hadiapurwa et al., 2024; Kranz et al., 2022; Monroe et al., 2019; Morrissey and Morrissey, 2024; Nepras et al., 2022; Rousell and Cutter-MacKenzie-Knowles, A., 2020). While some climate education research engages with petro-pedagogy in the classroom, broader petrostate dynamics largely remain beyond view in education research.

In fossil fuel reliant contexts, research increasingly points to the longstanding influence of oil and gas industries over formal education, both basic education and higher education, through means ranging from teacher resourcing to corporate sponsorships (Keary and Chestnut, 2025), naming such influences ‘petro-pedagogy’ (Eaton and Day, 2020; Tannock, 2020). Characterised by greenwashed and techno-optimistic portrayals of the fossil fuel industry, petro-pedagogy downplays anthropogenic causes and the injustices inherent to climate change by presenting so-called ‘balanced’ representations of the climate crisis that emphasise natural causes. Firmly situated within neoliberal logics, petro-pedagogies focus on individualised climate actions at the expense of systemic change, leaving climate-affecting industry practices beyond view through a focus on actions such as cycling, recycling, and other individual behaviours.

Fortunately, the hegemony of petro-state politics is not complete, and emerging research recommends more critical forms of climate change education that, for example, pushes back against oil industry actors that use community-focused yet corporate-branded philanthropic educational efforts, like building playgrounds or funding libraries, to shape both formal and non-formal education toward reducing resistance to oilsands developments (see Hoeg, 2020). From a humanities angle, Lowan-Trudeau (2023: 654) encourages applying an absurdist lens to Alberta's context, which can enable critique and introduce creative possibilities while maintaining humour in the face of the 'Alberta government's unconscionable environmentally-related actions'. Such scholarship pushes the boundaries of global 'greening' efforts by engaging directly with climate-harming activities of both industry and the state.

However, most of the petro-pedagogy scholarship focuses either on the direct influence of the fossil fuel industry and/or attends to specific sites rather than the broader political climate within which climate education policy is created and enacted. A recent systematic literature review by the authors (Karsgaard and Shultz, 2025) about research at the intersections of fossil fuels and education identifies growth in this research area; however, overall, fossil fuel interests are prioritised in education research according to state economic and workforce development goals and discourses. Despite the intensifying climate crisis, only nine of 89 articles critique the interface of fossil fuels and education. Hodgkins (2008), for example, articulates how the rise of neoliberalism compounds within petrostates to enable infusion of industry propaganda in education. Examining the role of the petrostate in higher education, Adkin (2021; 2023) reveals state influence over politics, cultures, and governance of post-secondary institutions to ensure alignment with petrostate aims. Such studies point to a need to more deeply understand the mechanics of petrostate influence over education if climate change education is to meaningfully take hold. We now turn to an example petrostate, the province of Alberta in Canada, to consider the tensions and restrictions it poses for climate change education.

Alberta as a petrostate: curtailing climate change education

Alberta, a landlocked province in western Canada, has long been dependent on resource extraction. The 'discovery' of oil in the early to mid-20th century

continues to be celebrated in the province in ways that are part myth and part hard economic realism. The petroculture that surrounds the exploration, extraction, and development of fossil fuel products stretches across the province, infusing its governance. The culture and economics of fossil fuels set Alberta apart from other areas in Canada, and Albertans are more likely than their fellow Canadians to accept unconventional fossil fuel developments (Brunner and Axsen, 2020; see also Government of Alberta, 2025), such as bitumen extraction in the Fort McMurray oilsands development. Situated in the northeast of the province, this development contentiously sits on land governed by Treaty 8, an agreement signed in 1899 during the colonisation of Indigenous land by the government of Britain, which established relations between local Indigenous groups and the Canadian government. The government of the Province of Alberta, the area where most of Treaty 8 land is located, is bound by the national agreements signed even before Alberta became a Canadian province. Included in the Treaty 8 agreement is the right for Aboriginal people to continue their use of the land for subsistence by activities such as hunting, fishing, and the procurement of life's necessities, and it delineates land reserved for each specific Indigenous group. In this, Indigenous people have rights related to the whole of the land under Treaty 8 with additional rights to the land reserved for their particular Indigenous group (Whose Land, n.d.).

This Treaty is the foundation for negotiations today with the many parties interested in developing the rich and diversely endowed resources within the Treaty agreement. The extraction practices of national and international fossil fuel corporations in the region, and subsequent massive disruption and destruction of the land and the lives of local people, continue to be ongoing points of legal, economic, and social conflict. Like other petrostates around the world, the Government of Alberta has made fossil fuel extraction its main focus for economic development, and destroying land, air, water, and human communities, aptly described as *sacrifice zones of extraction*, are viewed as necessary if the riches of oil are to be accessed (Juskus, 2023; Lerner, 2010). The benefits of the extraction are for people with jobs in the industry and, most significantly, foreign owners and shareholders, many in companies headquartered in the United States, while the burdens are on Indigenous people (Deranger et al., 2022) and small farmers in rural communities.

Conservative governments:

“which ruled the province continually from 1934 to 2015, and took power again in 2019, draw not only (since the 1990s) upon neoliberal ideology but also upon deep veins of libertarian populism and frontier masculinity associated with the resource-extractive economy” (deSmog n.d., qtd. in Adkin 2023: 2)

Karl (1997) and Ross (2012) found that oil-rich states are more likely to experience authoritarianism, economic mismanagement, corruption, and gender inequality as central to governance structures and processes. Institutions tend to be underdeveloped in petrostates, leading to corruption, weak democratic processes, and instability caused by the underdevelopment of industries other than fossil fuels. Petrostates are vulnerable to world oil prices and in Alberta, like other petrostates, the solution is to increase fossil fuel extraction rather than to look at diversifying the economy. Fossil fuel companies and politicians work together to create fossil fuel-friendly policies such as low taxation, generous subsidies for fossil fuel exploration and development, and minimal environmental regulations that overlook the destructive impacts on land, air, and water.

In recent years, the reality of the climate crisis has become apparent through increased destructive weather events such as floods, droughts, and wildfires, along with global movements to make people aware of the peril of overshooting planetary boundaries by increasing levels of carbon in the atmosphere. The Alberta government, demonstrating how deeply petroculture and petrostate governance are embedded, generally refuses to support these collective efforts to limit climate change-related destruction. In fact, the province makes active efforts to promote oil and gas industries and counter climate policy through disinformation campaigns that shape public discourse.

Canadian Energy Centre Ltd., aka ‘Energy War Room’

The most prominent manifestation of the Government of Alberta acting as a petrostate is the recent effort to mainstream pro-oil discourse through its Canadian Energy Centre Ltd. (CEC), also known as the ‘Energy War Room’. In 2019,

Jason Kenney, leader of the right-wing United Conservative Party (UCP), created this provincial corporation with an annual budget of \$12 million (French, 2022). The CEC worked under CEO Tom Olson ‘to promote Canada as the supplier of choice for the world’s growing demand for responsibly produced energy’ (Canadian Energy Centre Ltd., 2025). More specifically, the goal of the CEC was to actively refute ‘domestic and foreign-funded campaigns against Canada’s oil and gas industry’ (Olsen 2019), using ‘data, stories, and narrative’ (Canadian Energy Centre Ltd., 2021: 3) to ‘fight misinformation related to oil and gas’ (Heydari, 2019) coming from environmental groups and foreign interference. As a crown corporation - a provincial organisation that is structured like a private company and is thus less subject to government oversight - the CEC was not subject to Alberta’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP Act), which supposedly protects against the very foreign-funded interests the CEC seeks to counter. CEC’s bypass of FOIP raised questions about the lack of public oversight and use of propaganda within the petrostate (French, 2022).

In 2024, after running for five years as a crown corporation, the CEC was rolled back into the provincial government. While critics celebrate this shift, articulating the centre as a waste of taxpayer money, the move was likely more strategic than cost-saving. In June 2024, the Canadian federal government passed the Amendments to the Competition Act (Bill C-59), which included anti-greenwashing legislation that required energy companies to ensure scientific accuracy in any published claims. The Alberta government characterised Bill C-59 as an ‘undemocratic gag order’ (Belliveau, 2024), in keeping with the province’s resistance to federal emissions policies. Such resistance is so strong that Premier Danielle Smith has threatened to invoke the Alberta Sovereignty Act to protect Alberta oil and gas from federal emissions caps (Tran, 2024). By moving the work of the CEC back into the provincial government, therefore, the province could continue to shape public discourse via the CEC’s website, social media accounts, and other campaigns to boost the province’s oil and gas industry without federal interference (Kaufman, 2024).

CEC annual reports reveal a comprehensive suite of web content, campaigns, social media posts, public education, and advocacy efforts to ‘change attitudes about Canadian oil and gas’ (Canadian Energy Centre Ltd., 2023b: 4)

in ways that directly oppose the climate science behind global education policy. CEC's website, the content hub, translates research on oil and gas into public-friendly reports that boost the industry, with a special focus on First Nations, global comparisons, and environmental and economic concerns. In keeping with the CEC's aim to 'showcase the leadership of Canada's oil and gas sector in environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance, and highlight the importance of the oil and gas industry to Canada's economy' (Canadian Energy Centre 2022: 8), the CEC website promotes the oil and gas sector's contributions to environment, economy, and community. Benefits to Indigenous communities are particularly emphasised, where the oil industry is depicted as contributing to economic reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the state. In addition, through a focused section about oil 'In Our Lives', the website uses infographics and stories to intentionally highlight the oil's inherence to modern life and activities dear to Albertans (Ibid.: 4), from camping to barbecuing, and holiday events to sports activities. Despite the purportedly factual nature of information available in CEC materials, economist Andrew Leach (2019) has drawn on scientific research to rebut many of CEC's claims. However, the CEC continued to develop content, using Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and X/Twitter to drive viewers to the website (CEC, 2022: 11). It is the X/Twitter account, @CDNEnergyCentre, that is the focus of our study.

Discourses of climate policy obstruction

Corporations in the fossil fuel sector have long mobilised traditional and social media through disinformation campaigns that shape public conceptions of climate and environmental issues and that promote particular climate solutions that are favourable to industry profits (e.g. Carroll, 2021; López, 2022; McKie, 2021; Si et al., 2023). Through their ability to shape public perception, social media campaigns are powerful tools in industry efforts to shape policy debates by establishing political and cultural hegemony through discourse (Ferns and Amaeshi, 2021; Kinol et al., 2025; Kraushaar-Friesen and Busch, 2020; Nyberg et al., 2018). While social media holds participatory, 'bottom-up' possibilities for knowledge creation, the carefully crafted nature of fossil fuel campaigns means they are instead locked down, warranting critical analysis of the 'discursively propagated and disseminated constructs of collective identities' (KhosraviNik and

Zia, 2014: 760) that can become internalised through repeated socialisation online, with implications for climate change education policy.

In this context, we understand the petrostate's fossil fuel disinformation campaigns as a method of climate education policy obstruction through control of discourse, where fossil fuel actors engage in 'strategic attempts to undermine and subvert climate policy' (Kinol et al., 2025: 21). Here, we rely on the work of Kinol et al. (2025: 21) in highlighting industry efforts to shape public discourse via social media 'with the intention of stopping, slowing, or reversing climate policy or action'. While Kinol et al. focus on discourses of climate policy obstruction within the corporate sector, we extend their framework to education policy obstruction within the petrostate. Here, obstruction is carried out not by industry but by the petrostate itself, as it seeks self-maintenance in the face of strengthened international agreements supporting climate action and education. While the petrostate holds the power to create policy, mounting public pressure may push the petrostate to manipulate discourse to foster consent for a policy agenda. For instance, as a signatory to the Paris Agreement, the Government of Canada actively seeks to mainstream climate change education across the country (ECCC, 2024) in keeping with global 'greening education' efforts, including within Alberta. Even as pressure escalates from national and international levels, grassroots mobilisations within Alberta - from Indigenous climate action to youth climate movements - raise the profile of climate education in relation to people's lived experiences. Discourses of obstruction may therefore be intentionally taken up by the state to foreclose alternatives, limiting public debate and deliberation (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 92) about climate education.

As policy discourses, obstructive discourses hold potential to shape public courses of action (Ibid: 18), including climate action through education policy. Discourses, to some extent, shape what is possible, including through 'representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries - representations of how things might or could or should be' (Fairclough, 2023: 458). While the current study does not trace the direct outcomes of obstructive discourses, it unpacks the discursive moves whereby the petrostate defines the current problem of climate change and projects imaginaries for potential futures,

which hold implications for what is considered possible or preferable in climate education (Ibid: 459-460).

Critical policy analysis of climate obstruction over X/Twitter

Education researchers have identified the need to understand education policy within its wider context, particularly in understanding how policies restrict or enable particular education possibilities. Education, as one of the state's responsibilities, is an area where there is often a struggle for generational control of the social, economic, and environmental outcomes for a society. Critical policy analysis (Young and Diem, 2018; Diem et al., 2014) provides a framework for scrutinising the context and policy making procedures through discursive reading and rereading of policies, communication strategies and outputs, and social media engagement.

One pattern within this study's findings was an overt government effort, both through formal policy and informal messaging, to close discursive sites where pro-climate change action information and activism was or could be circulated in Alberta. Critical analysis of discourses of such obstruction is therefore necessary to unpack the petrostate's tactics in reinforcing petrostate hegemony, towards understanding the discursive bounds around climate change education policy in Alberta. Critical discourse analysis, in a political sense, seeks to unpack discourse in relation to political and institutional contexts (i.e. of the petrostate) and actors (i.e. of the CEC), along with the particular structure of argumentation in its attempt to 'convince an audience that a certain course of action is right or a certain point of view is true' (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 18). Discussion of obstruction must therefore consider both the power *behind* the discourse, as described in relation to the petrostate of Alberta above, and the power *in* discourse (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; KhosraviNik, 2014; KhosraviNik and Zia, 2014) to shape policy conversations.

We take up critical discourse analysis in relation to Kinol et al.'s (2025) discourses of climate obstruction to unpack the CEC's methods of argumentation surrounding climate change and fossil fuel developments. Within a comprehensive framework articulating discourses of climate obstruction (see Table 1), the authors combine Lamb et al's (2020) discourses of climate delay and Cook's (2020) discourses of climate denial, identifying a suite of discourses that

are intentionally used across fossil fuel-oriented sectors of fossil energy, plastic production, and agrichemicals. Lamb’s (2020) four delay discourses serve to stall action on climate by redirecting responsibility for climate change away from fossil fuel corporations, supporting non-transformative solutions to climate change such as technological innovations like carbon capture and storage, emphasising the disruptive downsides of enacting climate policy, and surrendering to climate change by asserting that it is too late to act. Fossil fuel companies combine delay discourses with four denial discourses, which Kinol et al. adapt from Cook’s (2020) taxonomy, namely: ‘it’s not happening’, or outright climate denial of climate science; ‘it’s not bad’, or denial of the severity of the climate crisis; ‘it’s not us’, or denial of the role of fossil fuels in climate change; and ‘it’s taken care of’, or denial of the need to take action and alter behaviour. Discourses of climate policy obstruction can take a variety of forms, from negative interventions countering fossil fuel regulations to positive messaging that promotes uncritical views of the fossil fuel sector (Kinol et al., 2025: 21). Indeed, discourses of obstruction can adopt even very progressive language and rhetoric without serving those ends (Solomun et al., 2025: 6). Together, delay and denial serve to entrench fossil fuel hegemony through powerful and at times subtle narratives that may pose restrictions to the kinds of climate education policies emerging from the science.

Table 1 Discourses of climate obstruction (Kinol et al., 2025)

Discourses of Climate Policy Obstruction	
Discourses of Climate Delay	Discourses of Climate Denial
• Redirect responsibility • Non-transformation • Surrender • Downside emphasis	• It’s not happening • It’s not that bad • It’s not us • It’s taken care of

X/Twitter provides a site of analysis for government methods of controlling public discourse and by extension climate policy, in keeping with

research demonstrating policy obstruction over social media by fossil fuel companies (Gunster et al., 2021; Kinol et al., 2025; Solomun et al., 2025). In relation to discourses of policy obstruction, tweets may be intentionally shared to ‘undermine or subvert climate policy through social media’ (Kinol et al., 2025: 21). Managed according to the CEC’s strategic plan, as reflected in annual reports (Canadian Energy Centre Ltd., 2021, 2022, 2023b), the CEC’s X/Twitter account lends insight into the coordinated effort by the Government of Alberta to influence climate discourse, particularly as the platform is a primary driver to the CEC’s website. Social media discourse is thus not only ideological but also political. The CEC set up its X/Twitter account, @CDNEnergyCentre in October 2019, with a self-identified account location of ‘Alberta’, and the brief descriptor, ‘Fact-based news and research demonstrating that Canada is the world’s energy solution’. At the time of writing, the CEC still posts on X/Twitter regularly.

We harvested all tweets associated with @CDNEnergyCentre using Phantombuster’s Twitter Profile Scraper (n.d.) on 3 October 2022, when the CEC had 10,300 followers. Our harvest resulted in a set of 1,133 tweets from a three-year period (October 2019 to October 2022). Only 27 retweets were present in the set, indicating very little engagement by CEC with other accounts; rather, the account reflects centralised messaging driven by CEC in keeping with the agenda outlined in the annual reports. In our analysis, we excluded the retweets to focus on crafted CEC messaging. We also excluded 61 tweets that had insufficient content to code or were irrelevant, such as those that are simply linked to the CEC website without comment or referencing celebrated holidays. The final corpus therefore contained 1,045 tweets. Reading in full the finalised set of 1,045 tweets, we conducted a discourse analysis by deductively coding all tweets according to Kinol et al’s (2025) discourses of climate obstruction. As we coded, we kept notes on the various ways these discourses were mobilised within the petrostate. A nuanced reading of discourses of obstruction emerging from Alberta’s CEC in the following sections will provide insight into the particular challenges facing climate change education within petrostates, leading to recommendations for climate change education policy.

Findings: The CEC's discourses of obstruction

Tracing discourses of climate obstruction throughout the CEC X/Twitter account, we see discourses of denial and delay take unique life in relation to the petrostate as described below. Throughout CEC messaging, oil and gas is depicted as a national (Canadian) industry, rather than a provincial (Alberta) one, in efforts to gain further public support across the country. The CEC leverages all discourses of climate obstruction aside from 'surrender'. A delay discourse that indicates it is too late to act on climate, surrender would not be in keeping with the petrostate's broader denial of the depth or significance of the climate crisis. Nor would surrender align with the discourses of hard work and innovation that characterise the petrostate, whereby any problem can be solved.

In place of surrender, tweets deny or downplay the urgency of climate change while emphasising the oil and gas industry as a key actor, discursively centering an *energy* crisis rather than a *climate* crisis, where the impetus is to get Canadian fossil fuels to market as quickly as possible to meet growing demand. Highlighting how fossil fuels are necessary to everyday life both within and beyond the petrostate, the CEC directs support for the fossil fuel economy over and against other priorities, such as the climate or broader environment. Where climate change is recognised, technology and innovation are highlighted as solutions to green the industry, ultimately maintaining ongoing extraction.

Discourse of denial 1: it's not happening

Denial that climate change is real ('it's not happening') dominates CEC messaging. Many posts deny climate change by simply not mentioning it, instead naturalising fossil fuel production and consumption far into the future. The necessity of oil in the activities of daily life - including schooling - is often emphasised: 'When kids go back to school in the fall, it's oil and gas products that help students and teachers make the grade. Learn more here: <https://t.co/9xEHHz7FfB>' (23 September 2022). In many cases, ongoing development of fossil fuels is assumed within any mention of reducing emissions. Other posts directly counter climate activists by naturalising fossil fuelled futures:

"Don't believe some supporters of the 'Just Transition' who that tell you (sic) oil and gas is a sunset sector whose sizeable impact on jobs, GDP

and purchase of goods and services can be easily replaced” (<https://t.co/jBXx6oqsCC>, 8 December 2021).

In this vein, many tweets highlight the benefits of the oil and gas industry to ‘producers, federal and provincial governments and all Canadians’ (26 July 2022). Corporate benefits and climate injustices are ignored as tweets instead highlight the benefits of oil and gas to marginalised groups such as Indigenous communities, new Canadians, and women. Rather than imagining alternative economies that more justly benefit these groups, a singular capitalist oil economy is normalised as the sole method for inclusion and elevation of those marginalised within Canadian society.

Discourse of denial 2: it’s not that bad

In posts denying that climate change is a significant problem (‘it’s not that bad’), the CEC emphasises how, even as some efforts are made to transition from fossil fuels, oil and gas will remain part of the energy mix well into the future. Any calls for divestment or rapid emissions reductions are therefore seen as extreme. Here, education is drawn directly into the conversation, where universities are called to moderation or even support for the fossil fuel sector: ‘Our universities and banks need to reject the activist agenda to divest and instead invest in Canada’s hydrocarbon sector for the good of the economy, the environment, shareholders and everyday Canadians’ (<https://t.co/0LqIjVq1t7>, 13 December 2021). Any stronger climate actions, such as United Nations’ climate commitments or carbon taxes on Canadian citizens, are stated to be overkill, since climate change is not a significant problem in relation to others: ‘The G20 summit before COP26 reached no major agreements on net zero, coal or methane. Why? Because the real world has other problems’ (<https://t.co/6spcUIZSkP>, 8 November 2021).

While COP meetings are shown to be out of touch with the real world, those who act on climate change are represented as hyperbolic activists; for example, Extinction Rebellion is described as a ‘bizarre group of misfits’ (2 September 2020). In contrast, the CEC highlights the need for a ‘balanced’ approach to emissions reductions, where oil and gas are maintained even as some efforts are made for a green transition.

Discourse of denial 3: it's not us

Where climate denial takes the form, 'it's not us', the CEC asserts that climate change is indeed happening, but Canadian energy companies are not part of the problem. Such posts celebrate how Canada is a more responsible and ethical producer than other countries, working harder than anyone else to reduce emissions: 'Did you know that the emissions produced by the planet's top six polluting coal plants is more than the entire Canadian oil and gas sector?' (<https://t.co/ughoiTjMHW>, 22 October 2021). According to the CEC's logic, because Canada contributes to greening fossil fuel extraction and transport through technological innovations, shutting down Canadian oil and gas would not stop climate change but would instead slow progress, since the industry is part of the solution: 'From water use and tailings to methane and CO₂ emissions, Canada's oil and gas industry is a global leader with its commitment to responsible development and continuous improvement. Learn more: <https://t.co/eJDqewbUEC>' (23 December 2020).

Because 'Canada is making real and measurable progress in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions intensity' (12 August 2020) via the fossil fuel sector, the CEC asserts there is no need for Canada to respond to global climate agreements:

"Singling out Canada's oil and gas sector at the UN's climate conference won't make any difference in global emissions. Tell [Canadian Prime Minister] Justin Trudeau that sharing our industry's innovation and leadership WILL move the needle. Send a letter today!" (<https://t.co/jlqeb8HAa8>, 4 November 2021).

Discourse of denial 4: it's taken care of

Emphasising the Canadian oil industry's historic and ongoing efforts to reduce emissions, many posts also reflect the denial frame that 'it's taken care of'. More conclusive than 'it's not us', these posts emphasise that no additional efforts are required: 'For more than a decade, Canada's oil sands producers rolled up their sleeves to achieve real progress in tackling emissions. Spoiler alert ~ it's working. Learn how those efforts are paying off here: <https://t.co/D8LMeDbXWY>' (2 February 2022). Liquid natural gas (LNG) is frequently celebrated for solving

climate issues by replacing high-emitting coal, both within Canada and abroad. Further, environmental victories brought on by the oil industry are recognised:

“How do you improve the world’s largest protected boreal forest? You make it even bigger. And thanks to work by First Nations, government, oil sands producers and forestry companies, it’s now grown to more than twice the size of Vancouver Island” (<https://t.co/r5L7VTGzg3>, 24 March 2022).

In these ways, the CEC highlights how Canadian oil is already as green and responsible as can be, and it is therefore vital to ensuring secure energy provision for allies such as Europe and the United States. Due to industry successes, the CEC denigrates any efforts by social science researchers to intervene in climate policy:

“Memo to anthropology, religious studies and social justice academics opposed to carbon capture and storage: ‘Please leave economic policy, energy science and the development of new ways to decarbonize the atmosphere to actual subject matter experts’” (<https://t.co/jyxNRzqZ7>, 28 January 2022),

In other words: industry knows best. While we might expect such a statement as a branding tool from a fossil fuel corporation, the statement coming from the government again highlights the workings of the petrostate operating on behalf of fossil fuel actors.

Discourse of delay 1: redirecting responsibility

Citing the expertise within Canada’s oil and gas sector, along with Canada’s successes in producing green and responsible oil, the CEC also leverages the delay discourse of redirecting responsibility to countries with higher emissions:

“As a global emitter, Canada only contributes 1.6 per cent of the world’s #emissions. If we just went dark and didn’t emit a single molecule of CO₂ and reduced our emissions to zero, China’s growth would eat up

that percentage in less than a year” #LNG (<https://t.co/v4ZCLaUbMy>, 23 April 2022).

Rather than taking responsibility for emissions reductions within Canada, the CEC passes responsibility to other high emitting countries. Further, citing Canada as an ethical producer with a clean human rights record, the CEC diverts attention to autocratic regimes. Pointing towards autocracy elsewhere is a way of slowing divestment movements at home, including within universities:

“Western University staffers want to end all investment in oil and gas. Divestment doesn't reduce demand or reduce emissions. It DOES empower autocratic regimes. Tell Western's Board of Governors to reject divestment demands by sending a letter today!” (<https://t.co/tN9xrxazkk>, 4 May 2022).

Discourse of delay 2: emphasising the downsides

Prominent with CEC's X/Twitter communications are posts highlighting the downside of climate policy. Global demand for oil and gas is high, and the CEC emphasises that climate policies will result in Canada missing out on economic benefits that will otherwise go to other oil producers. Further, without profits from the oil and gas industry to fuel energy transition, the CEC asserts, taxpayers will need to bear the cost of the transition to renewables. In other words, a quick drive to net zero will negatively affect the economy, resulting in lost jobs and higher taxes. In an appeal to Indigenous and progressive publics, the CEC declares that Indigenous peoples, in particular, will be harmed by reductions in the oil industry:

“A federal emissions cap and rapid reductions would significantly damage our oil and gas industry, which could derail critical pathways to prosperity for Indigenous people. Tell the federal government its plan will hurt Canadians by sending a letter here: <https://t.co/ZijlWtbD3K>” (6 September 2022).

Rather than creating positive change, climate action is presented as holding negative consequences for Indigenous communities and workers, who face violence and ‘criminal protests’ by climate and anti-pipeline activists.

Discourse of delay 3: proposing non-transformative solutions

In place of climate action towards swift emissions reductions, the CEC discourse instead promotes delay through a focus on non-transformative solutions. Primary among these is replacing coal with LNG: ‘A new LNG project in the U.S. is required to use Canadian natural gas - as a way to lower green house gas emissions’ (<https://t.co/1wLZsmmrLa>, 16 December 2020). Investments in renewables, technological innovations, such as carbon capture and storage, and environmental efforts of the fossil fuel sector are celebrated:

“Canada's oil and gas industry invests billions into cleantech innovation. For the oil sands, that’s fueling lower GHG emission intensity, reducing fresh water use, less land disturbance and reducing tailings #cdnpoli #ThroneSpeech2020” (<https://t.co/X6kqwfBpoK>, 23 September 2020).

Overall, non-transformation discourses position the fossil fuel sector as essential to reducing emissions.

To understand the full impact of these data, it is important to remember that these tweets create a public message coming from a government that holds the responsibility for ensuring the social, environmental, and economic wellbeing of people in their jurisdiction, and providing institutions, such as education, that are key to this wellbeing. In a petrostate, the government is shaped by one key actor: the fossil fuel industry. The tools of government are used to enhance the industry rather than the citizenry as a primary priority. Shaping public discourse enables particular state and non-state actions and forecloses others. In the case of the CEC tweets, the message about climate change is clear.

Climate change education as resistance in a petrostate

Critically analysing state messaging through the ‘discourses of obstruction’ framework is a helpful way to make sense of the various tactics used by the petrostate to entrench fossil fuel hegemony through public discourse and thereby

restrict possibilities for climate-forward education policies. Here, deciphering discourses of denial and delay is not merely a matter of unpacking disinformation but recognising the bounds around what is possible and impossible for climate change education within the petrostate. In the face of discourses of obstruction, climate education is significantly curtailed, educators are positioned as resistant, and stronger climate education policies are needed to better support education transformation.

Petrostate discourses of obstruction

While the ‘discourses of obstruction’ framework was developed to decipher industry disinformation, it is also helpful for sensemaking the restrictions facing climate change education within the petrostate. The CEC’s discourses overlap with industry messaging as described by Kinol et al. (2025), but they also obstruct climate education policy by appealing directly to state identity and using existing policy to legitimise industry dominance. CEC posts draw on Canadian exceptionalism and nationalist sentiment, highlighting the state as a driver of innovation, ethical producer, and provider for global energy needs, ultimately placing the state as beyond reproach, including by global climate policy bodies. Here, climate policies are depicted as harming the national economy and expected way of life, rather than supporting the lives of those in places more significantly impacted by climate change. Any opposition is therefore depicted as misguided or even anti-Canadian. Such discourse of course bypasses altogether the fact that Canada is one of the highest emitters per capita on the planet, with a way of life that contributes 19.6 megatonnes of carbon dioxide per capita equivalent compared to 6.3 globally (Government of Canada, 2024). Instead of addressing Canada’s responsibilities to reduce emissions and enact climate justice, therefore, petrostate discourse reinforces the state as a green global citizen in ways that do little to address the causes of climate breakdown (Perry and Sealey-Huggins, 2023).

Discourses of obstruction also create discursive links between the fossil fuel industry and existing state policies, validating ongoing industry dominance while solidifying state power. For instance, CEC discourse celebrates industry benefits to Indigenous peoples as part of meeting Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and commitment to a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous nations. While reconciliation is a complex process,

involving remediation of systemic and historic wrongs (such as land theft and harm to children through educational and social services programmes), the CEC depicts reconciliation in economic terms, whereby the oil and gas industry remediates colonial harms by making Indigenous communities financially independent. Here, industry is celebrated as enacting reconciliation through a slight of hand whereby ‘resource extractivism gets positioned as a form of economic self-determination [for Indigenous peoples] - all despite the fact that the industry and practices are still held firmly within the control of the settler-state’ (Solumun et al., 2025: 13). Rather than pointing to state responsibilities for colonial harms, including those historically and currently caused by fossil fuel developments, or by recognising Indigenous self-determination, the petrostate uses discourses of obstruction to ensure all state relations are governed to the benefit of the fossil fuel industry.

‘Greening’ climate change education as insufficient in the petrostate

Throughout the same period that the CEC has been conducting public education through its website and social media channels, Alberta’s United Conservative Party government has curtailed formal climate education through policy shifts. For example, under the United Conservative Party, Alberta’s education minister supported a panel that sought to counter through formal education what were represented as ‘extremist views’ about climate change through a ‘balanced’ approach that emphasised the value of Alberta’s fossil fuel sector (Bennett, 2020). By April 2024, the Alberta government published a curriculum framework that aimed to ‘teach K-12 students about “Alberta’s reputation as the most ethical producer of oil in the world”’, and ‘the importance of natural resources in enabling and sustaining Alberta’s society and Albertans’ quality of life’ (Government of Alberta 2024; quoted in Local Journalism Initiative, 2024). Such curriculum did not arise in a vacuum; following longstanding links between the Alberta government and the oil and gas industry, which stretch back to the 1950s (Keary and Chestnut, 2025: 11, 19), the curriculum is likely a response to industry lobbying (Amato and Penrose, 2024). In this context, if teachers want to respond to student interests in climate and energy issues and address them through robust educational engagement, they struggle to find resources not created by the oil industry (Lowan-Trudeau and Fowler, 2017: 10). Further, teachers receive

pushback from parents and community members when bringing in guest speakers or topics related to renewable energy and climate change (Ibid: 8).

In this obstructive context, the ‘greening’ policies promoted by UNESCO and the OECD may be insufficient where climate change education is positioned in direct opposition to dominant discourse. Within the petrostate, enacting climate change education - whether in policy, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher education, or otherwise - becomes a resistant act. While the current study does not address the lived experiences of those working within educational contexts, it does show the ways climate change educators are discursively positioned by the ‘War Room’ as opponents in a war, opposing what it means to be Canadian, fighting the industry that fuels Canada’s economy, refusing the cultures of consumption that define Canada’s way of life, and negating industry contributions to state goals for reconciliation. To resist is to become, as the CEC puts it, one of the ‘climate crusaders’ or ‘foreign-funded environmentalists’ that the War Room was created to refute.

In this context, while greener, softer, or more ‘balanced’ forms of climate change education that allow fossil fuels to persist may be palatable, it is likely that, within this context, more transformative forms must be hidden. Some greening education policies emerging from bodies such as UNESCO and the OECD may be acceptable within the petrostate, particularly when they remain apolitical and individualised, in keeping with the petro-pedagogical efforts of industry. For instance, school gardening initiatives, advocacy for sustainable consumption, and student empowerment for green careers may be acceptable since these can be promoted while leaving the petrostate intact. Even deciphering climate disinformation may be acceptable, so long as it is positioned as a skill for climate literacy rather than part of a broader effort to enact social change. While such softer forms of climate education offer alternatives to the status quo, they are largely in keeping with neoliberal petro-pedagogies that greenwash fossil fuel industries, falling short of bringing the harder societal and economic shifts necessary to enacting the swift emissions reductions within the petrostate.

Conclusion: transforming petrostate discourse by strengthening climate change education

Within petrostates, educators work against a government that serves the economic interests of the fossil fuel industry over the social, economic, and environmental interests of other businesses, workers, and citizens. The case of the province of Alberta, Canada and the government's 'Energy War Room' provides insight into how discourses of obstruction are mobilised to prevent any limitations on the fossil fuel industry. Further research directly with educators could reveal the challenges of working within a discursive context that curtails their efforts to provide people with the information they need to understand and respond to the role of fossil fuels in causing climate change. However, as much as this petrostate wants their declaration of war to become fossilised in the minds and actions of citizens, we know that discourses, however powerful, are also fluid (see Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Fairclough, 2013). Knowledge about climate change is available in abundance from not only current science but people's own lived experiences. The evidence is in every extreme wildfire, drought, flood, and other record-breaking weather event. The impact of the Energy War Room's messages will weaken because they are not backed by experience or science - even economic science.

Climate change education plays a key role in transforming discourses of obstruction by directly challenging the fossil fuel industry and petrostate disinformation about the perils of drastically cutting the use of fossil fuels. The message that an economic nightmare will surely follow any decrease in fossil fuel use can be challenged by rearticulating the crises caused by climate change, which are intensified by persistent burning of fossil fuels. There are many examples, mostly outside petrostates, where education, law, and media embed the language of climate mitigation and adaptation, such as land-based movements, transitions to renewable energy, and economic models that are not based on overshooting planetary boundaries. Shifting education is urgent to encourage action towards a future where humans live in ways that repair and sustain life for everyone and everything.

References

Adkin, L E (2023) 'Cracking Foundations, Contested Futures: Post-secondary Education in Alberta at the End of the Holocene', *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 0 (0), pp. 1–29.

Adkin, L E (2021) '10 Petro-universities and the Production of Knowledge for the Post-carbon Future' in W K Carroll (ed) *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*, Athabasca, Canada: Athabasca University Press.

Amato, A and Penrose, C (2024) 'What Alberta wants children taught about fossil fuels', *The Tyee*, 12 November, available: <https://thetyee.ca/News/2024/11/12/What-Alberta-Wants-Children-Taught-Fossil-Fuels/> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Aykut, S C and Castro, C (2017) 'The End of Fossil Fuels? Understanding the Partial Climatisation of Global Energy Debates' in S C Aykut (ed.) *Globalising the Climate: COP21 and the Climatisation of Global Debates*, London: Routledge, pp. 173-193.

Belliveau, E (2024) 'Statement in Response to the Government of Alberta's Attack on Greenwashing Amendments in Bill C-59', *Environmental Defence*, available: <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2024/05/31/response-to-the-government-of-albertas-attack-on-greenwashing-amendments-in-bill-c-59/> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Bennett, D (2020) 'Alberta Panel Suggests Schools "Balance" Lessons about Climate Change, Oilsands', *Lethbridge News Now*, 29 January, available: <https://lethbridgenewsnow.com/2020/01/29/alberta-panel-suggests-schools-balance-lessons-about-climate-change-oilsands/> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Brunner, T and Axsen, J (2020) 'Oil Sands, Pipelines and Fracking: Citizen Acceptance of Unconventional Fossil Fuel Development and Infrastructure in Canada', *Energy Research & Social Science*, Vol. 67, pp. 1-14.

Canadian Energy Centre Ltd (2025) 'About Us', available: <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/about-us/> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Canadian Energy Centre Ltd (2023a) '\$755 billion: The Energy Sector's Revenue Contribution to Canadian Governments 2000–2021', March, available: <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CEC-Research-Brief28-V2-Mar-23-2023.pdf> (accessed 03 June 2026).

Canadian Energy Centre Ltd (2023b) 'Annual Report 2023', available: <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CEC-Annual-Report-2022-23.pdf> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Canadian Energy Centre Ltd (2022) 'Annual Report 2022', available: <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CEC-Annual-Report-2022.pdf> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Canadian Energy Centre Ltd (2021) 'Annual Report 2021', available: <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CEC-annual-report-2021-Final.pdf> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Carroll, W K (ed.) (2021) *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*, Athabasca, Canada: Athabasca University Press.

Cook, J (2020) 'Deconstructing Climate Science Denial' in David Holmes and Lucy Richardson, (eds.) *Research Handbook on Communicating Climate Change*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. pp. 62-78.

Deranger, E T, Sinclair, R, Gray, B et al. (2022) 'Decolonising Climate Research and Policy: Making Space to Tell Our Own Stories, in Our Own Ways', *Community Development Journal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Diem, S, Young, M D, Welton, A D, Mansfield, K C and Lee, P L (2014) 'The Intellectual Landscape of Critical Policy Analysis', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* Vol. 27, (9), pp. 1068-1090.

Eaton, E M and Day, N A (2020) 'Petro-pedagogy: Fossil Fuel Interests and the Obstruction of Climate Justice in Public Education', *Environmental Education Research*, Vol. 26, (4), pp. 457-473.

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) (2024) 'Toward a National Framework for Environmental Learning: Discussion Paper', available: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/corporate/transparency/consultations/national-framework-environmental-learning/discussion-paper.html> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Fairclough, N (2013) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Fairclough, N (2023) 'Critical discourse analysis' in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 11–22.

Fairclough, N and Fairclough, I (2012) *Political Discourse Analysis*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Ferns, G and Amaeshi, K (2021) 'Fueling Climate (In)Action: How Organizations Engage in Hegemonization to Avoid Transformational Action on Climate Change', *Organization Studies*, Vol. 42 (7), pp. 1005-29.

French, J (2022) 'Alberta Energy War Room Immune from Freedom of Information Law, Rules Adjudicator', *CBC News*, 22 March, available: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-energy-war-room-immune-from-freedom-of-information-law-rules-adjudicator-1.6392887> (02 June 2026).

Government of Alberta (2025) 'Oil Sands', available: <https://www.alberta.ca/oil-sands> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Government of Alberta (2024) 'The Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum', available: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/guiding-framework-design-development-k-12-curriculum> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Government of Canada (2024) 'Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Drivers and Impacts', available: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/greenhouse-gas-emissions-drivers-impacts.html> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Gunster, S, Neubauer, R, Bermingham, J and Massie, A (2021) "'Our Oil" Extractive Populism in Canadian Social Media' in W K Carroll (ed.) *Regime of Obstruction: How Corporate Power Blocks Energy Democracy*, Athabasca, Canada: Athabasca University Press, pp. 197–224.

Guterres, A (2023) 'UN / Guterres Climate Remarks', available: <https://media.un.org/avlibrary/en/asset/d307/d3075580> (accessed 29 July 2026).

Hadiapurwa, A, Ali, M, Ropo, E and Hernawan, A H (2024) 'Trends in Climate Change Education Studies in the Last Ten Years: A Systematic Literature Review', *Mimbar Ilmu*, Vol. 29, (1), pp. 32-45.

Heydari, A (2019) 'Jason Kenney Touts \$2.84M "War Room" but Provides Few Details', *CBC News*, 07 June, available: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/jason-kenney-war-room-calgary-1.5167205> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Hodgkins, A P (2008) 'A Critical Analysis of Freirean Pedagogy: The Case of Development in Northern Canada', *Journal of Transformative Education*, Vol. 6, (4), pp. 302–316.

Hoeg, D (2020) 'Human and Non-human Tensions in Socioscientific Issues and the Oil Sands in Canada', *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, Vol. 15 (2), pp. 415–422.

Juskus, R (2023) 'Sacrifice Zones: A Genealogy and Analysis of an Environmental Justice Concept', *Environmental Humanities*, Vol. 15, (1), pp. 3–24.

Karl, T L (1997) *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Vol. 26, Berkely: University of California Press.

Karl, T L (1999) 'The perils of the Petro-state: Reflections on the Paradox of Plenty', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 53, (1), pp. 31–48.

