Perspectives

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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Development and global issues have never been more in the public gaze than they have been in 2005. From Live8 to 'Make Poverty History' and the range of initiatives around Africa, development educationalists can no longer argue that 'development' and 'global' are marginalised. However, much of the debate has been superficial. For those engaged in development education practice, we know that understanding the causes of poverty and the solutions are not easy and straightforward. It could also be argued that all too often the messages communicated are distorted via 'western perceptions'. The voices of those directly affected by poverty and inequality are rarely heard. Development educationalists have a responsibility therefore to ensure that the voices of the marginalised are heard. Many of the observations mentioned above are similar to comments raised about development education more than a decade ago (see Arnold, Osler). Whilst many of the arguments might be similar to those of the 1990s, the economic, social and educational climates are different.

Globalisation is having an increasingly direct impact upon people's lives. It is also relatively easy to have access to information about global issues. People are more aware of global issues but how do they decide as to how they will critically assess the information they receive. This is why development education is so important and why it needs to be part of the mainstream of formal learning opportunities. In a number of countries, global and development issues are becoming more mainstream within formal education programmes, although there is still a long way to go (see Hoeck and Wegimont).

What all this means is that the traditional 'development education Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)' can no longer claim to be the fountain of all knowledge or the 'experts.' Yet the principles behind development education, although they might be packaged in different ways depending on the educational framework, cultural situation and political support, are key to addressing the big educational and societal challenges of the twenty first century.

Through development education, people can:

• 'understand their own situation in a wider context;
• make connections between local and global events
• develop skills and knowledge to interpret events affecting their lives
• understand causes of global inequality, justice and solidarity
• learn from experiences elsewhere in the world
• identify common interests and develop solidarity with diverse communities
• combat racism and xenophobia
• widen horizons and personal development
• make a difference to their world by participating in society.' (DEA 2001).

There are examples of practice in a number of countries which demonstrate this from projects which make connections to understanding specific African cultural perspectives to local community cohesion and those on subjects such as fair trade, climate change and global citizenship.

Professor David Selby, a well-known writer on global education, has criticised this author for operating with the dominant ideological paradigm and for critically accepting the dominant ideas of today, linked to education for global competitiveness. "He (Bourn) clearly aligns himself with the liberal technocratic school of thought, while also locating himself squarely within the government-driven culture of compliance that has come to characterise much of British education." (Selby 2004, 2005, Bourn 2005).

These comments pose in a wider context the challenges that many development educationalists have today. Do they comment from the side and remain purist, saying that their agenda is really about social transformation? Or do they engage in the ideological debate and aim to make advances and progress within the framework set by globalisation and economic competitiveness? Does development education challenge the status quo and if it does, what alternatives does it offer?

McCollum stated nearly a decade ago that the tradition of, "development education has been, of a movement, which speaks only to itself, it has not located itself within a broader critical pedagogical discourse." (1996) Whilst there has been some progress since then, this tradition is still too prevalent in many industrialised countries where development education is delivered by a range of NGOs and social movements.

It is often where development educationalists have engaged in broader debates that progress has been made. Through a range of international and national educational policies and programmes, the term 'global' is becoming part of the everyday language of educationalists. A major opportunity for development educationalists has been the opening of the debates around the need for 'learning societies and for actively informed citizens' and social cohesion (Bourn 2001).

However, as can be shown from the strategy for international education published by the English Ministry for Education in November 2004, the tensions between the economic and social needs are most evident. It refers to promoting the concept of 'global citizens' and to 'instil a strong global dimension into the learning experience of all children and young people.' But it also talks about 'equipping employers and employees about the skills needed for a global economy' (DfES 2004). Selby has been right to pose the dilemma but if development education is to engage in the debates then it is recognised that its role is both to secure concessions within the dominant paradigm but also to raise the issues and encourage dialogue.

In developing its thinking for its work within higher education, the Development Education Association developed a framework for learning around knowledge and learning, cognitive, social and practical skills and values and attitudes. Central to this framework is the interrelationship of these concepts. One cannot learn and understand about the causes of poverty and inequality without the development of critical and analytical thinking, respecting views and having a commitment to social justice (McKenzie 2003). This initiative has already influenced a radical re-thinking of a number of degree courses in at least five universities in England.

Development education should also, if it is about learning, offer a range of perspectives and views. This means ensuring perspectives and views from different social and cultural groups around the world but in a form that is debated within a critical framework. It needs to be perceived as making connections between the local and the global within a values base of equity, social justice and human rights. It is about posing fundamental questions about the role of an educator which should be to create a learning environment which enables learners to critically assess in their own way and on their terms the subject under discussion (DEA 1999).

Charles Leadbetter in writing recently about the challenge of globalisation suggests that there is a need to create a culture in society that challenges pessimism about what is happening in the world. He suggested there is a need, particularly in education, to respond to the challenges of globalisation, to engage and shape it for the benefit of all. He also suggests that globalisation necessitates innovation and imagination (Leadbetter 2002). Development education in the era of globalisation needs to respond in an equally imaginative and innovative way. It needs not to re-trench or retreat within the safe havens of challenging dominant political paradigms. Educational change only comes through social and political interaction. Development education needs to see itself as a power house for ideas, creativity and new thinking about how people in society can be better equipped to create a world which is more just and equal.

In order to achieve this, development educationalists should see their role as how they can influence societies and empower people to develop the skills, knowledge and value base which can make connections between their own lives and those of people elsewhere in the world. Only then will societies promote learning that creates a better understanding of the causes of inequality in the world and gives people the skills and value base to enable them to create their own voices and forms of engagement to secure real social change.

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