

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND CAMPAIGNING – THE PERFECT PARTNERSHIP?

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If development education and campaigning were the perfect partnership, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) would not have spent years, it seems, restructuring their organisations to find the most effective relationship between them. For example, a Campaigns Department may begin life attached to Fundraising, then have been severed from Fundraising and spliced onto Development Education in a Marketing Division before both getting lumped together finally with Advocacy. NGOs have clearly been wrestling with the tension between these different sections. I would suggest that these struggles in the organisational structures reflect real inner struggles in the minds of people working in them.

I think it important to consider the different motivations of people engaged in each of campaigning and development education to highlight why these tensions exist and why they can become a creative force. I am not going to attempt definitions but will briefly explore where overlaps exist and clear differences are apparent in order to illustrate why different people choose to involve themselves in each. I propose the hypothesis that the main tensions between campaigning and development education stem from the motivations of the individuals and their different beliefs about how change can effectively be brought about. I want to consider just those campaigners who actively engage in the planning, organisation and delivery of campaigns and not those many others who join a rally, sign a petition or are cajoled into posting a ready-written postcard, and similarly with development educators. I recognise that many people engage in both development education and campaigning. Some people manage to engage successfully in both of these simultaneously whilst others may commit themselves to development education with occasional forays into active campaigning and, occasionally, vice versa.

I suggest that the two activities meet different needs in those involved. Having been myself involved in both at different times, I suggest that involvement in the buzz of an active campaign produces higher levels of adrenalin, induces a feeling of excitement and engagement and provides those involved with a clearer feeling of success and achievement. On the other hand I would suggest that development education activities tend to provide for the more reflective needs of the individual involving more open discourse and inducing pleasure through a deeper exploring of ideas. Research since the 1950s, but especially more recently, shows us that each of our brains is uniquely wired, that each of us learn in different preferred ways and that the pleasure centres of our brains are activated by different combinations of experience. It should be of no surprise that some of us prefer to engage more in campaigns than in development education activity and that over time many of us change our preferred type of involvement.

I would suggest that there is a danger inherent in campaigning. Do not many of those committed to addressing an issue get caught up in the excitement of action? Do not campaigns often involve engaging other concerned members of the public who may not necessarily have as deep an understanding or knowledge of the issues, the causes, the complexity or a consideration of the likely long term outcomes of the campaign actions. An active campaign may engage people at a superficial level, involving them in ‘purposeful activity’, engaging them in social groups, giving them a sense of purpose and membership. This heady mix can provide an adrenalin high in which caution is lost. Herein lies one danger. Campaign aims can be for the social good or bad. Groups, such as racist organisations, can recruit through involving people in such action where the thrill of the action over-rides the concern for the overall effectiveness of the campaign or dulls people’s critical faculties.

Much recent research tells us that for effective learning we need to be in a state of low stress and high challenge. Is the state induced by an often high stress campaign, induced by need to deliver on client numbers and meet deadlines the best one for learning and critical reflection. I would suggest that

this is unlikely. Campaigns by their nature are often defined with timelimited outcomes. There are a number of conflicting views on the **definition of campaigning** but they often include phrases such as “working towards an objective in a strategic way with clear targets and time frames”. (Campaign for Social Change). The demand for public profile ensures that there are clearly observed actions. Action without sufficient reflection can leave those involved with a post-campaign low that may lead to ceasing involvement or on the contrary to a need for further excitement and action. For any such further action to be effective in addressing the key issue a different lens is needed. There is a danger that those involved get hooked on action for its own sake and lose the sense of perspective which other approaches such as development education might provide. On the other hand the danger with the development education approach could be that those involved become increasingly introspective or in realising the complexity of the issues become frozen in inaction.

One way to consider this difference is to consider a wide angle lens and a zoom on a camera. Does not development education tend to use the wide angle taking in as much of the vista as possible from the particular standpoint in order to allow the observer to see the relationships between different elements? And is not the Campaigns approach one that tends to narrow the focus on a specific aspect, examining key features in greater detail. Both give insights, both are valid, but the two approaches can give rise to participants’ contradictory understandings. This can be an opportunity for creative thinking or for dispute.

I would also suggest that whilst campaigns may well be successful in addressing both large and small issues it is important, following involvement in campaigns, to step back, let the adrenalin rush pass, widen the perspective and review the experience through the lens of development education approaches. It also seems important that those involved in development education immerse themselves in campaign action to see some of the issues close. If those involved are to gain most from their experiences this change of focus needs to be actively managed either by aware individuals themselves or through a facilitator. The ‘perfect partnership’ does not appear to be the right

description of the relationship between campaigning and development education. I have, in the past, suggested that at best the two can produce a creative tension. I think the dilemma lies inside each of us too. How do we each manage our own need to address the world's inequalities with decisive action while managing our own self-doubt about whether our actions are being effective? If those involved in development education and campaigning cannot ensure that there is a 'creative' tension between them, might people's development education be left to television and their need to act be satisfied by fundraisers?

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