Karsgaard, C and Shultz, L (2025) 'Education as a Petro-Pipeline: Beyond the Limits of Education Research in the Face of Climate Change', *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 48(4), pp. 1225–1257.

Kaufmann, B (2024) 'Energy "War Room" Shuffled into Government; NDP Claims It's a Sign of Failure', *Calgary Herald*, 11 January, available: <https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/energy-war-room-government-ndp-claims-failure> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Keary, A and Chestnut, J (2025) 'Polluting Education: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on Children's Education in Canada', *Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and For Our Kids*, available: <https://www.forourkids.ca/pollutingeducation> (accessed 02 June 2026).

KhosraviNik, M and Zia, M (2014) 'Persian Nationalism, Identity and Anti-Arab Sentiments in Iranian Facebook Discourses: Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Media Communication', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 13, (4), pp. 755–780.

KhosraviNik, M (2014) 'Critical Discourse Analysis, Power and New Media Discourse: Issues and Debates' in M Kopytowska and Y Kalyango (eds.) *Why Discourse Matters: Negotiating Identity in the Mediatized World*, Lausanne, Switzerland: Peter Lang, pp. 287–305.

King, P, Regan, C and Roche, T (2023). 'Awash in Greenwash', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol 37, Autumn, pp. 142-158.

Kinol, A, Si, Y, Kinol, J and Stephens, J C (2025) 'Networks of Climate Obstruction: Discourses of Denial and Delay in US Fossil Energy, Plastic, and Agrichemical Industries', *PLOS Climate* 4 (1): e0000370.

Kranz, J, Schwichow, M, Breitenmoser, P and Niebert, K (2022) 'The (Un) political Perspective on Climate Change in Education - A Systematic Review', *Sustainability*, Vol. 14, Issue 7, 4194.

Kraushaar-Friesen, N and Busch, H (2020) 'Of Pipe Dreams and Fossil Fools: Advancing Canadian Fossil Fuel Hegemony through the Trans Mountain Pipeline', *Energy Research & Social Science*, Vol. 69, 101695.

Lamb, W F, Mattioli, G, Levi, S, Roberts, J T, Capstick, S, Creutzig, F and Steinberger, J K (2020) 'Discourses of Climate Delay', *Global Sustainability*, 3, e17.

Leach, A (2019) 'Facts Matter', 30 December, available: <https://web.archive.org/web/20191230172654/http://andrewleach.ca/uncategorized/facts-matter/> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Lerner, S (2010) *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States*, Boston: MIT Press.

Local Journalism Initiative (2024) 'Kids to Learn Alberta Is "Most Ethical Producer of Oil in the World" in School', *CTV News*, available: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/edmonton/article/kids-to-learn-alberta-is-most-ethical-producer-of-oil-in-the-world-in-school/> (accessed 02 June 2026).

López, A (2022) 'Gaslighting: Fake Climate News and Big Carbon's Network of Denial' in Karen Fowler-Watt and Julian McDougal (eds.) in *The Palgrave Handbook of Media Misinformation*, Cham: Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp. 159–177.

Lowan-Trudeau, G (2023) “‘A good hell’: Absurdist Insights for Environmental Education & Research’, *Environmental Education Research*, 29, (4), pp. 649–658.

Lowan-Trudeau, G and Fowler, T A (2017) ‘Exploring Sociocritical Perspectives on Renewable Energy Education in Alberta, Canada’, *Environmental Education Research*, 0 (0), pp. 1–19.

McKie, R E (2021) ‘Obstruction, Delay, and Transnationalism: Examining the Online Climate Change Counter-Movement’, *Energy Research & Social Science*, Vol. 80, 102217.

Milne, M (2025) ‘Alberta per-student funding still the least in Canada’, *ATA News*, 18 February, available: <https://teachers.ab.ca/news/alberta-student-funding-still-least-canada#:~:text=The%20newest%20release%20from%20StatsCan,standard%2C%20coming%20in%20at%20%2411%2C464> (accessed 03 June 2026).

Monroe, M C, Plate, R R, Oxarart, A, Bowers, A and Chaves, W A (2019) ‘Identifying Effective Climate Change Education Strategies: A Systematic Review of the Research’. *Environmental Education Research*, 25, (6), pp. 791-812.

Morrissey Gleeson, E and Morrissey, J (2024) ‘Towards a Fit-for-purpose Climate Change Education: A Systematic Literature Review Identifying Core Principles and Potential Barriers’, *Environmental Education Research*, Vol. 31, Issue 11, pp. 1-54.

Nepraš, K, Strejčková, T and Kroufek, R (2022) ‘Climate change education in primary and lower secondary education: Systematic review results’, *Sustainability*, 14, (22), p.14913.

Nusche, D, Fuster Rabella, M and Lauterbach, S (2024) ‘Rethinking Education in the Context of Climate Change: Leverage Points for Transformative Change (OECD Education Working Papers)’, Paris: OECD.

Nyberg, D, Wright, C and Kirk, J (2018) ‘Dash for Gas: Climate Change, Hegemony and the Scalar Politics of Fracking in the UK’, *British Journal of Management*, 29, (2), pp. 235–251.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022) ‘Teaching for Climate Action (Teaching in Focus #44)’, available: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/teaching-for-climate-action_d3a72e77-en.html (accessed 03 June 2026).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2024) 'Empowering Young People through Climate Literacy', available: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/11/ClimateBrochure_Nov2024_FIN.pdf/jcr_content/renditions/original/ClimateBrochure_Nov2024_FIN.pdf (accessed 03 June 2026).

Olsen, T (2019) 'The Canadian Energy Centre Aims to Tell Canada's Energy Story', *Canadian Energy Centre*, available: <https://www.canadianenergycentre.ca/the-canadian-energy-centre-aims-to-tell-canadas-energy-story/> (accessed 03 June 2026).

Perry, K K and Sealey-Huggins, L (2023) 'Racial Capitalism and Climate Justice: White Redemptive Power and the Uneven Geographies of Eco-Imperial Crisis', *Geoforum*, Vol. 145, 103772.

Phantombuster (n.d.) Twitter Profile Scraper [Software], available: <https://phantombuster.com/automations/twitter/9375/twitter-profile-scraper> (accessed 03 June 2026).

Ross, M L (2012) *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rousell, D and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, A (2020) 'A Systematic Review of Climate Change Education: Giving Children and Young People a "Voice" and a "Hand" in Redressing Climate Change', *Children's Geographies*, 18, (2), pp. 191-208.

Si, Y, Desai, D, Bozhilova, D, Puffer, S and Stephens, J C (2023) 'Fossil Fuel Companies' Climate Communication Strategies: Industry Messaging on Renewables and Natural Gas', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 98, 103028.

Solomun, S, Monroy, I B, Bugiel, J, Chan, E, Gowd, N, Hayes, H A, Jayme, N H, Kim, S, Ross, C and Tollefson, H (2025) 'Climate Obstruction: On the State and Spread of Climate Disinformation in Canada. The Centre for Media, Technology and Democracy', available: <https://www.mediatechdemocracy.com/climate-obstruction-report> (accessed 02 June 2026).

Tannock, S (2020) 'The Oil Industry in Our Schools: From Petro Pete to Science Capital in the Age of Climate Crisis', *Environmental Education Research*, 26, (4), pp. 474-490.

Tran, C (2024) 'Alberta Plans to Invoke the Sovereignty Act. What Does That Mean?', *Edmonton Journal*, 27 November, available: <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-sovereignty-act-explained> (02 June 2026).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) 'Canada's Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials', *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Vol. 4. McGill-Queen's University Press.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (n.d.) 'Greening Education Partnership', available: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future> (accessed 03 June 2026).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Communication and Education (MECCE) (2024) 'Education and Climate Change: Learning to Act for People and Planet', available: https://mecce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/9823-UNESCO-Climate-Change-and-Education-Paper-First-Edition_WEB.pdf (accessed 03 June 2026).

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (n.d.) 'Action for Climate Empowerment', available: <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-and-youth/big-picture/ACE> (accessed 03 June 2026).

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (2024) 'Declaration on the Common Agenda for Education and Climate Change at COP28', available: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/declaration-common-agenda-education-and-climate-change-cop28> (accessed 03 June 2026).

Wang, W (2021) 'The Oil and Gas Sector in Canada: A Year After the Start of the Pandemic', *Statistics Canada*, <https://www150-statcan.gc.ca>

Whose Land (n.d.) 'Treaty 8', available: <https://www.whose.land/en/treaties/treaty8> (accessed 04 June 2026).

Young, M D and Diem, S (2018) 'Doing Critical Policy Analysis in Education Research: An Emerging Paradigm' in Chad Lochmiller (ed.) *Complementary Research Methods for Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 79–98.

Lynette Shultz is Professor Emerita and the former Director of the Centre for Global Citizenship Education and Research in the

Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. She researches epistemic justice, global citizenship, and conviviality to understand how forms of democracy, social justice, and education can support well-being in the face of climate crises. E-mail: Lshultz@ualberta.ca.

Carrie Karsgaard is an Assistant Professor in the Education Department at Cape Breton University, where she teaches in the Master of Education in Sustainability, Creativity, and Innovation. She is Principal Investigator of Learning Collective Worldmaking, a suite of research projects exploring ways to live in creative and relational ways within the planet's boundaries while simultaneously challenging and repairing harmful systems. E-mail: Carrie.Karsgaard@cbu.ca.

TOWARDS CRITICAL AND TRANSFORMATIVE GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: MEZIROW'S TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY AND THE CHALLENGE OF DEEP CHANGE

ANNE M. DOLAN

Citation: Dolan, A M (2026) 'Towards Critical and Transformative Global Citizenship Education: Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and the Challenge of Deep Change', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 69-88.

Abstract: This article offers a systematic theoretical integration of global citizenship education (GCE) and transformative learning theory (TLT), examining how their intersection can illuminate and strengthen GCE's transformative potential. GCE has emerged as a prominent educational response to intensifying global challenges including climate change, inequality, forced migration, and geopolitical instability. Yet its emancipatory aspirations remain inconsistently realised in practice. TLT, originating in Jack Mezirow's work and subsequently diversified by extensive scholarship, provides a robust process model for understanding how GCE might foster fundamental shifts in learners' meaning perspectives, rather than merely transmitting information about global issues. Through systematic theoretical integration and critical analysis of the literature, this article addresses three central questions: (1) How does TLT illuminate the processes through which GCE can foster perspective transformation? (2) What theoretical tensions emerge at the intersection of these frameworks? (3) What implications can be drawn for the conceptualisation and enactment of transformative GCE? The analysis acknowledges that TLT encompasses diverse and sometimes divergent approaches beyond Mezirow's original formulation. It also interrogates critiques from critical, decolonial, and poststructuralist perspectives, considering their implications for GCE's transformative aims. The article concludes by proposing a theoretically grounded framework for transformative GCE that addresses persistent tensions between individual and collective transformation, cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, and instrumental and emancipatory orientations.

Key words: Global Citizenship Education; Transformative Learning Theory; Mezirow; Perspective Transformation; Critical Reflection; Decolonial Education; Emancipatory Pedagogy; GCE Framework.

Introduction

The early decades of the twenty-first century have witnessed a convergence of global emergencies including climate breakdown, accelerating species loss, deepening socioeconomic inequality, genocide, armed conflict, mass displacement, and the rise of authoritarian populism, none of which can be adequately tackled by any single country or field of expertise. This interlocking array of crises, often termed a polycrisis (Berners-Lee, 2025; Dolan, 2025), describes a situation in which multiple, mutually reinforcing shocks interact to produce conditions that are exceedingly difficult to navigate or resolve. In turn, this polycrisis has placed growing pressure on education systems to cultivate learners who can respond meaningfully to a world marked by profound interconnectedness and persistent unpredictability (UNESCO, 2015; IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2023). Global citizenship education (GCE) positions itself as a direct response. In its transformative variant, GCE seeks to decentre the global North as the sole knowing subject, surface the unexamined histories behind universalist claims, and shift education from transmissive knowledge delivery toward collective political action (Oxley and Morris, 2013; Andreotti, 2006; Davies, 2006).

Yet these transformative aspirations remain persistently contested. Postcolonial, critical race, and poststructuralist scholars argue that mainstream GCE tends to undermine its own goals (Andreotti, 2011; Bryan, 2011; Pashby et al., 2020). While claiming to dismantle epistemic hierarchies, it often reinstates them. The global North becomes the active knower and the global South a passive topic of concern while universal values are championed without acknowledging their Western roots and transformation is reduced to an individual cognitive event rather than understood as shared political struggle. Studies of GCE in practice consistently reveal a gap between ambition and superficial delivery, a gap rooted not merely in implementation, but in unresolved theoretical assumptions about how deep perspective change actually occurs (Shultz, 2007; Tarozzi and Torres, 2016).

It is at this theoretical juncture that transformative learning theory (TLT) offers significant resources. Originating in the work of Jack Mezirow, TLT provides a process model that GCE currently lacks, a vocabulary of disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and rational discourse for understanding how adults revise the deep meaning perspectives that govern their experience (Mezirow, 1991; 2000). However, TLT is not a monolithic framework but a field of diverse approaches, and its critiques mirror those of GCE itself - rationalist bias, inadequate attention to power and structural constraint, under-theorisation of affect and embodiment, and neglect of the collective and political dimensions of transformation (Brookfield, 2012; Taylor, 2008; Hoggan, 2016). This article provides a comprehensive theoretical examination of the relationship between GCE and TLT, addressing three central questions: (1) How does TLT illuminate the processes through which GCE can foster perspective transformation? (2) What theoretical tensions emerge at the intersection of these frameworks? (3) What implications can be drawn for the conceptualisation and enactment of transformative GCE?

Global citizenship education and the implementation gap

The empirical literature extensively documents the gap between GCE's transformative aspirations and its typical enactment in practice. Shultz (2007), reviewing GCE across multiple national contexts, identified a persistent pattern, even approaches that are nominally critical tend to collapse into transmissive pedagogies. Learners receive information about global issues, but they lack structured opportunities for critical reflection and dialogic engagement. Tarozzi and Torres (2016) found similar dynamics across European and North American GCE programmes, noting that teacher discomfort with controversy, institutional time pressures, and assessment cultures oriented toward knowledge recall systematically constrain the space for genuinely transformative pedagogical encounters.

Crucially, this implementation gap is not merely a failure of will or professional skill. More fundamentally, it reflects the absence of a theoretically adequate account of the learning processes through which GCE's transformative aspirations might be realised. Without a coherent framework for understanding

what perspective transformation involves, how it is initiated, and what facilitates or obstructs it, GCE practitioners lack the pedagogical tools to design learning experiences commensurate with the aspirations they nominally pursue. This article argues that TLT provides a significant part of this missing theoretical architecture. Imperfect and contested though it is, TLT, particularly in its broader, post-Mezirow elaborations offers a more systematically developed account of perspective transformation than anything currently available within the GCE literature itself.

Transformative learning theory: architecture, development and elaboration

Mezirow's Foundational Framework

Jack Mezirow developed his transformative learning theory following his 1978 study of women returning to community college after years at home. Across four decades of research, Mezirow identified a form of learning distinct from the mere acquisition of facts or skills, learning as a deep change in the fundamental lenses through which we see the world and decide how to act. He termed these lenses meaning perspectives: 'the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions' (Mezirow, 1994: 222). Meaning perspectives are comprehensive systems that shape how we make sense of all experience. Mezirow (1991) identified three intersecting dimensions of meaning perspectives. The epistemic dimension concerns knowledge itself: what counts as valid knowledge, what constitutes good evidence, and the relationship between knower and known. The sociolinguistic dimension encompasses culture, language, and society, assumptions about social roles, belonging and exclusion, authority, and the meaning of cultural symbols. The psychological dimension pertains to the self: assumptions about our abilities, weaknesses, relational tendencies, and emotional responses to threat or novelty. In practice, these dimensions are deeply entangled. A false belief about one's abilities may be sustained by cultural norms regarding gender or class and reinforced by an epistemology that dismisses certain ways of knowing as invalid.

For Mezirow (1991, 2000), perspective transformation is the process by which individuals critically examine and revise the deep assumptions or the meaning perspectives, that have structured their interpretation of experience. This

is not mere information acquisition or incremental adjustment within an existing framework. Rather, it involves a fundamental shift in the very structures through which we understand ourselves, our relationships, and the world. Triggered by a disorienting dilemma, the process demands critical examination of long-held assumptions. The outcome is a more inclusive, discriminating, and open perspective that enables new ways of being and acting. Perspective transformation is deeply personal, often uncomfortable, and fundamentally alters one's identity and sense of purpose (Mezirow, 1991).

De Oliveira (2021) extends Mezirow's work by insisting that transformation must be collective, painful, and world-ending, not merely individual and assumption-revising. While Mezirow focuses on personal cognitive shifts, De Oliveira, (2021: xxi) argues that our entire modern/colonial frame of reference the 'single story of progress' must be hospiced, not merely revised. This demands disinvestment from promises of mastery, growth, and innocence. For De Oliveira, perspective transformation becomes a form of intellectual accountability, the capacity to sit with complicity, complexity and grief without seeking resolution or recognition. It is not about becoming a better person, but about unmaking the self that clings to harmful conscious and unconscious practices. Transformation is ongoing, humble, and relational, a collective practice of letting go. This reframes global citizenship not as a status to achieve, but as a lifelong, uncomfortable practice of collective responsibility and ethical wakefulness.

Disorienting dilemmas and the phases of transformation

Mezirow proposed that transformative learning characteristically begins with a disorienting dilemma, an experience whose meaning cannot be adequately assimilated within the learner's existing meaning perspective, generating sufficient cognitive and affective disturbance to motivate re-examination of foundational assumptions (Mezirow: 1991, 2000). Disorienting dilemmas may be acute, such as bereavement, diagnosis, migration, or encounter with radical injustice, or may result from the gradual accumulation of conflicting experiences that eventually reach a threshold of dissonance. From this initiating moment, Mezirow (1991: 168-169) elaborated a ten-phase sequence of transformative learning: a disorienting dilemma; self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; critical

assessment of assumptions; recognition that one's discontent and transformation are shared; exploration of new roles and actions; planning a course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills; provisional trying of new roles; building competence and self-confidence; and reintegration on the basis of one's new perspective. This sequence has been criticised as excessively linear and cognitively rationalist (Taylor, 2008; Hoggan, 2016), but it remains the most systematic developmental account of perspective transformation available.

Beyond Mezirow: the development of divergent traditions

Mezirow's framework has been substantially elaborated, contested, and extended by subsequent scholarship. Taylor's (2008) comprehensive review confirmed the importance of disorienting dilemmas and critical reflection while challenging the linearity of Mezirow's original sequence and documenting significant variation in how transformation actually unfolds. Crucially, Taylor demonstrated that transformative learning has expanded beyond Mezirow's formulation to encompass affective, relational, and even spiritual dimensions of change. Hoggan (2016) argued that transformation can occur across four domains: epistemology (how we know), ontology (who we are), behaviour (what we do), and structural capacity (our ability to navigate systems). He suggested that Mezirow's theory overemphasises epistemological change while neglecting the other three domains. For GCE, which aims for both cognitive and identity-level change, this distinction is crucial.

Dirkx (2006, 2012) argued that Mezirow's theory is overly reliant on rational, logical thinking. Drawing on depth psychology, Dirkx suggested that genuine transformation also involves emotions, imagination, and unconscious forces, deeply personal, often non-rational elements for which Mezirow's framework has no adequate account. De Oliveira (2021) pushes this critique further, reframing transformative learning as a process of unlearning and self-unmaking, a radical departure from conventional education's emphasis on acquisition and mastery. Unlearning is the painful, active process of disinvesting from the deeply embedded assumptions, desires, and worldviews that modernity has instilled in us: letting go of the 'single story of progress' (De Oliveira, 2021: xxi), the belief in endless growth, and the promise of the good life defined by accumulation.

Yet unlearning alone is insufficient. It must be accompanied by self-unmaking, the dismantling of the very identity constructed around modern values. This means surrendering the heroic narrative of the saviour, the activist, or the 'good person' on the right side of history. De Oliveira uses the metaphor of the onion. Unlike a cup, which is filled with knowledge, the onion has no fixed centre. Self-unmaking involves peeling away layers, certainties, defences, attachments, until no solid core remains. This involves grief for the person one thought oneself to be and the world one thought one inhabited. Yet, in this unmaking, there is also a strange liberation, the relief of shedding a skin that no longer fits. This is what De Oliveira means by hospicing, offering palliative care to a dying world while making space for something new to be born. Ultimately, unlearning and self-unmaking are about developing the capacity to dwell in discomfort, to sit with complexity and complicity without rushing to resolution. It is the most difficult learning there is and, De Oliveira suggests, the only learning that can save us. Crucially, De Oliveira insists that this is a collective practice.

We cannot do this alone, because the perspectives we need to unmake are collectively held and reinforced. Solnit (2026) expands this idea by calling for a shift towards seeing the world as an intricate web of connection, where the isolated self is a myth, and where collaboration, not competition, is the engine of life and society. Taken together, these developments have made transformative learning theory considerably richer and more diverse than Mezirow's early work alone. This expanded tradition is now better equipped to address the full range of dimensions that GCE aspires to engage, not just thinking and reasoning, but also emotions, relationships, spirituality, and political action. However, this diversity also raises important questions about whether a unified 'transformative learning theory' still exists, or whether we should instead speak of transformative learning theories in the plural. This article argues that while no single framework can address all of GCE's concerns, the broader tradition of transformative learning scholarship offers valuable resources when approached critically and selectively

Productive convergences: TLT as theoretical architecture for transformative GCE

Meaning perspectives, disorienting dilemmas and the formation of global understanding

The most fundamental connection between TLT and GCE concerns the role of pre-existing meaning perspectives in shaping and distorting learners' understanding of global realities. Learners do not approach global issues as blank slates. They bring deeply held perspectives shaped by nationality, culture, media, religion, and economic position, assumptions about Western superiority, the fairness of the global economy, the deservingness of the global poor, or the extent of individual responsibility for distant others. This is GCE's real challenge, not filling gaps in knowledge, but engaging with the perspectives learners already hold. TLT explains why simply presenting facts about global problems so often fails to change attitudes or behaviour. If learners' existing perspectives are not directly addressed, new information will be filtered and bent to fit those perspectives, confirming rather than challenging prior beliefs (Mezirow, 1991; King, 2005). This insight pushes GCE away from content delivery and toward the design of experiences that create sufficient discomfort to prompt learners to question their deepest assumptions.

The concept of the disorienting dilemma acquires particular salience in GCE contexts. The encounter with global suffering, injustice, and complexity is frequently disorienting for learners whose meaning perspectives have been formed within the relative insulation of national and cultural privilege. The lived realities of climate displacement, the structural dynamics of global poverty, and non-Western epistemic traditions can, under appropriate pedagogical conditions, function as precisely the kind of disorienting experience that initiates transformative learning. For privileged learners, encountering global suffering is deeply unsettling, and research (Kiely, 2004) demonstrates that this discomfort, when pedagogically supported, is the most powerful trigger for genuine transformation. GCE should therefore prepare for dissonance, not avoid it.

Critical reflection as GCE's core competence

Mezirow's (1991) three-level framework of critical reflection describes a progression from surface-level thinking to the questioning of core beliefs. Content

reflection examines what happened; process reflection examines how we think, feel, or act; and premise reflection questions why we perceive and act as we do. Premise reflection is the deepest level, potentially leading to perspective transformation. This framework maps directly onto GCE's competence aspirations. Content-level analysis of global issues represents the most straightforward dimension, process reflection extends into questions of efficacy and ethics while premise reflection, the critical examination of foundational assumptions represents the most demanding and transformatively significant aspiration.

The pedagogical conditions for cultivating premise reflection are demanding but knowable. Brookfield (2012) offers a practical framework using four lenses: (i) autobiographical reflection on how life experiences shaped global assumptions; (ii) dialogic engagement with others who see the world differently; (iii) encounter with theoretical frameworks that reveal hidden structural conditions; and (iv) immersion in narratives that embody entirely different meaning perspectives. While Mezirow's transformation involves critically reflecting on assumptions to build a better frame of reference, De Oliveira (2021) argues this is insufficient when the core problem is not ignorance but denial. Denial is a fortress built by the ego to protect the self-image we have carefully constructed. It allows us to know about climate catastrophe and ongoing systemic violence and still feel like fundamentally decent people. Transformative learning must bypass the ego's defences and force us to confront our complicity. This is a psychic and spiritual dismantling that feels like dying, because, in a very real sense, a part of us does die.

Rational discourse and the democratic classroom

Mezirow argued that rational discourse requires the absence of coercion, equal participation, and genuine openness to changing one's opinions in the face of better arguments. These conditions align with GCE's aspiration to develop democratic citizens who can engage across difference. A GCE experience grounded in TLT takes these dialogic conditions seriously: diverse perspectives are genuinely heard; status does not determine whose voice matters; and learners are supported to develop dialogic skills such as listening, perspective-taking, and resisting premature certainty. Such conditions are particularly important because

GCE deals with deeply controversial, value-laden topics that provoke defensiveness. A pedagogy informed by TLT embraces controversy rather than avoids it, requiring clear norms for respectful inquiry, intellectual tools for evidence-based discussion, and epistemic dispositions such as humility and responsiveness to evidence (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003). However, not all learners come to these discussions with genuine openness to change. Some may feel personally threatened by discussions that implicate them in privilege or injustice. TLT suggests that the conditions for openness such as safety, trust, and being genuinely heard, must be carefully cultivated through deliberate pedagogical planning.

Theoretical tensions and critical interrogations

The rationalist bias: affect, embodiment and the limits of cognition

The most persistent criticism of Mezirow's TLT is its overemphasis on rational thinking. Heavily influenced by Habermas (1984), Mezirow framed transformation primarily as revising beliefs through logical discourse. Critics argue this undervalues the role of emotion, physical sensation, and the body in forming and revising assumptions (Dirkx, 2006, 2012; Illeris, 2014). The issues GCE engages with are emotionally and existentially charged, affecting learners at levels that pure rational dialogue cannot reach. Zembylas' (2012) work on anti-racism pedagogy demonstrates how emotions like shame, guilt, anger, and grief can either enable or block reflective engagement. Later scholars who built on and critiqued Mezirow offer resources to address this gap (Dirkx, 2006; Brookfield, 2012; Hoggan, 2016; De Oliveira, 2021), enriching his framework to better suit the full scope of GCE.

Power, privilege, and the politics of transformation

Brookfield (2012) offers a critique from critical theory, arguing that Mezirow's framework is insufficiently attentive to structural conditions including class, race, gender, that shape both how we develop distorted worldviews and whether we have opportunity to transform them. Mezirow's idealisation of rational discourse as universally available risks allowing privileged groups' communication norms to pass as universal standards. This aligns with postcolonial scholarship on GCE. Andreotti (2011: 4-6) analysed the 'epistemic violence' unreflective GCE can

commit. The global North positions itself as the knowing subject while treating the global South as objects to be fixed, a transformation that reinforces rather than challenges privilege. Spivak's (1988: 86) concept of 'sanctioned ignorance' captures the structural inability of Western liberal education to truly hear the voice of the subaltern. Transformation that occurs entirely within existing frameworks may leave the deepest distortions untouched. Perspective transformation must include transforming how learners understand their own position within global systems, their privilege, complicity, and situatedness as knowers, requiring what Leonardo (2009: 107) calls 'white ignorance' work and De Oliveira's (2021) 'hospicing modernity'. Bryan's (2022: 329) 'pedagogy of the implicated' positions learners as already enmeshed in relations of privilege and complicity, making structural critique immediately accessible.

Individual and collective dimensions of transformation

Mezirow's framework is fundamentally about individual learning. While he acknowledges that transformed individuals might engage in collective action, he does not theorise these dimensions as integral to transformation itself. For GCE, which aspires to both individual change and collective action, this is a significant limitation. Freire's (1993) concept of conscientisation offers a richer account of collective transformation, though it addresses the oppressed rather than the privileged learner who is typically the focus of GCE. Welton (1995) developed a social movement learning framework, arguing that social movements are learning sites where people develop critical awareness, share knowledge, and build collective identity. These scholars offer partial bridges, but the challenge remains unresolved: how do we integrate individual and collective transformation? While no single framework adequately addresses both, practitioners can draw on both Mezirow's account of individual transformation and Welton's account of collective learning, recognising that different contexts require different emphases. For Solnit (2026) the phrase 'the beginning comes after the end' (taken from the title of her book) is a powerful way to reframe how we think about social and political change, and collective action is central to this process. For Solnit, the 'end' is not a final catastrophe, but the visible collapse of an old, dominant worldview. The 'beginning' is the new world that is already being built through the patient, often unseen, work of many people acting together. Solnit argues that major change rarely happens through a single, dramatic event. Instead, it's the

result of a slow revolution driven by countless small, persistent actions that build up over time. This is where collective action is crucial.

Decolonial and poststructuralist interrogations

Poststructuralist and decolonial thinkers raise deeper problems that attack the shared foundations of both TLT and GCE. The global citizen is a particular kind of person shaped by particular political interests (Foucault, 1972; Butler, 1990). Both TLT and GCE are products of Western colonialism's long history. Mignolo (2007: 156) describes the 'colonial matrix of power', the deep structures through which the West dominated other ways of knowing and being. Without decolonising the very notion of transformation, a particular Western version of the human becomes the universal standard (Wynter, 2003). These critiques suggest we need to rebuild TLT and GCE entirely, not merely revise them. This article argues that taking these critiques seriously produces a more honest and responsible form of transformative GCE. Recent scholarship, including the special issue of Prospects (2025, Issue 55), collated by Bosio and Waghid (2025) provides important resources for rethinking both theory and practice.

Towards a framework for critically transformative GCE praxis

Based on the preceding analysis, this section proposes a six-point framework of commitments for critically transformative GCE. Informed by Mezirow's theory while responsive to its critiques, each commitment is grounded in the theoretical analysis above.

First commitment: consider epistemic disruption as pedagogical strength

This means deliberately creating encounters with global complexity that challenge and unsettle existing beliefs, building a curriculum that prioritises challenge over comfort, counter-narratives over dominant stories, and structural analysis over individual charity. Responding to Andreotti's (2006, 2011) critique of soft GCE, genuine transformation requires epistemic disruption that unsettles not just what learners know but how they know it. This is not about causing distress for its own sake but about creating conditions for premise reflection. As Kiely's (2004) research demonstrates, it is precisely the discomfort of encountering radically different realities that, when pedagogically supported, triggers genuine transformation. For instance, De Oliveira (2021) draws inspiration from

Indigenous philosophies, which view living and dying well as inseparable, offering a pathway away from the modern Western obsession with the good life defined by accumulation towards a more relational and responsible way of being.

Second commitment: critical reflection must take place at the level of premises

This operationalises Mezirow's (1991) distinction between content/process reflection and premise reflection. Content and process reflection are like rearranging the furniture, the worldview remains intact. Premise reflection means stepping outside the house entirely and inspecting its foundations. For GCE, this means moving beyond asking learners what they think to examining the deeper epistemological frameworks that shape how they think. This demands pedagogical tools and sufficient time for genuine reflective engagement. Brookfield's (2012) four-lens framework provides practical guidance.

Third commitment: power matters: rethinking dialogue and transformation

This draws on Mezirow's ideal of rational discourse while responding to Brookfield's critique of its insufficient attention to power. We should aim for encounters where no one is coerced into agreement, everyone has genuine opportunity to speak, and participants are open to changing their minds. However, we must remain realistic about power dynamics, confidence, social status, cultural authority, factors forever present in economic settings. This means actively creating inclusive and equitable conditions, attending to whose voices are present, and modelling intellectual virtues. It also means acknowledging that some learners may experience discussions as threatening. Transformative pedagogy must anticipate resistance and prepare for it.

Fourth commitment: beyond rationality: emotion and embodiment in critical education

Responding to critiques from Dirkx (2006, 2012), Illeris (2014), and Zembylas (2012), this commitment recognises that transformation is not merely cognitive. When students genuinely confront global realities, they experience emotional reactions: grief for what is being lost; anger at those in power; shame about privilege or complicity; and hope that something else is possible. Many educational settings avoid these feelings. TLT makes space for them, recognising emotions as the raw material of transformation. Drawing on Dirkx's (2006: 116)

‘soul-based’ account, this commitment foregrounds emotion, imagination, and the unconscious. It also recognises, drawing on Zembylas’ (2012) work on anti-racism pedagogy, that emotions can both enable and block transformation. The goal is not to induce guilt or shame but to create conditions for working through these emotions productively.

Fifth commitment: unsettling the known: towards a decolonial practice

Responding to critiques from Andreotti (2011), Mignolo (2007), and Wynter (2003), this commitment challenges mainstream GCE’s unspoken assumptions about knowledge, rationality, development, and progress, assumptions that are Western but treated as universal. A decolonial orientation makes space for non-Western and marginalised ways of knowing, not as curiosities or objects of pity, but as genuine contributions to a global conversation. This commitment also requires recognising the diversity of learner subject positions within GCE. Transformation for learners in the global South, who may themselves be marginalised by global systems, will look different from transformation for privileged learners in the global North. A decolonial orientation is attentive to these differences, refusing universalised models of transformation that ignore the specific situatedness of different learners. Recent scholarship on decolonial GCE (Bosio and Waghid, 2025) provides resources for operationalising this commitment.

Sixth commitment: attention to the conditions of possibility

This applies TLT to educational institutions themselves. Transformation does not happen simply because an educator wants it to; it occurs within real institutions with their own rules, pressures, and cultures. Most curriculum structures are rigid. Assessment regimes reward memorising facts while institutional cultures value efficiency over messy, non-linear learning. Genuine transformation requires the opposite, time to sit with discomfort, space for uncertainty, and permission to be unsettled. A critically transformative GCE must attend to these structural, institutional, and relational conditions. This commitment draws on Welton’s (1995) social movement learning framework, highlighting how collective action and institutional change are necessary for transformation to extend beyond individual learners.

A final note: orientate toward praxis

These six commitments should function as a compass rather than a map. Freire's concept of praxis, the endless back-and-forth between reflection and action is central: reflect, act, observe, reflect again, adjust, act again. These commitments will look different in different contexts. Educators should expect tensions. These are not failures but opportunities to pause and ask what can be learned. Transformation does not emerge from smooth, linear progression but precisely from the friction between aspiration and resistance, between old assumptions and disruptive encounters. When educators and learners learn to stay with discomfort rather than retreat from it, the conditions for genuine perspective change begin to materialise.

Conclusion: the challenge of deep change

This article has argued that transformative learning theory offers GCE a rigorous explanation of how deep learning actually happens. Starting with Mezirow's foundational work and extended by subsequent scholarship, TLT's key ideas including meaning perspectives, disorienting dilemmas, premise reflection, and rational discourse, have much to offer GCE. However, tensions remain, as TLT has been criticised from multiple directions: critical theory, decolonial scholarship, poststructuralist thought, and research on emotion. The framework proposed here does not solve these tensions and that is not a failure. Tensions can be productive. The tension between individual and collective change keeps alive the question of what education is really for. The tension between thinking and feeling prevents us from reducing learning to a purely intellectual or emotional endeavour. The tension between practical goals and deeper hopes enables GCE to critique itself when institutions push it toward the purely instrumental. Importantly, these critiques do not apply uniformly to all versions of TLT. Although Mezirow's original model justifiably attracts criticism for its over-reliance on rationality and its neglect of emotional dimensions, later contributions to the transformative learning literature have worked to correct these imbalances. The framework proposed in this article draws on both Mezirow's foundational insights and these subsequent developments, while acknowledging that no single theoretical tradition can fully resolve the challenges of transformative GCE.

What the framework offers is a set of principles for navigating these tensions, not as a roadmap to certainty, but as a compass for staying honest. These principles help educators hold onto GCE's deepest hopes while acknowledging just how difficult the work truly is. The polycrisis of our time leaves no room for pretence. We cannot claim to be transformative while merely transmitting information. The polycrisis requires nothing less than profound, unsettling change in how learners see themselves, their world, and their responsibilities. Applied with critical rigour and integrity, transformative learning theory is one of the most powerful frameworks we have to achieve it. But let us be clear. The challenge GCE faces is not primarily a technical problem of programme design. Design matters, but that is not the heart of it. This is a philosophical, political, and existential challenge. It strikes at the very foundations of educational systems, their assumptions about what learning is, who it serves, and what it is for. Meeting that challenge requires exactly the kind of premise reflection that Mezirow, at his most rigorous, insisted upon. It demands that we stop rearranging the furniture and start questioning the architecture itself.

References

Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 3, pp. 40–51.

Andreotti, V (2011) *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Berners-Lee, M (2025) *A Climate of Truth: Why We Need it and how to Get it*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bosio, E and Waghid (eds.) (2025) *Prospects: Special issue on decolonial and postcolonial perspectives on global citizenship education*, Issue 55, available: <https://link.springer.com/journal/11125/volumes-and-issues/55-1> (accessed 10 August 2026).

Brookfield, S D (2012) *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question their Assumptions*, California: Jossey-Bass.

Bryan, A (2022) 'Pedagogy of the implicated: advancing a social ecology of responsibility framework to promote deeper understanding of the climate crisis', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 30:3, pp. 329-348.

Bryan, A (2011) 'You've Got to Carefully Nudge: Framing the Development Education–Global Citizenship Education nexus in Irish Post-Primary Schooling', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, issue 12, pp. 21–36.

Butler, J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge.

Davies, L (2006) 'Global citizenship: Abstraction or framework for action?', *Educational Review*, Volume 58, Issue 1, pp. 5–25.

De Oliveira, V M (2021) *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, California: North Atlantic Books.

Dirkx, J M (2006) 'Engaging Emotions in Adult Learning: A Jungian Perspective on Emotion and Transformative Learning', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Volume 109, pp. 15–26.

Dirkx, J M (2012) 'Nurturing soul work: A Jungian Approach to Transformative Learning' in E W Taylor and P Cranton (eds.) *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research and Practice*, California: Jossey-Bass, pp. 116–130.

Dolan, A M (2025) 'Hope and Hopelessness in the Face of a Polycrisis', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 41, Autumn, pp. 81-96

Foucault, M (1972) *The Archaeology of knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, New York Pantheon Books.

Freire, P (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.

Habermas, J (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Hess, D E (2009) *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*, London: Routledge.

Hoggan, C D (2016) 'A typology of transformation: Reviewing the transformative learning literature', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Volume 48, Issue 1, pp. 65–82.

IPBES (2019) 'Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (eds. E S Brondizio, J Settele, S Díaz and H T Ngo), IPBES Secretariat.

IPCC (2023) 'Synthesis report of the IPCC sixth assessment report (AR6)' (eds. H Lee and J Romero), Cambridge University Press, available: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf (accessed 17 June 2026).

Illeris, K (2014) 'Transformative Learning and Identity', *Journal of Transformative Education*, Volume 12, Issue 2, pp. 148–163.

Kiely, R (2004) 'A Chameleon with a Complex: Searching for Transformation in International Service-Learning', *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Volume 10, Issue 2, pp. 5–20.

King, K P (2005) *Bringing Transformative Learning to Life*, Florida: Krieger.

Leonardo, Z (2009) *Race, Whiteness and Education*, London: Routledge.

Mezirow, J (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, California: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J (1994) 'Understanding Transformation Theory', *Adult Education Quarterly*, Volume 44, Issue 4, pp. 222–232.

Mezirow, J (2000) 'Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory' in J Mezirow and Associates (eds.) *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, California: Jossey-Bass, pp. 3–33.

Mignolo, W D (2007) 'Introduction: Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking', *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), pp. 155–167.

Oxley, L and Morris, P (2013) 'Global Citizenship: A Typology for Distinguishing its Multiple Conceptions', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Volume 61, Issue 3, pp. 301–325.

Parker, W C (2003) *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Pashby, K, da Costa, M, Stein, S and Andreotti, V (2020) 'A Meta-review of Typologies of Global Citizenship Education', *Comparative Education*, Volume 56, Issue 2, pp. 144–164.

Shultz, L (2007) 'Educating for Global Citizenship: Conflicting Agendas and Understandings', *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, Volume 53, Issue 3, pp. 248–258.

Solnit, R (2026) *The Beginning Comes After the End: Notes on a World of Change*, London: Granta Publications.

Spivak, G C (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C Nelson and L Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Champaign IL: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271–313.

Tarozzi, M and Torres, C A (2016) *Global Citizenship Education and the Crises of Multiculturalism: Comparative Perspectives*, London: Bloomsbury.

Taylor, E W (2008) 'Transformative Learning Theory', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 119, pp. 5–15.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015) 'Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives', Paris: UNESCO, available: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232993> (accessed 17 June 2026).

Welton, M R (ed.) (1995) *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*, New York: New York Press.

Wynter, S (2003) 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation - An Argument', *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 3, Issue 3, pp. 257–337.

Zembylas, M (2012) 'Pedagogies of strategic empathy: Navigating through the emotional complexities of anti-racism in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, Volume 17, Issue 2, pp. 113–125.

