Resource reviews

EDUCATION, LEARNING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF DEVELOPMENT

Review by Su-ming Khoo

Amy Skinner, Matt Baillie Smith, Eleanor Brown and Tobias Troll (eds.) (2016) *Education, Learning and the Transformation of Development,* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge

The topics that this book tries to bring together: education, learning, development and the possibilities for transformative change are all inherently expansive, but are at the heart of this journal's aims and scope. The typical response to the expansiveness and complexity of this intersecting subject matter is to pin down and narrow definitions, and to choose to focus on specific practice settings. This book genuinely attempts to break the mould by treating education in a broader way, linking it to general societal processes of learning and transformation. Interested in how learning processes can facilitate alternative visions and practices of development, the contributions bypass existing mainstream schooling, to seriously consider the transformative potential of alternative educational approaches, models and practices of learning from citizen engagement and political struggles for voice and justice. Mainstream development approaches that focus on expanding formal schooling are not dismissed, however they are not the subject of this volume. The focus of this book is on educational practices and learning processes that tend to be regarded as somewhat marginal in development and educational studies, but directly address situations of social and political change.

The editors have structured this book very intentionally in three sections: 'rethinking education and development', 'education and development alternatives' and 'learning, agency and citizen engagement'.

Critical scholarly pieces by April Biccum and Jethro Pettit start off the first and last sections. The rest of the chapters and the entire central section on alternatives present experiential and practitioner perspectives. The kind of learning that is privileged and highlighted in this volume is what Helena Norberg-Hodge defines as 'learning for life'. Biccum sets the scene for questioning transformative education and social change by foregrounding the question of how to think about the political subject and placing the political subject at the centre of the debates about both 'development' and 'education'. Biccum historically grounds the rejection of injustice, and the emergence of critical thinking, civic participation and progressive social change in three movements: the anti-colonial activism and nationalism of the 1920s to 1960s; awareness-raising civil rights campaigns of the 1960s and 70s; and the 'explosion' of adjectival educations since the 1980s. Surprisingly, however, the feminist dimension is missing from this historical scene-setting. Personal and subjective development that can be aligned to democratic values, justice, activism and education have received considerable attention over the past decades. However, education and knowledge have been framed in an instrumental manner, oriented towards individual change for economistic outcomes, rather than for collectively transformative social change.

Biccum's excellent analysis presents education as an 'ambivalent hinge in modernity', linking the political subject with a social order that functions in a divided fashion: to attain both social control / reproduction and emancipation / transformation. This ambivalence works through different levels of institutions, states, economies and individuals. Liberalism, *the* central tradition of modern European political thought, contains contradictory ideas. Liberalism simultaneously supported and critiqued colonialism. Liberal thought and education reproduced and buttressed colonial administration, while also emphasising principles of freedom and self-governance, and espousing the belief in the educative and transformative role of civic action in developing both individual selves and society as a whole.

The rest of the chapters in this first section open out the question of rethinking development and education with different experiences from

FUNDAEC, a global network for rural, cultural and spiritual development originating in Colombia; a study on time spent in formal schooling versus participating in the community as its own 'educational system' in the Papua New Guinea highlands; and Norberg-Hodge's deep critique of western schooling as a system of 'civilizing' transformation that develops scarcity and poverty, in contrast to an original condition of 'uncivilized' flourishing in the Himalayan region of Ladakh. These chapters overturn conventional assumptions about people's educational futures and how different they might look if their lives and perspectives are not just somehow taken into account, but taken as the starting point. These three endogenous or 'emic' perspectives question the dominant assumption that 'education' is an external 'good' that people should unquestioningly adopt in its current, externally-given form. Mainstream 'Western' education detaches people's education from their spiritual values, environment, livelihoods and communities and may lead to a loss of futures that might otherwise have maintained these aspects within education.

The central section on 'development alternatives' explores the possibilities and complexities of education within the alternative frames and marginalised spaces of ethno-development, community and adult education in Bolivia, Catalunya and Mozambique. These accounts help us to understand how marginalised groups can, through education, pursue a 'quality of life' that they have been allowed to define for themselves (Straubhaar, 104). In the Bolivian case, experiments in indigenous schooling have enabled learning in the context of political demands for indigenous autonomy and rights. Increased interest in ethno-development coincided with a broader interest in intercultural education particularly in the Andean region, and across Latin America generally. Indigenous education became politically contested as indigenous people struggled to secure territorial rights. Formal government support for a plurinational state and the autonomy accorded to indigenous people are contradicted by the state's extractive economic policies. Does ethno-development offer an alternative development model? Successful indigenous education has equipped young leaders with the skills needed to enter the political arena, but the outcome often results in

indigenous leaders supporting economic modernisation projects. These sit in tension with communities opposing extractivism and seeking alternatives, for example in collective food sovereignty.

Roig and Crowther's chapter on an alternative adult school in Barcelona seeks to make a distinction between 'merely useful' and 'really useful' knowledge, arguing for 'radical practicality' as a route to social transformation (79). Jain and Akomolafe's chapter explores the 'wild world' of informal learning that exists outside the formal/non-formal educational structures. Our current ways of dealing with today's multidimensional crises are insufficient; education and development remain part of the crises. Alternatively, autonomy, creativity, interconnectedness and abundance might be seen as truly countercultural possibilities. They suggest that we need to dismantle and re-imagine development and education to rekindle our connections with land and people, decolonise ourselves from the self-limiting and harmful confines of development thinking. The discourses of development and education must themselves be stretched, in terms of what is said and allowed to be said, and must take responsibility for the possibilities that have been excluded.

