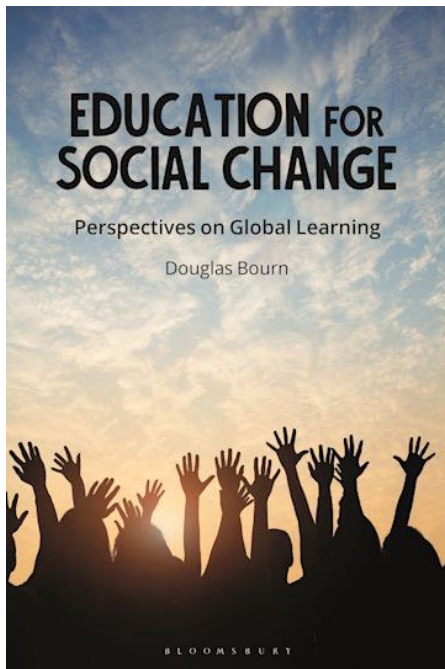


# EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL LEARNING

**Linda Briskman**

Bourn, Douglas (2022) *Education for Social Change: Perspectives on Global Learning*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.



Lament for slow progress in creating a just world is a feature of many disciplines and professions that have social justice as a central aspiration. As I write this review, the world is precariously exiting the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted inequalities between and within nations, but failed to galvanise the leadership of privileged nations into becoming more attentive to inequalities. Such disparities have been pervasive under neoliberal capitalist ideologies that preceded the pandemic, which merely brought them into sharp relief. With multiple approaches required to bring about systemic change, the transformative

potential of education is never far from the attention of scholars and practitioners.

Douglas Bourn has written an accessible book that offers perspectives that add to scholarly and practice-based development education. The thrust of the book and case study inclusion will have wide appeal, as the content is sure to attract those who traverse local and global perspectives, sometimes with a

degree of discomfort in generalising beyond their own contexts, and who seek knowledge and examples of how localised pedagogical innovation might guide the universal quest for global change. As a well-regarded Professor of Development Education at University College London, Bourn seeks to draw on his extensive knowledge and that of others in this valuable text.

It is an unconventional place to start, but the conclusion to the book succinctly explains the content and arguments of the previous chapters. As Bourn sums up, the volume showcases ways in which education can bring about social change and does so through historical and contemporary traditions and discourses that have informed sustainable and robust approaches. A unifying factor is the quest for social justice within a framework of transformative learning. His chapters delve into topics that are not often seen in texts that deal with pedagogy, such as in chapter four which proffers information on the development of socialism for a new society, which is a timely reminder when the global status quo is affixed to neoliberal thinking and the dominance of free enterprise markets.

The importance of civil society actors and organisations is highlighted in the text, first by outlining valuable theoretical and educational perspectives that draw on such luminaries as Paulo Freire, before moving to global illustrative examples through which we might learn. In challenging hegemonic approaches and orthodoxies, innovation and creativity are hallmarks for change. The role of young people is revered, giving heart to future prospects for activism for change.

Challenging educational orthodoxies can be a confronting task as normative approaches that codify the right to education are frequently privileged over content and pedagogies. Within a paradigm of creating democratic societies, as Bourn reflects in chapter two, democratic forms of education may be lacking. He takes us through different forms of democracy education and provides an illustration from South Africa. What seems central is that as transformative educators we must remove ourselves from the shackles of co-option as agents of the state, despite pervasive constraints. From my own experience as a tertiary educator committed to fostering action

for justice, it is somewhat of an anathema that new graduates are likely to be employed in formal organisations where there is an inevitable risk of collusion and compliance. With Bourn's text beside them in equal weighting to organisational policy documents, this can serve as a reminder for broader goals than those imparted in day-to-day practice.

Chapter three contains inspirational messages that serve to counteract organisational imperatives, dominant ideologies and the lure of the market. It leads readers to contemplate education as a liberation force, drawing from the work of Mahatma Gandhi, Julius Nyerere and Paulo Freire, and moving to tangible examples of Black liberation and the civil rights movement. Chapter five is compelling in disentangling the perceived tension between local/national and global approaches to social change. Here Bourn shows how global forces influence all aspects of life, ranging from climate emergency to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, the latter which stunned the world into revived mobilisation following the 2020 police killing of George Floyd in the United States (US) and led to activists in other countries responding to the clarion call for solidarity that extended beyond the specific. Growing global leaders is a challenge and an example from Coventry University in the United Kingdom (UK) illustrates what can occur when students are equipped to take on these roles.

Chapter eight is one likely to resonate in the tertiary education sector. Expounding the role of teachers as agents of social change, it arguably echoes the values and approaches of those journal readers who toil as educators, seeking to transform future generations of social justice aspirants. Bourn poses a challenge to the conventional view of education as a one-way process, with the teacher as knowledge expert and the student the passive recipient. For those of us that have our classes filled with international students from non-western countries, many find it a humbling experience with the knowledge they bring to the classroom and the way we conceptualise and act upon teaching practices to be dynamic and open-minded.

It is to be commended how the author privileges the role of education to bring about the twinning of social justice and social change. Although exponents of development education are familiar with this notion, there are others who might learn from the wisdom that Bourn brings to such endeavours. It is sometimes more pragmatic for educators to focus on political and social movement activism as a separate entity, than to embrace what tends to be the slow grind of centring education at all levels in order to produce a change convergence between the theoretical drivers and practice. Recognising the potential of students to be lifelong learners as well as the role of formal and informal educators in striving to overcome local and global inequities and human rights violations, is an objective to which Bourn's work can contribute.

Although the book is written in an accessible style, its content is wide and dense. I read it from beginning to end (and in a brief review cannot give full justice to chapter content), but it is also a useful resource for those who wish to selectively engage with critiques and to learn from grounded approaches. In ending, I make reference to the final chapter twelve, that enhances understandings of the role of the United Nations (UN) including the in-progress Sustainable Development Goals, as the UN receives mixed responses in development education schools of thought. What I interpret from Bourn is that rather than embracing received wisdom, it is crucial to continually engage in analysis and unravelling that critiques the ideas propagated by powerful institutions, as opposed to grassroots movements. Showcasing the work of people of courage and conviction to bring about change, including at micro levels and by students, combine to reveal that creating a better world is a global quest and achievable if momentum can be maintained and goodwill cultivated.

A book released around the same time as Bourn's is Offord et al.'s (2021) edited interdisciplinary collection on how pedagogies of human rights might activate social and cultural change. These two works are complementary, with Douglas Bourn delving into the realm of global learning as the title reveals and Offord's focusing on human rights praxis. Although each can be read separately, this timely convergence adds to the suite of

material available to educators, researchers and practitioners interested in development education and beyond.

The book ends with a pedagogy of hope, adopting the title of one of the great works of Freire (1994). Bourn reminds us of the urgency to tackle climate change but there are ever-evolving challenges that have arisen since his book was published. As war bells sound in Ukraine, a number of urgencies converge to remind us that the future of the planet is at stake and that education may be key to not only social, environmental and political change but to peaceful co-existence.

In concluding, I resist naming disciplines or levels of education where benefit might ensue, but rather emphasise that the book is for all who seek to critically reflect on their own work and guiding values within a challenging world and who share a belief that seizing power from below can create influence.

### **References**

Freire, P (1994) *Pedagogy of Hope*, London: Bloomsbury.

Offord, B, Fleay, C, Hartley, L, Woldeyes, Y G and Chan, D (2021) *Activating Social and Cultural Change: The Pedagogies of Human Rights*, Abingdon: Routledge.

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