Anne M. Dolan is an associate professor and lecturer in primary geography with the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education in Mary Immaculate College, Ireland. She is the author/editor of *Teaching the Sustainable Development Goals to Young Citizens: A Focus on Hope, Respect, Empathy and Advocacy* (Routledge, 2024), *Teaching Climate Change in Primary Schools: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Routledge, 2022), *Powerful Primary Geography: A Toolkit for 21st Century Learning* (Routledge, 2020) and *You, Me and Diversity: Picturebooks for Teaching Development and Intercultural Education* (Trentham Books/IOE Press, 2014).

THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: DESIGNING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS IN AN AGE OF POLYCRISIS

MICHAEL WALIMBWA

Citation: Walimbwa, M (2026) 'The Future of Development Education: Designing Transformational Learning Ecosystems in an Age of Polycrisis', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 89-112.

Abstract: Development education (DE) is operating within a period of intersecting global crises characterised by widening inequality, ecological breakdown, democratic erosion and rapid digital transformation. Recent development education debate describes this condition as a polycrisis and, more fundamentally, a meta crisis in which attention is directed towards the systemic relationships and root causes connecting these crises (Dolan, 2025; McCloskey, 2026). While digitisation and artificial intelligence are increasingly shaping educational practice, this article argues that the central question for DE is not technological efficacy but whether new pedagogical environments can sustain its radical and transformative purpose. Drawing upon critical traditions within DE (Andreotti, 2006, 2011; Bourn, 2015; Bryan and Bracken, 2011), and rooted in Freirean praxis (Freire, 1970), the article proposes a framework of transformational learning ecosystems that re-centres social justice, structural critique and collective agency in both physical and digital spaces.

Rather than treating digital innovation as inherently progressive, the article situates technological change within broader political economies of knowledge, power and inequality. It examines how DE practice can resist depoliticisation by embedding participatory inquiry, South-North and South-South dialogue, and civic engagement within hybrid learning networks. Drawing on reflective engagement with Ugandan Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Ugandan policy and recent scholarship on teacher education, curriculum localisation and technology-mediated learning, the article considers how ecosystemic approaches can move beyond awareness-raising towards sustained civic agency. The article concludes that the future of DE lies not in technical

adaptation to digital tools, but in its capacity to shape educational environments towards emancipatory ends. In an age of polycrisis and meta crisis, DE must reclaim its role as a site of critical dialogue and democratic imagination, ensuring that emerging technologies remain accountable to justice rather than efficiency alone.

Key words: Development Education; Critical Pedagogy; Decoloniality; Democratic Civic Agency; Digital Transformation.

Introduction: Reclaiming the transformative core of digital education in a digital age

Development education has historically been understood as more than a curriculum theme or awareness-raising exercise. Emerging from traditions of critical pedagogy, international solidarity and social justice, it has sought to cultivate forms of critical consciousness capable of interrogating structural injustice and nurturing democratic participation (Freire, 1970; Bourn, 2015). Its distinctive contribution has been normative as much as pedagogical: an insistence that education should engage with global inequality, power relations and ethical responsibility in ways that move beyond information transmission towards transformative engagement.

In the current moment, rapid digitalisation and the expanding presence of artificial intelligence (AI) systems in education have generated new debates about teaching, learning and institutional practice. These developments arise within a wider condition increasingly described in development education as a polycrisis, in which ecological, political, social and economic crises intersect, while the related idea of a meta crisis directs attention to the deeper systemic relationships that generate and reproduce them (Dolan, 2025; McCloskey, 2026; Pollock and Bell, 2025). This framing matters for DE because it shifts attention from isolated global issues towards the interdependence, power relations and root causes connecting them. It also raises important questions about digitalisation: how should a field committed to justice and critical literacy respond to data-driven platforms, algorithmic mediation and digitally networked learning environments? There is a risk that these questions become framed primarily in technical terms,

focusing on tools, efficiency or innovation, rather than on DE's deeper ethical and political commitments (O'Toole, 2024).

The discussion is situated within Ugandan initial teacher education (ITE). Uganda offers a particularly significant setting because teacher education is being reshaped through the National Teacher Policy, the Harmonized Framework for Initial Teacher Training, quality assurance reforms and a national Education Digital Agenda, while curriculum reforms increasingly emphasise competence, learner-centred pedagogy and relevance to social realities (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016, 2019b, 2021). Recent Ugandan scholarship also points to continuing questions around teacher educators' readiness for curriculum reform, institutional support during school practice, curriculum decolonisation and the pedagogical meaning of technology-mediated learning (Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Nampijja, 2024; Natukunda et al., 2026). Consequently, Uganda provides more than an illustrative backdrop; it offers an opportunity to reflect on how the aspirations of DE are interpreted, negotiated and enacted within a postcolonial African education system.

This article argues that the challenge posed by digital transformation is not principally technological but normative. The task is not to determine whether digital pedagogies are effective in instrumental terms, but to consider how DE can retain and indeed deepen its transformative core within digitally mediated contexts. Reclaiming that core requires returning to foundational concerns: whose knowledge is legitimised, how power circulates through educational structures, how crises are connected rather than treated as isolated issues, and how learners are positioned in relation to democratic life.

The analysis is framed as practice-informed reflective scholarship rather than as an empirical study. Drawing upon DE literature alongside sustained professional engagement within Ugandan higher education, particularly teacher education and digital pedagogy, the discussion reflects on how global debates about digitisation, crisis and transformation intersect with institutional realities in a global South context. References to Ugandan practice are supplemented, where appropriate, by Ugandan research and policy documents; they are not presented as representative findings or sector-wide evidence. This positional grounding

seeks to resist abstract universalism and to foreground the perspective of a scholar-practitioner working within postcolonial educational conditions.

DE scholarship has consistently emphasised critical literacy, ethical reflexivity, global interdependence and attention to structural injustice (Andreotti, 2006, 2011; Bourn, 2015; Bryan and Bracken, 2011). Recent debates in *Policy and Practice* further reinforce the need for DE to retain its critical edge in an era of polycrisis, educational silencing and intensifying pressure to depoliticise education (Dolan, 2025; McCloskey, 2026; O'Toole, 2024; Wheatley, 2024). At the same time, decolonial analyses have urged the field to interrogate its own epistemic assumptions and to remain attentive to asymmetries between global North and global South contexts (Andreotti, 2011; Mignolo, 2011). These concerns are particularly relevant to Uganda, where recent scholarship calls for greater attention to Indigenous knowledge, curriculum localisation and decolonial approaches to education (Asimwe, Natamba and Mukasa, 2025; Nampijja, 2024). Digital infrastructures, from online platforms to data-intensive systems, intersect with these concerns in complex ways. They may expand opportunities for dialogue and collaboration, yet they may also reproduce hierarchies of voice, commodify knowledge and depoliticise structural critique (Couldry and Mejias, 2019; Natukunda et al., 2026).

Rather than approaching digital change as either threat or panacea, this article proposes that it offers an opportunity to clarify DE's purpose. In response, three interrelated strategic shifts are advanced. First, the article calls for a movement from content transmission towards participatory knowledge co-creation, reaffirming DE's dialogical and epistemically just orientation. Second, it argues for a shift from standalone interventions towards hybrid transformational learning ecosystems that embed DE structurally within institutions and communities. Third, it proposes a transition from awareness-raising towards democratic civic agency, reconnecting critical reflection with sustained participation in public life. These shifts are not presented as definitive models or empirical generalisations. They are offered as reflective provocations grounded in DE theory and informed by professional experience and Ugandan research and policy contexts. Together, they seek to reclaim DE's transformative horizon at a

time when technological discourse can narrow educational debate to questions of efficiency, innovation and managerial adaptation.

Positionality and approach: practice-informed reflective scholarship

This article is not an empirical study reporting findings from a defined dataset. Rather, it is a practice-informed, reflective intervention grounded in development education scholarship and shaped by my professional experience as a lecturer in educational technology and teacher education in Uganda. The analysis draws upon sustained engagement with curriculum reform, digital transformation initiatives and civic-oriented pedagogies within Ugandan higher education, alongside published Ugandan studies and policy documents. Reflective scholarship has a strong affinity with critical pedagogy because Freire (1970) conceptualised praxis as the dialectical relationship between reflection and action. In this sense, theorising from practice can contribute to knowledge production when it remains explicit about its positionality and does not claim the evidential status of a formal empirical study. The article therefore brings practitioner reflection into dialogue with development education scholarship and with Ugandan evidence on teacher education, curriculum reform and digital learning (Bourn, 2015; Andreotti, 2011; Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Natukunda et al., 2026).

The Ugandan references in this article therefore function both illustratively and analytically. They do not claim statistical generalisability; instead, they situate the argument within documented educational realities and policy directions in the global South. The use of Ugandan research is particularly important because it enables the article to examine epistemic hierarchy from a context that has historically been positioned as a recipient of externally generated development knowledge. The strategic shifts proposed here emerge from the reflective intersection between DE theory, professional experience and this contextual literature. They are offered not as definitive prescriptions, but as provocations for dialogue within the DE community about how its radical commitments can be sustained and deepened in a digitally mediated world.

Conceptual foundations: critical traditions, decolonial perspectives and democratic agency

Reclaiming the transformative core of DE in a digital age requires revisiting the intellectual traditions that have shaped the field while asking what these traditions mean in concrete educational contexts. DE has never been solely about transmitting information on global poverty or international development; rather, it has been grounded in critical pedagogical traditions that link knowledge, power and social transformation (Bourn, 2015). At its strongest, it has positioned education as a site of ethical inquiry and democratic possibility. The contemporary meta crisis adds urgency to this tradition because the connected nature of current crises requires learners to examine systems, relationships and root causes rather than treating each crisis as a separate educational topic (McCloskey, 2026).

Critical pedagogy and transformative learning

The influence of Paulo Freire on DE is foundational. Freire's (1970) critique of the 'banking model' of education challenged hierarchical conceptions of teaching in which learners are passive recipients of knowledge. Instead, he advanced a dialogical model centred on *conscientização*, the development of critical consciousness through reflection and action. Within DE, this orientation informed pedagogies that encourage learners to interrogate structural inequality rather than merely acquire descriptive knowledge about global issues.

Bourn (2008, 2015) argues that DE should be understood as a pedagogy for global social justice, concerned not only with awareness but with fostering critical understanding of interdependence and power. Recent *Policy and Practice* contributions continue to emphasise the need for transformative, critical and hopeful approaches to global citizenship education in the face of polycrisis and institutional pressures that can weaken critical engagement (Dolan, 2025; O'Toole, 2024). Similarly, Bryan and Bracken (2011) emphasise the importance of engaging learners in questioning dominant narratives of development, charity and progress. These traditions frame DE as an inherently political and ethical endeavour, though not partisan in a narrow sense. In the context of accelerating digital transformation, revisiting these foundations becomes particularly important. If education is increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems, data infrastructures and global platforms, the Freirean insistence on dialogue and

critical agency acquires renewed relevance. The question is not whether technology can deliver content efficiently, but whether it enables or constrains critical participation.

Decolonial perspectives and epistemic justice

Alongside critical pedagogy, decolonial scholarship has significantly influenced contemporary DE. Andreotti (2006, 2011) distinguishes between ‘soft’ and ‘critical’ global citizenship education, cautioning against approaches that emphasise empathy and charitable action while leaving structural hierarchies intact. Recent work in *Policy and Practice* similarly warns that global citizenship education can reproduce silences and dominant assumptions when critical questions of power and positionality are not addressed (Gamal, Hault and Taylor, 2024; Stein, 2024). From this perspective, DE must remain attentive to how colonial legacies shape knowledge production, representation and global discourse. Mignolo (2011) advances the concept of epistemic disobedience, urging recognition of plural epistemologies beyond Western modernity. Within DE, this entails interrogating whose knowledge is legitimised, whose experiences are centred and how global problems are framed. Decolonial perspectives therefore push the field beyond inclusion towards a structural critique of epistemic power.

These concerns intersect with digital transformation in complex ways. Global digital infrastructures are largely designed and governed within powerful economic centres, shaping flows of information and data. Recent discussion of technology-mediated learning in Ugandan universities similarly cautions that policy support for digitalisation does not automatically guarantee pedagogically meaningful or equitable learning (Natukunda et al., 2026). A decolonial lens therefore invites DE to examine not only what is taught through digital media, but how digital systems themselves participate in global power relations and whose knowledge becomes more visible or less visible through them.

Democratic agency and civic participation

A third conceptual strand within DE emphasises democratic agency. Osler and Starkey (2005, 2010) argue that education for global citizenship must prepare learners for meaningful participation in democratic life. This includes fostering

political literacy, ethical reasoning, and the capacity to engage in informed, respectful deliberation with people who hold diverse and sometimes competing perspectives. DE, in this view, contributes to democracy not merely by informing learners about global challenges, but by cultivating dispositions and competencies for engagement. Recent work on global citizenship education likewise stresses the importance of agency, action and critical engagement rather than passive awareness (Dolan, 2025; O'Toole, 2024). Mannion et al. (2011) further caution against reductive interpretations of global citizenship that detach it from political structures and public participation. If DE is to remain transformative, it must link critical awareness to opportunities for civic engagement.

These ideas have particular relevance to Ugandan ITE, where teachers are prepared not only as classroom practitioners but as professionals working within schools and communities. Uganda's teacher education policy framework explicitly places teacher education within wider responsibilities for professionalisation, quality, ethical practice and responsiveness to the education system (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019a). The Ministry's teacher education structures also identify participation in the social, cultural and economic development of society as part of the intended orientation of teacher preparation (Ministry of Education and Sports, n.d.). Research on community-oriented teacher education and school practice in Uganda suggests that relationships among teacher educators, student teachers, schools and communities can provide important spaces for contextual learning and professional agency (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024; Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025). The issue, therefore, is not simply whether democratic agency should be valued, but how ITE can create sustained opportunities for future teachers to practise it.

Integrating the traditions

Taken together, critical pedagogy, decolonial theory and democratic education form a coherent conceptual foundation for rethinking DE in a digital age. Critical pedagogy foregrounds dialogue and agency; decolonial perspectives interrogate epistemic hierarchy; democratic theory emphasises civic participation and public deliberation. Recent DE scholarship adds a further imperative: the ability to address interconnected crises through systems thinking, critical hope and collective agency (Dolan, 2025; McCloskey, 2026). None of these traditions

centres technology as a primary concern. Instead, they provide normative criteria against which technological developments can be assessed. The three strategic shifts proposed in the following sections are therefore not technological reforms, but pedagogical and structural reorientations derived from these critical traditions and interpreted through Ugandan ITE, policy and practice.

Strategic shift 1: from content transmission to participatory knowledge co-creation

If DE is grounded in critical pedagogy, democratic agency and epistemic justice, then its pedagogical forms must reflect those commitments. A persistent tension in contemporary practice, including in teacher education, lies in the reliance on transmission-oriented approaches: expert-led workshops, curated global issue modules and externally produced teaching resources that position learners primarily as recipients of knowledge. Such approaches may raise awareness, but they sit uneasily alongside DE's emancipatory aspirations. Freire (1970) critiqued the 'banking model' of education, in which knowledge is deposited into passive learners. Recent Ugandan work on competence-based education similarly describes a shift away from teacher-centred transmission towards learner-centred, active and applied learning, while also identifying implementation gaps (Kasujja, Muzaale and Kasekende, 2025; Arinaitwe et al., 2026).

The first strategic shift, therefore, involves moving from content transmission toward participatory knowledge co-creation. This shift is not presented here as a universal reform prescription, but as a normative direction emerging from DE's foundational commitments and from reflective engagement with practice.

Co-creation as democratic practice

Participatory knowledge production aligns directly with DE's aim of cultivating democratic subjectivity (Osler and Starkey, 2010). When learners investigate issues affecting their own communities, they move from abstract awareness to situated inquiry. In Uganda, teacher education, school practice and community-oriented programme innovations have created opportunities for student teachers and practicing teachers to engage local problems through learning-by-doing and partnerships with communities (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Kitooke and Mahon,

2024). My own professional engagement with teacher education similarly suggests that community-linked inquiry can reposition learners as contributors to knowledge rather than consumers of pre-defined content. These reflections are illustrative rather than representative data, but they point to the value of treating local communities as co-producers of educational knowledge.

These experiences are not offered as representative data across the sector, but as reflective illustrations that are now complemented by Ugandan research. Walimbwa et al (2022), for example, found that programme innovations involving local stakeholders could strengthen contextually relevant competencies and learning-by-doing among in-service teachers, while Kitooke and Mahon's (2024) broader review identifies community-oriented teacher education as a means of developing knowledge of local issues, cultivating social justice and preparing teachers for particular school and community contexts. Such scholarship strengthens the case for participatory co-creation as a practical extension of DE's emphasis on situated learning and collective problem-solving.

Epistemic justice and South-South dialogue

Participatory co-creation also responds to decolonial critiques of DE. If dominant development narratives have historically marginalised non-Western epistemologies, then transformative practice must create space for epistemic plurality (Mignolo, 2011). Ugandan scholarship has increasingly taken this question seriously. Nampijja (2024) argues for curriculum transformation that recognises local experiences, values and languages, while Asimwe, Natamba and Mukasa (2025) examine the integration of Indigenous knowledge into Uganda's curriculum as a strategy for decolonisation and cultural reclamation. Kiiza et al. (2024) similarly call for teacher education curricula to be rethought around Ugandan Indigenous contents and learning experiences. These studies suggest that decolonisation in teacher education is not merely a conceptual aspiration; it concerns the knowledge, examples, languages and experiences through which future teachers are prepared.

Digital platforms may extend opportunities for dialogue across contexts, but their transformative potential depends on pedagogical framing and epistemic purpose. In Uganda, the Education Digital Agenda seeks to improve digital

transformation while supporting ICT integration, research and innovation, human resource capacity and continuity of education during disruption (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021). Recent analysis of technology-mediated learning in Ugandan universities nevertheless cautions against equating digital access with pedagogically meaningful learning (Natukunda et al., 2026). The relevant question for DE is therefore not whether digital platforms are available, but whether their use supports reciprocal dialogue, local knowledge production and critical interrogation of power.

From awareness to situated structural analysis

Transmission-based approaches often present development challenges as universal problems requiring technical solutions. Participatory co-creation, by contrast, foregrounds situated structural analysis. Learners are invited to explore how global processes intersect with local realities and how climate change affects specific communities, how trade regimes shape local markets, or how digital platform economies influence youth livelihoods or how digital platform economies influence educational and employment opportunities. Bryan and Bracken (2011) argue that global citizenship education becomes transformative when learners confront their own positionality within systems of power. In Ugandan ITE, community-oriented and school-based inquiry offers a practical route for connecting such global analysis to local educational realities (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024).

These reflections are illustrative rather than evidential claims about the entire sector. They nevertheless indicate why participatory approaches can be valuable for DE: they create opportunities for learners to encounter complexity, question assumptions and relate global systems to lived experience. Their transformative potential remains dependent on context, facilitation and institutional support.

The role of the educator

This shift reconfigures the role of the educator. Within a transmission model, the educator functions as primary knowledge authority. Within a co-creative model, the educator becomes facilitator, dialogical partner and co-learner engaged in shared inquiry, aligning with Freire's (1970) concept of co-intentional

education. Ugandan policy and research point towards increasing expectations for teacher educators to support competence-based, learner-centred and professionally relevant preparation (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019a; Kasujja, Muzaale and Kasekende, 2025). Research on teacher educators' readiness for curriculum change, however, suggests that institutional capacity and the involvement of teacher education institutions in reform processes remain important issues (Atibuni and Olema, 2024). Participatory co-creation therefore requires not only changes in classroom practice but institutional support for teacher educators themselves.

Digital tools as enablers, not drivers

Within this strategic shift, digital technologies occupy a secondary yet potentially enabling role. Collaborative platforms, digital storytelling and open resources can support shared authorship and dialogue, but technology alone does not guarantee co-creation. Ugandan evidence on technology-mediated learning has repeatedly highlighted the importance of contextual conditions, capacity and pedagogical purpose (Tusiime, Johannesen and Guðmundsdóttir, 2019; Natukunda et al., 2026). The evaluative question for DE is therefore not how technologically advanced a learning environment appears, but whether it advances democratic participation, epistemic justice and locally grounded inquiry.

Strategic shift 2: from standalone interventions to hybrid transformational learning ecosystems

If participatory co-creation reshapes pedagogical relationships within classrooms, a second shift concerns the broader institutional architectures within which DE is situated. Development education cannot realise sustained transformation if it remains dependent on isolated events, short-term projects or individual champions. The move towards an ecosystem therefore asks how teacher education institutions can connect curriculum, school practice, community partnerships, civic engagement and digital spaces into sustained relationships. Reflection on Ugandan ITE, together with recent research on school practice and community-oriented teacher education, suggests that institutional support and collaboration are central to making such relationships meaningful (Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024).

Development education beyond the event

Bourn (2015) argues that DE requires continuity if it is to influence learners' dispositions and civic identities. Recent articles published in *Policy and Practice* similarly warns against the marginalisation or dilution of critical global education when it is absorbed into institutional structures without sustained attention to its purpose (O'Toole, 2024). Within Ugandan teacher education, this raises a practical question: how can development-oriented learning become part of the normal work of ITE rather than remaining an occasional workshop or externally funded activity? Uganda's National Teacher Policy and the Harmonized Framework for Initial Teacher Training provide an institutional basis for professional, coherent teacher preparation, while the Ministry's quality assurance framework emphasises standards and continuous improvement (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016, 2019a). These policy commitments provide entry points for embedding DE more systematically.

An ecosystem approach therefore conceptualises DE as a relational network linking teacher education institutions, schools, communities, civil society organisations, policy actors and, where appropriate, digital spaces. In Ugandan practice, community-oriented teacher education and school practice already offer partial forms of such relationality. Walimbwa et al. (2022) describe programme innovations that brought local stakeholders into teacher education, while Aheisibwe and Barigye (2025) highlight the importance of institutional support, supervision and collaboration between training institutions and practicum schools. The proposal here is to connect such relationships more explicitly to the transformative aims of DE rather than treating them as separate administrative functions.

Relationality and institutional coherence

The ecosystem metaphor foregrounds relationality. DE has long emphasised global interdependence; extending this principle institutionally suggests that educational transformation requires sustained partnerships rather than isolated activity. The Ugandan evidence is instructive: community-oriented teacher education can connect local people, places and institutions to teacher learning (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024), while research on school

practice points to the importance of institutional support and constructive supervision (Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025). Such findings reinforce the argument that ecosystemic learning requires organisational structures that support continuity in inquiry, feedback and mutual learning.

Digital communication tools can facilitate ongoing dialogue within these partnerships, particularly where geographic distance presents logistical constraints. Uganda's Education Digital Agenda 2021-2025 explicitly sought to integrate ICT into teaching, learning, assessment and management, while promoting research, innovation and continuity of education during disruption (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021). Yet recent Ugandan scholarship cautions that digitalisation should not be reduced to access or infrastructure and should instead be judged by the quality and relevance of learning it supports (Natukunda et al., 2026). The defining feature of an ecosystem is therefore not digital connectivity but shared normative purpose

Hybrid spaces: possibilities and constraints

Hybridisation, understood here as the deliberate integration of physical and digital learning spaces, offers possibilities for sustaining dialogue beyond immediate localities. In Uganda, the move towards technology-mediated learning has expanded the potential for communication among universities, teacher educators, student teachers and schools, although uneven infrastructure and institutional capacity continue to shape participation (Tusiime, Johannesen and Guðmundsdóttir, 2019; Natukunda et al., 2026). The implication for DE is that hybrid spaces need to be designed around equity and participation rather than assumed to be inherently inclusive.

From a decolonial perspective, hybridity also demands careful attention to agenda-setting, language and knowledge authority. International digital collaborations can reproduce unequal relations if knowledge, technology and decision-making remain concentrated in the global North (Andreotti, 2011; Couldry and Mejias, 2019). Ugandan scholarship on curriculum decolonisation reinforces the importance of local experiences, values, languages and Indigenous knowledge in educational design (Nampijja, 2024; Asimwe, Natamba and Mukasa, 2025). Hybrid DE ecosystems should therefore make reciprocal South-

South and South-North learning possible without allowing external agendas to displace locally grounded knowledge.

Institutional engagement and policy dialogue

Moving beyond standalone interventions also implies closer connection between DE and public deliberation. Osler and Starkey (2010) argue that democratic education should create pathways for meaningful participation in civic processes. Uganda's teacher education policy framework links teacher preparation to wider professional, ethical and societal responsibilities (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019a), while the Ministry's teacher education structures explicitly recognise participation in social, cultural and economic development as part of the intended orientation of teacher preparation (Ministry of Education and Sports, n.d.). For DE, these commitments create opportunities to connect student teachers' inquiry with school and community dialogue, local education structures and public problem-solving.

Structural pressures and sustainability

An ecosystemic orientation also requires confronting structural pressures shaping contemporary education. Funding cycles, performance metrics and market-oriented reforms can encourage short-term outputs over sustained relational work. Ugandan research on competence-based reforms and teacher education points to challenges involving resources, institutional readiness, ICT integration and the coordination of reform across teacher education institutions (Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Atibuni and Olema, 2024). The proposal for ecosystemic transformation is therefore aspirational as well as analytical: it identifies a direction aligned with DE's normative commitments while recognising that institutional change is gradual, contested and dependent on policy implementation.

From pedagogical innovation to structural reorientation

Participatory co-creation as presented in Shift 1 reorients the micro-level dynamics of teaching and learning. The move toward hybrid transformational ecosystems extends this reorientation to institutional and relational levels. Rather than treating DE as an occasional thematic supplement, this shift positions it as an organising orientation shaping partnerships, curricula and engagement strategies. Digital technologies intersect with this transformation as enabling infrastructures

rather than primary drivers. They may support continuity, collaboration and transnational dialogue, but the central question remains normative: do institutional arrangements sustain democratic participation and epistemic plurality over time? In this sense, ecosystemic thinking represents not a technological turn, but a structural deepening of DE's transformative ambitions.

Strategic shift 3: from awareness-raising to democratic civic agency

If participatory co-creation reshapes pedagogical relationships and ecosystemic embedding strengthens institutional continuity, a third shift concerns purpose. DE has long prioritised awareness of global injustice. Yet reflective engagement with practice and recent DE scholarship suggest that awareness alone is insufficient for sustained democratic participation (Dolan, 2025; O'Toole, 2024). Consistent with Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientização*, critical consciousness becomes transformative when linked to praxis: reflection and action upon the world. In ITE, this means preparing teachers not only to explain global challenges but to facilitate dialogue, support inclusive participation and connect learning to the civic life of schools and communities.

Beyond empathy: toward political literacy

Andreotti (2006; 2011) cautions against forms of global citizenship education that emphasise empathy without interrogating structural power. In reflecting on teacher education in Uganda, classroom discussions on inequality, climate change or educational disadvantage can begin at the level of moral concern, but they can also become more analytically productive when learners are invited to examine governance structures, policy processes, institutional responsibilities and economic relations. This observation is offered as professional reflection rather than evidence of a generalised effect. It nevertheless points to the importance of political literacy: understanding how institutions function, how decisions are made and where citizens can intervene.

Osler and Starkey (2010) argue that democratic education should equip learners with capacities for meaningful participation. In Uganda's decentralised governance system, schools and communities interact with local government structures that can provide spaces for dialogue on education, health, environment and community development. Teacher education can prepare future teachers to

understand and navigate such spaces rather than treating civic engagement as separate from professional practice. Uganda's National Teacher Policy, with its emphasis on professionalisation, ethical practice and wider social responsibility, provides a policy foundation for considering this broader role (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019a).

Scaffolding agency within ecosystems

The movement from awareness to agency does not occur automatically. It depends on the relational and institutional infrastructures described in the previous section. Where DE remains episodic, opportunities for sustained engagement are limited. Where partnerships endure, cycles of inquiry, feedback and reflection become possible. Ugandan work on school practice and community-oriented teacher education indicates the value of institutional support, supervision, local partnerships and authentic learning experiences (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024). These studies strengthen the argument that civic agency must be intentionally supported rather than assumed as a natural by-product of awareness.

Contestation and democratic risk

DE oriented toward civic agency must also acknowledge that democratic participation involves contestation. Dialogue around development priorities like land use, environmental protection, economic reform, gender equity among others, often reveals divergent perspectives. In plural contexts such as Uganda's, these differences may reflect generational, political or socio-economic divides. Freire (1970) emphasised dialogue as an ethical encounter grounded in mutual recognition rather than imposed consensus. For teacher educators, the challenge is therefore to create spaces in which disagreement can be explored critically and respectfully. Recent DE discussions about educational silence and the dilution of critical global citizenship education reinforce the importance of maintaining spaces for difficult knowledge and contested issues (Gamal, Houtt and Taylor, 2024; O'Toole, 2024).

From individual awareness to collective engagement

Awareness-oriented approaches often focus on individual attitudinal change. Civic agency, by contrast, requires collective orientation. Participatory co-creation

(Shift 1) introduces collaborative inquiry at classroom level. Ecosystemic partnerships (Shift 2) extend collaboration institutionally. The culmination lies in enabling learners to see themselves as participants in broader publics rather than isolated moral actors. Ugandan teacher education provides tangible entry points through school practice, community-oriented projects and engagement with local education challenges (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025). DE can intersect with such initiatives by providing critical frameworks for understanding power, inequality and global interdependence.

Ethical reflexivity and global solidarity

A shift toward civic agency must remain ethically reflexive. Andreotti (2011) warns that well-intentioned action can reproduce paternalistic or hierarchical relations if not critically examined. This concern is particularly relevant to North-South partnerships and to educational projects involving communities whose knowledge has historically been marginalised. Ugandan scholarship on decolonised curriculum points towards the importance of local experiences, values, languages and Indigenous knowledge (Nampijja, 2024; Asiiimwe, Natamba and Mukasa, 2025). Hybrid engagements connecting learners across borders may foster solidarity when grounded in reciprocity, but they require intentional attention to power, positionality and agenda-setting.

Reasserting purpose

The progression from co-creation to ecosystems to civic agency clarifies DE's horizon. The goal is not merely informed awareness, but participation in democratic processes oriented towards justice. In Ugandan ITE, this means preparing teachers who can connect global issues to local educational realities, facilitate critical dialogue and work collaboratively with communities. Reflective engagement and the available research suggest both possibilities and constraints: competence-based reforms and community-oriented approaches create openings for participation, while questions of institutional capacity, resources, digital inequality and curriculum ownership remain significant (Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Nampijja, 2024; Natukunda et al., 2026). These reflections do not claim generalisability but reinforce a central normative insight: DE must sustain its commitment to linking critical understanding with democratic participation.

The application of the three strategic shifts to a Ugandan context

Applying the three shifts to Ugandan education and ITE requires moving from principle to institutional practice. First, participatory knowledge co-creation can be strengthened by reorienting student-teacher inquiry, school practice and assessment towards locally identified problems and community knowledge. This would build on existing community-oriented teacher education work, while making the connection to development education and critical social justice more explicit (Walimbwa et al., 2022; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024).

Second, teacher education institutions could be supported to function as learning ecosystems rather than separate providers. The National Teacher Policy, the Harmonized Framework for Initial Teacher Training and the Quality Assurance Framework provide policy entry points for stronger links among teacher educators, student teachers, practicum schools, communities and professional bodies (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016, 2019a). The Education Digital Agenda can complement this by supporting hybrid collaboration, while maintaining attention to equity, local relevance and meaningful pedagogy (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021; Natukunda et al., 2026).

Third, democratic civic agency can be made more explicit within ITE through structured opportunities for student teachers to investigate public issues, engage community and local-government actors, deliberate across difference and reflect on power and positionality. Decolonisation should accompany these shifts by giving greater curricular space to Ugandan histories, languages, Indigenous knowledge and locally generated educational knowledge (Nampijja, 2024; Asiimwe, Natamba and Mukasa, 2025). The substantive next step is therefore not a new digital programme but a coordinated institutional commitment to make critical, participatory and locally grounded teacher education the connective tissue of development education.

Conclusion: reclaiming the transformative horizon of DE

This article has argued that the future of DE does not lie in technological adoption for its own sake, but in renewing its critical, democratic and emancipatory commitments within a digitally mediated world shaped by intersecting crises.

Recent DE debate on the polycrisis and meta crisis reinforces the need to examine systemic relationships, root causes and possibilities for collective action rather than treating crises as isolated topics (Dolan, 2025; McCloskey, 2026). The three strategic shifts outlined here provide a framework for that renewal. First, moving from content transmission to participatory knowledge co-creation reclaims DE's Freirean foundation and gives practical expression to epistemic justice. Second, moving from standalone interventions to hybrid transformational learning ecosystems extends this commitment institutionally through sustained relationships among teacher education institutions, schools, communities and civic actors. Third, moving from awareness-raising to democratic civic agency reconnects critical reflection with meaningful participation in public life.

Taken together, these shifts reposition DE as a structural orientation rather than a thematic add-on. Their significance becomes clearer when considered through Ugandan ITE. Uganda's teacher education policy and curriculum reforms provide institutional openings for professional, competence-based and contextually relevant teacher preparation, while research on community-oriented teacher education, school practice, curriculum decolonisation and digital learning illustrates both opportunities and constraints (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016, 2019a, 2021; Walimbwa et al., 2022; Kitooke and Mahon, 2024; Asimwe, Natamba and Mukasa, 2025; Aheisibwe and Barigye, 2025; Natukunda et al., 2026). Uganda is not presented as a model to be replicated elsewhere. Rather, it offers a global South context from which the international DE community can consider how critical pedagogy, decolonisation and digital transformation are negotiated together in practice.

The article has been presented as practice-informed reflective scholarship rather than as an empirical evaluation of Ugandan ITE. This distinction is important to the epistemic argument of the article: Uganda should not be invoked rhetorically while its educational realities remain undocumented, but neither should reflective experience be presented as sector-wide evidence. The substantive next step is therefore to connect existing policy, research and professional practice more deliberately, so that teacher education institutions can use participatory pedagogy, institutional partnerships and civic engagement to deepen the transformative purposes of DE.

The risk in the present moment is not technological change itself, but depoliticisation: the subtle drift towards framing global challenges as technical problems requiring managerial solutions. DE must resist this drift. Its distinctive contribution lies in cultivating critical consciousness, ethical reflexivity, epistemic plurality and collective agency. Digital tools may support these aims, but they cannot substitute for them. Ultimately, the future of DE depends on its capacity to remain intellectually rigorous and politically courageous while learning from diverse contexts, including those of the global South. In doing so, it sustains the transformative horizon that has animated the field from its inception: the possibility that education can contribute meaningfully to more just, equitable and solidaristic futures.

References

Aheisibwe, I and Barigye, E (2025) 'Institutional support and supervisory practices as predictors of competency acquisition among teachers on school practice in Southwestern Uganda', *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 8(3), 209–221.

Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 3, pp. 40–51.

Andreotti, V (2011) *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Asiimwe, F M, Natamba, S. and Mukasa, S (2025) 'Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Uganda's primary school curriculum: Strategies for decolonisation and cultural reclamation', *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 8(3), pp. 245–261.

Atibuni, D Z and Olema, D K (2024) 'Readiness for the new lower secondary school curriculum among teacher educators in Uganda', *1st International Conference on Curriculum Development 2023*, Kampala: National Curriculum Development Centre.

Bourn, D (2008) 'Development Education: Towards a re-conceptualisation', *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 1(1), pp.5–22.

Bourn, D (2015) *The Theory and Practice of Development Education: A Pedagogy for Global Social Justice*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Bryan, A and Bracken, M (2011) *Learning to Read the World? Teaching and Learning about Global Citizenship and International Development in Post-Primary Schools*, Dublin: Irish Aid.

Couldry, N and Mejias, U A (2019) *The Costs of Connection: How Data is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating it for Capitalism* California: Stanford University Press.

Dolan, A M (2025) 'Hope and hopelessness in the face of a polycrisis', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 41, pp. 81–96.

Freire, P (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.

Gamal, M, Hoult, S and Taylor, K (2024) 'Development education and the scandal of the human: The grammar of silence and erasure', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 39, pp.11-33.

Kasujja, J P, Muzaale, T and Kasekende, F (2025) 'Transforming higher education in Uganda: An integrated pedagogical and assessment strategy for technology-enhanced and learner-centred learning'. *Journal of Curriculum Development, Evaluation, and Education*, 1(2), 120–138.

Kiiza, M., Odele, A., Wakwebwa, J, Nalubega, J M, Egele, C, Masereka, J, and Kayi Modest, O (2024) 'Rethinking Teacher Education Curricula Finished with Ugandan Indigenous Contents and Learning Experiences'. *International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research*, 8(7), 49–58

Kitooke, A and Mahon, K (2024) 'Affordances of Community-oriented Praxis in Teacher Education: A configurative review', *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1456310.

Mannion, G, Biesta, G, Priestley, M and Ross, H (2011) 'The Global Dimension in Education and Education for Global Citizenship: Genealogy and Critique', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9(3-4), pp. 443–456.

McCloskey, S (2026) 'Pedagogical Responses to the Meta Crisis: The Role of Development Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 42, pp.1–18.

Mignolo, W D (2011) *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Ministry of Education and Sports (2016) 'A harmonized framework for initial teacher training in Uganda', Kampala: MoES.

Ministry of Education and Sports (2019a) 'The National Teacher Policy', Kampala: MoES.

Ministry of Education and Sports (2019b) 'The quality assurance framework for initial teacher education in Uganda', available: <https://www.education.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-Quality-Assurance-in-Teacher-Education-Framework.pdf> (accessed 18 August 2026).

Ministry of Education and Sports (2021) 'Education digital agenda strategy 2021–2025', available: <https://www.education.go.ug/digital-agenda/> (accessed 18 August 2026).

Ministry of Education and Sports. (n.d.) 'Teacher education', available: <https://www.education.go.ug/teacher-education/> (accessed 15 August 2026).

Nampijja, F K (2024) 'Perspectives of curriculum regulatory authorities on adopting a decolonized curriculum in Uganda: A case of National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC)', *Frontiers in Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2(4), pp. 44–51.

Natukunda L, Nampijja F K, Adyanga, F A and Momanyi, O J (2026) 'Re-thinking Technology-Mediated Learning in Ugandan Universities: A Narrative Review of Policy and practice', *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(1), pp. 271–279.

Osler, A and Starkey, H (2005) *Changing Citizenship: Democracy and Inclusion in Education*, London: Open University Press.

Osler, A and Starkey, H (2010) *Teachers and Human Rights Education*, Staffordshire, UK: Trentham Books.

O'Toole, B (2024) 'The silences of global citizenship education: A concept fit for purpose?', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 39, pp.171–183.

Pollock, R and Bell, R (2025) 'From polycrisis to metacrisis: A short introduction', *Life Itself*, available: <https://news.lifeitself.org/p/from-polycrisis-to-metacrisis-a-short> (accessed 18 August 2026).

Stein, S (2024) 'The paradox of educational silences and cacophonies in liquid modernity', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 39, pp.1–10.

Tusiime, W E, Johannesen, M and Guðmundsdóttir, G B (2019) 'The dilemma of teaching with digital technologies in developing countries: Experiences of art and design teacher educators in Uganda', *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 3(2), pp.55–71.

Walimbwa, M, Mugisha, A, Buluma, A and Mbulankende, J (2022) 'In-service teacher reflections on program innovations towards education responsive to local communities', *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 3(2), pp.285–297.

Wheatley, K F (2024) 'Regrettable silences and future directions in development education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 39, pp.34–52.

Michael Walimbwa is a lecturer of Educational Technology at Makerere University in Uganda and holds a PhD in Educational Technology. He teaches and supervises postgraduate research in curriculum studies, digital pedagogy, assessment innovation, and teacher education at Makerere University. His scholarship focuses on the transformative potential of technology in resource-constrained higher education systems, with particular attention to equity, global justice, and the integration of generative artificial intelligence in teaching and learning. He has published and presented on innovative assessment practices, employability skills in teacher education, and access to assistive technologies for learners with disabilities. His work is grounded in critical pedagogy and is committed to advancing socially responsive and contextually relevant DE in the global South. Email: walimbwamichael@gmail.com

GET CRITICAL: FRAMEWORK ADAPTATION FOR CRITICAL GLOBAL LEARNING AS FREIREAN PRAXIS AND PEDAGOGICAL INQUIRY

BRIGHID GOLDEN, CHARLOTTE BISHOP AND NINA SACHAU

Citation: Golden, B, Bishop, C and Sachau, N (2026) 'Get Critical: Framework Adaptation for Critical Global Learning as Freirean Praxis and Pedagogical Inquiry', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 113-136.

Abstract: Get Critical is a Research Ireland-funded project that enabled the Irish non-governmental organisation (NGO) and Irish Aid strategic partner for higher education (HE), STAND, to engage in a process of adapting an established educational framework for critical global learning (Golden, 2025) guided by the framework author. The original framework for critical global learning was adapted and redesigned to better reflect the unique aspects of STAND's educational context and organisational goals and is being used by STAND staff and facilitators to guide their educational activities. Centring systemic thinking and critical engagement with the root causes of global injustice, the project positions framework adaptation as a catalyst for re-imagining global citizenship education (GCE) practice. This article outlines the participatory processes through which the framework was revised, presents the newly configured STAND Framework now shaping their pedagogical approach, and examines the organisational and educational outcomes emerging from its implementation.