The final section of the book connects learning with agency and citizen engagement. Jethro Pettit opens with a useful conceptual typology of three traditions: information or awareness raising, critical pedagogies and creative approaches that include the artistic, narrative and embodied learning processes. 'Civic habitus' describes the complex of socialised dispositions that constrain people's freedom. The pedagogical challenge for educators is to enact the kinds of curriculum, facilitation and learning that support citizens to become mindful of their civic habitus and able to transform it, with Pettit making a particular case for creative, imaginative and embodied approaches (137). Troll and Krause outline the transformative potential of development education, pointing to the need for questions of justice and sustainability to be addressed in a more systematic and inclusive fashion. Learning from research on civil society pioneers, they present three main options for development education – connecting to local power struggles, creating a

global movement for a global regime change and, most radical of all, searching for a radical new humanity. They make the case for a 'new' development education which returns to its radical roots to become a powerful tool for systemic and collective change. Helen Underhill calls for 'development' to be redefined and reconnected to education and learning for social justice. Underhill focuses on diasporic and migrant activists in Egypt as a lens for learning about power, agency and social justice. The Arab spring has changed these activists and their relationship to Egypt, and reconnected them to the people, and an imagined community, in ways that they perhaps could not have predicted.

This book is relatively rare in bridging the 'worlds' of development and development education. The problematic gulf between these two fields of theory and practice has long been observed in the pages of this journal, but it has rarely been successfully addressed in an integrated publication. The book is a long-term outcome of a development education project (DEEEP) within CONCORD - the European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs (2017). It shows the strengths, complexities and intellectual, conceptual and political binds experienced by this grouping, but also by the development education sector and readership of this journal as a whole.

At the very outset, this volume refreshingly states its commitment to the role of learning in discourses and practices of development. This immediately marks out a space beyond the usual comfort zone of development education, by reaching out to forms of learning other than schooling, breaking out of the educational silos and 'sectoralisation' that are only too easy to get trapped within. Education, narrowly defined, is widely accepted as a tool for development. However, incremental changes within the mainstream paradigm seem a far less compelling pathway to transformation than broadly conceptualised education that readily takes on the role of challenging dominant conceptions and practices. 'Development' is definitely ripe for challenge: while measurement and evaluation have become increasingly sophisticated, human development concepts continue to evolve and critiques of post-colonialism, post-development and critical theory

abound. Yet understandings of the relationships between education and development remain narrowly conceived and are frequently decontextualised (xx). In answer to this, this volume seeks to critically analyse the relationships between education and development, by documenting the extent to which formal, non-formal and informal learning processes in various contexts are facilitating the emergence of alternative visions and practices of development around the world. The book attempts to 'reframe' learning practices and processes in relation to broader struggles for justice, voice and development, complementing academic contributions with practitioner perspectives.

These alternative perspectives will nevertheless continue to be treated separately from the continued roll-out of 'business-as-usual' formal schooling. The latter remains an unavoidable necessity, given that 57 million children currently lack access to quality primary education. Yet it is also acknowledged that the mainstream schooling that is envisaged for those who lack it fails to respect cultural diversity or value indigenous knowledges. 'Education For All' (EFA, n.d.), for example, means 'one-size-fits-all' ideas of learning that are essentially imported from elsewhere. Mainstream development has become commodified, depoliticised and increasingly reliant on fundraising, charity and celebrity humanitarianism. Within this mainstream of development, education is associated with the policy rhetoric of poverty alleviation, and its practice is dominated by technicist forms of accountability, measurement and target setting. Within mainstream development, mainstream education continues to further the depoliticisation of development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2015) and EFA agendas have sailed through without internalising the critical debates about development. The relationship between mainstream development and education has therefore remained conceptually narrow and decontextualised.

Biccum considers the World Bank's new interest in behavioural change and culture, signalled by the 2015 World Development Report. This promised a fresh approach and redesign of development to include norms, culture, and communication. However, it becomes clear that the turn to

communicative, educative, cultural and systemic methods is not oriented towards the production of critically aware political subjects, capable of creating progressive change (13). Instead, the vision narrowly seeks to nudge 'behaviour changes' and optimise individual economic choices in already given markets. The new emphasis on behaviourism and cost effectiveness actually serves to further entrench the 'rational choice' economic model, rooted in possessive individualism and overshadowed by the global realities of ever-increasing inequality.

The aim of transformational education is to raise the capacity of all people to engage politically to create the possibility for social change. How are we are going to shift development from its preoccupation with economic reductionism, and move educational preoccupations from narrow questions of pedagogy and schooling to the broader goals of societal transformation? 'Learning' is not only about teachers' job to teach, but the role of peers, communities and places. Skills can be acquired from a range of sources and experiences. Adult literacy is especially important for generating and enabling social inclusion. The purpose of lifelong learning is change and transformation – enabling a more cooperative and ecologically sound future.

In asking how we might move learning and transformation, this book has prioritised locally-developed and nonconformist forms of education, informal learning spaces and social experimentation. However, the thorny question remains: in bypassing institutionalised schooling and according priority to informal and alternative, are we denying the promise of mobility and globalised opportunity offered by mainstream conformity? This continuing bifurcation between the mainstream and the alternatives begs for more dialogue and interdisciplinary research to bridge the mainstream formal and alternative informal education sectors. It begs for greater crossover between the education and development specialists and for academia and civil society to collaboratively attempt to bridge the gaps.

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