Viewpoint

TRAVELLING DOWN UNDER: DISMANTLING THE 'GLOBAL SOUTH'

Fiona Beals

Introduction
Young people in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) experience an irony of sorts. They know they are geographically situated in the Southern Hemisphere, but without consultation are taught that ‘in reality’ Aotearoa NZ is a Northern country in the great North/South development divide. In this article, I will explore the implications of development labels in the Aotearoa NZ education system. I will argue that Aotearoa NZ’s discursive position in the North, combined with its recent history of colonisation, has implications in the way that power, relationship and identity are understood and played out in both formal and informal education settings. Recent labels such as ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ have just caused more confusion as teachers and youth workers are increasingly dependent on resources produced by the development sector. In effect, for educators and young people, the labelling language of development can result in a disempowering of the players in the educational process – we are so pre-occupied with the ‘them’ that we cannot see the inequality in ‘us’. So, rather than looking for boxes with neatly typed labels in which we can explore and group issues and people, perhaps our pedagogy needs to move to stories of self-definition, transformation and hope.

Coming from the Land Down Under
For those of us growing up in the isolated English speaking countries of the Southern Pacific, we are raised to know that we are not the centre of the world. Early lessons through the school, community and pop culture teach us that we live on the periphery of a centre; a centre not in the middle of the world but lying across European and North American waters. For me, as a young person in the 1980s, one of the greatest pop groups of our times was the Australian band Men at Work. One of their biggest hits was ‘Down Under’; a song about living down under, in a foreign country far away from some reality; for those of us living ‘down under’, it was a song that gave us an identity.
The *Men at Work* song was my first exposure to the complex divisions we have in our world. My second exposure occurred in that same year - a gifted world map complete with playable record. I could now journey around the world to the voice of a man from Disneyland. But this map had a serious problem which threw me as a six-year-old. Aotearoa NZ was not in the middle - it was on the edge. In fact, it broke the boundary of the map and looked like it should not have even been there. Aotearoa NZ, on this map, looked like a great sliding fridge magnet.

Through the teaching of *Men at Work* and the unidentifiable man from Disneyland, I learnt the insignificance of Aotearoa NZ’s position - we were down under from what was on top and an add-on to the rest, or to be perhaps correct, West of the world. And then our teachers, in a guise of trying to build confidence in being a New Zealander, introduced the upside-down map - our class soon learnt that the emphasis on this map was on the upside-down and that no one (not even my classmates) would buy into something that was the wrong-way round.

However, my personal story of education is situated in the 1980s and 1990s. There have been changes to education in Aotearoa NZ; many arising in reforms during the 1970s and 1980s. A stronger History curriculum has been one of these changes. The generation of the 1980s was one of the first, post colonisation, to learn that Aotearoa NZ had a history before European settlement. Before the 1980s, NZ history was England’s history wrapped up in the Magna Carta and Queen Victoria. The predominant ethnic group in our country was not Māori or Pākehā (the Māori word for English/European settlers), they were English. They defined themselves through their proud links back to the homeland (e.g. Wood, 1940).

So, back before the 1980s, if the schools’ curriculum associated Aotearoa NZ with the historical European countries of its predominately white population, issues arising from our history of colonisation would be buried under the carpet. Being labelled as a Northern country would have been something of which to be proud; it connected us to the powerful countries and gave us a role to play in the world. But now, under the new curriculum, students majoring in NZ History learn that our country was founded on a
broken treaty between the ōtāngata whenua (people of the land) and the English crown. *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi) brought a false assurance to the Māori people as the settling population saw potential in the land and hope in a secular classless society. Subsequent policy, war and Western disease each played a part in hobbling the future of Aotearoa’s indigenous people.

Maybe back in the 1930s, when it was still believed that the Māori people were considered to be a dying race and New Zealand’s income came predominately from rural exports to its English homeland (Belich, 1996), it would have been seen as appropriate to adopt labels such as ‘North’ – more fitting and appropriate to our reality. But, if you ask an Aotearoa NZ classroom today whether a term such as ‘North’ defines our identity you would find a deep resistance by many Pākehā to identify with a country from which it is generations removed. Furthermore, given that the word Pākehā is also seen by some to be imposed ethnic labelling, you would also find resistance (Corbett, 2001). Instead, you would hear children ask: ‘why can’t we be New Zealanders? This is where we were born and where we belong. Why do we have to accept any label imposed on us?’ You would also hear confusion from indigenous students, maybe even anger, at just another attempt of a colonial labelling of otherness.