The project followed a three-stage sequential design which included professional development, collaborative development and testing, and stakeholder feedback leading to a finalised adapted framework. Moving beyond a technical account of framework adaptation, the article positions this process as a case study in Freirean praxis, collaborative meaning-making, and pedagogical re-imagination. It explores how GCE educators engaged in dialogical reflection can interrogate their assumptions, surface organisational values, and critically analyse their existing pedagogical practices. This dialogical, reflective engagement illustrates how GCE educators can collectively refine and redesign their approaches to better cultivate learners' capacities for systemic analysis and critical global engagement.

The resulting STAND Framework embodies a process-oriented pedagogy rooted in criticality, emotional capacity, collective action, and transformative learning in line with the works of Freire (1970; 1974) and Shor (1992) who advocate for educational approaches which are experiential, dialogical, and who position learning as a co-created process. By analysing both the adaptation journey and the shifts it enabled within STAND, the article argues that intentional, reflective pedagogical redesign can support GCE educators in imagining and enacting new futures for GCE: futures grounded in systemic thinking, context-responsive practice, and a commitment to empowering learners to question, resist, and act for global justice.

Key words: Critical Thinking; Framework Adaptation; Pedagogical Development; Praxis.

Introduction: why adapt a framework?

Educational theory, frameworks, and pedagogies are not static, but are fluid and ever evolving in terms of how they are interpreted and implemented at individual levels. However, the process of interpretation, and potential adaptation is often unconscious on the part of the educator working to implement educational approaches which work in their context and align with their own understandings. This article argues that intentional and purposeful adaptation processes can catalyse organisational learning and pedagogical re-imagination, not just produce a better tool for use in practice; that the process of adaptation is as important as the outcome.

This article presents the findings from a Research Ireland-funded project called ‘Get Critical’ during which Irish NGO STAND adapted an established educational framework for critical global learning to create one which better aligned with their organisational goals, educational context, and collective beliefs. STAND are Irish Aid’s strategic partner for higher education and work with students, student leadership bodies, and academic and professional staff from across multiple campuses in Ireland, supporting them to integrate GCE into their practice and stand up for global justice, equality and sustainability. Not confined to formal education requirements, STAND offers national and campus-based programmes working through residentials, online spaces, exhibitions, and in

tailored programmes for their audiences. Their staff deliver, coordinate and facilitate, as well as working with external facilitators hired for specific purposes. Their context is unique, and their remit is clear. They entered into this project in response to changing global contexts, namely the meta-crisis, which focuses on understanding the systemic causes of the climate emergency; racism and the far-right; the hollowing out of democracy; the genocide in Gaza; and neoliberal economics (McCloskey, 2026) and to ensure that they were centring critical thinking in their work and had a cohesive educational approach which tied their activities together.

The framework STAND adapted is outlined in *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework* (Golden, 2025). The adaptation process involved professional development with the original framework author, a process of co-development, adaptation and testing, and a finalisation of the final STAND framework which now underpins not only their activities and projects but informs the monitoring and evaluation of their programmes and their reporting to funders and partners. This article presents the iterative adaptation process which STAND engaged in as a form of Freirean praxis which was rooted in dialogues, critical engagement, and served to surface assumptions and reorient pedagogy towards systemic analysis and collective action.

Foregrounding critical thinking within global citizenship education practice

This project foregrounds critical thinking development as a lynchpin for achieving the aims of GCE. Critical thinking features as a goal of many education systems, positioned as a 21st Century skill, the impact of critical thinking development within education is described as fundamental for informed decision-making, democratic engagement, and solving complex global problems (Jaramillo Gómez et al., 2025). Within GCE work critical thinking is frequently listed as a skill, an outcome, or a transformative pedagogy. Indeed MacCallum (2014: 39) considered global learning to be a process of ‘realized critical thinking’ which allows for consideration of social, cultural, economic, political and environmental issues from multiple perspectives. Within this context, critical thinking development relates to deepening learners’ awareness of diverse perspectives, enabling them to question the status quo, and to dig deeper into considering root

causes of justice issues (Andreotti, 2006). Centring critical thinking in education has never been more important than now. We live in a time when the concept of truth is being eroded by global leaders willing to spread mis- and dis-information, and when social media and independent self-declared journalism is on the rise. This context necessitates that education equip learners with the skills to analyse what they hear and encounter, question dominant narratives, and consider wider perspectives. Critical thinking development in this context acts as an opportunity to support learners in building empathy, making connection with others, developing resilience, and cultivating values crucial to GCE. In this way, we position critical thinking as a first step in informed critical action.

Although frequently named as an important skill to develop within GCE, how to develop this skill in this context is rarely researched or written about. The original framework upon which this project is based aimed to address this gap in research and literature, and this project builds on addressing this gap by considering how criticality can be fostered in another context. However, a further challenge within GCE is the consideration of how to implement pedagogical approaches in different contexts. Materials are often developed for use within formal education but rarely supported by evidence of how they can be used or adapted for other contexts. Fundamentally, this project aimed to address this research gap in providing a research informed approach to adapting frameworks designed for one context, namely initial teacher education (ITE), for use in a non-formal education context.

Conceptual grounding: criticality, systems thinking and praxis

The adaptation process was underpinned by a number of theoretical pillars including critical pedagogy and transformative learning, critical GCE, and understandings of praxis and professional learning. Critical pedagogy facilitates a view of 'learning as revolution' (hooks, 1994: 2), promoting educational approaches rooted in conscientisation (Freire, 1974) and co-creation (hooks, 1994; Shor, 1992). From this perspective, education must be viewed as a 'practice of freedom' (Freire, 1970) which encourages independence and supports learners to pose critical questions which challenge the status quo including the structure of the learning space itself. In her writing, hooks talks about 'teaching to transgress' and shares that to truly radicalise the hierarchical nature of the

classroom, the educator must genuinely and authentically value all students' contributions and students themselves as equal contributors creating the learning space. This involves deconstructing the notion that only the educator holds responsibility for shaping and influencing the classroom dynamics but instead proposes that 'excitement is generated through collective effort' (hooks, 1994: 8). While critical pedagogy focuses on breaking down hegemonic power structures, transformative learning also offers an approach to questioning assumptions about power, enabling deeper reflection on systems that shape us and our positioning and influence within those systems (Mezirow, 2006). These ideas underpinned STAND's approach to this adaptation process as they worked to embed an approach to education which was rooted in genuine dialogue and enabled their students to experience freedom and develop and practice criticality.

The adaptation process was also underpinned by understandings of critical GCE and a desire to align with post-critical framings of GCE which emphasise uncertainty and complexity and aim for ongoing reflexive learning. Concepts of decolonisation and a commitment to deconstructing charity narratives and universalist doctrines (Andreotti, 2009; Bourn, 2015; Spivak, 1999) informed STAND's review of the original framework and considerations for their own practice. STAND's stated mission necessitated an understanding of collective affect-rooted action and systems thinking which informed decisions made. STAND staff were conscious of the emotional labour often involved in taking action and endeavoured to craft an educational approach rooted in hope and solidarity (hooks, 2010). Furthermore, an understanding not only of root causes of injustice but of complex systems influencing global challenges and opportunities for multi-level change was at the root of discussions during the adaptation process (Capra and Luisi, 2014).

The adaptation process itself was framed as praxis in that while reflective and rooted in theory, it was also action focused and included multiple 'testing' points and feedback loops. This was made possible through the community of practice style approach taken by STAND staff during the process. While there was one staff member leading the process, all staff involved in education programmes were involved in discussing, drafting, editing, testing, and reflecting on the evolving framework being designed. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) use

the term ‘inquiry-as-stewardship of practice’ to highlight the importance of educators continually questioning, interpreting, and reconstructing their own practice in dialogue with others. When this approach is taken at an organisational level educators become custodians of pedagogical integrity, actively shaping and protecting educational values, not acting as technicians delivering pre-set material; they take responsibility for the evolution of their organisation’s pedagogy. This deeply collaborative approach to pedagogy development framed the adaptation process undertaken by STAND and is evident in the findings from this project.

Framework adaptation and pedagogical re-imagination as critical pedagogy

Drawing on Kemmis’s (2019) practice theory, framework adaptation offers an opportunity to reshape the sayings (shared language), doings (pedagogical routines), and relatings (collaborative relationships) that influence and shape practice. Adaptation therefore becomes simultaneously a redesign of pedagogy and the conditions that support it, and due to the approach taken by STAND, pedagogical redesign became organisational change. Fullan (2016) frames educational change as systemic, relational, and dependent on shared meaning-making.

By adapting the framework collaboratively, STAND embodied Sfard’s (1998) ‘participation metaphor’ in which learning becomes part of a community of practice as educators themselves participated in knowledge-building rather than simply absorbing a pre-made model, connecting with critical pedagogy approaches outlined earlier. Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (2009) ‘inquiry as stance’ advocates for educators to engage in ongoing, collaborative inquiry into what their practice should be and do. The adapted STAND Framework presented in this article is not a fixed product but a reflection of educators’ ongoing stewardship over their own practice. Furthermore, Laurillard (2012) argues that teaching is a design science, meaning pedagogical approaches must be deliberately engineered, tested, and refined, not left to intuition or tradition. Framework adaptation can, therefore, be positioned as a structured design process, where educators iteratively redesign the learning conditions to better support their goals. The ‘Get Critical’ project reflects Laurillard’s vision in that it presents pedagogy as responsive, evidence-informed, and co-constructed; qualities inherent to critical pedagogy’s emphasis on agency, dialogue, and purposeful intervention.

Crucially, this project presents framework adaptation as not simply a technical exercise, but as a political act. Critical pedagogy emphasises that education is never neutral (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). Adapting a learning framework is, therefore, a political choice about what knowledge, skills, and dispositions matter, and which worldviews are privileged. The adaptation process itself becomes an act of reshaping power relations and enabling educators to challenge inherited assumptions about GCE. The ‘Get Critical’ project positioned framework adaptation as an opportunity for STAND to more explicitly embed systemic analysis, multiple perspectives, and criticality into their organisational pedagogy. The re-imagination of the framework became a living enactment of praxis, where organisational assumptions were surfaced, contested, and transformed. In the project collective reflection, facilitator inquiry, and iterative redesign constituted praxis. Through dialogue, staff interrogated their underlying beliefs about learning, justice, and agency, and redesigned pedagogy to align with those commitments. Importantly, these processes did not emerge in isolation within the project itself but reflected a broader organisational culture within STAND that values ongoing reflexivity, dialogue, and less-hierarchical forms of leadership. There is a recognition within STAND that commitments to challenging power must be practiced organisationally as well as pedagogically. Furthermore, these commitments shaped the methodology of this research project, ensuring that key considerations in relation to pedagogy development and critical pedagogy were reflected in the collaborative approach to research.

Context and original framework

The adaptation process undertaken by STAND followed a presentation of the original framework at an IDEA (Irish Development Education Association) research event in 2024. Staff members from STAND were present at the presentation and felt that while many aspects of the framework resonated with their work, they were interested in how it could be adapted to better suit their context and be used to inform their overall educational approach which would underpin all programmes and activities.

The original framework (Golden, 2025) was developed through a three-year self-study action research project and was designed to support student teachers to develop critical thinking skills in the context of GCE modules within

ITE. The framework used the term ‘critical global learning’ to represent the interconnection between critical thinking and GCE. It consists of two parts. Firstly, a Model for Teaching Critical Global Learning which acts as a conceptual framework for understanding what critical thinking looks like in the context of GCE which includes a central commitment to criticality, and both skills that students should expect to develop, and teaching considerations for educators to be aware of. The second component is a planning tool which is designed to support the practical implementation of the model. The planning tool includes the conditions for learning which should be fostered in the classroom, elements which should form the basis of any lesson and outcomes that educators should be conscious of. The framework was grounded in the same theoretical principles which informed STAND’s adaptation process as outlined above and was intentionally designed to be an open system which could be adapted to other contexts.

While much of the content and underpinning values behind the original framework were in line with STAND’s work, their unique context meant that there were changes they needed to make for the framework to be better aligned with their organisational goals and educational context. Table one below outlines some of the unique distinctions between domains of the original framework, and STAND’s context.

Table 1: Mapping original framework domains → STAND's needs/gaps

	Original Framework Domains	STAND's needs / context
Purpose	A structured approach to embedding critical thinking into GCE	To develop a coherent GCE approach that centres critical thinking.
Goals	Individual	Organisational
Context	Academia	Non-academic, non-formal education
Audience	Other academics	GCE sector, funders, collaborators in HE
Setting	HE formal education setting	HE non-formal and varied education settings
Learner Profile	ITE, largely homogenous student group	Students and HE staff from wide variety of disciplines and backgrounds
Framework use	To be used by multiple people with one leader	To be used by multiple people independently, across a variety of programmes
Framework implementation	Sessions repeated multiple times for different groups – need for replicability for equity	Programmes delivered once off with all participants simultaneously – more flexibility with design
Group size	Large cohort and group sizes	Small group sizes

From the table it is clear to see that the original framework, though conceptually aligned with STAND's goals, was not an ideal fit for their unique context. Their aims for the adaptation process included:

1. Developing a coherent and intentional educational approach;
2. Strengthening a shared educational identity, language, and understanding of critical and decolonial education in practice;
3. Ensuring the organisation's educational approach remained responsive to a changing and complex world;
4. Creating a strong foundation for learning and impact evaluation across programmes.

Methodology: a three-stage sequential design as Freirean co-Inquiry

As outlined earlier, the process was conceptualised as Freirean praxis. This two-year project followed a three-stage sequential design which was practice-based, participatory, and iterative, drawing on principles of participatory design (Ten Holter, 2022):

Professional development

During this initial phase CPD was provided to all STAND staff (n=7) on the original framework by its author. This took the form of a one-day workshop which included content delivery, reflective activities, and collaborative dialogue to capture initial responses to the framework and consider how it overlapped with STAND's existing frameworks and programmes, and where there may be gaps. As part of the professional development phase, STAND staff were provided with a pack of materials to frame their ongoing collaborative adaptation process.

Development and testing

During this phase STAND staff worked collaboratively to reimagine the original framework. This process was led by one staff member who chaired meetings, collated notes and suggestions, and presented their fellow staff members with proposed changes based on their collaborative discussions. During this phase staff members also tested out their evolving framework, using it to structure workshops, inform planning and design learning activities. This enabled an iterative process in which the team were enabled to reflect and test ideas independently while still feeding into an overall organisational redesign of the framework.

Feedback and finalisation

Once STAND staff were satisfied with a full draft of their reimagined framework they then shared it with relevant stakeholders. This process included a CPD session led by STAND to share the proposed new framework, and a facilitated reflective feedback session which took the form of a focus group interview with each group. The first group included five students who had engaged with STAND programmes, the second group included six facilitators and educators from the wider GCE community in Ireland, including some HE staff, and some people working on other Irish Aid Strategic Partnership programmes. This feedback informed a finalisation of the framework and supported staff to clarify aspects of the framework for more effective implementation. Data sources which informed the analysis of the adaptation process included three focus group interviews, notes generated in meetings and CPD sessions, and a researcher reflective diary. The

focus group interviews included one with students, one with facilitators, and one with STAND staff at the conclusion of the project.

At all stages conversations about ethical research practice took place. Ethical approval was granted for the project, and all participants gave informed consent to participate in the project. Individual anonymity and the right to withdraw were made clear to participants from the outset. Although there was a lead researcher (Golden) on the project who led on research design and analysis, the process was collaborative ensuring that the project had value for the organisation. Data were analysed iteratively and thematically using abductive coding (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012), a qualitative research method that combines elements of both deductive and inductive approaches. Both approaches followed a reflexive thematic analysis approach following steps of data familiarisation, generating initial codes, and identifying, developing, reviewing and refining themes. The process involved an initial round of deductive coding to identify factors which led to changes in the framework in line with identified parameters such as framework elements, organisational goals, and other known contextual factors. Following this, open-ended inductive coding was engaged with which revealed underlying factors or additional parameters not initially considered. At all times attention was paid to the affective and ethical dimensions influencing participants contributions (Finlay, 2002), which is reflected in the interpretation of data and presentation of findings.

The adapted STAND framework

The adapted STAND framework is available in full on their website. While critical thinking was the lynchpin of the project, the final framework represents STAND's GCE approach, not a framework solely for critical thinking development. Rooted in the organisational values of global justice, equity, critical thinking, sustainability, collaboration and diversity, the approach focuses on developing four core critical capacities which are nurtured in every programme and activity that STAND offers. Capacities build on each other but are not developed in linear order.

Building knowledge on global justice issues

Understanding the historical, economic, political, and cultural forces that shape the world including root causes of challenges and questions of power. It also encourages making connections across issues, linking past and present, local and global contexts, and personal experiences with wider systems. It invites learners to value diverse perspectives and remaining open to learning, unlearning, and new ways of understanding.

Questioning dominant stories

Cultivating the ability to recognise and challenge dominant narratives that shape our understanding of the world, especially those that normalise injustice or unsustainability by questioning their origins, impacts, and whose voices are excluded. It encourages learners to examine their own social positions and consider how they may reinforce or disrupt these narratives. This capacity also invites deeper empathy by engaging with multiple perspectives and embracing the complexity and nuance that come with seeing through others' experiences.

Cultivating emotional capacity

Developing the emotional resilience needed to engage with difficult knowledge, helping learners to stay present with challenging emotions and deepen their capacity for honest, meaningful conversations. It also encourages reflection on personal values, recognising how they shape our responses and support more grounded and compassionate engagement with others. Finally, this capacity invites deep listening and dialogue over debate, fostering empathy, curiosity, and more constructive engagement with differing perspectives.

Imagining better and taking informed action

Imagining new possibilities beyond global crises, fostering the sense of agency in shaping a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. It encourages telling new, hopeful stories and recognising personal strengths to build confidence in contributing to change. It invites the development of skills that are necessary to take informed, collective action, grounded in a deep understanding of the issues.

Considerations for facilitation (the how)

The framework recognises that the degree to which these four capacities can be developed depends on how educators show up throughout the learning process, as summarised in these ‘considerations for facilitation’:

Pedagogical approach

The approach is grounded in the traditions of critical pedagogies which see education as transformative. It focuses on participation and dialogue, and creativity and experiential learning. It cultivates a practice of engagement to remain present with emotions as a foundation for more reflective dialogue.

Conditions for learning

The approach is based on the recognition that the relational and physical dimensions of a learning environment shape the quality of learning. As such STAND invests in building caring, respectful connections with learners and creating welcoming physical learning environments to enable respectful and critical dialogue.

Commitment to criticality

At the onset of programmes and activities, a shared commitment to critical engagement is established with learners. This active intentionality for sustained critical engagement provides an important foundation for the development of the four critical capacities.

Recognition of the ‘cultural backpack’

The approach recognises that both learners and educators bring diverse experiences, values, and perspectives that shape their engagement with learning. Reflective consideration of these ‘cultural backpacks’, on the part of both educators and learners, inform the design and facilitation of inclusive and responsive learning environments.

Some of the core concepts which underpin STAND’s framework include a commitment to criticality (problem-posing, ideology critique, unpacking power); systemic analysis (root causes, structures, interdependencies, leverage points); emotional capacity (holding complexity, discomfort, hope/agency,

solidarity); collective praxis (dialogue, deliberation, action; collaboration; accountability); and transformative learning (perspective shifts; cycles of reflection). While STAND did not develop a planning tool like in the original framework, they have developed a facilitator pack which is continuously tweaked and used to inform the delivery of all their programmes and activities. Within this pack, each of the capacities are illustrated with examples, and the considerations include sample activities which could be used by facilitators. While each facilitator will have their own approach, they are encouraged to design their session with consideration of STAND's framework.

One way the framework is implemented is through STAND's global issues course, a six-week course delivered by STAND in collaboration with contracted facilitators. The development of the framework focused on how this course is framed, including using the first workshop to anchor the following five sessions. Interactive activities that encourage and emphasise the importance of critical engagement conclude with a 'commitment to criticality' pledge that each learner takes. They 'Choose a C' (from: commitment, creativity, care, connection, and courage) and share how they intend to engage in the space and with their peers, explore the concept of the (and their) cultural backpack, and spend time connecting with their peers. This focus on relationship and community building is presented as being essential to a conducive learning environment and, subsequently, effective action-taking.

The facilitators that facilitate on the subsequent sessions, use the opening fifteen to twenty minutes of each session to remind participants of the commitment to criticality, the focus on the 'cultural backpack' and an invite them to 'Choose a C'. The subsequent ninety to one hundred minutes is topic focused, approached through the lens of the four capacities. The final, sixth session focuses on action taking (this year's final workshop was called: 'What if we build better futures together?'). Participants home in on one of the issues covered in the previous weeks that concern them the most and consider and plan for their own roles, responsibilities, skillsets, and capacities for taking action in relation to that issue. This final session, and others like it on other STAND programmes, ensures that the framework enables not just learning about the meta-crisis but equips people with the skills and dispositions necessary to respond to it.

A post-evaluation asks students to comment on their ability to ‘engage critically’. Future programme surveys are being developed to align closely with intended capacities and considerations, enabling more systematic tracking of learning and impact.

Table 2: Changes made in the STAND framework

Domains	Original Framework	STAND Framework
Skills → Critical Capacities	Develop Global Learning Base	Building Knowledge on Global Justice Issues
	Question Orthodoxies	Questioning Dominant Stories
	Engage in Self Reflection	Cultivating Emotional Capacity
	Use a Values Lens	Imagining Better and Taking Informed Action
Considerations for Teaching → Considerations for Facilitation	External Influences	Recognition of the Cultural Backpack
	Pedagogy	Pedagogical Approach
	Conditions for Learning	Conditions for Learning
	Outcomes	Commitment to Criticality

Findings: organisational and educational outcomes

While the framework produced through this project does not represent a significant conceptual or pedagogical shift from previous practice, the ‘Get Critical’ project enabled STAND to develop a shared language around their educational approach and produce a focused framework to guide programme coherence across their diverse activities. As one staff member highlighted in the final focus group ‘we were doing criticality but not with intentionality’. The word intentionality came up repeatedly with staff to describe the shift in focus that developing the framework brought for them. It enabled ‘just making sure it’s [criticality] always there’, which was significant for them as an organisation, as articulated by another staff member who stated that ‘because we could do so many things with our audience, but this is what we want. This is what we’ve agreed on’. The emphasis on criticality which was brought through this project enabled staff to make deliberate choices which focused on what they considered most important as an organisation. Not only was the emphasis on criticality an important outcome, but the interpretation of criticality which was embedded in

the framework demonstrated a commitment to critical pedagogy and critical GCE in its intertwining of affective and cognitive domains. This approach was appreciated by the students who reviewed the framework who praised ‘the combination of emotionality and criticality... you don’t really see that a lot... you can be logical while being emotional and caring’.

A significant contributing factor for STAND in initiating this project was a desire to reflect on how their educational approach could support them in responding to the meta-crisis. While acknowledging that education is a slow process, and that being a justice education focused organisation, and not a single-issue organisation, makes it difficult to publicly take a stand on all local and global geopolitical events, the framework has supported them in placing an emphasis on making a difference. As outlined above, the focus on their critical capacities enabled the inclusion of sessions focused specifically on action in their global issues course. This is also evident in their Changemakers Academy, their Ideas Collective, and in the direction of their STAND news site, all of which take a focus on action and linking with campaigns and activities in the wider civil society GCE sector. Furthermore, not only has the framework impacted on work with their participants but has impacted organisational culture; STAND have introduced ‘activism hours’ to enable staff to use paid work time to engage in action that is meaningful to them. In outlining how the framework enabled these changes, one staff member shared that ‘engagement for us is not only traditional “action” it is also critical thinking and a general way of engaging with the world’.

The framework development process helped STAND identify gaps in terms of skills and knowledge needed to deliver on their agreed framework. When discussing their use of the framework during the focus group interview, staff identified navigating difficult knowledge and questioning dominant narratives as an area which they want to cultivate more. This conversation reflected a ‘sticking point’ for some staff as they navigated what ‘difficult knowledge’ meant to STAND, and how they wanted to incorporate this idea into their work. One staff member articulated that they felt as an organisation they were ‘maybe unconsciously a bit resistant to polarising views in the same room because we’re so concentrating on, we’re so community-based and we’re so into safe, safe, warm, comfortable spaces’, sharing that they felt ‘that challenge is still unmet for holding

really difficult conversations’. However, another staff member challenged this, proposing that they felt ‘that some of our spaces are made so comfortable that the difficult conversations occur, but they don't feel like difficult conversations’, they went on to share examples of where conversations could have been acrimonious but instead were conducted in a respectful curious manner, which they attributed to the educational approach modelled by staff. The process was, therefore, not punitive in identifying gaps, but transformative in highlighting areas for further exploration, and enabling disagreements, uncertainty and resistance within the process.

The process engaged in also enabled a deepening of collective collaborative reflexivity amongst the staff through the adoption of a community of practice style approach to reinforcing reflective practice as an organisation. They described the process they underwent in adapting the original framework, sharing that they put their ideas on the wall in a shared space in the office, that they looked at elements of the framework for a long time before making decisions; ‘I don't think our putting them into a framework was immediate. I think there was a lot of meditating on them at first’. This approach demonstrated a willingness to sit with ideas and give the time needed for authentic reflection, showing a commitment to a non-linear reflective enquiry approach in line with Freirean praxis. Although there was recognition that time was needed for meaningfully reflective work, the length of time which the project took (two years) also presented as a challenge in the process: ‘I thought the process was too long. If I went to another organisation and they said, oh, should we do a critical thing? I'd say, yeah, great, but let's do it in six months, not two years’. The project was not initially envisioned to take two years, but due to funding and other contextual factors, it was extended. This extended timeframe was seen to dilute the energy and enthusiasm for the process, with the suggestion that if it was shorter ‘it would feel more dynamic then, if it was only six months’. There exists a tension, therefore, between time needed for an authentic Freirean praxis approach, and the impact which an extended project can have on organisational morale and engagement.

The team also demonstrated an ability to be selective, to recognise also what elements of the original framework did not work for them. This

demonstrated organisational knowledge, trust, and confidence in their approaches: 'it's just... It [the Planning Tool] didn't seem that helpful for us. ... We don't feel the need to think about it or formalise it, operationalise it because it's kind of happening. So, it would be pointless to spend time analysing that'. Not only was this reflective approach demonstrated through the process but was also seen to be built into the final framework which participants in the facilitator focus group praised: 'There's space in it for self-reflection... and weight given to that gives it value'.

A significant organisational and educational outcome for STAND was the enhanced ability to track, measure and report on the impact of their programmes. As outlined by staff 'organisationally and structurally it has helped to operationalise how we monitor the impact we are having'. Through the development of a comprehensive and cohesive framework to guide their work, they were enabled to develop monitoring and evaluation tools to match which will ultimately inform their educational reflection process, programme development, reporting and advocacy work within the sector by giving them a research-backed framework as a structure. Furthermore, the structured approach is a helpful tool for their specific context in providing a framework to share with external facilitators they employ to ensure continuity across programmes and sessions. During the final focus group, when discussing the impact of the new framework, one staff member stated that 'this is actually really practical. It's not a rule book. It's just a sort of set of guidances for new staff or for external facilitators who are doing sessions'. This led to a critical reflective conversation about how best they can operationalise the framework to harness this potential while still aligning with STAND's educational beliefs and the practices of staff: 'I have a few questions just around the how of doing this... tools, lesson plans... standardisation...what does criticality look like in practice?'. This conversation demonstrated a willingness to engage with the uncertainty still felt by some, and the potential limitations of the framework in the context of real-world implementation. Even during an interview, the ongoing commitment to taking a reflective approach to pedagogy development was evident.

Discussion: implications for GCE theory and practice

The findings from this study illustrates that critical GCE frameworks become transformative when educators engage in Freirean praxis, including collective reflection and action that surface assumptions, redistribute epistemic authority, and reorient educational practice (Freire 1970; hooks 1994; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). The findings demonstrate that intentional framework adaptation can operate as Freirean praxis, reshaping not only pedagogical tools but organisational cultures and identities (Freire 1970; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). By integrating systems thinking, decolonial critique, and emotional capacity (Zembylas, 2015), the adapted STAND framework exemplifies a multi-dimensional form of critical GCE. Indeed, the STAND framework represents a rare attempt to operationalise a synergy between systems literacy, decolonial vigilance, and affective-critical learning, responding to long-standing critiques that GCE tends to depoliticise global injustice (Stein, 2017). Furthermore, the intentional cultivation of emotional capacity embedded within STAND's framework aligns with calls for GCE to address the affective dimensions of encountering injustice, including discomfort, ambivalence, and hope (Zembylas, 2015).

The adaptation process itself demonstrated Laurillard's (2012) principle that pedagogical design is iterative, evidence-informed, and systemic, and Fullan's (2016) view that educational change succeeds only when meaning-making is shared across the organisation. By showing how an NGO adapted a framework to align with its organisational mission, this study offers a model for context-responsive GCE design, strengthening Bourn's (2020) call for NGOs to cultivate clearer, more coherent pedagogical identities. Indeed, in sharing both the process and outcomes, STAND offer a replicable example for other NGOs seeking to align their pedagogies with justice-oriented aims. This case adds to GCE scholarship by illustrating how framework adaptation can foster a community of practice, cultivate a culture of inquiry, strengthen professional identity, and produce more context-responsive, ethically grounded global learning practices.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article shares a worked example of framework adaptation as Freirean, systemic, affect-aware praxis that strengthened both pedagogy and the

organisation. The adaptation process STAND underwent represents not just a technical tweak, but organisational learning that reoriented pedagogy and relationships. The move from focusing on implementation of pre-established organisational goals to the co-creation of a living framework surfaced both organisational and individual assumptions and values and enabled an interrogation of both. In facilitating this transformation, dialogue emerged as a critical ethical imperative. Furthermore, the process represented a process of significant organisational learning for STAND. The co-developed redesigned framework became an infrastructure for enabling coherence, quality, and a reflective culture, not just facilitating pedagogy and curriculum development.

The findings suggest that the most transferable aspect of this project lies not in the framework produced, but in the process through which it emerged. The use of dialogical, iterative, and critically reflective practices demonstrates how Freirean praxis can be operationalised within organisational settings. For other practitioners, this highlights the value of engaging in context-specific, collective inquiry as a means of translating abstract principles of critical GCE into grounded and meaningful pedagogical approaches. Indeed, findings point to strong recommendations for other educators around the importance of building time for collective reflection and professional development to enhance pedagogy and progress organisational coherence. Awareness of the affective dimension of pedagogical reimagination and collective design should be embedded as a design requirement rather than an add-on when engaging in this work. The process and positive findings of this project gave rise to a wider 'Get Critical' project which includes educators from a wide variety of backgrounds and settings all working to adapt the original framework to their own contexts. This research will enable comparative studies across contexts, to establish what are the core components of criticality which educators retain as essential to GCE. Further research would enhance our understanding of the long-term impact of organisational framework development. There would be merit in tracking the impact of the implementation of the newly developed STAND framework including exploring longitudinal learner impact.

References

Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 3, Autumn, pp. 40-51.

Andreotti, V (2009) 'Global education in the "21st century": Two different perspectives on The "post"-of postmodernism', *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, Vol, 2, (2), pp. 5-22.

Bourn, D (2015) *The Theory and Practice of Development Education: A Pedagogy for Global Social Justice*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Bourn, D (2020) 'Introduction' in D Bourn (ed) *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Global Education and Learning*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 1-9.

Capra, F and Luisi, P L (2014) *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Cochran-Smith, M and Lytle, S L (2009) *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Finlay, L (2002) "'Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity', *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 12, (4), pp. 531-545.

Freire, P (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.

Freire, P (1974) *Education for Critical Consciousness*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Fullan, M (2016) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Golden, B (2025) *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework*. Springer Nature.

hooks, b (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*, New York: Routledge.

hooks, b (2010) *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, New York: Routledge.

Jaramillo Gómez, D L, Álvarez Maestre, A J, Parada Trujillo, A E, Pérez Fuentes, C A, Bedoya Ortiz, D H and Sanabria Alarcón, R K (2025) 'Determining factors for the development of critical thinking in higher education', *Journal of Intelligence*, Vol. 13, (6).

Kemmis, S (2019) *A Practice Sensibility: An Invitation to the Theory of Practice Architectures*, Singapore: Springer Nature.

Laurillard, D (2012) *Teaching as a Design Science: Building Pedagogical Patterns for Learning and Technology*, London and New York: Routledge.

MacCallum, C S (2014) *Sustainable Livelihoods to Adaptive Capabilities: A Global Learning Journey in a Small State, Zanzibar*, London: University College London.

McCloskey, S (2026) 'Pedagogical Responses to the Meta Crisis: The Role of Development Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 42, Spring, pp. 1-18.

Mezirow, J (2006) 'An overview on transformative learning' in J C P Sutherland (ed) *Lifelong Learning*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 40-54.

Sfard, A (1998) 'On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one', *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 27, (2), pp. 4-13.

Shor, I (1992) *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spivak, G C (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press.

Stein, S (2017) 'The Persistent Challenges of Addressing Epistemic Dominance in Higher Education: Considering the Case of Curriculum Internationalization', *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 61(S1), pp. 25-50.

Ten Holter, C (2022) 'Participatory Design: Lessons and Directions for Responsible Research and Innovation', *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, Vol. 9, (2), pp. 275-290.

Timmermans, S and Tavory, I (2012) 'Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis', *Sociological theory*, Vol. 30, (3), pp. 167-186.

Zembylas, M (2015) "'Pedagogy of discomfort" and its ethical implications: the tensions of ethical violence in social justice education', *Ethics and Education*, Vol. 10, (2), pp. 163-174.

Brighid Golden is Assistant Professor in Global Citizenship Education at Mary Immaculate (MIC) College, Ireland, and represents MIC on the national DICE (Development and Intercultural Education) Project Network. She is the author of *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework* (2025, Palgrave MacMillan and available in open access at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-89642-2>) and editor of *Curious Teachers, Critical Classrooms* (2023, Dublin: DICE Project). She is also the host of the podcast series *Curious and Critical GCE* on Spotify. Brighid teaches, researches, and publishes in the areas of global citizenship education, critical thinking, resource development, initial teacher education, and self-study research approaches.

Charlotte Bishop has served as STAND's Education and Research Manager since 2023. Charlotte brings experience from Amnesty International, Sonairte, Brigit's Garden, and the Centre for Environmental Justice. In her work with STAND, she also draws on her studies in Anthropology and Environmental Law and in development studies.

Nina Sachau is the executive director of STAND and has an MA in Geography and Postgraduate Diploma from Kimmage Development Studies Centre. She has extensive experience in the civil society sector, having worked, for example, with the Trade Justice Movement in Germany, as Coordinator of Claiming our Future in Ireland and the European Alternative Trade Mandate Alliance. She has also worked as Civil Society Advisor with GIZ, the German Development Cooperation Programme, in Vietnam and worked for

GOAL Global in Ireland to develop their Global Citizenship Department before joining STAND in 2021.

Perspectives

AN EMERGENT TEACHER COMMUNITY OF PRAXIS: THE DIA-LOGICS OF PRACTICAL HOPE AND RADICAL LOVE

JAIME ALVARO PAREDES PAEZ

Citation: Paredes Paez, J A (2026) 'An Emergent Teacher Community of Praxis: The Dialogics of Practical Hope and Radical Love', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 137-154.

Abstract: Across Western-dominated schooling systems, teacher learning and professional development are often organised as market-driven training measured through logics of efficiency, sidelining relational and ethical conditions through which teachers may become critical subjects. This article re-centres Paulo Freire's ontological vocation of becoming more fully human to re-imagine such spaces as dialogic gatherings grounded in practical hope and radical love, which I refer to as a community of praxis.

For Freire, critical educational counternarratives, as communities of praxis intend to be, must be rooted in hope as a fundamental dimension of the human condition and educational practice: an impetus to intervene together in the making of history. Yet hope is not possible without love as motivational sustenance for struggling against historical determinisms through radical listening, epistemic humility, curiosity and care. Drawing on four months of weekly gatherings with six schoolteachers in Western Canada, I ponder what becomes possible when educators commit to these principles as a collective struggle over consciousness.

Methodologically, the study adopted an action research-oriented bricolage in which teachers' lived stories became generative texts, allowing themes to self-organise through dialogue. Three *dia-logics* animated the community's unfolding: trust against time-as-capital; emergence through uncertainty, care and problem-posing; and unfinishedness/becoming as the ethical condition of

conscientização (conscientisation). Rather than beginning with strategies to change teachers' practice, this article argues for the urgency of humanising learning spaces where transformation may first be experienced as an interior-collective movement: starting from what teachers know, where they are, and learning to be more fully human together.

Key words: Consciousness; Praxis; Hope; Love; Professional Development.

Introduction

“If there is no struggle, there is no progress”
(Douglass, 1857: 22).

Much of my research has been oriented by Freire's struggle over consciousness as the precondition for informed action, or praxis, against systems of domination operating at both discursive and material levels (Freire, 2005). This struggle unfolds within the *dis-logics* of patriarchal neoliberal Western capitalist modernity (Escobar, 2018), where teachers' possibilities to resist commodifying pedagogies are squelched. Critical thinking is thereby market-washed and *data-fied* into human-proof, machine-like algorithmic performance devoid of genuine critical contextualisation, while learning is conflated with training-as-capital-accumulation and the fantasy of endless growth. Together, these dynamics produce an educational regime that manages teachers and students as resources to be endlessly optimised (Han, 2021), while obscuring the historical, political and material conditions that shape who teachers and students are socialised into becoming (Giroux, 2022).

Freire's struggle against such neoliberal fatalism and determinism is nourished by his courage 'to speak about love without fear of being called ascientific, if not antiscientific' (2005: 26): a form of radical love 'that is at the same time the foundation of dialogue itself' (Ibid.: 89) and cannot exist without hope. Hope, for Freire, is not naïve optimism but a practical-political impetus through which we recognise our unfinishedness and move, in solidarity with others, to transform oppressive systems (Ibid.: 92). Freire also believed that radical love makes liberatory and emancipatory horizons possible and that, without it, teachers would lack the ethical drive to challenge the status quo. Love,

then, as an act of courage rather than fear (Ibid.), has become a fascination of mine; more precisely, what continues to haunt my work is the question of how educators, myself included, may nurture hopeful, caring and loving capacities amid systems that strip individuals of their agency (Giroux, 2022), while still learning to struggle ‘conscientiously, critically, politically, and in a strategic manner’ (Freire, 1998: 44).

This question grounded my doctoral research, through which I sought to disrupt one of the spaces where dominant market-driven ideologies are often left unchecked, and even overtly reinforced: teacher learning and professional development (Kincheloe, 2003; Nawab, Bissaker and Datto, 2021). By re-imagining professional development through Freire’s principles of dialogue, hope, love and praxis, I tried to move away from learning-as-training, compliance and standardised efficiency to trace and deconstruct the lived *dia-logics* of an alternative teacher professional development space I refer to as a community of praxis.

A note on terminology is necessary here. I deliberately hyphenate *dia-logic* as it carries the politics of the concept. *Dia-logic* resists the domestication of dialogue in dominant educational discourse (Freire, 2005), returning instead to its etymology, where *dia* evokes movement through, across and between, and *logic/logos* centres reasoning and meaning making, both profoundly social. By *dia-logics*, then, I refer to the relational movements through which individuals may name, question and re-contextualise their lived experiences together. The plural form (*s*) signals the multivocal and unfinished character of this process, juxtaposed against neoliberal dominant *dis-logics*: institutionalised rationalities of disconnection, fragmentation and dehumanisation that often appear in schools as efficiency, accountability, self-improvement (Giroux, 2022).

The design

The study gathered six teacher-participants working in K-12 public schools in Western Canada, meeting once a week, over four months. In North America, K-12 refers to schooling from Kindergarten to Grade 12, broadly equivalent to primary and post-primary education elsewhere, though systems are not perfectly interchangeable. Recruitment first followed school-board channels, with the intention of circulating an open call through formal district pathways, meaning

the local school authority responsible for administering public schools in a given area. However, the pathway that opened was more relational, resonating with action research-oriented bricolage as a critical and flexible research orientation that assembles methodological tools in response to emergent contextual complexity, including the relationships through which inquiry becomes possible, rather than forcing the study to follow a predetermined procedural route (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004).

Early outreach connected me to a cohort of international teachers working within the International Spanish Academy programme (bilingual English/Spanish schools) where an open call was shared in September 2024. Participants brought more than twenty-three years of teaching experience across public, state-funded/private, and international educational contexts, with current and prior teaching areas including: mathematics, English language arts, social studies, Spanish, science, career and life design, intercultural studies, English as an additional language, and generalist elementary/kindergarten teaching. Such diversity mattered methodologically since our dialogues resisted the positivistic fragmentation of teacher learning by subject and grade level, allowing a nuanced dialogue across contexts. Bringing together educators differently positioned across school systems meant the gatherings could trace how institutional dis-logics moved through teachers lived worlds, including their sense of space, body, time and relationality, without reducing their narratives to de-contextualised data points. Instead, their stories were approached as situated structures of experience shaping pedagogical practice (Nigar, 2020).

A foundational dia-logic: trust

“Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (Freire, 2005: 91).

