GLOBAL LEARNING AND BREXIT

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Abstract: This article provides a development education perspective on Brexit. It assesses the real and potential impact of Brexit on concepts of globalism and identity, explores how the outcome relates to xenophobia and racism, and examines the implications for the attitudes of young people with regards to global citizenship. The article concludes by outlining how development education has an important role in combating insularity and isolationism in the wake of Brexit whilst addressing some the underlying reasons why many communities opted to vote Leave.

Key words: Global learning; Brexit; European Union; development education; racism.

The referendum vote in the UK in June 2016 that resulted in the majority of those who voted recommending leaving the European Union raises important questions and issues for those within education who are interested in promoting learning about the wider world. Development education practice in the UK has relied heavily on funding from the European Commission. Europe Aid has had a budget line specifically on awareness raising and learning about development issues. Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities and higher education institutions have benefited from this budget line. More recently, other budget lines from the Commission including Erasmus and Horizon 20:20 have also provided opportunities for funding development education type activity. At a broader level, education at all levels within the UK has benefitted from the opportunities to share approaches towards learning, undertaking research and developing joint projects with partners elsewhere in Europe.

But perhaps even more important than the issue of funding is that the vote in the UK raises wider challenges to those within education about how best to respond to what is clearly a reaction to global influences, be they concerning refugees, economic migration or a growing sense of alienation

from society. How should those who promote development education and global learning respond in terms of their work with schools, young people and other educational institutions? This article will outline some of the issues that development educationalists need to consider in responding to the challenges of Brexit, addressing particularly themes related to globalisation and identities and the influence of racism within UK society.

What is clear is that within the UK, or at least within a large number of communities in England and Wales particularly, is resentment amongst many working people to the recent influx of economic migrants from Central and Eastern Europe. What is also evident is that since the vote in June, the rise of racist attacks reflects perhaps a more deep-seated and latent xenophobia in the UK that has perhaps not been discussed openly enough before. These themes reflect a broader dislocation from society particularly amongst many working class communities that is a direct consequence of the impact of globalisation and neoliberal policies on local economies. These trends therefore suggest that for those involved within development education and global learning, the referendum result identifies three major, albeit interrelated themes:

- The impact of globalisation on people's sense of identity, place, employment opportunities and culture;

- The xenophobia and racism that exists in many communities needs also to be related to the postcolonial forces that are still ever present in British society; and

- The role that education can play in equipping young people to play an active role in society, to feel included, valued and listened to.

Globalisation and globalism

Globalisation has many interpretations but underlying most of them is recognition that societies and communities are becoming interconnected socially, culturally and economically (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Held and

McGrew, 2000). In much of the debate about the reasons for Brexit, the term globalisation has emerged as a major one, as a reason why many working class voters rejected the European framework (Elliott, 2016; Sharma, 2016). As Coyle has written:

> "The UK's 'Leave' vote could be seen as a vote against globalisation and its uneven impact on different parts of the country, rather than a vote specifically against the EU. The proportions voting for Leave were higher in the Midlands and North of England, where deindustrialisation struck hardest and where average incomes have stagnated. London, the UK's only truly global city, saw growth and a high share of Remain voters" (2016: 1).

The economic changes that could be said to have influenced the referendum outcome go back to the Thatcher period in the UK and the consequent dominance of neoliberal economic strategies.

What globalisation has done is to accelerate these changes and increase the divisions in society between those who have access to stable forms of employment and those who do not. The consequences of these themes can be seen in terms of increased poverty, low self-esteem and within education, challenges in terms of role models and encouraging positive engagement in societies. As Younge (2010) suggests, globalisation has turned individuals into a 'universal tribe of consumers' who are 'economically interdependent but isolated and impotent as citizens'. These changes suggest that the more people sense a loss of control and access to democratic levers, the more people retreat into distinct identities or tribes (Cantle, 2013. Martin Jacques, a UK journalist, commented in 2016 that Brexit is a classic example of populism, of a reaction to political elites, a feeling amongst people who 'have lost out and been left behind…who feel dislocated by large scale immigration over which they have no control and who face an increasingly insecure and casualised labour market.'