**Aotearoa NZ – Are we really a Northern Country?**

As I ventured into development studies, I quickly learnt that Aotearoa NZ is seen as a Northern country. Coming from a youth work sector and with a formal education degree, I was keen to work with, and empower, young people in my community to make a difference to the world and to their own lives; so I needed to learn more about this ‘Northern’ label. During this time, I was privileged to work with a group of Māori academics on a development education resource for the UK. However, we were confused as the label ‘North’ had never featured in our cognitive framing of Aotearoa NZ.

A senior colleague attempted to help us by showing us another map. Rather than having the equator as the dividing line, it had some sort of red-blue divide – a bit like a wave encroaching in on a beach. The wave came down engulfing the Pacific, including Australia and Aotearoa NZ. Again, someone,
with what appeared to be little understanding of the reality of poverty in the Pacific and the statistical divide between poor and rich in Australiã and Aotearoa NZ, had changed the world to group my neighbours and I with the ‘oppressing’ Northern countries.

Both my Mõori colleagues and I were angered at this labelling. This deepened further, when we were told in simplistic terms that the North/South divide was initially about colonisation – the Northern countries colonised the Southern countries. But in that definition, surely Aotearoa NZ fitted that Southern box? To counter this we learnt that our country had survived colonisation and that the indigenous people were not exploited as a result. You can probably imagine the reaction of my colleagues at this last point.

This was exactly where my problem lay. I had no problem being connected through my own personal whakapapa (history of connections) with the North. However, the politics of dividing the world into North and South and redefining Aotearoa NZ as a Northern country meant that the very real, and reverberating, aftershocks of historical injustice were completely overlooked. Mõori, alongside the indigenous people of Australia and the people of the Pacific, were invisible in this divide.

We were asked to launch our contribution to the development resource in London. When we got there, we actually voiced our confusion. Somewhere along the line someone decided that te Tiriti o Waitangi worked; our history of colonisation was a success. Our counter argument was that the land and climate was more suitable for European habitation and exploitation – but colonisation a success? Ask the people of Parihaka, who in an act of passive resistance experienced horrific torture, and the proud people of the Urewera who never signed te Tiriti but were still made subject to its conditions (and the subsequent injustice to it) (Belich, 1996). Ask the street kids in Auckland and the children struggling for dental hygiene in Northland where poverty disproportionately affects Mõori households (Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty, 2012). Ask the kids in Alternative Education (O’Brian, Thesing and Herbet, 2001) and ask the reporters who insist that bad news in New Zealand always involve a brown face (Beals, 2006).
Here in Aotearoa NZ, the economic dimension and definition to such labelling plays less of a part in words such as ‘North’ and ‘South’. Economics is acknowledged but attributed closer to words such as ‘developing’, ‘developed’ and ‘emerging’. These are the terms that youth workers and teachers prefer to use in teaching development issues which create a clear division between the income levels of countries relative to that of Aotearoa NZ. However, the classroom (both formal and informal) is a contested and political space, and the language of labelling coupled with the art of political correctness often creates confusion for educators as those constructing development education resources jostle for dominance in terminology and change language without consultation.

Today, you would be less likely to find the words ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ in resources, the preference has tended to be ‘North’ and ‘South’. But in Aotearoa NZ educational settings, such terms are not interpreted economically but socially and politically. Words like ‘developing’ and ‘emerging’ even cause complication, as the demographics of our young population changes. We are encouraged by our government to look outside the traditionally labelled ‘developing’ countries to our Pacific neighbours – once labelled as tourist destinations, these countries are now seen economically as places of poverty, inequality and disadvantage; they are major recipients of New Zealand aid. Counter to this, Pacific youth are now the fastest growing population group in Aotearoa NZ (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2005). As poverty is seen collectively in the Pacific as a condition of shame, labelling, even if for educational purposes, imposes such shame on Pacific youth and the flow through into our negative statistics is, for many of us, a disgrace. In our own lesson of the past few decades, we are learning about the impact on a people’s self-identity when ‘we’ label them but fail to consult those being labeled.