The dis-logics of Western neoliberal capitalist thought have effectively shaped the way time is perceived, normalised and disciplined: linear, measurable, reified, always scarce, always exchangeable (Little Bear, 2000). Time then becomes capital, and capital in turn becomes the hidden curriculum through which

educational life is organised (Apple, 2018); hence, the popular Western saying *time is money*. Which is not merely a saying, but an insidious paradigm socialising us into accumulating, spending, saving, managing and extracting time as if life itself were an economic resource to be optimised (Rosa, 2013). As Han argues, ‘confronted with a time-limited life, we accumulate time-as-capital’ (2021: 7). Such a dis-logic does not escape teacher learning and professional development, often appearing as efficiency. For example, a sixty-minute training, clear objectives, transferable strategies, measurable outputs, and an exit ticket, can perhaps create an impression that something transformative has happened because time was used ‘well’.

As our community of praxis began to gather, I came to understand trust as a foundational dia-logic; one embedded in a struggle over consciousness shaped by time-as-capital. This is not to say that, somehow, we operated outside the constraints of Western understandings of time; we still needed dates, hours, calendars, reminders and the usual logistics that would make collective work possible across different rhythms of everyday life. The shift was rather, as Stuart Hall observes (1997: 295), a type of moral awareness that shifts human consciousness. It involved refusing time as a ruling despot and beginning to treat it as a dynamic sensitivity within the flux of relationality. It was all about centring trust-based relationships (Wilson, 2008), and from there, letting the community self-produce.

As such, teacher-participants would arrive at a coffee shop of their preference to meet with me and their fellow peers, who came from different schools in the city. Tiredness and frustration were often very tangible, so food and a hot beverage, especially during winter, became nourishment for the soul and a fitting segue into our dialogues. As Shor (2022: 111) reminded us: ‘good food and good companions moved Paulo [Freire] to tell stories.’

Our meetings regularly went ‘overtime’, even after the recording stopped, the conversation continued, and so did the agency of us-in-place. This mattered ethically and methodically, since the direction of each gathering, and the following ones, was not predetermined by me as facilitator-researcher, but instead self-organised around the far-from-equilibrium conditions of themes emerging in

dialogue and teachers' rhapsodic curiosity (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984; Berry, 2015). We opened each gathering with the same grounding question: 'How do you come to this space today?' What followed was a series of stories, lived experiences as texts, that served as entry points into the iterative movement of what I have come to understand as critical dialogue: lived experience becomes text; texts make contradictions (dis-logics) visible (naming); contradictions become shared inquiry (problem-posing); inquiry (critical re-contextualisation/backloading literature) locates broader sociopolitical and material conditions (conscientisation); conscientisation leads to informed practice; and back to dialogue where the cycle begins again (Kincheloe, 2003).

Centring trust-based relations to nurture our dialogues required me to continually challenge the extractivist, time-as-capital researcher-participant relationship, where participants are often positioned as sources of information and the researcher as the one who collects, interprets, and legitimises meaning (Flecha, 2015; Wilson, 2008). This was a conscious struggle because I do not stand outside the very logics I critique; I remain conditioned, yet not determined, by them, even as I attempt to unsettle them. The gatherings slowly taught me to think less in terms of coverage and more in terms of presence; less in terms of accomplishing and more in terms of learning to know and be with one another. Teacher-participants wanted to talk, share, debrief, laugh, extend solidarity and support each other by participating with compassion in the 'funk', paraphrasing Cornell West (2021). In such a process, trust was not 'scheduled' into existence; it was cultivated through a 'slow' pedagogy of care, where no one in the room was expected to perform certainty. Rather, teachers gradually spoke from places of vulnerability, offering their exhaustion, frustration, humour, doubts, and in turn, hope and love could be observed as part of the messy process of becoming more fully human together.

For instance, what first appeared as a teacher's frustration at being moved from Mathematics into a Grade 6 generalist teaching load did not remain a discrete anecdote about scheduling or adaptation to a new school system. As the group stayed with the story, the conversation widened into a critique of teacher de-professionalisation and the cost-saving model of the 'interchangeable teacher'. Under this arrangement, teachers' pedagogy, identity and professional judgement

are treated as detachable from disciplinary knowledge, language and philosophies. Appeals to professional flexibility then become an institutional alibi for deploying teachers across knowledge domains (Giroux, 2022). While the tension between discipline-based specialisation and interdisciplinary approaches remains an important and ongoing pedagogical conversation (Kreijkes and Greateorex, 2024), teachers' accounts and critique suggested that when such an approach is disconnected from teachers' agency and imposed through managerial logics, it cannot become a generative pedagogical project but a mechanism for flattening expertise.

What teacher participants were unearthing in dialogue was mistrust toward the dominant system as a tangible phenomenon. Mistrust emerged from the ways institutions seemed to position them not as intellectuals and pedagogical experts, but as replaceable technicians whose professional histories, disciplinary knowledge and agency are treated as commodities (Giroux, 2013). Without looking for definitive answers, we backloaded literature by introducing theory after lived stories had surfaced, as Ira Shor (2022) suggests, to mediate our insights and ground the problem posing process in theoretical complexity (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004). Lived experience was the starting point, but it was not left alone or unproblematised. Following Freire's caution against taking lived experience at face value, these experiences were critically recontextualised through literature and collective dialogue. For instance, teachers' questions about tracked curriculum, streaming and Advanced Placement classes allowed us to connect normalised curricular structures with broader histories of discrimination, meritocracy and institutionalised privilege (Follwell and Andrey, 2021).

The critique sharpened in one teacher's words: 'you become an instrument of the system, a transmitting vehicle for what they have decided should be transmitted to the population, and there you have no more room to manoeuvre'. Trust within the community could not reproduce the same dis-logics teachers were naming. Instead, as Freire (2005) insists, trust must be founded on love, humility and faith in people as a slow ethical-political dialogical relation that attempts, however imperfectly, to disrupt dominant internalised frameworks. Such a foundation was necessary for engaging in critical dialogue and vital for even beginning to problematise the time-as-capital paradigm, as we came to realise

how many of the teachers' struggles were already organised through the productivist temporalities of schooling: too little time to teach well, to know and care for students, to be known as professionals, and to become together otherwise (Han, 2021; Spooner, 2018).

A dynamic dia-logic: emergence

“Humankind emerges from their submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled. Intervention in reality - historical awareness itself - thus represents a step forward from emergence, and results from the conscientization of the situation. Conscientization is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence” (Freire, 2005: 109).

Engaging in the struggle over consciousness, echoed at moments Weiler's (1996: 370) critique of Freire's tenets as 'almost mystical abstractions which may be inspirational'. Methodologically, I grappled with the questions of 'How to design for emergence without domesticating it into a measurable sequence? What evidence could support the claim that we were emerging toward critical consciousness?' The process felt difficult to enact. Such a struggle, however, did not imply that Freire's pedagogy lacks methodological rigour (Steinberg and Down, 2020). Rather, the questions pointed to my own emergence and process of conscientisation, where I first needed to notice, name and critique how research itself remains entangled with modernist regimes of regulation, including the hyper-rational management systems that assume human learning can and must be precisely measured, controlled and verified through scientific instruments (Kincheloe, 2003; Steinberg et al., 2021).

Such questions were deeply entangled with the self-producing movement (autopoiesis) of the study itself (Maturana and Varela, 1987; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984). I had initially envisioned the community of praxis as a space where teachers would engage more directly with evidence-based literature and move toward inquiry-oriented transformations in classroom pedagogy (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004). However, both elements happened only partially, or more accurately, bifurcated from the original design. I had prepared guiding questions,

possible prompts, tentative readings and methodological pathways toward what I understood, at the time, as conscientisation moving into in-class praxis. While these served as a foundational and reassuring structure for me as a researcher, they did not determine the community's direction once dialogue began to unfold.

As we gathered, the group began to self-organise, which became one of the most generative lessons of the study. An action research-oriented bricolage required me not only to be conversant with multiple methods, traditions and literatures, as Kincheloe and Berry (2004) indicate, but also to remain with the uncertainty produced when teachers' stories began to steer the inquiry. Emergence, then, was not a lack of methodological rigour. It was a different kind of rigour: my own discipline, as facilitator-researcher, of noticing where the conversation was becoming more alive, more troubled, and more capable of problem-posing, so that, we could move toward conscientisation (Freire, 2005).

Emergence became more tangible to me as care gradually surfaced as the most salient cross-connectivity in our dialogues. Across the gatherings, what first appeared as individual accounts of exhaustion, lack of institutional support, and teacher-student relational challenges began to gravitate around care and its complex, even paradoxical, ethical-political dimensions. One teacher approached this tension sharply when noting how educational institutions 'want to systematise care so much that in the end there's no time to care'. Most strikingly, care did not remain merely as a discursive backbone; I came to recognise it as a relational imperative that could re-orient the community's emerging learning journey toward conscientisation (Pyrko, Dörfler and Eden, 2017; Monchinski, 2010).

In this vein, emergence was not separate from care. It was fostered through the caring relations that allowed teachers' stories to move beyond normalised accounts and become collective sites of inquiry. The unsettling yet dynamic power of emergence shaped our struggle over critical consciousness while also creating methodological uncertainty and non-normative relational horizons. As a dia-logic, emergence became an embodied trajectory taking shape as we went, echoing Horton and Freire's *We Make the Road by Walking* (1990), always part of a changing practice in a world in the making (Lave, 2019; Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991). As such, emerging toward conscientisation could not be

treated as a quantifiable process, nor as a shared threshold everyone was expected to cross at the same pace. The movement toward critical consciousness began unevenly from the situated experiences teachers brought into the room.

As Monchinski (2010) insists, such a process must begin where people are and with what they already know, which methodologically meant accommodating different starting points while centring teacher-participants' agency in how our dialogues unfolded. Some teachers moved toward systemic critique and ways to challenge dominant narratives, while others focused on practical strategies and classroom-level interventions. Yet all these moments constituted the actual ground from which emergence toward consciousness became possible, as care held the space open enough for different forms of knowing, questioning and becoming to surface.

Personally, emergence held profound ethical implications. Forcing the dialogue toward my original design would have reproduced the same dis-logics I was trying to disrupt, while remaining too loose risked turning emergence into romantic improvisation. My work, then, was to inhabit the tension: to guide without colonising, to bring literature without silencing lived experience, and to let teachers' stories bifurcate the study without abandoning its critical commitments. Such liminality, regardless of how successfully I navigated it, was pivotal in positioning the community of praxis as an alternative possibility to dominant frameworks shaping contemporary teacher learning and professional development, where certainty, accountability and measurability often remain the core organising principles (Gore, Rickards and Fray, 2023).

An ongoing dia-logic: becoming

“Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming - as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (Freire, 2005: 84).

The work of communities of praxis, whether building a community from the ground up or striving for critical consciousness within it, remains situated, perhaps fragile, and unfinished. Our community of praxis sits within the

paradigm of constant becoming that Freire (2005) so insistently described at the heart of participatory research, transformative education and praxis; therefore, as a continuum of emergence, it cannot be transferred in any formulaic sense. The contribution of this experience on building a community of praxis is modest, though no less educationally significant. Its value rests in the lessons offered to teachers, practitioners and researchers seeking to unsettle, however tentatively, the core assumptions of teacher learning and professional development within Western neoliberal capitalist academies. Rather than proposing a fixed scheme, this study articulates a principled orientation by tracing a cohort of international schoolteachers' struggle over consciousness, alongside my own as principal investigator, as a relational, ethically grounded, and unfinished endeavour.

Freire argues that 'no one educates anyone else, no one educates themselves, people educate each other through the mediation of the world' (2005: 32). Teacher-participants did not come together as 'empty vessels' waiting to be filled with knowledge nor as 'fully formed' professionals needing only to exchange strategies. They arrived as unfinished yet experienced subjects in relation with an unfinished world: often exhausted yet hopeful, frustrated yet curious, committed to care, and still searching for a language of critique and possibility through which to deconstruct and re-read the systems shaping their identities and realities (Giroux, 2022). For Freire, then, becoming is far from a romantic notion; it is an ontological struggle worked and re-worked in relationship. One teacher captured the difficulty of sustaining such relational becoming when institutional hierarchies isolate teachers from one another:

"Here [Canada] I find it harder to find those [allies] colleagues. I feel they are more accustomed to compliance. I find it harder to find those colleagues here.... When are you going to show resistance or oppose the system if you are the 'poor little one' of the moment? Do you think the privileged teacher in a school organised like a medieval caste system is going to resist?"

The recognition, whether tacit or explicit, of our struggle to become was, in my understanding, one of the conditions that drew the cohort into critical dialogue and made learning from one another possible as the primary ground for

teacher professional development. Becoming, thus, cannot be conceptualised as an arrival or a developmental stage, but as the unfinished movement of *conscientização* through which individuals may begin to emerge from the immediacy of their ontological readings, name the conditions shaping them, and re-imagine their capacity to intervene in the world (Freire and Macedo, 1987). It is important to note, then, that trust and emergence were not adjacent to becoming. Trust made it possible for lived experience to be voiced without being prematurely resolved, while emergence marked the deepening of awareness through which those experiences could be problematised as historical and political, and therefore open to transformative action.

Literature supported this movement not as closure, but as backloaded mediation, grounding lived experiences as the dialogues invited more informed readings of sociopolitical-educational phenomena. The community, then, offered a space where learning could be detached, however momentarily, from market-driven training and re-imagined as a relational, inquiry-oriented partnership (Kincheloe, 2003). Emerging through these conversations was a different understanding of teacher professional development and learning, one centred less on acquiring new techniques than on making their craft available for collective problematisation. I strived to engage teachers in dialogue as lifelong learners, not in the hollow neoliberal sense of endlessly adapting, re-branding and improving oneself in response to new mandates (Danvers, 2021). Rather, teachers were welcomed as learners in the Freirean sense: unfinished historical-social beings struggling to unlearn, re-learn and act with others in a world still being made through their actions (Horton and Freire, 1990).

Conclusion: practical hope and radical love as praxis

In the attempt to enact a community of praxis, I did not encounter hope and love as discursive mechanisms or abstract values added to our dialogues after the fact, nor as experiences I could presume to name fully for everyone. Rather, I learned to recognise them through concrete moments of radical listening, epistemic humility, curiosity and care: when teachers named exhaustion not as personal failure, but as an endemic symptom of a commodifying system; when they questioned institutional dis-logics without allowing critique to become withdrawal from caring for students; and when they unsettled care itself as a contested place

where institutional demands, student needs and teachers' agency collided (Monchinski, 2010). Through these moments, I came to understand hope as a future-oriented practice disrupting neoliberal determinisms about teachers' professionalism and agency, and love as a radical ethical-political commitment to remain accountable to one another's humanity while confronting the forces that deform it (Freire, 2005; hooks, 2010). As one teacher reminded, 'the first support was among ourselves ... you keep talking to one another, you stay in contact; clearly, that is the first support you have'.

Communities of praxis also carry an enactivist implication for hope and love. Knowing does not happen separately from practice but takes shape through the mutually constitutive relationship between people and the world (Kincheloe, 2011). Knowing and doing are therefore co-implicated, with learning and understanding developing through interaction rather than existing independently of it. Hope and love, then, were not peripheral to this process, but part of the dialogical movement through which teachers came to read their conditions otherwise. In this way, dialogue did not simply represent a world already known; it brought forth new (hopeful) worlds of understanding and possibility, even if only temporarily (Reid and Mgombelo, 2015).

Such re-orientation, through which new worlds become momentarily available, is where the contribution of my study lies: not in transferability as a model, but in the orientation it foregrounds. In contexts where professional development and learning may be reduced to compliance, efficiency and performativity, what becomes disruptive is not replication but grounded re-orientation: re-creating dialogical conditions where practitioners may interrogate the dis-logics of their work-world, situate experience within broader sociopolitical contexts, engage in learning as co-constructed rather than delivered, and resist institutional narratives that fragment, isolate and depoliticise human action. Echoing Monchinski (2010), this re-orientation may take the form of a pedagogy of care: a praxis that begins where people are, attends to what they already know, and moves professional development elsewhere, toward more humanising, dialogical and politically courageous forms of collective learning.

Since such a pedagogy cannot be scripted in advance, communities of praxis must remain ‘radically open’ to discovering and learning what cannot be known beforehand (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014: 9). Their power lies not in certainty, but in disciplined uncertainty: remaining open without becoming directionless, hopeful without becoming naïve, and loving without abandoning critique. Communities of praxis offer a way of staying in the struggle over consciousness without surrendering to despair or giving in to the commodifying dis-logics of neoliberal governance. This study suggests that teacher learning and professional development may need slower, more relational and ethically grounded conditions, where teachers may emerge as researchers and intellectuals, as agentic caring subjects, as contradictory human beings, and as people still becoming in a world still in the making.

References

Apple, M W (2018) *Ideology and Curriculum*, New York: Routledge.

Berry, K (2015) ‘Research as Bricolage: Embracing Relationality, Multiplicity and Complexity’ in K Tobin and S R Steinberg (eds) *Doing Educational Research*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Danvers, E (2021) ‘Individualised and Instrumentalised? Critical Thinking, Students and the Optics of Possibility within Neoliberal Higher Education’, *Critical Studies in Education*, Vol. 62, No. 5, pp. 641–656.

Douglass, F (1857) *Two Speeches, by Frederick Douglass: One on West India Emancipation, Delivered at Canandaigua, Aug. 4th, and the Other on the Dred Scott Decision, Delivered in New York, on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the American Abolition Society, May, 1857*, Rochester, NY: C. P. Dewey, Printer, American Office, Digitized by the Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County, Historic Monographs Collection, available: https://www.libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Two_Speeches_by_Frederick_Douglass.pdf (accessed 1 August 2026).

Escobar, A (2018) *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Flecha, R (2015) *Successful Educational Actions for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe*, Cham: Springer.

Follwell, T and Andrey, S (2021) 'How to End Streaming in Ontario Schools', *Ontario 360*, 13 May, available: <https://on360.ca/policy-papers/how-to-end-streaming-in-ontario-schools/> (accessed 29 June 2026).

Freire, P (1998) *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Freire, P (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.

Freire, P and Macedo, D (1987) *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Giroux, H A (2013) 'Neoliberalism's War Against Teachers in Dark Times', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 458–468.

Giroux, H A (2022) *Pedagogy of Resistance: Against Manufactured Ignorance*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gore, J, Rickards, B and Fray, L (2023) 'From Performative to Professional Accountability: Re-imagining "the Field of Judgment" through Teacher Professional Development', *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 38, No. 3, pp. 452–473.

Hall, S (1997) 'Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities' in W Lubiano (ed) *The House that Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Han, B-C (2021) *Capitalism and the Death Drive*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Healey, M, Flint, A and Harrington, K (2014) *Engagement through Partnership: Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, York: Higher Education Academy.

hooks, b (2010) *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, New York: Routledge.

Horton, M and Freire, P (1990) *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Kincheloe, J L (2003) *Teachers as Researchers: Qualitative Inquiry as a Path to Empowerment*, London: Routledge Falmer.

Kincheloe, J L (2011) *Key Works in Critical Pedagogy: Joe L. Kincheloe*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Kincheloe, J L and Berry, K S (2004) *Rigour and Complexity in Educational Research: Conceptualizing the Bricolage*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Kreijkes, P and Greateorex, J (2024) 'Differential Effects of Subject-based and Integrated Curriculum Approaches on Students' Learning Outcomes: A Review of Reviews', *Review of Education*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 1-40.

Lave, J (2019) *Learning and Everyday Life: Access, Participation, and Changing Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Little Bear, L (2000) 'Jagged Worldviews Colliding' in M Battiste (ed) *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, Vancouver: UBC Press.

Maturana, H R and Varela, F J (1987) *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, Boston, MA: Shambhala.

Monchinski, T (2010) *Education in Hope: Critical Pedagogies and the Ethic of Care*, New York: Peter Lang.

Nawab, A, Bissaker, K and Datto, A K (2021) 'Contemporary Trends in Professional Development of Teachers: Importance of Recognising the Context', *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 35, No. 6, pp. 1176-1190.

Nigar, N (2020) 'Hermeneutic Phenomenological Narrative Enquiry: A Qualitative Study Design', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 10-18.

Prigogine, I and Stengers, I (1984) *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*, New York: Bantam Books.

Pyrko, I, Dörfler, V and Eden, C (2017) 'Thinking Together: What Makes Communities of Practice Work?', *Human Relations*, Vol. 70, No. 4, pp. 389-409.

Reid, D A and Mgombelo, J (2015) 'Survey of Key Concepts in Enactivist Theory and Methodology', *ZDM Mathematics Education*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 171-183.

Rosa, H (2013) *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Shor, I (2022) 'Paulo Freire at 100, Still Inspiring: An Interview with Ira Shor' in F Mızıkacı and E Ata (eds) *Critical Pedagogy and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Keeping Communities Together in Times of Crisis*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Spooner, M (2018) 'Qualitative Research and Global Audit Culture: The Politics of Productivity, Accountability, and Possibility' in N K Denzin and Y S Lincoln (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Steinberg, S R and Down, B (eds) (2020) *The SAGE Handbook of Critical Pedagogies*, London: SAGE Publications.

Steinberg, S R, Kincheloe, J L, Adjapong, E S and Tippins, D J (2021) *The Stigma of Genius*, New York: Peter Lang.

Varela, F J, Thompson, E and Rosch, E (1991) *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Weiler, K (1996) 'Myths of Paulo Freire', *Educational Theory*, Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 353–371.

West, C (2021) 'Hope and Optimism, Love and Loss', *Cornel West Teaches Philosophy*, MasterClass, available: <https://www.masterclass.com/classes/cornel-west-teaches-philosophy/chapters/hope-and-optimism-love-and-loss> (accessed 17 June 2026).

Wilson, S (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Jaime Alvaro Paredes Paez is a doctoral candidate at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, where his passion for critical pedagogy drives his exploration of sociopolitical–educational hope and radical love as frameworks for professional development in teacher learning communities. His work bridges popular and emancipatory education, dialogic pedagogies, EDIA, socioecological governance, and transdisciplinary collaborations. With over a

decade of teaching experience in K-12 schools in Colombia and the United States, he brings a deep commitment to transformative and inclusive education.

GLOBAL EDUCATION AS A DEFENCE AGAINST THE HARMFUL IMPACTS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN EDUCATION

BARRY PEAK

Citation: Peak, B (2026) 'Global Education as a Defence Against the Harmful Impacts of Artificial Intelligence in Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 155-172.

Abstract: This Perspectives article looks at the challenges and issues within education that are emerging as a consequence of the growth in the use of artificial intelligence (AI). It argues that AI is having a harmful impact on education in a number of areas. The article suggests that by integrating global education (GE) into curricula and practice, educators can mitigate against this harm. The article begins with an Introduction to AI, focusing on the type of AI most prevalent in education; i.e., generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), which uses machine learning models to generate text, images, audio, video etc., based on prompts which have been inputted by a user. It then examines how and why GenAI has been adopted in such an uncritical manner within the education sector. Following that, common themes associated with GE are identified using a range of policy and guidance documents from Irish and international documents.

The main body of the article looks at the various areas where AI is having a harmful impact on education: epistemology; pedagogy; human rights; and sustainability. For each of these, the nature of the harm is explained, and the potential positive contribution of GE is identified. The article concludes with some advice for educators who may be concerned about the rise of AI in education, suggesting they can be pro-active in their adoption of progressive pedagogy and practice to ensure learners are equipped for changing times and can take action to create a better world.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence; Global Education; Epistemology; Pedagogy; Sustainability.

Introduction

There is a tension within education as we enter the second quarter of the twenty-first century. Whether at the level of policy, practice or wider discourse, there are competing forces struggling to shape the trajectory of what we perceive as progress. On one hand, there is a growing interest in the broader purpose of education as a force for social good. Whether it's development education, education for sustainable development (ESD), global citizenship education (GCE), or any of the other 'adjectival' forms of education that seek to promote social, global or climate justice, there is an increasing awareness that these themes and issues should be integrated into curricula and practice. For convenience sake, and in line with the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (GENE, 2022), these will be referred to as global education (GE).

However, competing against this is the growing presence of artificial intelligence (AI). Fuelled by corporate interests and big tech, the pressure to integrate AI into education to improve efficiencies and prepare learners for an uncertain future is having a profound impact on educators, students, and institutions alike. This article will illustrate how AI is harming education and suggests that integrating GE into curricula and practice can act as a defence against these harms and ensure that educators and learners know that they can make choices that will limit the consequences. The article introduces some of the key areas where AI is having an impact and suggests potential responses. The limitations of space prevent a more complete discussion of each, but the literature is rich and a fuller exploration is encouraged. The article is mostly framed by practice in Ireland, however, it assumes that the points made are applicable to other countries and jurisdictions.

The article is structured as follows. It firstly introduces what is meant by AI, the particular forms of AI that are having an impact on education and considers how and why they have become so prevalent. It then discusses some of the common themes and priorities that unite GE before considering the negative consequences of AI for education (and beyond) with a specific focus on epistemology (what is taught), pedagogy (how teaching and learning happens), human rights and social justice (who benefits from teaching and learning), and sustainability (the impact of education on the planet). For each, the harms of AI

are identified and the way GE can mitigate against them are explored. The article concludes with some words of advice on how educators can navigate the problems presented by AI which can hopefully have a positive impact on their practice.

AI: what is it, and how did it become so prevalent in education?

AI is a catch all term that describes a variety of technologies that perform a range of functions, some of which impact on everyday life and others which have very specialised uses. At one end of the spectrum, predictive text can support the completion of coherent sentences. At the other, breakthroughs in medical technology can improve diagnostic accuracy. When looking at the impact of AI on education, the discussion mainly focuses on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). This specific type of AI uses machine learning models to generate text, images, audio, video etc., based on prompts which have been inputted by a user.

GenAI first came to public attention in 2022 with the introduction of ChatGPT created by OpenAI. Since then, other models have entered the market, such as Microsoft's Copilot, Google's Gemini, and Anthropic's Claude. Discussing AI's impact, Shi et al (2026: 1) write: 'It almost goes without saying that artificial intelligence (AI) appears to be of major social, economic, political and cultural significance – a set of technologies that have been placed at the forefront of the world's attention'. Some of the earliest writing on the impact of AI on education (AIEd) was positive, particularly regarding what Tuomi (2018) referred to as 'gofai' or good old-fashioned AI. He notes how AI provides a range of benefits, from generating summative assessments to identifying the needs of individual learners. Kimondo et al (2023) also identified positives, highlighting benefits in terms of monitoring and personalising the teaching and learning process.

This positivity took hold quickly, resulting in the strong uptake of AIEd. For example, the Digital Education Council's (2025) AI Faculty Survey notes how 64 percent of faculty are now using AI, with 75 percent using it to generate teaching materials. For students, the numbers are more dramatic, with the Higher Education Policy Institute's 2026 survey showing that 94 percent of respondents are using AI for assessed work. Significantly, this same study suggests students are more likely to see the benefits of AIEd, with very few concerned about fairness,

skills erosion, or social isolation. So, how did this positivity take hold and how did AIED become so universally, and uncritically adopted? Three broad reasons will be discussed: the ‘halo’ effect; the power of big tech; and dominant discourses around AIED. Wårnestål (2025) describes the halo effect as a psychological phenomenon that results in our overall impression of something being shaped by a single positive trait. GenAI is surrounded by such an effect, whereby due to the benefits in areas such as healthcare, it is assumed these will be repeated in every area, including education.

So, what are the forces generating the halo effect? One possible answer lies with the power of big tech, those companies with a commercial interest in educational institutions adopting and using AIED. Guest et al (2026) begin from a position that education should be a space for the development of knowledge free from ulterior motives; however, it is increasingly under attack from hostile and self-interested actors. They relate this directly to how neoliberalism is impacting education and targeting educational institutions. Indeed, Shi et al (2026: 2) argue that ‘education has been cynically established as one of the main (and most susceptible) markets for GenAI products’. They suggest that the deployment of AI in education is intertwined with political and economic interests, including big tech firms, investors, and policy actors. These interests can shape educational priorities, business models, and governance structures, along with how they may advantage or disadvantage different populations (Ibid.: 5-6). Furthermore, the technologies are pushed in a manner that suggests there is no alternative.

O’Neil (2026: 3) sees AIED as part of the bigger problem of the impact of EdTech, suggesting companies are motivated exclusively by profit accumulation, resulting in practices which are potentially ‘devastating or ecocidal’. O’Neill notes how this is particularly concerning given that education ought to be in the public interest and, in the Irish context, educational institutions are mandated to reduce their carbon usage. Significantly, the power of EdTech companies to have such an impact on education is supported by powerful discourses. In their analysis of policy and guidance documents from organisations such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), Bryan and

Delahunty (2026) show how these discourses stress not only the benefits but also the inevitability of AIED. They posit that a combination of techno-solutionism and ‘promissory visions’ results in a populist discourse that highlights the benefits of AIED at the expense of more critical discussions around justice and sustainability. AI is presented as an inevitability that can save outdated forms of education that are no longer fit for purpose.

Against AI: themes and perspectives in quality GE

As stated previously, this article sets out to illustrate how adopting quality GE into curricula and practice can mitigate against the most harmful impacts of AIED, so it is important to identify some common themes and priorities within GE. To do this a range of international and Irish-based resources have been analysed. These include the UNECE’s (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) Learning for the Future (2012), UNESCO’s ‘Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development’ (2021) and ‘ESD to 2023 Toolbox’ (UNESCO, n.d.), the European Commission’s ‘European Sustainability Competence Framework’ (Bianchi, Pisiotis and Cabrera Giraldez, 2022), the GENE European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (GENE, 2022), Irish Aid’s Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-25 (Irish Aid, 2021), WorldWise Global School’s (n.d.) ‘Guiding Principles for Global Citizenship Education’, and the Irish Development Education Association’s ‘Code of Good Practice for Development Education’ (IDEA, 2019) and ‘Theory of Impact for Global Citizenship Education’ (IDEA, n.d.).

From these, it can be concluded that quality GE goes beyond knowledge acquisition and ensures learners are given opportunities to reflect on their values in order to act on issues at a local and global level. It develops a wide range of skills, sometimes referred to as 21st Century skills or transversal skills, such as critical thinking, systems thinking, problem framing and solving, and futures literacy. GE also encourages learners to recognise the structural connections between their own lived experience and global issues. In doing so, GE foregrounds justice and understanding of the causes and consequences of oppression and injustice. This in turn supports critical perspectives on power relations and provides opportunities to take informed collective action on local and global issues. These actions focus on the root causes of injustice and address

them through solidarity that builds an awareness of human rights, anti-racism, and colonialism. Thus, GE's pedagogies and methodologies promote experiential, participatory, democratic, and discursive approaches. These global education values and principles highlight some of the approaches that can be integrated into curricula and practice, regardless of academic discipline, to potentially shield education from the worst harms of AIED.

AI's impact on education and how educators can use GE to resist the harms

Epistemology (what is taught)

Epistemology is a complex concept which incorporates many dimensions of knowledge; however, for this article, the discussion will be limited to what knowledge is considered important or valuable - the origin and scope of that which is taught and, conversely, what knowledge is considered less important and is, therefore, omitted from teaching. There are growing concerns that AIED is influencing the types of knowledge perceived as legitimate or important and, more significantly, those that are excluded from education. Wärnestål (2026) notes that the type of large language models (LLMs) that are the foundation of much AIED are biased toward and optimised for students in the global North, particularly English-speaking nations. They do not respect knowledge created in the global South or represent the lived experiences of people there. Additionally, Stephens (2026) argues that AI also has a problem with women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and broader social inclusion.

Nguyen (2020) makes a series of points on algorithms, noting how they produce a form of knowledge limited to a small number of viewpoints. Personalised technology, selective exposure, and algorithmic filtering create 'epistemic bubbles' where opposing or minority voices are simply not heard. Coeckelbergh (2026) relates the idea of epistemic bubbles directly to AI, arguing that it diminishes a user's 'epistemic agency', reducing their freedom to reflect on their values and beliefs. He suggests that the exclusion of certain perspectives is related to power, noting that 'it seems that there is no epistemic equality, globally or locally' (Ibid.: 67). Coeckelbergh draws on the work of Charles Wade Mills (2007) to suggest that AI supports a 'white ignorance', privileging certain voices at the expense of others. This can be viewed as a form of 'epistemic injustice' (Fricker, 2007) while Andreotti (2006) sees it as a form of 'epistemic violence'

whereby learners in the global North do not understand the root causes of their own privilege or global injustice.

It is clear how this can have a detrimental impact on the educational attainment of members of certain social groups, with the potential to consolidate and amplify existing injustices both locally and globally. However, sitting in direct opposition is the approach to knowledge evident in good GE. In the literature, there are multiple references to the inclusion of marginalised and minority voices and perspectives, as well as explicit references to anti-racism. Furthermore, the importance of challenging bias and stereotypes is evident, alongside calls for solidarity and empathy, which suggests a deeper knowledge and understanding of a wide range of views.

Another process that complements GE is that of decolonising curricula. Heilbronn (2025) suggests this is required in response to significant epistemic injustice against Indigenous groups, while Engelmaier (n.d.) notes the importance of examining power and asking who decided what was legitimate knowledge in the first place, suggesting that ‘decolonising curricula must therefore be intersectional, recognising how race, gender and class and colonial histories overlap’. Higher Education Institutions in and beyond Ireland are embracing this process (see, for example, Trinity College Dublin, n.d; Dublin City University, 2026; and Manchester Metropolitan University, n.d.) and while they recognise it is difficult in the current policy climate, Glowach, Hicks-Beresford, and Mitchell (2023) raise the importance of beginning it in secondary schools.

Pedagogy (how teaching and learning happens)

A second way AIED is having a significant impact on education is in the area of pedagogy. This article will touch on three related areas: teaching; learning; and assessment. Peter Baker (2026) makes an important point: teachers are generally very responsible. They want to do right by their students by developing their skills but also ensuring they don’t fall behind by not embracing new technologies. However, Curran (2026) notes that while education has increasingly been about the holistic development of learners, AI has entered the room, a technology which ‘strangulates human creativity, critical thinking, and independence of thought’.

In this context, the role of teachers and teaching is likely to change; however, the exact direction is uncertain. On one hand, Bryan and Delahunty (2026: 1) refer to ‘ex-machination’ with the role of teachers reduced to ‘techno-pedagogues and ethical gatekeepers’. Conversely, Chatfield (2025) suggests the role will evolve. Teachers will develop a ‘pedagogical empathy’ (Ibid.: 22) for individual learners and a sophisticated understanding of what AI can and should do in the classroom. However, this perspective embraces the ‘technosolutionism’ described by Mochizuki, Bruillard and Bryan (2025), whereby teachers are wrongly presented as a problem - a barrier to the solutions offered by AI. Instead, they argue that AI ought to be seen as the challenge rather than a solution.

And while there are certainly challenges for teachers and teaching, AIED is having a major impact on learning itself. Much of the literature here focuses on the impact AI is having on key skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, systems thinking, and creativity. Pearson (2025) accepts that there are benefits to AI in terms of efficiently preparing students for a rapidly changing world; however, she recognises how it can impede their cognitive development, including the development of key skills. Adelman and Burke (2026) take a more dramatic tone: ‘AI is coming for human thought... it is poison for education in the humanities and social sciences.’

Furthermore, in a discussion on the ethics of using AI in primary and secondary schools, Wieczorek, Hosseini and Gordijn (2025) highlight a series of impacts on learning, stemming from the propensity to use AI as a form of passive knowledge acquisition. Among these are students becoming increasingly distracted, dependent on technology leading to reduced problem-solving skills and curiosity to explore issues and topics outside what is presented to them by the algorithm, and increased isolation as learning becomes individualised.

And while a decline in thinking skills is concerning, AI could be contributing to more fundamental problems. Jagt (2026) suggests students are losing the ability to read and write. Rather than an efficient way to cover the basics, allowing students to concentrate on higher order skills, AI is depriving them of the development of essential skills. This view is supported by Guest (2026: 12) who argues that LLMs in the classroom will increase illiteracy and

dependence on big tech.

Finally, and dominating much of the discourse around the impact of AI in education, is assessment, a discourse that often goes beyond concern and hints at panic as it has such a profound impact on the area of academic integrity. Guest (2026: 12) accepts that cheating has always existed; however, the use of LLM chatbots to complete assignments not only damages educators and learners, it also erodes public trust in education itself. Pearson refers to ‘testing troubles’ (2025: 791) noting that the use of unsupervised tests is problematic as they no longer, with any certainty, inform society of the skills or capabilities a student holds. Chatfield (2025: 15-17) recognises that AI has contributed to a deepening crisis in education as the assumption grows that everyone is cheating; furthermore, he suggests the institutional response of retreating back into supervised testing is not fit for purpose.

Having identified these issues related to pedagogy, it is again valuable to examine what can be learned from quality GE to mitigate against them. With regard to teaching and learning, quality GE involves the adoption of critical pedagogies and transformative learning. Critical pedagogy is most often associated with Paulo Freire (2017) who rejects education based on rote learning and advocates for a dialogical approach, rich in critical thinking. Likewise, Misiaszek’s (2023) work on environmental education promotes a view of education that enables learners to critically ‘read’ acts of environmental violence and identify who benefits and who suffers. Like Freire, he suggests this is achieved through open discussion and deep reflection.

The aim of GE is transformative learning. Originally developed by Mezirow (1997), this centres on the idea that education can allow learners to reorient their values through dialogue and reflection. Rodriguez and Barth (2020) note how applying these principles to issues such as sustainability can result in improved outcomes including increased knowledge and critical and systems thinking. Similarly, Odell et al (2020) note how transformative learning allows for learning that goes beyond knowledge and develops new worldviews, norms, theories, and action.

Significantly, these approaches require teachers and learners to engage in activities and methods that are missing when AIED appears, such as allowing space for dialogue and reflection and actively developing skills such as critical and systems thinking. This suggests there is a reciprocal relationship between quality GE and the development of key skills, which are under threat with the use of AIED. While these skills are important in recognising, understanding and empowering learners to take action on social, global and climate justice issues, engaging with these issues and integrating them into curricula, gives learners the opportunity to develop these skills.

Finally, with regards to assessment, it is interesting to note how many forms of ‘authentic assessment’ complement the broad aims and pedagogical approaches of GE. For example, challenge-based learning (Doulougeri et al, 2024) allows for engagement with real world challenges, frequently related to social, global and climate justice, resulting in the development of key skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.

Human rights and social justice (who benefits from teaching and learning?)

A number of the human rights and social justice concerns related to AI have already been discussed in this article. It has been shown that AI can have a negative impact on minority and marginalised social groups, both locally and globally, consolidating and amplifying injustice. This concern is brought into sharp focus by a report from Amnesty International (2026: 13-18) which illustrates how GenAI infringes on human rights in a number of areas, all of which have relevance for education. These include the right to privacy, the right to equality and non-discrimination and freedom of expression and thought. Furthermore, as Bryan and Delahunty (2026: 3) point out, most discussions around AI and related rights are limited to how it is used. Bigger concerns relate to issues of power and the shaping of public life in the interests of big tech. GE has a two-fold role to play here: encouraging resistance to the normalisation of AIED and highlighting the deeper injustices that have a powerful impact on broader society.

Sustainability (the environmental impact of AI in education)

Finally, it is impossible to talk about AI without discussing sustainability. While this might be related to education less directly, there is no doubt that educational

institutions are contributing to the climate crisis through their uncritical adoption of AIED. Furthermore, and to misquote the Music Declares Emergency movement (n.d.), there will be ‘no education on a dead planet’. Stephens (2026) notes that every AI search involves significant energy use, creating a demand resulting in ‘accelerating climate chaos and negating decades of climate policy designed to reduce both energy use and carbon emissions’. Riemlaud (2026) suggests that education’s rush to embrace AI has resulted in a lack of consideration for the ecological consequences. Furthermore, the growing relationship between education and industry prevents the necessary criticality to resist this trend.

A recent review of reports and academic papers on AI conducted by Stand, Friends of the Earth and others (Joshi, 2026) illustrates a ‘shocking’ new demand for fossil fuels, primarily coming from data centres used to power GenAI - the exact form of AI used in education. Furthermore, this review illustrates a sinister form of greenwashing from big tech that seeks to promote the ecological benefits of AI, made more problematic as the claims come from company websites rather than academic papers, noting that any benefits from traditional AI are dwarfed by the harms caused by data centres used to power GenAI. GE has a role to play in challenging unsustainable behaviour both within and beyond the education system. At the most basic level, this involves integrating climate literacy into curricula; however, quality (or critical) GE has the potential to go further by highlighting issues related to climate justice, foregrounding the structural and political nature of these issues, and empowering learners to take action and demand change.

Climate justice goes beyond ‘the narrow technocratic way that climate action is often presented’ (Stephens, 2024: 30) and includes an appreciation of the systemic and structural relationship between the climate crisis, the broader political and economic systems, and other forms of injustice. The strong focus within GE towards understanding the root causes of injustice and linking the local to the global, as well as building skills such as systems thinking and futures literacy, enables learners to see these relationships, understand the connections between all forms of injustice, and move towards taking action. Furthermore, while the disciplinary nature of mainstream education, especially in upper

secondary level and higher education, can mask these relationships, GE promotes an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach which allows the connections to come into focus.

Conclusion

GenAI is having a significant impact on education and while it is presented as benign by the companies that profit from it, there is little doubt that it is causing harm to educators, learners, the reputation of the system, and to the environment. In response, Neil Selwyn (2022) suggests three possible ways forward. Firstly, continue with the present course and see where it takes us. This is a risky option, but one which advocates of technosolutionism would suggest is unlikely to lead to significant harm. Secondly, attempts can be made at 'greening' AI. This is the position of big tech, who say we should trust them to make their products better and more sustainable. Finally, 'burn it to the ground' - resist AI wherever and whenever it is possible and liberate education from neoliberal growth models.

