

## ***UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL SKILLS FOR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PROFESSIONALS***

### **Review by Glenn Strachan**

Bourn, D (2018) *Understanding Global Skills for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Professionals*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan

This book is a significant contribution to the debate on skills for graduates and professionals and the debate on pedagogical approaches for delivering skills education. Douglas Bourn combines an extensive review of the literature, initiatives, and policies relating to skills education with his own experience of teaching and research in the field. The stated general aim of the book is to generate debate about the current and future skills required by professionals operating in the context of globalisation. It does this by addressing a range of issues including the following: the breaking down of the divisions between various categorisations of skills, such as technical skills, soft skills, cognitive skills, employment related skills and personal skills; the highlighting of how education policy on the skills lags behind the current skills demanded of professionals; and the critiquing of examples of skills education and identifying examples of good practice. Bourn presents his own conceptual Framework of Global Skills before exploring what he considers to be key professional areas that have been impacted by globalisation. This then leads to a discussion on lessons that can be drawn from the pedagogical approaches that have emerged in education for sustainable development and, finally, to skills for global social change in the context of current and future global challenges.

The book has thirteen chapters divided into an Introduction and four distinct but related Parts. The structure of the book is clear and the numerous sub-headings within chapters are useful signposts for the reader. The writing is excellent in the sense that this is an academic book discussing complex concepts in some depth in a style that is accessible.

The Introduction sets out the context for the book in terms of the skills agenda and the scope of the literature; the latter is reviewed in detail in subsequent chapters. The book is written from a Western and particularly a United Kingdom (UK) perspective, but is focused on discussing skills for a globalised world. The author uses Part I of the book to clarify some of the terminology that is central to the main argument. This includes reviewing the concept of 'globalisation', the narrow and broad ways in which the term 'skills' is used, and the relationship between skills and competencies. Bourn critically reviews a wide range of skills classifications and the way in which they are used. He criticises the focus from some quarters on hard employability skills, which he argues is an out-dated approach given the requirements of some multi-national employers and the current working environment for many professionals. Influential organisations in relation to the skills agenda such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) are introduced into the discussion, particularly in relation to their role in promoting a broader range of soft skills such as teamwork and problem-solving and socio-emotional skills.

Part II of the book explores the conceptualisation of global skills and in particular the difference between the frameworks of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, as presented by the likes of Trilling and Fadel (2009), British Council (2016) and Wagner (2010), and Bourn's view of global skills. Common themes emerge in relation to some of the skills that should be in a global skills framework such as skills for an uncertain world, critical thinking and systemic thinking, and inter-cultural understanding. The scale of the skillset required by today's graduates who want to move into working within a global company is highlighted in a quotation from Think Global which presents a typical director's comment suggesting that 'The people that succeed can work in multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural and multi-locational teams' (Think Global, 2011:2).

The last chapter in Part II is entitled 'A Conceptual Framework for Global Skills'. From looking at the contents page of the book and from the early chapters the reader may well feel that this chapter is the kernel of this book, because after further analytical review of the literature relating to global skills, Bourn presents his own, new Framework for Global Skills. This Framework draws heavily on the discussion of the literature on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and global skills, and Bourn's own research. The Framework consists of the following seven conceptual areas:

- An ability to see the connections between what is happening in your own community and in the communities of people elsewhere in the world.
- Recognition of what it means to live and work in a global society and of the value of having a broad global outlook that respects, listens to and values perspectives other than one's own.
- An ability to understand the impact of global forces on one's life and the lives of other people, and what this means in terms of a sense of place in the world.
- Understanding of the value of ICT and how best to use it, in a way that is self-reflective and critical, that questions data and information.
- Openness to the continued process of self-reflection, critical dialogue and questioning of one's own assumptions about the world.
- An ability to work with others who may have different viewpoints and perspectives, being prepared to change one's opinions as a result of working with others, and seeking cooperative and participatory ways of working.
- Confidence, belief and willingness to seek a more just and sustainable world.

Each of these areas is briefly expanded upon with reference to the previous discussions to justify their place in the Framework.

In Part III of the book, Bourn discusses the concept of the global graduate in relation to four professional areas he identifies as having been impacted by globalisation. These areas are business, teaching, engineering and health, with a chapter devoted to each. These chapters continue to reference a range of literature, but they also include examples of initiatives and training programmes that expand the discussion into the pedagogical approaches for skills education. Having presented his Global Skills Framework there might be an expectation that Bourn would use the Framework as part of the analysis in these four chapters, but only brief references are made to it. This lack of application of the Framework is referred to in the concluding chapter of the book and is mentioned later in this review.

Chapters eleven to thirteen constitute the final part of the book, Part IV. Chapter eleven is primarily concerned with education for sustainable development. The relevance of this chapter results from the emergence of sustainable development within education policy in the last 20 years and the close relationship between sustainability skills and global skills. Because of the common pedagogical roots in development education, there is considerable overlap in the pedagogical approaches and debates around sustainable development education and global skills. However, in concluding this chapter Bourn laments the lack of ‘dialogue between sustainability and global academic and practitioner groupings’. Chapter twelve is entitled ‘Global Skills for Global Social Change’ and in many ways it re-affirms and justifies the purpose of the book and the importance of engaging with the concept of global skills, because it argues that the broad approach of global skills as reflected in the stronger social purpose of the Global Skills Framework can influence social change that can, in turn, contribute to addressing some of the global crises. The pedagogical approach is particularly important in this context and the chapter draws on the transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow and the critical pedagogy theory of Henry Giroux. The concluding chapter highlights the fact that too many educational debates have failed to

address the impact of social and political changes around the world hence the need for this book to trigger increased debate on global skills.

According to the author the reason that the Global Skills Framework was presented but not applied in any significant way to the examples selected, was to generate further discussion in this field. However, applying the Framework may well have increased the potential engagement of the reader and highlighted issues for discussion. Bourn also acknowledges that he has not touched on the measurement or the assessment of global skills in this volume, suggesting that each of these topics are worthy of books in their own right. This is certainly the case, but incorporating links to issues associated with these important aspects of global skills education would have been a useful addition to this book.

With his Global Skills Framework Bourn claims to be pushing the concept of global skills to a deeper level, and making an attempt to break away from the neo-liberal employability view of skills that has dominated much of the policy debate. The extent to which he succeeds is open for the reader to decide. He certainly raises the prominence of socio-cultural skills; makes a case for breaking down the divide between skills for employment and skills for life; and poses some fundamental questions about the purpose of education and the role of skills. The book has a lot to offer anyone involved in skills education in further education, higher education or continuing professional development and that includes policy-makers, educators, awarding bodies and researchers. The review of the literature is substantial and provides a great deal of evidence for supporting developments in the area of skills education. The arguments and discussions raise issues that should concern all educators and policy-makers engaged in development education.

## **References**

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**Glenn Strachan** is a consultant in sustainable development and education, a tutor on the Education for Sustainability MSc at London South Bank University and Chair of the Shared Earth Trust. E-mail; [glenn@glennstrachan.co.uk](mailto:glenn@glennstrachan.co.uk)