‘North’ doesn’t work, but surely we can find a place in the ‘minority’/‘majority’ language?
After talking about our ‘down under’ perspective and confusion with labelling in London, I became a writer of youth work resources for community education in a development NGO. I came to this job in a changing climate – I was to write about global issues with a focus on development and a particular group of countries. In my new role, the words ‘North’, ‘South’, ‘developed’,
‘developing’, ‘first’ and ‘third’ were to be replaced with new and improved words: ‘minority’ and ‘majority’.

There was a really good reason for this. The term ‘majority world’ was designed to recognise the global nature of issues; the reality that issues are not limited to nation states. It was coined to recognise that poverty is an issue in Aotearoa NZ as it is an issue in every country. It was not designed as a box into which you could group countries but a framework of thinking to show that people share a common struggle across countries. In contrast, ‘minority world’ referred to those who held power, not only in Europe and North America but also in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

However, what seemed to make sense had added confusion attached to it. Because of the funding conditions attached to our organisation at the time, development resources had to be linked to countries of priority and need. So, even though I knew the definition of majority world, I found myself having to label countries like China as pertaining to the majority world and countries like the United States as belonging to the minority world. I then found myself tasked with having to educate the readers of these terms and their ideal meanings. Confusion reigned. And it is of no surprise that readers would say to me: ‘But isn’t this political correctness gone too far?’ Yes, to me it was, especially when I began to read materials coming from countries in the ‘South’ which still used the terms ‘developing’ and ‘Third World’. I soon recognised the reality that the new definitions did not arise from the oppressed, but that the teachers and students we worked with were right – they were labels created by the powerful (powerful in the creation of our knowledge of development) and the definitions did carry an element of political correctness. However, perhaps the biggest lesson was seeing the re-emergence of ‘Third World’ - both in self-determined development and in pop culture. It seemed to me that Foucault’s (1976) idea of resistance and the subversive play of language were coming to the fore. The people to whom a derogatory label once applied were using it to redefine both themselves and the label. However, the ‘West’/‘North’/‘developed’ had moved on to redefine a new reality and weren’t listening.
Just who does all the labelling?
In all of this, it appears that whoever is doing the labelling is not consulting the labelled. Issues are being addressed in each revolution of definition but the reality is, simplicity is lost in so much complexity and we are failing to ask ourselves: why do we have such an obsession with putting people(s) into boxes? And, then at the point in which I was writing words into resources, what does this mean for education in Aotearoa NZ? What does this mean for our classrooms, our students and our own identities as educators? The reality is labels like ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ are still the preferred terms even though they carry baggage. Labels like ‘North’ just pull up resistance and the majority/minority words work in principle but are difficult to speak into people’s lives and mindsets – where do you put whole countries when you are trying to teach about development? At the end of the day, it came down to two points. First, we need to educate the community about the evolution of terms and language. However, second, we should not expect the community to use ‘our’ language. If we are real to our kaupapa (our principles and ideas) of development and if that kaupapa acknowledges the importance of self-determination then shouldn’t we be prioritising the role and authority of a community to name itself, even if that name comes with historical baggage? If a community chooses to use the terms ‘Third World’ to define itself, then perhaps we need to ask why and look for possible resistance rather than assuming ignorance.

But there is even a deeper question, reflected in my own country’s story of development, one in which the colonised prospered, unfortunately, by hobbling the indigenous people. We do have stories of Māori success. But equality in a ‘successfully’ colonised country is much more complex than a history book of the 1950s tells us. Furthermore, we also have many Pākehā poor in Aotearoa NZ, and their stories are often silent and invisible – blamed on a dysfunctional work ethic.

We are told by our Children’s Commissioner that 25 percent of our children live in extreme poverty (Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty, 2012). For these children, the words ‘majority’/’minority’ would give them a voice in the story of global poverty. But this would not be in the context
of development education where teaching, and the resources supplied by development NGOs to supplement teaching, focus on giving an Asian or African face to poverty.

**Moving from Issues to Bring in the Third Dimension**

No matter what the terminology, when we teach about the global differences through issues-focused education we risk divorcing global issues from local realities. If we take a concept and issue like poverty, and look at global differences, we potentially silence the stories of our own students living in poverty in our classrooms. We need to ask: is their story worth less in the bigger educational picture? Should they be quiet while we focus on the real big issues? I would suggest that, in our silencing, we exclude, or disempower, these students. Furthermore, when we focus only on the desperation of poverty in developing contexts, we tend to show a hopeless situation in which the only way out is dependence on a richer wealthy donor.