However, another option is presented in this article. An option that puts power in the hands of educators. An option that trusts their judgement and positions them in a space where their skills and professionalism can be used to protect against the harms of AIED. An option that can inspire their learners to resist the malign creep of neoliberalism and growth-based economic orthodoxies. By integrating the themes and approaches developed by and evident in quality GE, all educators can not only prepare their pupils and students for an uncertain future, they can inspire and empower them to demand and work for a more fair, just and sustainable future.

References

Adelman, J and Birke, R (2026) 'The war on human thought: Educational institutions must take back control from AI', *TheJournal.ie*, available: <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/ai-in-universities-7044650-May2026/> (accessed 15 June 2026).

Amnesty International (2026) 'Unlawful by Design: Exposing the Human Rights Costs of Generative AI', available: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol40/0996/2026/en/> (accessed 2 June 2026).

Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 3, Autumn, pp. 40-51, available: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-3/soft-versus-critical-global-citizenship-education> (accessed 4 June 2026).

Baker, P C (2026) 'Teacher v chatbot: My journey into the classroom in the age of AI', *The Guardian*, 3 March, available: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2026/mar/03/cheating-machine-or-powerful-assistant-the-ai-anxieties-of-a-trainee-teacher> (accessed 15 June 2026).

Bianchi, G, Pisiotis, U and Cabrera Giraldez, M (2022) 'GreenComp: The European Sustainability Competence Framework', Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, available: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128040> (accessed 21 July 2026).

Bryan, A and Delahunty, T (2026) 'The ex-machination of teacher education: A genealogical critique of the politics of AI and the "responsibilities" of teacher educators', *Teaching Education*, pp. 1-22.

Chatfield, T (2025) *AI and the Future of Pedagogy*, White Paper, London: Sage.

Coeckelbergh, M (2026) 'AI and epistemic agency: How AI influences belief revision and its normative implications', *Social Epistemology*, 40(1), pp. 59-71.

Curran, A (2026) 'AI is a threat to the essence of education', *The Irish Times*, 18 March, available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2026/03/18/ai-is-a-threat-to-the-essence-of-education/> (accessed 10 June 2026).

Digital Education Council (2025) 'Digital Education Council Global AI Faculty Survey 2025', available: <https://www.digitaleducationcouncil.com/post/digital-education-council-global-ai-faculty-survey> (accessed 20 June 2026).

Doulougeri, K, Vermunt, J D, Bombaerts, G and Bots, M (2024) 'Challenge-based learning implementation in engineering education: A systematic literature review', *Journal of Engineering Education*, 113, pp. 1076-1106.

Dublin City University (2026) 'Decolonising and diversifying the curriculum at DCU', available: <https://www.dcu.ie/teu/decolonising-and-diversifying-curriculum-dcu> (accessed 24 June 2026).

Engelmaier, S (n.d.) 'Who decides what we learn? Decolonising education systems', *STAND*, available: <https://stand.ie/stand-newsroom/who-decides-what-we-learn-decolonising-education-systems> (accessed 24 June 2026).

Freire, P (2017) [1970] *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin Classics.

Fricker, M (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Global Education Network Europe (GENE) (2022) 'European Declaration on Global Education to 2050', available: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f6decace4ff425352eddb4a/t/6982093b5c81dc19773ff9d2/1770129723476/GE2050-declaration.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2026).

Glowach, T, Hicks-Beresford, T and Mitchell, R (2023) 'Decolonising the curriculum in English secondary schools: Lessons from teacher-led initiatives in Bristol' in Y Hutchinson, A A Cortez Ochoa, J Paulson and L Tikly (eds.) *Decolonising Education for Sustainable Futures*, Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Guest, O et al (2026) 'Against the uncritical adoption of "AI" technologies in academia', *Digital Culture & Education*, 16(2), pp. 85-118.

Heilbronn, R (2025) 'What does it mean to decolonise the curriculum: Is it possible?', *Ethics and Education*, 20, pp. 63-76.

Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) (2026) *Student Generative Artificial Intelligence Survey 2026*, available: <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/reports/student-generative-ai-survey-2026/> (accessed 9 June 2026).

Irish Aid (2021) *Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021–2025*, Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs, available: <https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/IA-Global-Citizenship-Education-Strategy.pdf> (accessed 4 June 2026).

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) (n.d.) 'Theory of Impact for GCE', available: <https://www.ideaonline.ie/theory-of-impact-for-gce> (accessed 4 June 2026).

Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) (2019) 'Code of Good Practice for Development Education', Dublin: Irish Development Education Association, available:

<https://www.ideaonline.ie/Code-of-good-practice-development-education> (accessed 4 June 2026).

Jagt, T (2026) 'My Students Can't Read', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1 June, available: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/my-students-cant-read> (accessed 10 June 2026).

Joshi, K (2026) *The AI Climate Hoax: Behind the Curtain of How Big Tech Greenwashes Impacts*, Washington, DC: Friends of the Earth U.S., available: https://foe.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/AI-for-climate-claims-Report_FEB-2026_FINAL.pdf (accessed 24 June 2026).

Kimondo, C, Wandeto, L, Indimuli, D and Ercetin, A (2023) 'The impact of AI on teaching and learning', *London Journal of Social Sciences*, pp. 124-129.

Manchester Metropolitan University (n.d.) *Decolonising the Curriculum Toolkit*, available: <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/professional-services/uta/reducing-awarding-gaps/decolonising-the-curriculum-toolkit> (accessed 29 June 2026).

Mezirow, J (1997) 'Transformative learning: Theory to practice', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, pp. 5-12.

Mills, C W (2007) 'White ignorance' in S Sullivan and N Tuana (eds.) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 11-38.

Misiaszek, G W (2023) *Freire and Environmentalism: Ecopedagogy*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Mochizuki, Y, Bruillard, E and Bryan, A (2025) 'The ethics of AI or techno-solutionism? UNESCO's policy guidance on AI in education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp. 1-22.

Music Declares Emergency (n.d.) 'No Music on a Dead Planet', available: <https://www.musicdeclares.net/gb/no-music-on-a-dead-planet> (accessed 24 June 2026).

Nguyen, C T (2020) 'Echo chambers and epistemic bubbles', *Episteme*, 17(2), pp. 141-161.

Odell, V, Molthan-Hill, P, Martin, S and Sterling, S (2020) 'Transformative education to address all sustainable development goals' in W Leal Filho, A M Azul, L Brandli, P G Özyay and T Wall, T (eds.) *Quality Education*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 905-916.

O'Neill, C (2026) 'AI and EdTech as Climate Criminal', *The Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, 9(1).

Pearson, H (2025) 'Universities are embracing AI: Will students get smarter or stop thinking?', *Nature*, 646, pp. 788-791.

Riemland, M (2026) 'Greenwashing AI in higher education: An environmental argument for universities' resistance to Big Tech', *Open Research Europe*, 6, p. 184.

Rodríguez Aboytes, J G and Barth, M (2020) 'Transformative learning in the field of sustainability: A systematic literature review (1999-2019)', *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 21, pp. 993-1013.

Selwyn, N (2022) 'Studying digital education in times of climate crisis: What can we do?', *Centre for Research in Digital Education Seminar Series*, University of Edinburgh, 23 June, available: https://media.ed.ac.uk/playlist/dedicated/79280571/1_6u9a41zh/1_l7anxl9x (accessed 22 June 2026).

Shi, L P et al (2026) 'Toward a sociology of education and artificial intelligence', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 47(5), pp. 1-12.

Stephens, J C (2024) *Climate Justice and the University: Shaping a Hopeful Future for All*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stephens, J (2026) 'Climate justice calls for a fairer, healthier, more stable future', *The Irish Times*, 18 June.

Trinity College Dublin (n.d.) 'Decolonising the Curriculum', available: <https://www.tcd.ie/equality/inclusive-curriculum/staff/decolonising-the-curriculum/> (accessed 24 June 2026).

Tuomi, I (2018) *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Learning, Teaching, and Education*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

UNESCO (2021) 'Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development: Learn for Our Planet. Act for Sustainability'. Adopted at the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development, Berlin and online, 17–19 May 2021. Paris: UNESCO. available: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381228> (accessed: 4 June 2026).

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (2012) *Learning for the Future: Competences in Education for Sustainable Development*. Geneva: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, available: <https://unece.org/info/Environment-Policy/Education-for-Sustainable-Development/pub/3098> (accessed 4 June 2026).

UNESCO (n.d.) 'Education for Sustainable Development for 2030 Toolbox', available: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/toolbox> (accessed 22 June 2026).

Wärnestål, P (2026) 'The Intelligence Misnomer: Notes on the Future of Higher Education from Mohali, India', available: <https://drpontus.writeas.com/the-intelligence-misnomer-notes-on-the-future-of-higher-education-from-mohali> (accessed 10 June 2026).

Wärnestål, P (2025) 'We Have Rushed into the AI Era – But Why?', *Medium*, available: <https://drpontus.medium.com/we-have-rushed-into-the-ai-era-but-why-b844604239fc> (accessed 17 June 2026).

Wieczorek, M, Hosseini, M and Gordijn, B (2025) 'Unpacking the ethics of using AI in primary and secondary education: A systematic literature review', *AI Ethics*, 5, pp. 4693–4711.

WorldWise Global Schools (n.d.) 'Global Citizenship Education', available: <https://www.worldwiseschools.ie/global-citizenship-education/> (accessed 4 June 2026).

Barry Peak is the Education for Sustainable Development Officer at Dublin City University. He was born in County Down and spent his formative years in Belfast. Prior to working in DCU, he taught politics and sociology at a secondary school and worked at an education charity that empowers young people to take action on social justice issues. Barry has an MA in political communication

from DCU and a Post Graduate Certificate in Global Citizenship Education from NUI Maynooth. Email: barry.peak@dcu.ie

Viewpoint

HIGHER EDUCATION CAN'T BE NEUTRAL IN AN AGE OF BRUTALITY: IT MUST CHOOSE DEMOCRACY

HENRY A. GIROUX

Citation: Giroux, H A (2026) 'Higher Education Can't Be Neutral in an Age of Brutality: It Must Choose Democracy', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 173-185.

The university as a democratic institution under siege

Across the United States, and increasingly in other democracies under siege, higher education faces a coordinated assault unlike anything witnessed in generations. State governments are prohibiting the teaching of histories that confront slavery, colonialism, Indigenous dispossession, structural racism, and widening inequality. Books are disappearing from classrooms and libraries. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are being dismantled. Faculty are encountering political intimidation, ideological surveillance, and threats to their employment. Students who have protested Israel's devastating assault on Gaza have been suspended, arrested, disciplined, and treated less as citizens exercising democratic rights than as enemies of public order. Universities themselves are facing threats of financial retaliation if they refuse to conform to the demands of increasingly authoritarian governments. These developments should not be mistaken for good faith disagreements over curricula or academic priorities. They represent an effort to reorganise the conditions under which knowledge itself is produced, circulated, and legitimised. They determine which histories deserve remembrance, which injustices may be named, which questions remain permissible, and which forms of citizenship become imaginable. This is not an expansion of intellectual diversity – it is an authoritarian restructuring of higher education. Its deeper purpose is pedagogical. It seeks to transform the university from a democratic institution into an instrument for manufacturing conformity, organised forgetting, and political obedience.

Much of the current discussion in public forums nevertheless continues to frame the university's crisis exclusively in terms of internal ideological imbalance. Universities are criticised for becoming too political, insufficiently open to conservative perspectives, or excessively influenced by progressive scholarship. Such criticisms may contain elements worthy of discussion. Universities should always remain open to self-criticism and should resist every form of intellectual orthodoxy, regardless of its political source. But these concerns become profoundly misleading when detached from the larger political forces transforming higher education from the outside. The greatest danger confronting universities today is not simply that certain viewpoints may receive greater attention than others; it is that political authorities increasingly seek to determine which viewpoints may legitimately exist at all. For this reason, intellectual diversity cannot be reduced to an equal number of competing opinions. It is not achieved by balancing syllabi according to ideological categories or by treating every perspective as equally grounded in evidence and democratic values. Genuine intellectual diversity rests upon a far deeper democratic foundation. It depends upon academic freedom, institutional autonomy, secure public funding, shared governance, independent research, historical honesty, and the right of faculty and students to pursue controversial questions without fear of political retaliation. Once these conditions begin to disappear, diversity itself becomes an increasingly empty abstraction. One cannot claim to value the marketplace of ideas while dismantling the institutions that make such exchange possible.

Authoritarianism and the politics of education

This distinction matters because authoritarian movements have always understood something that many defenders of liberal democracy continue to underestimate: education is never peripheral to politics. Schools and universities shape public memory, moral imagination, civic literacy, and the capacity to distinguish truth from propaganda. Every educational institution teaches far more than disciplinary knowledge. It teaches what kinds of citizens matter, whose histories deserve remembrance, what forms of agency are possible, and which futures remain imaginable. Schools and universities function as powerful forms of public pedagogy because they shape how citizens understand history, power, responsibility, and democratic possibility. History repeatedly demonstrates this

lesson. Fascist movements have consistently regarded universities as strategic sites in the struggle for political power (Stanley, 2024). They have sought not merely to censor dissent but also to reconstruct public consciousness itself. Nazi Germany did not simply eliminate political opponents; it transformed universities into laboratories of ideological conformity (Connelly and Grüttner, 2005). Jewish scholars were expelled, critical intellectuals silenced, historical inquiry subordinated to racial mythology, and scientific research enlisted in the service of eugenics and genocide. Education became a machinery for manufacturing obedience rather than cultivating judgment.

Historical analogies must always be employed with care. The contemporary United States is not Germany in 1933. Yet historical differences do not erase recurring patterns. They enable us to recognise, in new forms and under different conditions, the mobilising passions and pedagogical mechanisms of authoritarianism. When democratic remembrance is attacked and the lessons of the past are erased, society cultivates what Robert Jay Lifton (1982: 619) calls ‘psychic numbing’, a diminished capacity to respond to human suffering, accompanied by moral indifference and the erosion of ethical judgment. Authoritarian politics continues to recognise a truth too often neglected by liberal defenders of higher education: democratic institutions cannot survive once citizens lose the historical consciousness, ethical imagination, and critical capacities necessary to challenge organised lies and manufactured ignorance. The struggle over education is therefore never secondary to politics. It is one of politics’ decisive terrains. Authoritarians attack universities precisely because education is one of the few institutions capable of producing citizens who can recognise and resist authoritarian power. Recognising education’s political significance also exposes one of the most influential myths shaping contemporary higher education: the claim that universities can remain institutionally neutral.

The myth of institutional neutrality

This understanding exposes the limitations of the currently legitimating language of neutrality. The claim of institutional neutrality is a myth. It has become a defining rhetoric of contemporary university administrations. Harvard’s 2024 report (Haidar and Kettles, 2024) on its institutional voice argued that the university should refrain from taking positions on public controversies unrelated

to its ‘core function’, while Yale’s 2024 policy on its institutional voice (McInnis, 2024) similarly declared that the university would generally avoid public statements on political and social issues in the name of neutrality. Such appeals to neutrality present themselves as safeguards for open inquiry, but they often function as ideological cover for institutional silence in the face of assaults on democracy, academic freedom, and human rights. Universities have always been political institutions shaping and being shaped by the conflicts, values, and power relations of the societies they inhabit. Every curriculum privileges certain traditions of knowledge over others. Every institution reflects historical struggles over whose experiences matter, whose voices deserve recognition, and what forms of citizenship should be cultivated. The relevant question has never been whether education is political but which politics it advances.

As Stuart Hall (2025) argued, ‘It is not possible ... to study human societies ... in a “value-neutral” framework. Knowledge is always from a certain point of view’. He therefore warned that intellectuals ‘must never confuse commitment to the truth with value-neutrality, withstanding outside of history’. Hall’s insight makes clear that the issue is not whether universities are political, but whether they acknowledge the politics that already shape the production of knowledge or disguise them behind the rhetoric of institutional neutrality.

What remains of institutional neutrality when Texas A&M requires presidential approval for courses on race and gender while imposing restrictions on student research (Claycamp, 2026)? The language of institutional neutrality evaporates the moment university administrations substitute militarised policing for democratic dialogue. What remains of neutrality when Columbia University summons the New York City Police Department to dismantle student encampments protesting in solidarity with Palestinians (Edwards, Svruga and Rosenzweig-Ziff, 2024)? Or when universities such as Ohio State and Indiana University respond to peaceful demonstrations with heavily militarised policing, including the deployment of police snipers on surrounding rooftops (Middle East Eye, 2024)? Or when the University of Pennsylvania capitulates to the punitive demands of the Trump administration and vindictive donors by dismantling DEI initiatives, curbing academic freedom and free speech, and targeting trans students (Heller, 2026)? These are not politically neutral

administrative decisions. They are acts of institutional alignment with repressive power that transform universities from spaces of critical inquiry into instruments of censorship, surveillance, and ideological conformity.

Yet contemporary appeals to neutrality increasingly expose themselves as mere ideological performances. They identify as political only those forms of knowledge that challenge existing relations of domination while treating market values, corporate influence, billionaire philanthropy, militarised research, nationalism, and racial hierarchy as ideologically innocent. In these appeals, politics becomes visible only when it questions established power; the operation of power itself disappears beneath the reassuring language of balance, civility, and objectivity. Far from standing above politics, neutrality often functions as a form of public pedagogy. It teaches students that silence in the face of injustice is professionalism, that accommodation is wisdom, and that democracy can survive without moral courage. When the very pedagogical, cultural, and economic conditions that make democracy possible are under assault, neutrality becomes complicity.

The claim that universities can remain politically neutral during moments of democratic crisis is not merely mistaken – it is profoundly dangerous. Under such conditions, neutrality ceases to be prudence and becomes complicity. Universities educate not only through what they teach but through what they refuse to defend. Every act of institutional silence communicates a lesson about the meaning of citizenship, courage, and public responsibility. As Hall (2025) observed in defending radical intellectual Walter Rodney against state repression, governments fear critical ideas because they possess the power ‘to move people into action’. Universities have become targets not because they are excessively political but because they remain among the few institutions capable of cultivating critical consciousness, democratic agency, and the collective capacities necessary to resist domination and imagine otherwise. Education is the formative practice of democracy itself. When universities retreat into managerial caution as democratic institutions are dismantled, they teach students that conformity is safer than dissent, that moral responsibility yields to bureaucratic calculation, and that the defence of democracy lies outside the university’s mission.

The irony is striking. Those who insist that universities must avoid politics often remain conspicuously silent about the most sweeping political interventions currently reshaping higher education. Increasingly, these interventions no longer appear simply as overt censorship or legislative coercion. They also arrive in the reasonable language of institutional reform, scholarly rigour, viewpoint diversity, and political neutrality. As recent reporting on Republican efforts to ‘save the humanities’ suggests, the struggle is no longer simply over what universities teach but over who possesses the authority to define legitimate knowledge, civic education, and the purposes of higher learning (Manov, 2026). The vocabulary of reform increasingly masks an effort to institutionalise a new ideological orthodoxy under the banner of restoring neutrality. The fiction of institutional neutrality becomes even harder to sustain when universities themselves are subjected to political extortion. As the American Association of University Professors argues in a recent report, ‘U.S. higher education has, in effect, become a target of a massive extortion racket’ (AAUP, 2026). The report documents how the Trump administration has pressured universities by withholding or threatening federal research funds already legally owed to them unless institutions comply with sweeping political demands. Under such conditions, appeals to neutrality become profoundly disingenuous. What remains of institutional neutrality when universities must purchase their independence by submitting to political blackmail?

This logic increasingly shapes a broader body of commentary that attributes the crisis of higher education primarily to the political left. Across a range of essays, books, policy reports, and institutional commentaries by figures such as Jonathan Haidt, Heather Mac Donald, and organisations such as the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the National Association of Scholars, the humanities are portrayed as having been weakened by progressive scholarship, identity politics, and social justice concerns, while rigorous inquiry is said to have given way to ideological commitment. As Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza (2026) argues, a growing body of commentary attributes the crisis of higher education primarily to the political left. Such arguments rest on a fiction of ideological innocence (Zeleza, 2026). They imagine a university that once stood above struggles over class, race, colonialism, gender, empire, and inequality rather than recognising that these forces have always shaped what counts as legitimate

knowledge. Even more significant, they direct public attention toward an alleged excess of critical scholarship while diverting it from the far more consequential forces hollowing out higher education: decades of neoliberal austerity, corporate governance, public disinvestment, political intimidation, and the increasingly direct intervention of authoritarian governments into what may be taught, researched, and remembered. Rather than confronting these structural transformations, they redirect attention toward an imagined ideological crisis within the university while leaving the deeper assault on higher education largely untouched.

These commentators rarely object when legislatures dictate curricular content, when governors threaten universities with financial punishment, when faculty are dismissed for engaging controversial public questions, when books are removed from libraries, or when students are disciplined for exercising democratic rights. Politics appears objectionable only when it challenges dominant relations of power. When it protects existing hierarchies, legitimates state violence, accommodates corporate influence, or normalises organised injustice, it suddenly becomes invisible. Institutional neutrality, under such conditions, becomes less a democratic principle than a rhetorical device disguising the politics already embedded in institutional priorities, financial investments, governing structures, and public silence. Universities are never outside politics; the question is whether they will acknowledge their political responsibilities openly or conceal them behind the language of neutrality (Roberts, 2024).

The debate over intellectual diversity therefore remains fundamentally incomplete because it asks the wrong question. The issue is not simply whether universities represent a broad enough range of viewpoints. The deeper question concerns the democratic conditions under which intellectual life itself becomes possible. Universities belong to a broader democratic culture composed of public schools, libraries, independent journalism, social movements, museums, artists, writers, and public intellectuals. Collectively, these institutions preserve historical consciousness, cultivate ethical judgment, encourage informed dissent, and expand the public imagination. They enable citizens to distinguish truth from propaganda, justice from domination, and democratic responsibility from political conformity. When universities abandon these responsibilities in the name of

neutrality, efficiency, or market relevance, they cease to function as democratic public goods and become little more than credentialing institutions adapted to existing relations of power. And when this wider public culture is weakened through censorship, privatisation, political intimidation, organised forgetting, and the corrosion of public values, universities cannot flourish in isolation. Their crisis is inseparable from the crisis of democracy itself, which is inseparable from the political economy reshaping higher education.

Neoliberalism and the assault on the democratic university

Yet the debate over neutrality remains incomplete for another reason: even when it acknowledges the political struggle over ideas, it often ignores the economic structures that increasingly govern higher education itself. It treats universities primarily as communities of ideas while remaining remarkably silent about the corporate institutional order that increasingly governs higher education itself. As Rashid Khalidi has observed, many universities now function less as educational institutions than as ‘money-making, MBA, lawyer-run, hedge fund-cum-real estate operation[s], with a minor sideline in education’ (quoted in Iqbal, 2024). Khalidi’s observation points to the managerial and financial transformation of higher education that discussions of intellectual diversity too often ignore. Discussions of knowledge proceed as though ideas exist independently of the material conditions under which they are produced. Universities are imagined as autonomous intellectual communities whose principal challenge lies in balancing competing viewpoints.

The crisis of the humanities offers one of the clearest expressions of this transformation. Humanities bachelor’s degrees in the United States fell to 165,489 in 2024, the lowest number since 1991 and roughly 30 percent below their 2012 peak. Yet this decline tells us less about an alleged domination of universities by the political left than about decades of public disinvestment, market-driven restructuring, managerial governance, vocational reductionism, and the increasing subordination of higher education to corporate priorities. The crisis of the humanities is fundamentally political and economic before it is ideological. To reduce the crisis to ideology is to overlook the structural transformations that have fundamentally altered the mission, governance, and civic purpose of higher education over the last four decades. Every university

teaches through its curriculum, its institutional priorities, the values it rewards, the histories it preserves, and the forms of citizenship it encourages. It is embedded within relations of power that shape not only what is taught but what becomes thinkable in the first place. Every institution of higher education operates within a political economy that influences whose knowledge is funded, whose research receives institutional support, whose histories are remembered, and which forms of inquiry acquire legitimacy. To speak about intellectual diversity while ignoring these institutional realities is to separate ideas from the social conditions that make them possible.

This transformation is hardly incidental: neoliberal capitalism has transformed universities as profoundly as it has changed virtually every other democratic public institution. Public funding has steadily declined. Corporate partnerships have expanded. Billionaire philanthropy increasingly shapes research agendas. Military contracts influence institutional priorities. Administrators have adopted the language of branding, metrics, efficiency, entrepreneurial innovation, and measurable outcomes. Students have become consumers investing in future earnings. Faculty have become increasingly contingent labour subjected to audits, managerial oversight, and demands for immediate economic utility. Education itself has been reorganised according to the logic of investment rather than the requirements of democratic life. This transformation has consequences extending far beyond budgets or administrative organisation. It reshapes the meaning of knowledge itself. Under neoliberal capitalism, education increasingly loses its status as a site of democratic learning and becomes a private investment. Knowledge becomes valuable to the extent that it generates economic growth, technological innovation, workforce flexibility, or commercial advantage. Questions concerning justice, historical memory, ethical responsibility, democratic citizenship, ecological survival, inequality, and the cultivation of the imagination are increasingly subordinated to questions of the market or ignored altogether.

Education as democratic public pedagogy

This narrowing of education's purpose helps explain why contemporary debates over intellectual diversity often remain trapped within procedural questions while avoiding more fundamental issues of power. Missing entirely is any sustained

discussion of how concentrated wealth, corporate influence, donor pressure, privatisation, and austerity shape the production of knowledge itself. The deeper question is not whether universities include sufficient ideological diversity; it is the role of economic and political power in determining what counts as legitimate knowledge, what research receives support, which disciplines flourish, and what forms of inquiry are quietly marginalised. Capitalism today functions not only as an economic system but also as one of the most powerful pedagogical forces shaping contemporary consciousness. Neoliberalism is itself a vast system of public pedagogy, educating people to believe that markets are the template for shaping all social relations, competition is the highest civic virtue, the individual is the sole and most important site of agency, and private success is the measure of public value. It teaches values long before students enter a classroom (Giroux, 2010). Through corporate media, digital platforms, advertising, financial institutions, and the culture industries, it normalises competition over cooperation, privatisation over public responsibility, consumerism over citizenship, disposability over solidarity, and individual success over the common good. It cultivates a moral vocabulary in which efficiency replaces justice, profitability replaces public responsibility, and market value becomes the measure of human worth.

Universities increasingly reproduce this pedagogical order. Rather than serving as democratic spaces capable of questioning dominant assumptions, they are encouraged to become extensions of the market itself. Programmes are evaluated according to profitability. Research is assessed according to commercial application. Students are taught to view education primarily as vocational credentialing rather than preparation for democratic citizenship. Entire fields of inquiry devoted to ethics, history, philosophy, literature, cultural criticism, and the arts are pressured to justify themselves through economic metrics fundamentally alien to their democratic purpose. Such developments are often presented as inevitable and prudent adaptations to economic reality. They are nothing of the sort. They represent political choices that redefine education according to the imperatives of capital rather than the needs of democracy. In doing so, they precisely undermine those forms of inquiry that make intellectual diversity meaningful. Genuine intellectual diversity requires time for reflection, institutional independence, historical depth, ethical questioning, and the freedom

to pursue research unconstrained by immediate market demands. These conditions cannot flourish where knowledge itself has become increasingly commodified.

Democracy depends not merely upon constitutions, elections, or political institutions but upon the educational practices through which people learn to think historically, judge critically, act courageously, and imagine otherwise. Education, in this sense, is the formative practice of democracy itself. The crisis confronting higher education is therefore not simply an intellectual crisis; it is a crisis of democratic culture itself. The struggle over universities is inseparable from the struggle over the kinds of human beings that democratic societies hope to cultivate. The decisive question is whether students will acquire the historical consciousness, ethical imagination, civic courage, and critical capacities necessary to recognise domination, resist injustice, and imagine more democratic futures.

References

AAUP (2026) 'Extorted Compliance: A Threat to Institutional Autonomy, Academic Freedom, and Shared Governance', July, available: <https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/aaup-policies-reports/topical-reports/extorted-compliance-threat-institutional> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Claycamp, R (2026) 'Texas Universities' Crackdown on LGBT Courses and DEI Is Getting Worse', *Truthout*, 6 June, available: <https://truthout.org/articles/texas-universities-crackdown-on-lgbt-courses-and-dei-is-getting-worse/> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Connelly, J and Grüttner, M (2005) (eds) *Universities Under Dictatorship*, Philadelphia: Penn State University Press.

Edwards, J, Svrluga, S and Rosenzweig-Ziff, D (2024) 'More than 100 arrested at Columbia as police clear pro-Palestinian protest', *The Washington Post*, 18 April, available: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2024/04/18/columbia-student-gaza-protests-nypd/?utm> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Giroux, H A (2010) 'Neoliberalism as Public Pedagogy' in J Sandlin, B D Schultz and J Burdick (eds) *Handbook of Public Pedagogy: Education and Learning Beyond Schooling*, New York: Routledge.

Haidar, E H and Kettles, C E (2024) 'Harvard Will Refrain From Controversial Statements About Public Policy Issues', *The Harvard Crimson*, 28 May, available: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/5/28/harvard-institutional-neutrality-report/> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Hall, S (2025) [1974] 'When We Are All Enemies of the State', *Boston Review*, 12 June, available: <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/when-we-are-all-enemies-of-the-state/> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Heller, J (2026) 'How Trump Made Penn Quake in Its Boots', *TNR*, 31 May, available: <https://newrepublic.com/article/210098/trump-attack-university-pennsylvania-speech-antisemitism> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Iqbal, R (2024) 'Rashid Khalidi, America's foremost scholar of Palestine, is retiring: "I don't want to be a cog in the machine anymore"', *The Guardian*, 8 October, available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2024/oct/08/rashid-khalidi-palestine-israel-scholar-columbia-university-retires> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Lifton, R J (1982) 'Beyond psychic numbing: A call to awareness', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 52(4), pp. 619–629.

Manov, A (2026) 'Republican Machines: Can the GOP save the humanities?', *Harper's Magazine*, July, available: <https://harpers.org/archive/2026/07/republican-machines-ann-manov-humanities/> (accessed 3 August 2026).

McInnis, M (2024) 'Report of the Committee on Institutional Voice', Office of the President, Yale University, 30 October, available: <https://president.yale.edu/posts/2024-10-30-report-of-the-committee-on-institutional-voice> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Middle East Eye (2024) 'Armoured cars and snipers: The police repression of Gaza solidarity encampments', 1 May, available: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/armoured-cars-and-snipers-police-repression-gaza-solidarity-encampments> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Roberts, M (2024) 'Institutional neutrality does not exist—and it shouldn't', *Columbia Spectator*, 24 September, available: <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/09/23/institutional-neutrality-does-not-exist-and-it-shouldnt/> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Stanley, J (2024) 'Why fascists hate universities', *The Guardian*, 5 September, available: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/05/why-fascists-hate-universities-us-bangladesh-india> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Zezeza, P T (2026) 'Misreading the Humanities: A Critique of the Vanderbilt–Washington University Report', PT Zezeza's Newsletter, 13 June, <https://paulddf.substack.com/p/misreading-the-humanities-a-critique> (accessed 3 August 2026).

Henry A. Giroux currently holds the McMaster University Chair for Scholarship in the Public Interest in the English and Cultural Studies Department and is the Paulo Freire Distinguished Scholar in Critical Pedagogy. His most recent books include: *The Terror of the Unforeseen* (Los Angeles Review of books, 2019), *On Critical Pedagogy*, 2nd edition (Bloomsbury, 2020); *Race, Politics, and Pandemic Pedagogy: Education in a Time of Crisis* (Bloomsbury 2021); *Pedagogy of Resistance: Against Manufactured Ignorance* (Bloomsbury 2022); *Insurrections: Education in the Age of Counter-Revolutionary Politics* (Bloomsbury, 2023); *Fascism on Trial: Education and the Possibility of Democracy*, coauthored with Anthony DiMaggio, (Bloomsbury, 2025); *Assassins of Memory: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Erasure* (Bloomsbury 2026); and *Disappearing Futures: Education Against the Politics of Disposability* (Bloomsbury, 2027).

MOBILITY PRIVILEGE AS AN EPISTEMIC FILTER: PASSPORT HIERARCHIES AND TRANSFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

GIULIA FILIPPI

Citation: Filippi, G (2026) 'Mobility Privilege as an Epistemic Filter: Passport Hierarchies and Transformative Development Education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 186-198.

Abstract: International knowledge production is increasingly global, yet access to the spaces where knowledge is exchanged, validated, and made visible remains often structurally unequal. This article examines passport hierarchies and visa restrictions as political conditions that have consequences for the international circulation of research knowledge. Research on global visa regimes has shown that mobility rights are distributed asymmetrically and remain structured by geopolitical power relations (Mau et al., 2015; Czaika, De Haas and Villares-Varela, 2018; Czaika and Trauner, 2017), while recent work on academic mobility documents how costs, delays, refusals and uncertainty restrict participation by scholars holding passports from the global South (Yildiz et al., 2026). Visa authorities do not assess the intellectual value of research knowledge. Nevertheless, by shaping who can attend conferences, sustain international collaborations, conduct fieldwork and enter informal professional networks, border decisions can indirectly affect which knowledge circulates, gains recognition and contributes to shaping international scholarly agendas. Rather than explaining visa policy itself, bell hooks' reflections on structures of privilege and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti's critique of global citizenship education provide conceptual resources for examining how unequal mobility intersects with academic participation and epistemic visibility. Universities cannot determine visa decisions or eliminate global mobility inequalities, but they can consider whether arrangements within their sphere of influence intensify or mitigate these effects. Development education, therefore, requires attention not only to whose voices are represented, but also to the structural conditions that enable participation, collaboration and the circulation of knowledge.

Key words: Mobility Privilege; Epistemic Inequality; Passport Hierarchies; Development Education; Global South.

Introduction

In January 2023, members of Ibali, an international network of scholars and practitioners working on storytelling research, planned a workshop in Cape Town. One Nigerian researcher applied for the required visa, received a refusal, reapplied and finally obtained the visa eighteen days after the workshop had ended. Her absence was not a minor administrative inconvenience: it removed a particular researcher, perspective and set of relationships from the production of the project's knowledge. By contrast, a British colleague described her own journey as easy and fast to organise (Nebe, Agbaire and Buckler, 2023). This experience captures a problem that universities and international organisations often place outside the intellectual work of scholarship. Academic knowledge is described as global because research teams are transnational, conferences are international, and journals circulate across borders. Yet the spaces in which research knowledge is discussed, validated, and made visible are reached through passports, consular procedures, visa application fees, proof of financial means and administrative decisions. The aspiration to build a global and international research environment is therefore built on a mobility infrastructure that does not distribute access equally. This reflection asks whether the critical scholarship produced in the global North interrogates its own mobility privilege. Thus, the article uses mobility privilege to describe the unremarked advantage enjoyed by people for whom crossing a border for academic work is affordable and administratively straightforward. On the contrary, there is not simply immobility, but a condition of uncertainty in which travel requires repeated proof of legitimacy and resources.

Recent scholarship has named these dynamics with increasing clarity. Yildiz et al. (2026) conceptualised a 'global academic mobility divide', while Gülel (2025) examined academic immobility as a privilege structured by geopolitical hierarchies. Thus, the purpose of the present reflection is to bring these perspectives into development education (DE) and ask what transformational education requires of a field committed to facing inequality. The theoretical framework draws on hooks' analysis of class as a material and cultural relation of

privilege, together with Andreotti's distinction between soft and critical global citizenship education (hooks, 2000; Andreotti, 2006). Through this lens, visa regimes are considered to have indirect epistemic consequences: by shaping who can enter particular relationships and institutions, they can affect whose knowledge becomes present, connected, and visible. This does not mean that visa authorities judge intellectual value. It means that political decisions about movement structure opportunities for participation in knowledge production. The purpose of this Viewpoint article is not to suggest that universities can determine visa policy or eliminate mobility inequalities. Decisions on admission and border control remain within the state's powers. Rather, drawing on accounts from researchers affected by visa restrictions, the article asks how these political constraints shape the circulation of academic knowledge and how institutional practices may mitigate their effects or begin to critically reflect on them. The question is whether academic institutions can recognise unequal mobility as a condition of knowledge production and respond within the areas they can influence.

Furthermore, academic conferences, international workshops, research partnerships and professional networks are not merely settings in which knowledge is disseminated; instead, they are educational spaces in which concepts, professional identities and curricular priorities are formed. Unequal access to these spaces therefore shapes what development education can know, teach and imagine.

Mobility privilege and the production of knowledge

Academic mobility is often presented as a neutral mechanism of internationalisation and knowledge circulation. Yet it takes place within an unequal academic geography in which research infrastructures, funding, publishing networks and sites of scholarly recognition remain unequally distributed. Under these conditions, mobility can facilitate exchange while also reproducing existing institutional and epistemic hierarchies.

Passports look formally similar, but the mobility rights attached to them differ dramatically. Mau et al. (2015) traced visa-waiver policies across more than 150 states and found that average visa-free mobility increased between 1969 and

2010 while becoming more unequally distributed. OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries and high-income countries gained mobility rights, whereas gains were weaker or negative in other regions. Using the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) VISA database (International Migration Institute, 2026), Czaika, de Haas and Villares-Varela (2018) showed that global visa regimes reflected geopolitical inequalities, regional alliances and colonial histories. Czaika and Trauner (2017) further examined how European Union (EU) visa policy governs mobility before travellers reach the territorial border, filtering movement through prior assessments of legitimacy and risk. Mobility is therefore a political resource, distributed differentially.

These inequalities acquire epistemic force because academic resources are also geographically concentrated. Many highly ranked universities, research institutions, major professional associations, conferences and publishing networks are located in the global North. When access to these sites depends on restrictive visa regimes, unequal mobility and unequal access to academic recognition reinforce one another (Yildiz et al., 2026). A person may have an accepted paper, institutional funding and a formal invitation and still be prevented from participating. Thus, academic merit does not neutralise the geopolitical judgement encoded in a passport. Visa applications demand time, money, documentation and patience to wait. These procedures may cause financial losses. For example, hooks (2000) highlights the fact that in these cases class matters, avoiding the idea that this is due to nationality alone. Class also intersects with residence status, race and institutional prestige. Two holders of the same passport can consequently experience different degrees of constraint. The global North and global South are political categories, but they are not homogeneous geographical contexts.

The experience of the Ibali team illustrates these layered inequalities. Two researchers with Nigerian passports followed the same nominal procedure for travel to South Africa, but the one residing in the UK had faster reimbursement, stable internet access and a residence status that may have made her application appear less risky. Their British colleague moved with far greater certainty. The example shows ‘hierarchies within hierarchies’ rather than a simple binary (Nebe, Agbaire and Buckler, 2023). These different characteristics, such

as passport nationality, place of residence, contractual security and institutional infrastructure, shape mobility.

Visa-related exclusions affect knowledge in different ways. First, they determine presence: who can attend a workshop, present a paper or conduct fieldwork. Second, they redistribute time, as hours spent navigating visa procedures are taken away from research, teaching and rest. Third, they influence professional visibility, since conferences generate feedback, collaborations, and informal encounters that cannot be fully reproduced through the circulation of a paper. Fourth, repeated uncertainty may discourage future participation before an application is even submitted. A visa is not in itself an epistemic judgement. Its consequences can nevertheless become epistemic when restrictions sort, delay or prevent the participation of particular scholars. It may favour knowledge carried by people who can move easily, while making other contributions intermittent, mediated or absent. In this sense, mobility restrictions can create conditions that contribute to epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007): not by directly assessing the value of knowledge, but by unequally structuring opportunities to participate in the spaces where knowledge is exchanged, recognised and legitimised.

Mobility privilege is similarly obscured by its own ease. For those who rarely need visas, travel appears to follow from an invitation and a budget. Their movement is read as evidence of international experience, flexibility and academic success rather than as a benefit enabled by citizenship. Institutions then evaluate mobility as though everyone had faced the same starting conditions. A structural advantage is converted into an individual achievement, while restricted mobility may be misread as a lack of ambition, internationalisation or productivity.

The key question is, therefore, not only who has a voice, but who can reach the sites in which a voice is heard, challenged, cited and incorporated into future work. Knowledge production is never disembodied. It depends on bodies that move through materially unequal worlds. These processes are both educational and epistemic. Conferences and transnational collaborations function as sites of professional learning where educators encounter new frameworks, revise teaching materials, form partnerships and influence which perspectives and experiences are later incorporated into teaching materials and

curricula. When participation is filtered by mobility regimes, the consequences can travel back into classrooms and organisations: some knowledge gains legitimacy and circulation, while other knowledge remains localised or is mediated through more mobile actors. Mobility privilege can therefore shape not only academic paths, but also the educational resources through which global inequality is interpreted.

Theoretical framework: class, positionality and critical global citizenship

The framework developed here brings together bell hooks' (2000) account of class and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti's (2006) distinction between soft and critical global citizenship education. These concepts serve as interpretive lenses, not as empirical explanations of visa policy, and their application to academic mobility is necessarily an adaptation. The framework does not collapse their distinct intellectual projects into a single decolonial theory. Instead, it uses their complementary questions to examine how privilege becomes normalised, how benevolent action can leave unequal structures intact, and what it means for education to become transformative.

Hooks made class visible as both a material relation and a culture that shapes belonging, aspiration, shame and authority. In *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, she connected class to race and gender while refusing the idea that individual success dissolves structural hierarchy (hooks, 2000). She emphasised that education is shaped by the lived experiences, social positions, and power relations that educators bring to educational spaces. Additionally, in another foundational work, hooks describes education as the practice of freedom, challenging the idea of a neutral transmission (hooks, 1994). These insights influence academic mobility and positionality, which are not merely the result of nationality, race, gender or institutional location. In the context of academic mobility, positionality also encompasses class-related differences in scholars' capacity to access funding, obtain administrative support, tolerate uncertainty and easily occupy international space.

Mobility privilege may be particularly important for scholars and educators in the global North who work critically on migration, coloniality, development or inequality. Their analysis may challenge borders at the theoretical

level, while the conferences and collaborations in which they participate depend on privileges structured by those same borders. This contradiction does not invalidate critical scholarship. It does, however, require the critical perspective to turn towards the material arrangements through which that scholarship is produced. Moreover, Andreotti's distinction between soft and critical global citizenship education sharpens this reflection (Andreotti, 2006). A soft approach frames the problem in terms of poverty, helplessness or a lack of resources and invites privileged actors to take responsibility for others. A critical approach begins with inequality, injustice, historical complicity and the structures that maintain exploitation. It asks actors to analyse their own position and take responsibility towards others by changing assumptions, relationships and power arrangements. Similarly, in the discourse on academic mobility, a soft response may help an individual applicant navigate the visa system, while a critical perspective also asks whether some institutional arrangements determine an exclusion produced primarily by a nation's policy and which of those arrangements can reasonably be changed.

Drawing on Andreotti's HEADS-UP social cartography, these distinctions can be addressed by identifying hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticisation, salvationism, uncomplicated solutions and paternalism in global education (Andreotti, 2012).

A conference may reproduce 'hegemony' when it presents itself as international or global while treating one region as the default institutional centre of academic exchange. It is ahistorical when visa inequalities are detached from colonial relations and uneven development. It is depoliticised when a refusal is treated as the applicant's administrative problem. A response may become paternalistic when organisers or donors retain control over who receives support and on what terms, enabling a limited number of selected participants to attend while leaving their dependence on external assistance and the underlying barriers to wider participation unexamined.

This perspective also clarifies the fragility of decolonial solidarity. Solidarity can be rhetorically expansive while remaining materially conditional. A partnership may promise reciprocity but schedule its decisive meetings in places

that some partners cannot access or have issues reaching. Inclusion efforts may support a limited number of invited speakers from the global South while leaving the mobility barriers faced by non-invited participants largely unchanged. A project may celebrate co-production while contracts, reimbursements and visa support reproduce different levels of security. Good intentions do not remove these asymmetries; sometimes they make them harder to name.

Similarly, Abdi's (2026) 'politics of accompaniment', although developed in the context of migration research, challenges the assumption that knowledge is produced from a neutral position. Applied to academic mobility, this perspective suggests that conferences and research networks are not neutral spaces of exchange: their locations, languages and conditions of access shape who can participate and whose knowledge becomes visible.

The central argument can now be stated more precisely. Mobility privilege confers material advantages on individual scholars and can have indirect epistemic consequences by shaping presence, circulation, and recognition. Andreotti's distinction suggests that individual assistance, while valuable, remains insufficient when changeable institutional arrangements are left unexamined. The critical question, therefore, is what academic institutions and actors in development education can realistically change, given the political conditions they do not control.

Implications for transformative development education

The theme 'learning for transformation' asks development education to move beyond diagnosis and connect reflection with changes in practice. Mobility privilege provides a demanding test of the theoretical framework. A soft approach may teach passport inequality as an example of injustice elsewhere and focus on assistance to excluded individuals. A critical approach asks how the effects of a political inequality may be compounded or mitigated by practices within the influence of DE institutions, educators, funders and researchers, including meetings, partnerships, curricula and criteria of professional value (Andreotti, 2006). hooks' (2000) class analysis adds the question of who can bear the costs and risks even within the same passport category?

Transformational learning therefore invites reflection on institutional congruence. Teaching learners to question global inequality can be accompanied by attention to how educators' professional learning is organised under unequal conditions of mobility. The curriculum comprises not only formal content, but also institutional decisions about who is present, whose experience acquires authority and where educational exchange is expected to occur. Dillon (2024) similarly argues that critical global education in higher education should be examined not only through programmes and curriculum, but also across institutional policy, research, partnerships, non-formal engagement and institutional culture. Extending this perspective to academic mobility allows conferences and transnational networks to be understood as part of the institutional environment through which learning, participation and knowledge production are organised.

The first implication is curricular. Passport and visa hierarchies should be treated as part of the political economy of knowledge, not only as topics within migration education. Learners can examine how access to international travel is shaped by citizenship, wealth, colonial history and perceptions of migration risk. They can then trace how restricted mobility affects whose research appears at conferences, whose work enters syllabi and which institutions are recognised as international. Such enquiry links border regimes to epistemic justice without reducing the global South to a single experience.

The second implication is reflexive. Critical global citizenship education places responsibility not simply for an excluded other, but towards others through an examination of complicity and power (Andreotti, 2006). HEADS UP can then be adapted as an institutional audit. Who selected the conference location, and whose mobility was assumed? Which historical and geopolitical relations are absent from the planning process? Who carries the financial risk of an application? Is hybrid participation equivalent and visible, or is it a diminished alternative offered after exclusion has occurred? Whose language, time zone and professional calendar establish the norm? These questions transform reflexivity from a declaration of awareness into scrutiny of budgets, timetables and decision-making power.

The third implication concerns organisational practice and the distinction between individual assistance and broader institutional reflection. The Ibali team responded to visa inequality by covering the costs of repeated applications, budgeting for professional visa support and flexible travel, preparing reusable documentation, beginning applications early, and considering meeting locations accessible to all participants (Nebe, Agbaire and Buckler, 2023). Assistance with forms and invitation letters is valuable, although it may be insufficient when the applicant continues to carry avoidable financial risks. Yildiz et al. (2026) proposed rotating conference locations towards less restrictive visa regimes, expanding multilingual and hybrid participation, and strengthening institutional assistance. Such measures cannot guarantee mobility, but they can reduce some of the burdens placed on individual scholars.

Development education organisations can consider context-sensitive responses within their financial, legal and logistical constraints. Funders may recognise visa, biometric, translation, care and flexible-booking costs as legitimate project expenses. Partnerships may plan visa applications earlier and consider flexible travel, alternative locations or equivalent hybrid participation. Conferences may collect anonymised data on visa-related non-attendance, while research evaluation should avoid treating frequent international travel as straightforward evidence of excellence. These measures are not universal obligations, particularly for smaller organisations, but illustrate how institutions can mitigate mobility inequalities without implying control over border policy. Nor is online participation a complete solution. It can widen access, reduce costs and protect a project from visa delays, but it can also reproduce inequalities in connectivity, time zones, language and informal networking. A remote participant displayed on a screen while decisions are made in the room has been technically included but politically marginalised. Transformative design asks which activities require co-presence, who defines that requirement and how authority will be shared across modes.

A recent case in Ireland illustrates these limits. In 2026, a number of students from Gaza who had been admitted to Irish universities and awarded fully funded scholarships were refused study visas. Reported grounds included the absence of original bank statements, gaps in education and insufficient evidence

of an intention to return – requirements that were particularly difficult to satisfy under conditions of war and displacement (Smyth, 2026). The case shows that institutional admission and financial support do not, by themselves, secure access when participation remains contingent on border decisions.

Finally, DE needs a more material account of solidarity. An invitation alone may not be sufficient when unequal mobility prevents effective participation. Within their resources and authority, institutions can consider whether reasonable changes in location, format, timing, decision-making or financial support would make participation more equitable. Such choices connect learning about inequality with practical attention to the conditions through which its effects may persist.

Conclusion

International and global knowledge can obscure a simple material fact: scholarship crosses borders, and borders do not receive all scholars in the same way. Passport hierarchies distribute certainty to some and scrutiny, delay and cost to others. Because conferences, research sites and institutions are also unequally distributed, mobility regimes help determine who becomes present, connected and recognisable within academic life. For critical scholarship in the global North, acknowledging mobility privilege invites examination of how apparently ordinary arrangements – conference locations, reimbursement rules, deadlines, invitation letters, hybrid formats and measures of international experience – may convert geopolitical advantage into greater academic visibility. Efforts to decolonise knowledge may remain incomplete if the mobility conditions underpinning participation are left entirely unexamined, even though those conditions cannot be resolved by academic institutions alone.

For development education, the issue goes to the heart of transformational learning. Transformation concerns not only what learners understand, but also how institutions organise participation within the limits of their authority. hooks makes visible the classed resources that allow mobility privilege to appear as ordinary achievement, while Andreotti helps distinguish individual assistance from reflection on changeable structures. Before asking whose voice is represented, DE practitioners can also ask who can cross the

border, reach the room and take part in shaping what the room is for. Mobility privilege can have epistemic effects by shaping access to participation. Making those effects visible, while remaining realistic about institutional power, is part of the transformative task.

References

Abdi, A Y (2026) 'Politics of accompaniment: a reflexive ethnography from the South', *IMISCOE Reflexivities in Migration Studies Blog*, 5 May, available: <https://www.imiscoe.org/news-and-blog/sc-blogs/reflex-studies/2632-visions-for-migration-politics-of-accompaniment-a-reflexive-ethnography-from-the-south> (accessed 14 August 2026).

Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 3, Autumn, pp. 40-51, available: <https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-3/soft-versus-critical-global-citizenship-education> (accessed 14 August 2026).

Andreotti, V (2012) 'Education, knowledge and the righting of wrongs', *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 19-31.

Czaika, M, de Haas, H and Villares-Varela, M (2018) 'The global evolution of travel visa regimes', *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 589-622.

Czaika, M and Trauner, F (2017) 'EU visa policy: decision-making dynamics and effects on migratory processes' in A Ripoll Servent and F Trauner (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Justice and Home Affairs Research*, London: Routledge, pp. 110-123.

Dillon, E (2024) 'Towards a multi-dimensional mapping of global education in higher education in Ireland', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, No. 39, Autumn, pp. 72-86.

Gülel, D (2025) 'Navigating visa inequities: mobility as privilege in academia - "You are not supposed to be here"', *Global Social Challenges Journal*, Early View, pp. 1-10.

Fricker, M (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

hooks, b (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, New York: Routledge.

hooks, b (2000) *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, New York: Routledge.

International Migration Institute (2026) 'DEMIG VISA Data', available: <https://www.migrationinstitute.org/data/demig-data/demig-visa-data> (accessed 17 August 2026).

Mau, S, Gülzau, F, Laube, L and Zaun, N (2015) 'The global mobility divide: how visa policies have evolved over time', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 8, pp. 1192-1213.

Nebe, J, Agbaire, J and Buckler, A (2023) 'International research teams and Vis-aaaaaaaaarghs', *Ibali Knowledge Hub Blog*, The Open University, 15 October, available: <https://wels.open.ac.uk/research/networks/ibali/blogs/international-research-teams-and-vis-aaaaaaaaarghs> (accessed 14 August 2026).

Smyth, O (2026) 'Academics criticise visa refusals for Gaza scholarship students', *RTE Prime Time*, 14 August, available: <https://www.rte.ie/news/primetime/2026/0814/1587781-academics-criticise-visa-refusals-for-gaza-scholarship-students/> (accessed 17 August 2026).

Yildiz, E, Cangönül, M, Sun, Y, Uribe, J, Sharani, S, Tiky, L and Zvobgo, K (2026) 'Forum: The passports they carry: global South scholars and the global academic mobility divide', *International Studies Perspectives*, advance article, ekag007, 14 July.

Giulia Filippi holds a PhD in Education and is currently a Research Fellow in General and Social Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Italy). Her research focuses on global citizenship education, teacher education, comparative education and intercultural pedagogies. She is a member of the Academic Network on Global Education and Learning (ANGEL). E-mail: Giulia.filippi@unibz.it.

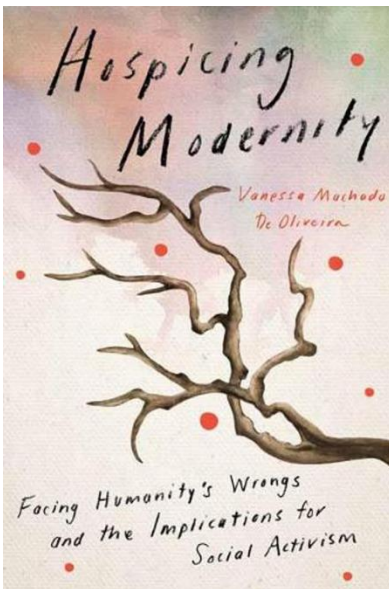
Resource reviews

HOSPICING MODERNITY: FACING HUMANITY'S WRONGS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL ACTIVISM

MARTA DA COSTA

Citation: da Costa, M (2026) 'Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 199-204.

Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (2021) *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, Berkley: North Atlantic Books.



Vanessa Machado de Oliveira Andreotti's 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education' (Andreotti, 2006), originally published in this journal, has become a landmark text in development education. Beyond this seminal work, Andreotti has continuously contributed a wide range of pedagogical tools, often in the shape of metaphors or social cartographies, to the field. These invite and support educators, researchers and policymakers to identify and critically reflect on the individual and collective narratives, as well as the absences and denials, that frame our understanding and practice of development education. No other scholar has shaped the field as profoundly, and *Hospicing Modernity* is

a compilation of many of these tools, alongside new ones, grounded in deeply personal stories and guided by the pedagogical creativity Andreotti is known for.

Reflecting the teachings she herself received from her grandmothers, Andreotti signs this book with her maiden name, as Vanessa Machado de Oliveira.

As the ‘House that Modernity Built’ crumbles, this book is a companion for sitting with, working through and caring for a system while it dies ‘within and around us’ (Machado de Oliveira, 2021: xxii). It is especially aimed at those of us involved in low intensity, low risk and low stakes struggles:

“if you have the time, energy and literacy necessary to read this book, you fit this category (...) we have a choice to show up or not, to become visible or not, to be arrested or not, to take risks or not” (Ibid.: 52).

However, Machado de Oliveira warns against reading this book, if the reader is still strongly invested in saving modernity and protecting themselves from confronting the unsustainability of the system as well as our complicity in the harm that it causes. This is certainly not a book concerned with inspiring hope and offering solutions to the problems we face. In Machado de Oliveira’s words, ‘if you are looking for strategies that will make you feel good, look good, and move forward, and if you know that this is what you need right now, do not read this book’ (Ibid.: 40).

If readers do choose to proceed, they will find a book divided into two parts: the first one – ‘Warm-up/ Prep Work’ – lays the conceptual and self-reflexive grounding for the teachings that follow in the second – ‘Hospicing Modernity’. However, readers are not instructed to follow a linear reading of the chapters and, arguably, the prep works starts in the first sentence of the Preface. Following Carl Mika (2017), Machado de Oliveira states that language ‘worlds the world’. As an alternative to western modern understandings of storytelling – where stories are seen as instruments of communication that represent, analyse and prescribe ‘reality’ – Machado de Oliveira, invites readers to recognise stories as living entities that emerge from, shape and produce our experiences of the world. Stories travel, transform and are transformed through the bodies, places and relationships they encounter. In this way, Machado de Oliveira’s invitation is not to read and think about, but to ‘dance with’, the personal and collective

stories she shares in this book. This is a call for active and reflexive engagement, not just with our head, but also with our heart, senses and body.

‘Who the heck is modernity?’

Through storytelling, Machado de Oliveira, traces, pulls at and unravels modernity, showcasing its limits and harmful side effects, as well as the tensions, contradictions and nuances inherent to existing in and (at least partly) through this system. Machado de Oliveira defines modernity as a single story of forward, rife with promises of safety, success and ever amounting health and wealth that are contingent on civilisation, scientific advancements and technological progress. This single story is rooted in ontological hierarchical separability – difference and distance between humans and nature (human exceptionalism based on logocentrism) and within humans (based on whose bodies and cultures have the capacity to reason in a legitimate way). This single story of progress, through Euro-western epistemic structures, institutions, discursive practices and material forms of violence, has established modernity as the only possible way to create and share meaning and relate to other beings in the world. Drawing on Anibal Quijano (2000), Machado de Oliveira refers to modernity/coloniality to elicit the violent systems of oppression on which modernity is built, including colonialism, racism, dispossession, destitution, and environmental destruction.

The story of separability, according to Machado de Oliveira, is the fault line on which the system stands and responsible for its collapse. She argues that perceiving ourselves as separate from nature and other beings affects us cognitively, affectively, relationally and even metabolically. It disconnects us from ourselves, from others and from the consequences of our actions, while numbing us to what is happening within and around us. In response, we seek fulfilment through participation in modernity's games of individuation and consumption. Furthermore, a belief in separability comes with an arrogant sense of superiority that informs our attempts to categorise, manage and control the world in our own image, while dismissing alternative ways of being and knowing that arise from different contexts, bodies and cultures. Yet, despite this sense of superiority, Machado de Oliveira argues modernity is infantilising. Deeply invested in the system's comforts and promises of security, health and wealth, we cultivate a fear of uncertainty and a need for a sense of control and continuous reassurance. We

learn not to look too closely at the harms we are complicit with, and, when we do look, we seek guarantees that our own sense of self will remain untroubled and our livelihoods undisturbed.

Modernity's ubiquity and deep roots in our individual and collective imaginary mean that alternative perspectives can only be read in a way that mimic modernity's worlding of the world, severing these stories from their ontological roots. One of the main contributions of this book is to render modernity/coloniality visible – naming its promises, harmful consequences and our investments in it – thus helping us to denaturalise it. But the book also enables us to reflect on where we stand geopolitically, socio-economically, racially and culturally; and how this position determines our experiences of modernity/coloniality as well as the questions we are able to ask and the answers we are willing to give.

Critiques of and from within the system, including those centred on redistribution, recognition and participation, can function as stories that ultimately reinforce rather than disrupt it. Machado de Oliveira argues these political mobilisations are helpful in terms of gaining 'access to institutions, social mobility, markets, and platforms for voice and power' (Ibid.: 182), therefore reducing the harms caused by modernity. Although expanding the system and including more people in it, these approaches are limited because the system is built on coloniality, and coloniality is also required for its expansion (Ibid.: 19). Nevertheless, finding alternatives to the system is not an option available at present, according to Machado de Oliveira, because we are too deeply socialised in modernity's stories and, therefore, only able to (re)produce different versions of it. Even if we could imagine an alternative, Machado de Oliveira maintains we are not ready to voluntarily face our denials nor relinquish the comforts and benefits modernity affords us. As such, more knowledge about the problem, however counter hegemonic, is not going to solve it, and neither are our good intentions.

It is only when the system finally collapses, and we are forced to interrupt our harmful desires and investments in modernity, that we will be ready to confront it and confront ourselves. As Machado de Oliveira puts it:

“Before anything different can happen, before people can sense, hear, relate, and imagine differently, there must be a clearing, a decluttering, an initiation into the unownable; and a letting go of desires for certainty, authority, hierarchy, and of insatiable consumption as a mode of relating to everything” (Ibid.: 235).

As such, this book is about doing our homework (or perhaps our shitwork, as Machado de Oliveira puts it) that will help us hospice modernity. To hospice modernity is to sit with/in a system in decline; to care for and learn from it; to grieve it while befriending death. As we prepare for this inevitability, Machado de Oliveira argues we need to develop the stamina, discernment, accountability and responsibility that we need to do the work that needs to be done while the house crumbles. For this, we must adopt a position of ‘humility, honesty, humour and hyper-self-reflexivity’ (Ibid.: 24) and this is what Machado de Oliveira models in this book.

Implications for development education

Development education is strongly concerned with educational and advocacy work in support of political mobilisations around redistribution, recognition and participation. This work has been, and continues to be, essential to challenge global/local power inequalities and support the upholding of human rights across borders, breaking the barriers raised by the dominant groups that benefit from their undermining. This work is, as Machado de Oliveira maintains, essential and limited. Because of the fault lines in the system (around hierarchical separability, capitalist consumption, and the privileging of certain bodies and cultures) and its approaching expiration, this work will become increasingly more complex and challenging. Machado de Oliveira argues that dominant groups in society will continue to hoard resources, forcing marginalised groups to compete against each other, for example through scapegoating. Modern/colonial institutions will take in those who have been historically excluded but not change, so that the only option becomes assimilation into the system but not true recognition or meaningful participation. These are not problems development education can solve itself.

In a field where developing critical perspectives, identifying solutions and mobilising people to take action is central, Machado de Oliveira presents us with a predicament, rather than a problem to solve. This book stops us in our tracks and asks us to turn our *critical* orientation inward. This is not instead of but alongside the work we are doing. It shares stories and raises questions we might want to dance with: what happens when we start from the recognition that we are complicit with, and often reinforce, the very issues we are trying to address? What framings of our present problems and images of the future inform our actions? And what desires and denials are we attempting to protect in the process? How is our relationship with counter-hegemonic knowledge keeping us from doing the work that needs to be done? As we fight to resist coloniality, can we fight our own resistance to an honest, humble, humorous and hyper-reflexive confrontation with ourselves?

References

Andreotti, V (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 3, Autumn, pp. 40-51.

Machado de Oliveira, V (2021) *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism*, Berkley: North Atlantic Books.

Mika, C (2017) *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy*, Oxon: Routledge.

Quijano, A (2000) 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, 15(2), pp. 215-232.

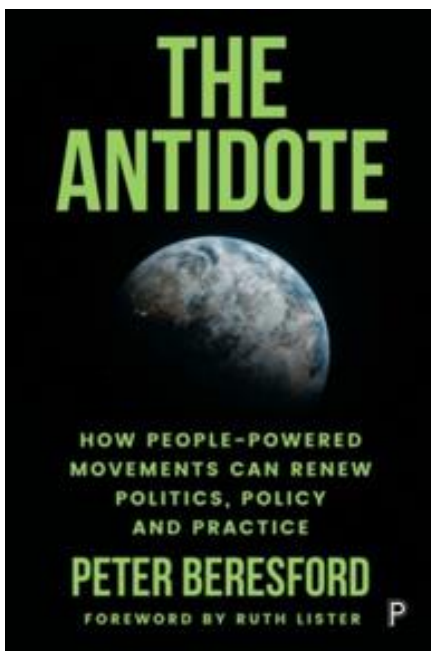
Marta da Costa is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research lies at the intersections of Global Citizenship Education and Environmental and Sustainability Education, and is concerned with centring colonial legacies at the root of Eurocentric epistemological frameworks in education, drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theoretical perspectives.

THE ANTIDOTE: HOW PEOPLE-POWERED MOVEMENTS CAN RENEW POLITICS, POLICY AND PRACTICE

SU-MING KHOO

Citation: Khoo, S (2026) 'The Antidote: How People-Powered Movements Can Renew Politics, Policy and Practice', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 43, Autumn, pp. 205-210.

Peter Beresford (2025a) *The Antidote: How People-Powered Movements Can Renew Politics, Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Bristol University Press.



This book offers an antidote to neoliberal, 'anti-social' welfare politics and policies in the UK (Beresford, 2025b). It presents a combined critique of neoliberalism and the general rightward shift and failures of politics, together with a critical diagnosis of harmful othering and wasteful welfare cuts. One of the important points made in this book is how neglect of disabled, elderly, young, and minoritised people's own experiences and knowledge deepens political processes of othering, and stigmatisation of people who are in need of help and support.

Peter Beresford is a social policy professor and key contributor to participatory social research practice in the UK. His advocacy and scholarship centre the experiences and knowledge of disabled people, mental health and other long term service users in social research, public policy and practice. He offers an open account of his

personal history as a service user, and involvement in the academic-activist field of Mad Studies which seeks to include people who identify as mad, mentally ill, service user or survivor, or disabled (see, for example, *The International Mad Studies Journal*, 2026). He is also a Co-Chair in the inclusive and intersectional disabled people's organisation, Shaping Our Lives (2026).

The book is in three parts: the opening section outlines the anti-social ideology of welfare austerity and failures of formal politics under neoliberalism, opening a gulf between political discourse and the social values that work on the personal level, and that most of us advocate and teach. The second section points to how 'new social movements' inform an alternative, grassroots approach and invites us to 'only connect'. The third and final section sets out a practical programme for building an alternative politics of inclusive connection, starting with what has gone wrong with communication in an age dominated by social media, big tech, and hard-right politics.

The first part begins by discussing neoliberalism's all-too-familiar consequences, at both individual and global levels. It explains how the gap has widened between formal politics and public understandings, on the one hand, and political and personal values and moralities on the other. Reactionary, right wing populist politics stand as a continuous threat, feeding into, and upon divisive politics. Internalised oppression and its projection, othering, stigmatisation and blame of others feed into, and off, reactionary politics. Neoliberalism promotes competition and 'aspirational politics', encouraging individuals to see themselves as better, and others as worse. Neoliberalism's micro-level effects impact people at the emotional and intimate level, while relying on commodification and exchange relationships to meet individuals' real needs.

The second part of the book addresses the failures of traditional politics but does not get stuck there. Most of the second part acts on the initial diagnosis, suggesting new routes for a different politics, and learning how to bring about change starting with our own lives, connecting with, and learning from, social movements, holding on to the principle of connecting on equal terms. The third and final part of this book seeks to build a new politics or connection on equal terms. Understanding what tends to go wrong with communication, learning

from lived experience and educating for empowerment and change are all key to the achievement of ‘truly inclusive’ communication. These prescriptions seem simple, and none of them are new, but it is a welcome relief to be given permission to return to these sound principles and to connect them in a pragmatic and logical way.

The advice to ‘only connect’, expressed by British modernists and cultural studies scholars at different points in the twentieth century leads to the ‘who’ of connection. Different emancipatory and activist groupings come under the umbrella of ‘new social movements’ to challenge oppression and discrimination, including disabled people, Black civil rights, LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Aromantic), and women’s movements. Connecting these movements enables diverse but disparate minorities to become a majority, capable of facing down the current status quo of minority rule by a destructive ‘overclass’. Politics seems driven by communicative failures, media monopolies, and political pandering to the far right. These failures can only be answered with a focus on first-person communication, speaking and listening to each other (Beresford, 2025a:149).

For this journal’s community and its central focus on development education, development and global citizenship education represent the most obvious structured opportunities to implement ‘the antidote’ of interpersonal dialogue and challenge, group discussion, resisting discrimination, and connecting to new social movements for change. What we have been less good at is integrating a critique of how neoliberalism runs in, and through formal education. We have seldom directly challenged the reactionary reforms which have deepened segregation, imposed privatisation, and widened hierarchies of knowledge. Hierarchy and entrenched divisions have reversed previous goals of social mobility that characterised educational systems half a century ago. Curriculum reform has become about micromanagement, rigidly imposed syllabuses, and the turn away from egalitarian education, and back to hierarchical, conformist, ‘banking’ or bucket-filling ideals (Ibid.: 197).

Beresford's humanistic and connected philosophy of education draws on the liberatory ideas of Fanon and Freire, but also the humane and outspoken, Black and gay writer, James Baldwin (Ibid.: 202). Chapter 15 on education pulls together and expands our familiar tools of critical pedagogy, community development, anti-poverty action, empowerment, consciousness-raising, adult education, critical race theory, participatory learning and research, decolonisation, and women's and queer studies, drawing them together towards an integrated analysis and inclusive connection.

Prefigurative politics comes about when people learn to work together and when current progressive learning becomes able to move from the private and personal sphere to the political sphere. Beresford questions the conventional charge levelled at new social movements, accusing them of undermining class-based solidarity with fragmented campaigns for particular rights. Returning to the user-led organisation, *Shaping Our Lives*, Beresford explains how their organisation used research to explore the relationship between diverse involvement and solidarity. Working together meant challenging all forms of discrimination and resisting external pressures to 'divide and rule' (Ibid.: 228). Challenging dominant neoliberal politics requires people to come together and to recognise what they have in common, and avoid falling for social division, fear and loathing (Ibid.: 229). Recognising common oppression and developing a common, anti-oppressive solidarity can draw from how new social movements have learned to oppose exclusion and discrimination, together, to fight oppression and stigmatisation, oppose hate crime, and overcome barriers to attain commonality. Since no identity is unitary anyway, recognising overlaps and cross-cutting identities, and building solidarity across them makes more practical sense than retreating to exclusive and fragmented interests.

The author recently shared on social media a hand-drawn sketch of two three-legged stools, side-by-side: the first depicts 'the three-legged stool of hate and perdition'. The seat of hate and perdition is upheld by three problems: 'positivist science and research' that prioritises empiricism and 'hard facts' over people's experiences and feelings, 'colonisation and white privilege', and 'neoliberalism'. The second, contrasting seat of 'hope and renewal' is upheld by the 'legs' of 'inclusive involvement', 'sustainability' and 'decolonisation'. This image

encapsulates much of what this book has to offer – a diagnosis of problems that are already familiar to the readership and authors who find community in this journal, and an antidote that many have been looking for – a connected and structural prescription for hope, addressing the pillars of hate directly, while also reconsidering how research can re-centre the experiences of people who are struggling for justice.

Neoliberalism has shown itself to be anti-democratic and politically, economically, and morally bankrupt, while the author argues that sustainability is the most urgent argument for challenging neoliberalism. However, the content of sustainability appears only at the very end of the book and is discussed in a rather schematic way that doesn't really address substantive environmental concerns. Readers more versed in environmentally-based social action will have to make additional efforts to connect environmental and social justice concerns.

An alternative economy that prioritises looking after each other and the planet we live on ultimately echoes the original concept of sustainable development that emerged half a century ago (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Inclusive connection thus implies a need to work harder to combine social justice and environmental social movements, connecting not only people to people, but also people to planet with non-discrimination, equality and inclusion at the forefront.

References

Beresford, P (2025b) 'Blog: Finding an antidote for anti-social politics and policy', *Social Policy Association*, 8 July, available: <https://social-policy.org.uk/news/finding-an-antidote-for-anti-social-politics-and-policy/> (accessed 12 March 2026).

Shaping Our Lives: Inclusive Involvement Matters (2026) available: <https://shapingourlives.org.uk/> (accessed 06 July 2026).

The International Mad Studies Journal (2026) available: <https://imsj.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/imsj> (accessed 06 July 2026).

World Commission for Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

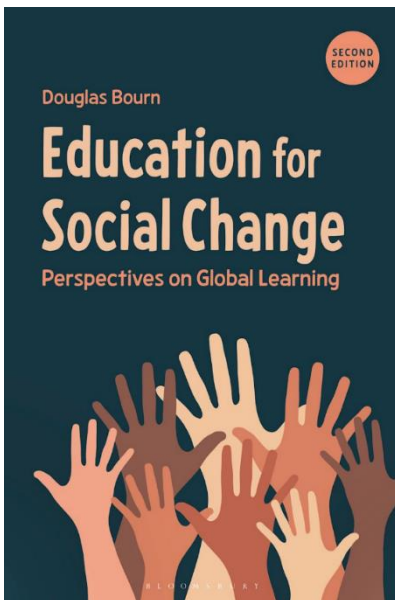
Su-ming Khoo is Professor in Sociology at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL LEARNING

GERTRUDE COTTER

Citation: Cotter, G (2026) 'Education for Social Change: Perspectives on Global Learning', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 211-217.

Douglas Bourn (2024) *Education for Social Change: Perspectives on Global Learning* (2nd ed.), London: Bloomsbury Academic.



Introduction

Douglas Bourn's *Education for Social Change* (second edition) is unapologetically ambitious in both scope and intent. It offers a comprehensive and carefully structured account of how education has been mobilised, historically and in the present, as a vehicle for social change. Building on the first edition, the volume brings together a wide range of traditions, concepts, and practices associated with development education, global learning, global citizenship, peace education, education for sustainability, and transformative learning. Its aim is not modest: it seeks to map the intellectual genealogy of education for social change, to examine its pedagogical

implications across sectors, and to situate these debates within national, civil society, and international policy contexts. It is a much-needed and highly valuable contribution to development education scholarship.

This second edition feels particularly timely. It appears at a moment when the need for a pedagogy of hope is not abstract but urgent. Across multiple contexts, educators and learners are grappling with democratic backsliding, intensifying climate and biodiversity crises, renewed militarisation, and deepening social and economic inequalities. Ongoing mass violence and genocide against civilian populations, alongside protracted conflict and famine in Sudan, raise profound questions about the role of education in contexts of structural injustice, colonial legacies, and moral rupture. At the same time, increasingly coercive migration and border regimes in Europe and North America, and the criminalisation of protest and dissent, underline how questions of power, voice, and belonging are being reshaped in troubling ways.

These global dynamics are inseparable from local realities. In Ireland, for example, the housing crisis has exposed the limits of market-driven policy approaches and the social consequences of persistent inequality, particularly for young people, migrants, and marginalised communities. Such contexts challenge educators to connect global structures of injustice with lived experience, and to move beyond abstract notions of citizenship or participation. It is within this landscape that *Education for Social Change* makes its strongest contribution. Rather than offering simplistic calls to action, the volume insists on education that is historically informed, ethically grounded, and attentive to power. The emphasis on hope throughout the book is therefore not naïve optimism, but a call for critical, collective, and informed engagement at a time when education itself is increasingly contested terrain.

Structure and scope

The volume is organised into thirteen chapters, followed by a substantial concluding synthesis. The opening chapters trace the historical and ideological roots of education for social change, beginning with human rights education and moving through education for democracy, liberation, and socialism. These chapters situate contemporary debates within longer intellectual traditions, drawing on thinkers such as Dewey, Gandhi, Nyerere, Freire, Tawney, and later critical pedagogues. The middle section develops what Bourn frames as a pedagogical architecture for social change, structured around four interrelated domains: social justice, peace, sustainability, and global citizenship, underpinned

by transformative learning. Subsequent chapters explore how these commitments are enacted across different educational sites and actors, including teachers, young people, universities, civil society organisations, and international bodies such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), and GENE (Global Education Network Europe).

One of the most striking features of the book is its consistency of structure. Each chapter combines conceptual discussion, policy analysis, research evidence, and illustrative examples of practice, followed by reflective questions. This makes the volume particularly accessible for use in higher education teaching, professional development, and postgraduate study, while still maintaining academic rigour. This is particularly evident in the chapters on teachers and young people, where Bourn moves beyond abstract discussion to consider how educators and learners navigate competing demands in practice. The discussion of teachers as agents of change, for example, highlights the tensions between curriculum constraints, institutional expectations, and the desire to engage critically with issues such as inequality, sustainability, and global justice. These moments, where conceptual framing meets lived educational realities, are among the book's most effective.

Contributions to the field

A central contribution of *Education for Social Change* is its capacity to hold together multiple traditions that are often treated separately. Bourn consistently resists reducing education for social change to a single domain as global citizenship or education for sustainable development. Instead, he argues for an integrated approach in which social justice provides the connective tissue across themes. The chapters on social justice and peace education are particularly strong in articulating how pedagogical approaches informed by critical pedagogy move beyond awareness-raising towards questions of power, inequality, and agency. Drawing on Giroux, Freire, Reardon, Galtung, and others, Bourn foregrounds the importance of education that encourages critical engagement, dialogue, and collective responsibility, rather than technocratic or skills-only approaches.

Similarly, the chapter on education for sustainable development avoids a purely instrumental reading of the Sustainable Development Goals. While recognising their policy influence, Bourn engages with critical scholarship that highlights their limitations, including depoliticisation, contradictions around economic growth, and unequal power relations. His discussion of ecopedagogy and systems thinking usefully re-centres sustainability education within broader debates on social transformation. Another important contribution lies in the book's attention to actors and institutions. Chapters on teachers, young people, universities, civil society organisations, and international bodies illustrate how education for social change is shaped by organisational cultures, professional identities, and political constraints. In particular, the discussions of teachers as agents of change and young people as social actors strike a careful balance between recognising agency and avoiding romanticised or over-burdening expectations.

Policy engagement and institutional legibility

One of the most defining features of Bourn's work, clearly evident in this volume, is his sustained engagement with policy frameworks and institutional contexts. UNESCO, UNICEF (United Nations' Children's Fund), OECD, and European policy initiatives are treated not merely as background influences, but as active shapers of how education for social change is framed, resourced, and evaluated. This policy engagement is both a strength and a point of tension. On the one hand, it lends the book considerable legitimacy and usefulness within formal education systems. Bourn demonstrates how concepts such as global citizenship, sustainability, and peace have gained traction precisely because they can be aligned, however imperfectly, with institutional priorities and international agreements.

On the other hand, the book repeatedly acknowledges the risk that education for social change becomes diluted when absorbed into dominant policy discourses. The analysis is careful and measured, often identifying 'spaces' or 'openings' within existing structures rather than calling for more confrontational or disruptive forms of resistance. While this reflects a pragmatic engagement with real-world educational contexts, it also raises a question that runs quietly through the book: whether working within these structures ultimately limits how far education for social change can go in challenging them.

Postcolonial and decolonial tensions

An important, if understated, tension running through the book concerns the relationship between education for social change and postcolonial or decolonial critique. Bourn engages substantively with thinkers from the global South, most notably Freire, Nyerere, and Gandhi, and repeatedly acknowledges the enduring influence of colonial power relations. Civil society organisations, youth movements, and global learning traditions rooted in the global South are recognised as key contributors to the field. However, postcolonial and decolonial frameworks are largely treated as important perspectives within the field, rather than as epistemological challenges that fundamentally reconfigure it. The dominant architecture of the book remains grounded in a broadly liberal-progressive tradition that seeks reform, expansion, and critical reflection within existing educational and political structures.

For some readers, this will be a strength. It allows the book to function as a shared reference point across diverse audiences and avoids the fragmentation that can accompany more polarised theoretical positions. However, for those working explicitly within decolonial, abolitionist, or anti-capitalist traditions, the book may feel more cautious than critical. While issues such as colonial legacies and global inequalities are clearly acknowledged, the analysis stops short of fully engaging with the more disruptive implications of decolonial critique - particularly in relation to epistemic justice, settler colonialism, and the structural limits of reform-oriented approaches to education.

Pedagogy, hope, and the question of change

The concluding chapters and final synthesis return to the themes of hope, futures, and pedagogy. Drawing on Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* and futures education scholarship, Bourn argues that education for social change must sustain a forward-looking orientation, even amid crisis and uncertainty. The emphasis on hope is consistent throughout the volume, but it is handled with care. This is not a hopeful narrative in any superficial sense. Rather, hope is framed as a deliberate pedagogical stance, one that insists on the possibility of change while remaining grounded in the realities of conflict, inequality, and uncertainty. At the same time, it raises a persistent and sometimes uncomfortable question within critical

education: whether hope can soften the sharper edges of critique. Bourn is clearly aware of this tension, but ultimately positions education as a space for engagement, dialogue, and gradual transformation, rather than rupture. This is a coherent and defensible position, even if some readers may wish for a more confrontational account of change.

Conclusion

Education for Social Change is an impressive, thoughtful, and carefully argued volume. Its strength lies not in advancing a single, dominant theoretical claim, but in its ability to hold together a complex and often fragmented field with clarity, balance, and intellectual generosity. It will be of significant value to academics, educators, postgraduate students, and practitioners working across development education, global citizenship, sustainability, and social justice education.

At a time when education is increasingly drawn into political, economic, and ideological struggles, the book offers a grounded and accessible framework for thinking about its role in social change. At the same time, it leaves some important questions deliberately unresolved, particularly around the limits of policy-aligned approaches and the depth of engagement with decolonial critique. In this sense, the book does more than consolidate the field; it quietly challenges readers to decide how far they are willing to go within it. That tension between pragmatism and transformation, is where its most important contribution lies.

Gertrude Cotter is a lecturer in the School of Education at University College Cork. Her work focuses on global citizenship and development education, critical global justice education, and the role of higher education in addressing inequality, power, and global responsibility. She is Academic Coordinator of the Praxis Project, a university-wide initiative supporting staff and students to engage critically with global justice issues through participatory, creative, and action-oriented pedagogies. Her research interests include critical pedagogy, decolonial and anti-racist approaches to education, North–South partnerships, and the use of creative and arts-based

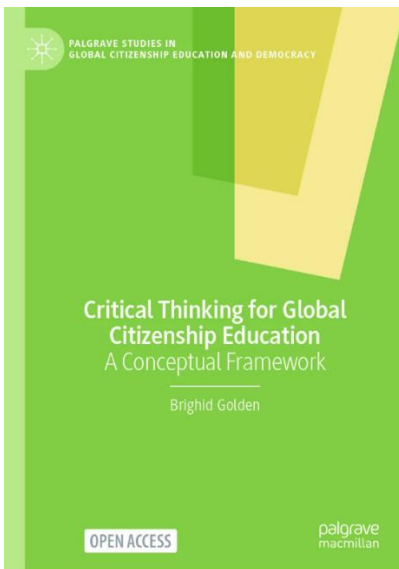
methodologies in teaching and research. She works across community, policy, and higher education contexts, with a strong commitment to ethically grounded and socially engaged scholarship.