This is especially apparent in Aotearoa NZ, where global education is very much ‘us’ and ‘them’, global connections are made through aspects such as consumerism and capitalism, but the actual teaching of issues is restricted to countries outside of Aotearoa NZ. No real connection is made beyond the wallet, the sweatshop and charity/aid. Most New Zealanders would agree that poverty is a reality here, but it is not a topic for teaching in classrooms and the historical connections to current inequalities are still limited to tertiary level qualifications and the optional subject of New Zealand History. As global educators in Aotearoa NZ, our own climbing statistics of poverty has seen teachers and youth workers ask for development resources that empower teachers and learners to discuss such subjects ethically within both a global and New Zealand context.

Perhaps the key challenge is to not use the issue as a point of connection for education and understanding but rather find a space to reframe issues through stories of hope. Why? Because, at the heart of it, any pedagogy that requires a labelling of people around issues can disempower both students and the labelled countries and people. Teaching through issues creates relationships around needs, and teaching for the purpose of hope gives students a connection beyond need.
In an ‘issue-focused’ approach which is common to development resources, we risk creating a two dimensional picture of poverty. On the first dimension, it is an issue of the developing world; on the second, it is an issue that can only be addressed by the developed nations – a sort of 40-hour famine in a classroom lesson – poverty is there and you are the solution. In this two-dimensional story, we miss a third dimension. Communities living in poverty also have their own stories – stories of survival and also stories of transformation. Often the stories of transformation include and are carried out by the youth. They are stories that encourage hope but can also build compassion as the link goes beyond the issue to both the story behind the issue and the hope that we all have for a better future.

But why have this emphasis on hope and compassion? Over the last decade, the work of Paulo Freire (1972) has played a major role in global education in Aotearoa NZ, as it has internationally. The basic premise in global education using his approach is to encourage a moment of cognitive dissonance (a moment of conscientisation) so that issues are explored, problems are proposed and a dialogue occurs. However, we have also found a problem in using Freire’s original work – a problem of intention. Freire’s intention was that his pedagogy would enable the oppressed to read and rewrite their world. As a pedagogical approach, it is problematic to use with students from advantaged backgrounds; awareness of problems and a need for rewriting can occur but the reality is that the power dynamics remain in the control of the oppressor.

Rather than using Freire’s (1972) work, global education may be better informed by Freire’s Pedagogy of Hope (1992). This text underpins Freire’s ontological basis for his pedagogical approach – hope in a world of inequality where the marginalised and advantaged work together. Combining Freire with Emmanuel Levinas’ (1969) work on compassion allows for global education to move beyond issues to hope a space for the exploration of ethics of relationship. The aim of such an approach is to bring into the third dimension a reflexive moment, where young people are not just dialoguing but listening in their dialogue. In this moment of listening, care would be taken to allow people to identify themselves and their own contextual identity rather than imposing a
label and to listen to the hope in their stories while learning the raw stories that led to inequalities.

As two young people found in exploring the role of youth participation in addressing poverty, lessons go beyond the issue itself to a greater understanding of the role young people have internationally in addressing issues in their own communities:

“Before we read the chapters [on participation], we assumed the majority [sic] world would not have an interest in youth participation. After all, we thought, they have bigger problems like poverty and inequality. However, as we read, we realised that it is precisely because of these ‘problems’ that youth participation is so needed and effective. It is about time that we listened to young people in other countries and communities” (Williams, Edlin and Beals, 2010: 289).

Conclusion
We will always want a label in which we can have a clearly defined and containable box. However, the least we can do as educators is to give our students an opportunity to dismantle the boxes that have been developed over history by focusing beyond the issue to the hope that is in all of us. As Freire once observed, the role of a progressive educator is to ‘unveil opportunities for hope, regardless of the obstacles’ (1994: 4).

References


**Fiona Beals** is a tutor in the Youth Development programme at the Wellington Institute of Technology. She has a background as a professional development provider in the Aotearoa New Zealand’s youth work sector and previously worked as a development resource writer for teachers and youth workers at Global Focus Aotearoa.