(RE)PURPOSING ‘THE CRITICAL’: A REVIEW OF *CRITICAL THINKING FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK*

DALILA PINTO COELHO

Citation: Pinto Coelho, D (2026) ‘(Re)Purposing “The Critical”: A Review of *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework*’, *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 218-226.

Brigid Golden (2025) *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, available in open access at: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-89642-2>



Introduction

Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework is a book authored by Brigid Golden, as part of the Palgrave Studies in Global Citizenship Education and Democracy Series. The book stems from the author's doctorate thesis (Golden, 2022), under the sponsorship of the Development and Intercultural Education (DICE) Project and Irish Aid. The research was conducted in Ireland, a particularly interesting context with an extended tradition in global citizenship education (GCE) (see McAuley and Wegimont, 2026 for a recent overview).

The book dialogues closely with several interests of *Policy and Practice* readers. From an initial stage, the author clarifies her positioning regarding GCE. Golden describes GCE as being a distinctive yet porous field, a 'collective commitment to global justice' (Golden,

2025: 5). It operates in-between theory and practice, academia and civil society working in the scope of GCE, and in need of keeping the connection to its activist roots alive while expanding and linking past, present and future events. This overall framing makes this work potentially relevant to other contexts, most particularly European countries with similar GCE trajectories (Bourn, 2015; Scheunpflug and Wegimont, 2024).

Golden reminds us of the complexity and uncertainty of present times, with unprecedented and resurfacing challenges, for which critical GCE is argued as having the utmost importance. Global citizenship education is positioned in the book at several intersections, that shape the way GCE is presented. First, the work addresses the ‘nexus between the fields of critical thinking and global citizenship education’ (Golden, 2025: 3). Second, is the assumption that ‘education and teaching must be a conversation between theory and practice if we are to reach the ambitious goals of GCE’ (Ibid.: 4). This is very evident in the book’s structure and content, rendering it of both scientific and pedagogical value. Those aiming to gather theoretical insight and/or implementing GCE for critical thinking (CT) in education – the big ‘why’ of this book – will find this a useful resource. The text reads fluently and is organised in three parts and seven chapters.

Part one: the need for a framework for critical global learning

Part one is comprised of three chapters mostly covering the conceptual basis of the work. Chapter one guides the reader in understanding the definition and relevance of ‘critical global learning’, a terminology that Golden adopts throughout the text. Critical global learning intersects critical thinking and GCE and is:

“(...) a reflective educational process founded on the values of global justice, equity and human rights. It focuses on engaging in understanding and questioning the dominant systems and structures which create and perpetuate multiple forms of inequality globally. It encourages us to consider how our lives interact with the questions being explored and fosters an interest in acting collectively to address inequality. It is a learning process which recognises different ways of

understanding the world and consequently draws on multiple perspectives to inform the learning process” (Ibid.: 12).

Critical global learning and critical thinking are briefly debated within wider education theory (specifically, civic education and the purpose of education), and with a consonant pedagogy that will later inform a Conceptual Framework proposed by the author. The chapter ends with an important note on the relevance of ‘reflexivity, self-awareness, and positionality in the context of critical global learning’ (Ibid.: 17-21). Here the author discusses personal trajectory and pitfalls, how power imbalances in teacher-student relationships limit possibilities for CT and ‘authentic engagement with self-reflection’ (Ibid.: 19) or how the multiple roles we assume can, inadvertently, hinder or compete with *doing* critical GCE.

Chapter two is devoted to unpacking the concept of critical thinking, situating how it intersects with GCE, and discusses criticisms common to CT. The chapter opens with a questioning of CT as a ‘universal good (...) repeatedly listed as an outcome of education’ and debates ‘whether there is a need to exercise caution when engaging in criticality with our learners’ (Ibid.: 27). It continues briefly listing classical definitions of CT, that present it as a multidimensional and ‘cross-disciplinary skill’ (Ibid.: 32). The centrality of CT to GCE is well explored in this chapter and remaining parts of the book. Many of the endeavours of (critical) GCE are in fact related to the self-reflection and perspective shifting that CT seeks to achieve. Furthermore, personal change and the possibility of impacting global issues are also linked to critical thinking, although the latter should not be conflated with social change.

Citing thinkers like Paulo Freire and bell hooks, the author emphasises the potential of CT ‘to be a catalyst for change by opening learners up to alternative ways of thinking and challenging hegemonic thinking’ (Ibid.: 33). The chapter ends with a very interesting reflection on common critiques of CT, which is useful to address the concept in theory and in practice, an aspect I will return to later.

Chapter three expands on the purpose and process of developing a framework that articulates both critical GCE and CT, covering the methodological aspects of its design, testing and sourcing. The author provides a clear description of the methodological choices leading up to the framework, which comprises a model and a planning tool. As is often the case, Golden created the resource that she needed for responding to the challenges of teaching GCE and critical thinking in initial teacher education (ITE), the sector in which she works. The framework is grounded on an extensive piece of research, based on a self-study about the author's teaching experience, using three cycles of action-research, during three academic years, with large cohorts of future primary teachers in Irish higher education. The framework was tested and fine-tuned across the cycles, with the input of students and critical friends (teaching peers). As someone who values deeply the systematic understanding of GCE experiences (e.g. Coelho et al., 2025), I found the author's choice of researching her own practice inspiring and very significant.

Part two: a conceptual framework for critical global learning

The second part of the book includes two chapters that describe the *Model for Teaching Critical Global Learning* (chapter four) and the *Planning Tool* designed to support the implementation of the model (chapter five). The framework is theoretically informed by Freire's (1974) *Critical Consciousness*, Boler's (1999) *Pedagogy of Discomfort*, Bourn's (2015) *Pedagogy of Development Education* and Andreotti and de Souza's *Through Other Eyes* (2008). It adopts 'an interactive approach to teaching which is focused on dialogue, modelling skills and attitudes, sharing challenging content knowledge, and supporting students to engage with and reflect on their learning' (Golden, 2025: 13).

The final Model is a three-part converging scheme, comprising nine main elements and twenty-one sub-elements. The main parts cover *Considerations for Teaching*, *Critical Global Learning Skills* and *A Commitment to Criticality*. This last part lies at the centre of the scheme, operating as a core pillar and, to my view, an end goal: 'the crucial anchor necessary for students to become critical global learners and to develop and build on the skills included within this model' (Ibid.: 68). The author carefully walks us through each of the parts, elements and sub-elements of the model over chapter four, explaining the

theoretical basis of each component, and at times, their practical and pedagogical reasoning as well.

Complementing the Model is an explanation and visual representation of the Planning Tool (chapter five). The author uses a funnel-type scheme with three levels of input: *Lesson Elements*, *Pre-conditions for Learning*, and *Outcomes* (Ibid.: 98). The chapter has a very practical undertone which I found quite useful. While higher education, particularly ITE, is the context for implementation of this tool, its content can be adapted to other formal and nonformal education settings. Golden aimed for a mindful application of these elements to ensure they are equitably incorporated in all lessons (e.g., ensuring a balance between skills and content focus).

The Planning Tool is quite complete and mirrors the reality of preparing future teachers, yet Golden's in-text explanation is needed for an accurate interpretation of the scheme. The scheme includes the 'sub-elements' but not the designation of the main elements which they represent (lesson elements, pre-conditions) and at times, the splitting of sub-elements that belong together limited a more immediate reading of the scheme.

Part three: considerations for the implementation of this conceptual framework for critical global learning

The final part of the book is comprised of chapters six and seven. The book closes its trajectory supporting readers in applying inputs concretely and contextually. In chapter six the author explores common challenges and tensions when implementing critical GCE. Chapter seven reflects on 'opportunities for critical global learning (...) with a comment on considerations for readers when planning for the implementation of critical global learning in their own contexts' (Ibid.: 21).

The tensions explored in chapter six cover aspects related to the pedagogical dimension, to the student and to external influences, which are aligned with the conceptual model devised and a good example of how research can inform and feed-back teaching processes. I particularly enjoyed the way this chapter (as well as four and five) is well grounded in education literature,

particularly, teacher action and development. The author also takes us on an honest and thorough reflexive journey of researching her own practice and seeking ways to improve it accordingly, which is quite useful for those engaged in teaching and (higher education) pedagogy.

I felt that some elements like opportunities, enablers and barriers to GCE, that feature in chapter seven, could have been explored in chapter one. However, the author's aim appears to have been to end the book by 'passing the baton' to the reader through the sustainable incorporation of the Framework's (model and planning tool) into the reader's practice. To this end, Golden proposes a five-step plan evolving from the individual to the contextual focus and finally, personalising and implementing the Framework.

On (re)purposing 'the critical'

The book makes two important contributions to the broader field of global education, both of which are transferable into research and practice. The first is the 'two-part conceptual framework for teaching critical global learning' (Ibid.: 49), that combines a 'model for teaching' and a 'planning tool'. Although scholarship about critical GCE has expanded, it is not uncommon to find a certain lack of specificity regarding what exactly is critical GCE and how it can be delivered. The Framework enables discussion, and envisions and maps critical GCE, and positions the purpose of criticality more clearly. According to the author, the Framework's power lies in synthesising longstanding components of GCE that have not necessarily been articulated and systematised. Thus the:

“(...) core purpose of the conceptual framework, [is] not to reinvent the wheel or present an entirely new and unseen approach to critical thinking development or GCE, but to cohesively and accessibly bring together research-informed strategies, and best practice in a way which is manageable to implement in the classroom” (Ibid.: 50).

Golden also claims the 'research study offers a new conceptualisation of critical global learning' (Ibid.: 160). However, precisely because some version of the diverse components of the Framework has been proposed elsewhere, the conceptual innovation lacks clarity. To this end, it would have been important to

systematically and critically review other conceptual models of GCE that dialogue or contrast with the work presented (e.g. dimensions of GCE proposed by Oxfam, UNESCO, OECD, the Council of Europe). Interestingly, Golden does engage with some of this literature, however, it is often to justify the relevance of CT and not so much the GCE aspect. Contrasting what these or other more recent models (e.g. Bosio and Schattle, 2023; Bosio, 2025) offer and where they overlap in the light of the author's proposal would have been important and a good way of positioning this work and the reader within previous literature more explicitly.

Moreover, while offering an entry point to understand what critical GCE is, at times a deeper dialogue with previous literature, particularly addressing non-western realities (e.g. Akkari and Malek, 2020) would have strengthened the book. Golden includes an interpretation of critical GCE that is clear, yet a bit circumscribed considering the field's diversity. The existence of many 'definitions of GCE' (Ibid.: 73, 135) is mentioned, however, engaging with them (and specially, its different orientations) remains limited (see e.g. Andreotti, 2016; Pashby et al, 2020).

This also concerns a need for inclusion of other empirical studies already conducted that align with the book's focus, and other general aspects of GCE theory and practice that would have been productive to the topic of the 'critical' more broadly. Exploring how 'the critical' has been addressed in recent reviews of the critical orientation and how it intersects with other GCE traditions (see, e.g. Pashby et al., 2020) would allow for a more nuanced vision. Overall, given critical GCE is the book's focus, a structured albeit concise positioning of critical GCE alongside other conceptual interpretations and similar empirical studies conducted could have improved the book's depth and outreach.

The second point to highlight is the focus on critical thinking, a much needed reflection for the global and development education space. In fact, being 'critical', is predominant across the GCE field, even though it is not always clear what critical means. To this regard, an interesting entry point brought by Golden was the discussion of common critiques to CT, such as the ambiguity and (therefore) the impossibility of teaching CT, its potential to 'devalue other ways of knowing', its intrinsic value-neutrality, and finally the counterproductive nature of

CT (Ibid.: pp. 34-43). In fact, this discussion ends by interweaving tensions that are highly relevant to GCE (and critical pedagogy at large). As a reader, linking GCE and CT acted as a meta-reflection that contributed to repurpose ‘the critical’ dimension of GCE.

Overall, through the Framework, experiences and insights presented, the book makes an interesting contribution to critical global education, grounded in the principles presented by the author as key: ‘a critical approach, the centrality of dialogue, the importance of active and participatory learning, and a pedagogy of discomfort’ (Golden, 2025: 13). Researchers, teachers and practitioners in the critical GCE space and/or focused on teaching critical thinking looking for a structured tool to implement and reflect on their practice might find this a very useful resource for professional development.

References

Akkari, A and Maleq, K (2020) ‘Rethinking Global Citizenship Education: A Critical Perspective’ in A Akkari and K Maleq (eds.) *Global Citizenship Education: Critical and International Perspectives*, Cham: Springer, pp. 205-217.

Andreotti, V (2016) ‘Global Education and Social Change: The Imperative to Engage with Different Discourses in H Hartmeyer and L Wegimont (eds.) *Global Education in Europe Revisited: Strategies and Structures, Policy, Practice and Challenges*, Münster: Waxmann, pp. 199-203.

Bosio, E (2025) [2023] ‘Global South University Educators’ Perceptions of Global Citizenship Education: Reflective Dialogue, Social Change, and Critical Awareness’, *Prospects* 55, 67–81.

Bosio, E, and Schattle, H (2023) [2021] ‘Ethical Global Citizenship Education: From Neoliberalism to a Values-based Pedagogy’, *Prospects*, 53, pp. 287–297.

Bourn, D (2015) *The Theory and Practice of Development Education: A Pedagogy for Social Justice*, Oxon: Routledge.

Coelho, D P, Caramelo, J, Amorim, JP and Menezes, I (2025) [2022] ‘Towards the Transformative Role of Global Citizenship Education Experiences in Higher Education: Crossing Students’ and Teachers’ Views, *Journal of Transformative Education*, 23(2), 149–164.

Golden, B (2022) *Critical Global Learning: Lessons from a Self-Study Action Research Project within Initial Teacher Education in Ireland*, PhD thesis, available: <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/82932/> (accessed 20 May 2026).

Golden, B (2025) *Critical Thinking for Global Citizenship Education: A Conceptual Framework*, Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, available: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-89642-2> (accessed 20 May 2026).

McAuley, J and Wegimont, L (2026) *Global Education in Ireland: The European Global Education Peer Review Process - National Report on Global Education in Ireland*, Dublin: Global Education Network Europe.

Pashby, K, da Costa, M, Stein, S and Andreotti, V (2020) 'A Meta-review of Typologies of Global Citizenship Education', *Comparative Education*, 56(2), pp. 144-164.

Scheunpflug, A and Wegimont, L (eds.) (2024) *Global Education in Europe: National Histories*, Volume 1, Second edition, Dublin: Global Education Network Europe (GENE).

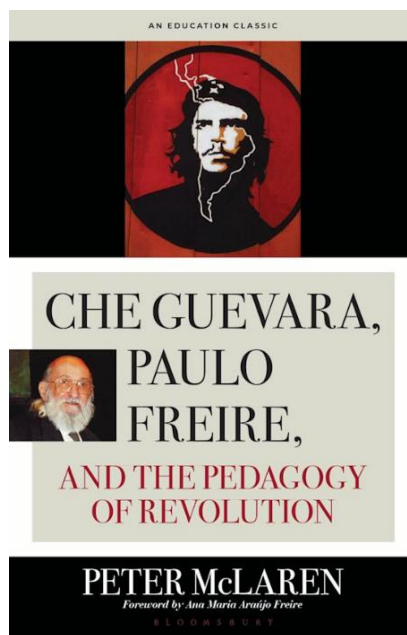
Dalila Pinto Coelho is an assistant professor in and a full member of the Centre for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE) of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at the University of Porto (Portugal). With a background in educational sciences and international development, her work intersects global education, citizenship, and development issues through post and decolonial scholarship. E-mail: dalilacoelho@fpce.up.pt.

CHE GUEVARA, PAULO FREIRE, AND THE PEDAGOGY OF REVOLUTION

GERARD MCCANN

Citation: McCann, G (2026) 'Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of Revolution', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Volume 43, Autumn, pp. 227-230.

Peter McLaren (2025) *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.



Introduction

In 2017, Aleida Guevara, the eminent Cuban physician and daughter of the revolutionary leader Che, gave a talk on medical advances in Cuba to a Belfast audience. Surprising to many, her reflections were not about her famous father or the big global politics that has dominated Cuba since the 1930s, but about innovation in healthcare in the global South. Revealing and resolutely developmental, Aleida was following in the footsteps of her father in the sense of duty and service to the vulnerable and exploited. In a world of celebrity and non-truths, governed by billionaires and oligarchs, honesty and a focus on human needs are powerful attributes of human agency.

Peter McLaren's book on two key revolutionary figures from the twentieth century, Paulo Freire and Che Guevara, gives us this direct reminder of individuals struggling for a better world in a history of inequality and oppression. Starting with the execution of Guevara in Bolivia on 9 October 1967, he navigates his way through Latin American liberation struggles, the Sandinistas, Chiapas,

Zapatistas and Mayans, referencing globalisation and neoliberalism along the way. Criticism of wealth injustice is weaved into every page in one way or another. The brutality of pro-Western governments and militias in Latin America in the twentieth century is examined in detail, the horrors of a new colonialism laid bare against the privileges of its apologists and slogans. As with Freire, Guevara is defined by McLaren as a new type of revolutionary agent, moulded by what he saw as ‘a critical, self-reflective agent of social transformation’ (McLaren, 2025: 71). With Che, the creation of the ‘new man’ [new human] was central to a universal revolution of the human experience.

The context and drive

What is brought out in the book is Che’s deep understanding of the role of learning in this. His love of reading as an act of resistance, manifesting itself in his prolific journal writing; teaching literacy classes in the Sierra Maestra, building schools in the Las Villas and reading *Faust* and other classics to the patients of the Jose J. Puente Leprosarium. Indeed, this ‘educator’ trait is brought out very strongly in the book, where McLaren notes that: ‘The importance of learning was so prominent in Che’s itinerary of the revolutionary that among his last words before he was executed included the remark, “tell Aleida ... to keep the children studying”’ (Ibid.: 76). As with Freire, a gift to the poor was the freedom of consciousness that learning could bring, and the lifting of the marginalised from the societal protectorate that globally – and historically - restricted education to the reserve of the elites.

And this educational spirit is where we have the link between the two protagonists in the book, a moral and philosophical link in a shared commitment to humanisation, society, transformation, and praxis - the unity of reflection and action. The methods were different, the circumstances extreme (particularly with Che) but the moral imperative was the same. ‘Che argued that material incentives should eventually be replaced by moral incentives’ (Ibid.: 96). For Freire, a stalwart of the Brazilian liberationist movement: ‘Each word was associated with issues related to existential questions about life and the social factors that determined the economic conditions of everyday existence’ (Ibid.: 143). Guevara pursued armed revolution and Freire championed critical literacy, both ‘options for the poor’. Both aimed to dismantle oppressive structures to cultivate what

they recognised as a new social paradigm for humanity. Freire deeply admired Guevara's leadership style, viewing it as a model of dialogue rather than elite imposition. Both thinkers rejected paternalistic systems, insisting that true liberation requires the oppressed to become active subjects of history, driven by a profound, radical love for humanity. This generated an evolving understanding of critical pedagogy. As McLaren puts it:

“Critical pedagogy and multicultural education need more than good intentions to achieve their goal. They require a revolutionary movement of educators informed by a principled ethics of compassion and social justice, a socialist ethos based on solidarity and social interdependence, and a language of critique that is capable of grasping the objective laws of history” (Ibid.: 101).

Mid-twentieth century Latin America was a crucible of intellectual, educational and political upheaval, defined by a quest to destroy the shackles of military dictatorship, economic dependency, and colonial legacies. Respectively, in Argentina and Brazil, Guevara and Freire emerged from a turbulent and violent context of oppression. They were both products of their circumstances and while Guevara famously and honestly wielded violence to dismantle oppressive structures, Freire utilised critical literacy to dismantle cognitive oppression. McLaren conveys this perfectly: ‘Reading and writing thus became grounded in the lived experiences of peasants and workers and resulted in a process of ideological struggle...’ (Ibid.: 143).

Their developmental ecosystem

Far from being disparate actors on the historical stage – or the products of a commercialist revisionism – Guevara and Freire operated within the same philosophical ecosystem. They shared a radical vision of human liberation that emerged from the revolutionary context of Latin America and they celebrated humanism in its broadest sense. Struggle was their shared meaning in life. Their common goal to bring about shifts in power is a given – that is the nature of politically conscious people – but it was more than that, it was about creating a society that enabled the ontological rebirth of the human character. Peter McLaren, a critical theorist to the core, has been able to bridge their respective

contexts, demonstrating that Guevara's learned insurgency and Freire's critical pedagogy are two sides of the same coin: a unified 'pedagogy of revolution'. To draw from the last words of the book, it was a about 'the transformation of the human heart' (Ibid.: 204).

This book is a useful reminder of the role of education in development. It gives a good sense of the struggles that highly vulnerable people must go through to have the right to learn, and the dedication needed by teachers to fulfil this hope. The book lights up the lives of two extraordinary characters who have shaped our understanding of Latin America and the context from which they emerged. Overall, the message McLaren brings to our insight into the lives of Guevara and Freire is their steadfast belief in the potential of humanity to change things for the better.

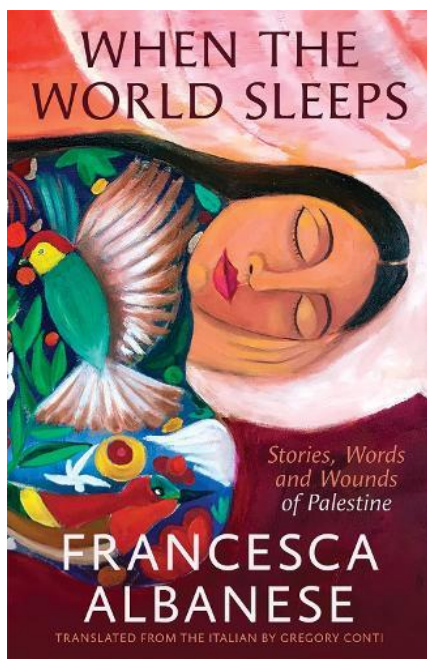
Gerard McCann is Professor of International Studies and Principal Lecturer at St Mary's University College, Queen's University Belfast.

WHEN THE WORLD SLEEPS: STORIES, WORDS AND WOUNDS OF PALESTINE

STEPHEN MCCLOSKEY

Citation: McCloskey, S (2026) 'When the World Sleeps: Stories, Words and Wounds of Palestine', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 43, Autumn, pp. 231-242.

Francesca Albanese (2026) *When the World Sleeps: Stories, Words and Wounds of Palestine*, Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books.



Introduction

Francesca Albanese is Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 and, in the age of genocide which has seen 72,945 Palestinians killed by Israeli occupation forces in Gaza, has become the most visible and principled defender of international humanitarian law. In July 2025, the United States government sanctioned Albanese after she published a report on corporate complicity in 'sustaining the Israeli settler-colonial project of displacement and replacement of the Palestinians in the occupied territory' (Albanese, 2025a: 1). With typically forensic detail, Albanese's report documented how forty-five corporate

entities have 'been implicated in human rights violations and international crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory' (Ibid.: 3). The US sanctions against Albanese bar her from entering the US and freeze her assets in the country. They

also prevent any US-based entity from doing business with her which denies her the use of a credit card (Aljazeera, 2026). These sanctions reflect how effective Albanese has been in documenting corporate and state complicity in Israel's occupation and colonisation of Palestine. Her work is always framed by the conventions of international law and she has steadfastly defended the rules-based order as countries across the global North have continued to trade with, arm, share intelligence with, and diplomatically support Israel's occupation of Palestine and genocide in Gaza. The complicity of third states that 'have enabled long-standing systematic violations of international law by Israel' was the subject of another Albanese report in 2025 (Albanese, 2025b).

When the World Sleeps is part memoir as it documents her travels through Palestine and the friendships that shaped her evolving knowledge of the territory. It reflects on the ten people who 'helped me open my eyes to see more clearly and to act for Palestine' (Albanese, 2026: 222). The book is also a very accessible introduction to the key legal arguments that Albanese has advanced to frame Israel's occupation of Palestine in international law. It is a book, therefore, that global educators and international development personnel will find useful to inform their own work in this area at a time of great peril for the rules-based order. I set out below the ten chapters and the main legal arguments and insights they carry.

Hind Rajab

Hind Rajab's story is the first in Albanese's book and is now known the world over as one of the most egregious crimes perpetrated by the Israeli military in its genocidal campaign in the Gaza Strip. Hind died with her aunt, uncle and four cousins when fleeing the Tel al-Hawa district of Gaza city on 29 January 2024. When their car came under attack from Israeli tanks, Hind was surrounded by her dead relatives with only her cousin, Layan Hamadeh, surviving. When Layan, too, died after calling the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) for emergency assistance, Hind remained on the phone with PRCS dispatchers for three hours pleading for help. Hind's final, agonising hours in conversation with the Red Crescent was the premise for a deeply moving and award-winning film called *The Voice of Hind Rajab* (Ben Hania, 2025). The car in which Hind and her relatives were travelling was riddled with more than 300 bullets despite Israeli soldiers

knowing that it was occupied by civilians (Albanese, 2026: 23).

Since this atrocity, Hind's name has been adopted by a legal foundation, The Hind Rajab Foundation (2026), that is 'dedicated to the quest for justice in response to the crimes against humanity, war crimes and human rights violations perpetrated by the Israeli state against Palestinians'. Hind's story is emblematic of how the childhood of Palestinians is being stolen or cruelly curtailed by Israeli occupation forces. A poll of 504 children in Gaza carried out in December 2024 found that '96% of children surveyed feel their death is imminent, while 49% have expressed a desire to die' (Reliefweb, 2024). Albanese reports that Hind's story is far from unusual. A two-year-old boy, Mohammed Tamimi, was shot in the head while travelling in his father's car in the occupied West Bank a few months before Hind's death (Albanese, 2026: 23). Albanese dedicated her third report as UN Rapporteur to children referring to the deprivation of childhood in the occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) as 'unchildling' (Ibid.: 26).

Her report was published before the start of Israel's genocide which has been an accelerant of childhood suffering with the number of child deaths in Gaza currently 21,283 (OCHA, 2026a). Additional to this total are the children left homeless, without one or both parents, critically injured, starved and diseased, and denied an education for nearly three years (Ibid.). As Albanese was denied authorisation by Israeli authorities to visit the OPT, she organised online focus groups with children in Gaza and the occupied West Bank to gather testimony of their lived experience under genocide, occupation and displacement. Their greatest fears are dying or losing their parents, being arrested or having their house demolished (Ibid.: 31). 'The home should be centre of their childhood, a safe haven where they can grow, explore, and dream' argues Albanese, but in Palestine 'protection is not found even within the walls of their homes' (Ibid.: 33). The silent unseen epidemic that attends the horrors visited on Palestinian children is trauma and the mental health scars that can last a lifetime and persist through successive generations. As Albanese suggests, the violence that is suffered by Palestinians 'is not only physical but psychological' (Ibid.: 35). Yet, she was struck, too, by the 'strong sense of discipline, resilience and mutual respect' in the focus groups with Palestinian children and praised the support networks that pervade Palestinian society (Ibid.: 38-39).

This chapter on childhood also reflects on the violence visited on Israeli children who, according to the Israeli philologist, Nurit Peled-Elhanan, quoted by Albanese are:

“educated from an early age to fear and suspect the other, to normalise violence, to perpetuate a worldview based on racial domination and oppression, shared by the ideology of their political leaders and often even by their own parents” (Ibid.: 42).

As Freire recognised, the ‘great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed (is) to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well’ (Freire, 2005: 44). Therefore, central to the liberation of Israeli society from the oppressive worldview through the lens of apartheid, domination and lawlessness is the liberation of the Palestinians. Children and young people are central to that endeavour and it is imperative that the unbearable human rights abuses visited on Hind Rajab and so many other Palestinian children are never repeated.

Experiencing the realities of occupation

Chapters two and three reflect on Albanese’s period of employment with the legal team in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, when she lived in the Old City of Jerusalem. As a divided city in which history is appropriated and misappropriated for contemporary political ends, Albanese (2026: 47) was able to lift the veil of ‘archaeological propaganda’ in the amiable and knowledgeable company of Abu Hassan the owner of Alternative Tours. Through Abu Hassan, she became a witness to the oppression of Palestinians who are subjected to four legal identities; those with Israeli citizenship in Israel (Palestinians of 1948); residents of East Jerusalem without Israeli citizenship; Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza where they hold Palestinian National Authority (PNA) identity cards but are de facto controlled by Israel (Ibid.: 49). These identities dictate their legal status, access to services and freedom of travel. Albanese and her partner, Max, travelled with Abu Hassan across the West Bank and discovered how the legal status of Palestinians under occupation impacts their daily lives in terms of rights to employment, education and housing, and the severe restraints imposed on the

exercise of their rights.

By contrast with the more reserved Abu Hassan was the more effusive George, a Palestinian engineer who befriended Albanese in Jerusalem and helped her navigate the Old City's 'impassable boundaries of apartheid' and 'oppressive tension' (Ibid.: 71). George and Abu Hassan helped her see the city through 'fresh eyes', not so much as tour guides but friends and travel companions who saw tourism not as 'cultural fusion' but the appropriation of Palestinian culture (Ibid.: 77). She learns about how the permit system helps maintain apartheid with residents of the West Bank only able to access Jerusalem with Israeli permits that are rarely issued. The permit system 'separates Palestinians from each other' and isolates 'them from their lands and families' (Ibid.: 83).

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism

Albanese's book is in many ways a tribute to the legal scholars who have informed and evolved her positions on the colonisation of Palestine. Chapter five is dedicated to Alon Confino, an Italian Israeli university professor who introduced Albanese to the use of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism which has conflated anti-Semitism with 'criticism of the State of Israel and its policies' (Ibid.: 89). This conflation risks associating all Jews with the State of Israel when there are many Jewish activists who campaign for a free Palestine (Jews Network for Palestine, 2026). As the Palestinian-American academic, Rashid Khalidi (2025) wrote: 'The IHRA definition deliberately, mendaciously and disingenuously conflates Jewishness with Israel, so that any criticism of Israel, or indeed description of Israeli policies, becomes a criticism of Jews'. The IHRA working definition conflates anti-Semitism with criticism of Zionism, the political ideology that is driving the colonisation of Palestinian land and the apparatus of apartheid that attends it. The dangers of this include the failure to 'focus on the *real* anti-Zionism that is repugnant and still exists' (Albanese, 2026: 90). Regrettably, twenty-five of the twenty-seven European Union states have adopted the IHRA working definition which is increasingly becoming a benchmark for assessing anti-Semitism despite a co-author of the IHRA working definition repudiating its uses (Khalidi, 2025). Worryingly, it has also been adopted by companies such as the airline Lufthansa which brings it into the workplace. Albanese quotes E. Tendayi Achiume, the

UN Rapporteur on racism who described the IHRA definition as contributing ‘to violations of human rights, including freedom of expression, right to assembly and political participation, among others’ (Ibid.: 96).

This chapter raises an issue of critical importance for the international development sector, particularly regarding its response to the genocide in Gaza. Albanese (Ibid.: 102-103) stresses that for too long the Palestinian issue has been:

“reduced to a humanitarian crisis, instead of being dealt with as a political issue to be resolved in accordance with international law. To confine ourselves to giving aid without addressing the structural causes of the crisis is to perpetuate injustice by normalising it, rather than doing everything possible to eradicate it”.

Addressing the Gaza genocide as a humanitarian issue will do nothing to fundamentally address the politically motivated annexation of Palestinian land and genocidal violence visited on Palestinians in Gaza and now Lebanon (OCHA, 2026b). Only the enforcement of international law will prevent the further erosion of the rules-based order implemented at the end of the Second World War and predicated upon multilateralism and the universal application of human rights.

Apartheid

Chapter six is dedicated to Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, an Austrian national who was a co-founder and former director of the Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights based in the occupied West Bank. Ingrid was also a co-founder of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement in 2005 which is led by Palestinian civil society with the aim of urging action that pressures Israel to comply with international law. Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement, BDS (2026) ‘upholds the simple principle that Palestinians are entitled to the same rights as the rest of humanity’. Albanese uses this chapter to recall the Dunnes Stores’ workers who came out on strike in 1984 in solidarity with Black South Africans subjected to a system of apartheid imposed by the National Party government between 1948 and 1994. Inspired by the Dunnes Stores’ workers, Ireland became the first Western country to impose a total ban

on the import of South African goods. The BDS movement is calling for a similar ban on Israeli imports, as well as disinvestment from the Israeli economy and sanctions on the Israeli government. Given the assessment of Israel as an apartheid state by Amnesty International, B'tselem and Human Rights Watch, Albanese (2026: 125) argues that the BDS movement 'must be supported in every possible way'. Investing in the Israeli economy, she argues, 'may have an implication or connection with the occupation and exploitation of Palestinians and their resources, and thus become a de facto act connected to criminal conduct' (Ibid.: 125).

Chapter seven discusses the toxic media coverage of the Gazan genocide through the story of Ghassan Abu Sitta, a British surgeon who worked extensively in Gaza's hospitals during the genocide and then found himself under attack by the British establishment. In return for sharing his experiences of the genocide on social media, he was suspended by the General Medical Council for being deemed unfit to practice medicine. His suspension was lifted for lack of evidence and the complaint against him shown to be politically motivated. Ghassan described Israel's genocidal project as like an iceberg with only the tip visible and the media apparatus enabling it rarely seen (Ibid.: 140). Ghassan was told by BBC journalists that he was on a list of those no longer to be interviewed by the corporation with the clear inference that when the message becomes uncomfortable then the messenger needs to be silenced. Ghassan's reports on the use of white phosphorous and repeated amputations carried out on minors injured in Israeli strikes sat uncomfortably with media efforts to frame the genocide as a 'conflict' (Ibid.: 144). Ghassan also shared stories of the targeting of health workers in Gaza with some of his colleagues tortured, sexually abused and killed in custody. A health worker in Gaza is two-and-a-half-times more likely to be killed by the Israelis (Ibid.: 145-146) with the UN reporting that 1,700 health workers were killed between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2025 (OCHA, 2026a). 'What can we do to stop all of this?', asks Albanese.

"How long will it go on while the world seems to be sleeping a stone-cold sleep and cannot keep its eyes open in the face of this wound that is as large as an entire people, this wound that no one seems to want to soothe or heal?" (Albanese, 2026: 147).

Forensic architecture

Eyal Weizman is the Director of the research agency, Forensic Architecture, based at Goldsmiths in the University of London. Through the use of spatial analysis and architectural tools, Forensic Architecture can reconstruct crimes and human rights abuses against Palestinians such as the murder of Hind Rajab and her family. In chapter eight, Albanese discusses how Weizman's spatial analysis reveals how 'Israeli colonies in the West Bank were strategically designed so that colonisation could create territorial fragmentation' (Ibid.: 154). The network of permanent and temporary checkpoints in the West Bank, the construction of the separation wall and the separate road network for Palestinians are designed to restrict movement and prevent a contiguous Palestinian state. As Albanese argues: 'it is evident that Israel has used architecture and geography as tools of power to consolidate its control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory' (Ibid.). Eyal Weizman applied the tools of Forensic Architecture (2024) to create a 'Cartography of Genocide' based on the collection of data 'related to attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the Israeli military'. It found that Israel's military conduct in Gaza indicates 'a systematic and organised campaign to destroy life, conditions necessary for life, and life-sustaining infrastructure' (Ibid.). This genocide, argues Weizman, 'does not start from scratch ... but (is) grafted onto preexisting structures and mechanisms' (Ibid.: 160). Weizman is one of many Israeli academics cited in Albanese's work for distinguished and courageous analysis and condemnation of Israel's genocide.

Art as resistance

The beautiful cover of Albanese's book seen above is the work of Malak Mattar, a talented artist who left Gaza on 6 October 2023 to take up a master's programme in London at a leading school of visual arts. Malak's story is told in chapter nine and is shared by many Gazans who have had the agony of family members left behind in Gaza where everyday brings the risk of death or life-changing injury. Eventually her family managed to find refuge in Egypt but they shared the guilt of the survivor leaving loved ones behind, both the living and the dead. Malak's father urged her to 'paint our lives, our struggle, all that we are going through' and her work is realising that goal (Ibid.: 181). The 'language of art', argues Malak, 'is the most powerful language against all forms of dehumanisation' (Ibid.: 180).

Chapter ten deals with the issue of trauma and healing, told through the work of Gabor Maté, a Canadian doctor and psychotherapist with Hungarian origins. He is the author with Daniel Maté of *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture* (Maté and Maté, 2022) which was reviewed by Caroline Murphy (2025) in *Policy and Practice*. Trauma is a critical issue for Palestinians who have been exposed to generations of conflict, forced displacement and now genocide. As Albanese writes: ‘trauma – especially when it occurs through a lack of emotional regulation – can also be interpreted in an intergenerational or collective perspective’ (Albanese, 2026: 185). Trauma can be internalised by an entire group and ‘feed a continuous sense of threat and mistrust in their collective view of the outside world’ (Ibid.: 185). She adds that minimising trauma can prevent the achievement of healing, particularly in regard to the ‘memory and pain of a genocide’ (Ibid.: 189).

The final chapter is reserved for Albanese’s partner Max, with whom she has journeyed through Palestine and shared the pain and stress of US sanctions and external pressure. Max and their daughter filed a lawsuit on Francesca’s behalf to have US sanctions against her lifted. This resulted in a temporary injunction, but she has since been returned to a list of state sanctioned individuals (Aljazeera, 2026). This is clearly a legal battle set to continue which is imposing intolerable pressure on their family. Francesca pays this tribute to Max: ‘Thank you for supporting me in these burdensome years, always encouraging me to persevere’ (Albanese, 2026: 216). Despite the opprobrium directed at Albanese and her family, she ends her book on a message of hope:

“hope can and should, also become a predisposition, a habit: something that we consider indispensable and to which we are also attached that we cannot do without it, beyond any logic or reasoning” (Ibid.: 218).

This reminds us that Paulo Freire considered one of the tasks of the progressive educator to ‘unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be’. ‘Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle’ (Freire, 1994: 3).

When the World Sleeps is ultimately an invocation to rouse ourselves from inertia, hopelessness and despair and actively engage with the causes and effects of Israel's genocide in Gaza which has now spread like an untreated cancer to southern Lebanon. This book provides a useful access point to the genocide by guiding us through the legal, colonial, spatial, psychological, historical and humanitarian dimensions and consequences of Israel's settler-colonial project in Palestine. As promised by the author in the preface, every story in the book 'offers a different, complementary lens from which to view the ongoing genocide and the global missteps that brought us to this point' (Ibid.: vxiii). It does not demand a deep and prior knowledge of the occupation of Palestine and will reward both readers coming to this question for the first time and those already equipped with a degree of understanding of the issue. Indeed, it could be a useful launching point for a deeper dive into the colonisation of Palestine given the number of literary references and recommendations it carries. The book reflects all the qualities of its author – erudite, legally expert, engaging, courageous – and always worth your time.

References

Albanese, F (2025a) 'From economy of occupation to economy of genocide: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967', UN General Assembly, Ref: A/HRC/59/23, 2 July, available: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/59/23> (accessed 25 June 2026).

Albanese, F (2025b) 'Gaza genocide: a collective crime: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967', UN General Assembly, Ref: A/80/492, 20 October, available: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/492> (accessed 25 June 2026).

Aljazeera (2026) 'US returns Palestinian rights expert Francesca Albanese to sanctions list', 28 May, available: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/5/28/us-returns-palestinian-rights-expert-francesca-albanese-to-sanctions-list> (accessed 25 June 2026).

Ben Hania, K (2025) *The Voice of Hind Rajab*, available: <https://www.watermelonpictures.com/films/the-voice-of-hind-rajab> (accessed 09 June 2026).

Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) (2026) available: <https://bdsmovement.net/>

(accessed 23 June 2026).

Forensic Architecture (2024) 'A Spatial Analysis of the Israeli Military's Conduct in Gaza since October 2023', 25 October, available: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/a-cartography-of-genocide> (accessed 24 June 2026).

Freire, P (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum: New York.

Freire, P (1994) *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Bloomsbury.

Jews Network for Palestine (2026) available: <https://jewishnetworkforpalestine.uk/> (accessed 23 June 2026).

Khalidi, R (2025) 'I spent decades at Columbia. I'm withdrawing my fall course due to its deal with Trump', *The Guardian*, 1 August, available: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/aug/01/columbia-historian-rashid-khalidi-open-letter> (accessed 23 June 2026).

Maté, G and Maté, D (2022) *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture*, London: Penguin Books.

Murphy, C (2025) 'The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture', *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 41, Autumn, pp. 178-185.

OCHA (2026a) 'Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip', 3 June, available: <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-3-june-2026> (accessed 09 June 2026).

OCHA (2026b) 'Flash Update #37 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon', 22 June, available: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-flash-update-37-escalation-hostilities-lebanon-22-june-2026> (accessed 26 June 2026).

Reliefweb (2024) 'Death feels imminent for 96% of children in Gaza, study finds', 12 December, available: <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/death-feels-imminent-96-children-gaza-study-finds> (accessed 09 June 2026).

The Hind Rajab Foundation (2026), available: <https://www.hindrajabfoundation.org/> (accessed 09 June 2026).

Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education and Editor of *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*.