This theme can be seen in numerous debates in and around globalisation. This sense of dislocation has been commented on in numerous

academic debates around globalisation (Dolby and Rizvi, 2008; Nayak, 2003). These trends relate to what could be called the rise of 'identity politics' and the erosion of traditional forms of democratic engagement in societies. A consequence of this retreat into distinct identities has also been the reluctance to engage with difference, cultures and outlooks other than their own. But there is a danger of merely equating globalisation with the impact of these social, cultural and economic forces. Ulrick Beck (2000) has commented on the complex nature of globalisation and that it should be seen in a wider context than just the domination of global companies and the marketisation. He uses the term globalism as incorporating the domination of the world market in both an economic and ideological sense (Beck, 2000:9).

Beck suggests on the other hand that globalisation could also be seen as globality; living in a world society where the totality of social relationships are not integrated into or determined by nation states (ibid.) This distinction is important because not only is globalisation here to stay, it has brought with it important openings and opportunities that can broaden one's outlook, provide access to instant information and put you in direct contact with peoples and communities from around the world. Global forces have enabled the potential mobilisation of communities through forms of social networking and an opportunity to develop partnerships and solidarity with peoples beyond the nation state.

Therefore, for development education, globalisation is not a simple economic or social force that needs to be exposed and campaigned against. It is much more complex phenomenon that brings with it opportunities as well as challenges. One of the challenges of the Brexit vote is to show through education that globalisation can result in the opening up of minds, ideas and experiences to different viewpoints and perspectives from around the world.

Xenophobia and racism

The UK is often lauded as being a more integrated and cosmopolitan society than much of continental Europe. Whilst there may be some evidence to

support this, particularly in a city such as London (Block, 2006), there are deep ideological undercurrents that raise important challenges for global learning. Racism in the twenty-first century cannot be divorced from making reference to the influence of globalisation (Macedo and Gounari, 2016; Stavenhagen, 1999). There has been an assumption that increased social and economic mobility can and has led to a decrease in racist behaviours. There is certainly some evidence that access to a range of cultures can broaden peoples' horizons (Fennes and Hapgood, 1997), and that travel and social mobility can lead to a decrease in stereotyping (Bamber, 2016). However, there is also evidence that increased global mobility can result in indigenous communities feeling isolated and resentful. Racism breeds on a sense of alienation, of dislocation from society. It can also become more prevalent when education in whatever form, fails to address underlying causes of racism (Stavenhagen, 1999).

The rise of racist attacks in the UK post-Brexit suggests there is a correlation between globalisation, racism and tribal identities. More than 3,000 allegations of hate crimes were made to UK police in the week before and the week after the 23 June vote, a year-on-year increase of 42 percent (Butler, 2016). These events however need to be seen as more than just short-term responses to Brexit but reflecting deep seated prejudices and views that have existed in UK society for a long time but were given a new air of legitimacy with the vote in June (Troyna, 1993). Britain, despite its outward appearance of being a tolerant, multicultural society, has deeply ingrained traditions of racism and xenophobia, running right through its modern history. The British Empire was built on a sense of racial superiority. Hostility to perceived outsiders has been a theme, from the 'nineteenth century to the present day including anti-Semitism in the inter-war years, post-war racism towards Black and Asian people, and today's Islamophobia and resentment towards Eastern Europeans.

These themes have been well documented in a range of reports in the UK, most notably the MacPherson Report in response to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, but where there has been less discussion is on the

undercurrents of xenophobia. This suggests that a neglected aspect of debates around these themes in the UK has been the relevance of postcolonial thinking. Whilst there has been some important recent work on postcolonial theories and development education and global citizenship, particularly through the work of Vanessa Andreotti (2012) and April Biccum (2010), there have few studies that have looked directly at the implications of racism and xenophobia for the practices of development education and global learning in the UK.

Young people and globalisation

The majority of young adults who voted in the referendum it appears tended to vote remain rather than leave. The reasons for this are probably numerous including being more socially and culturally mobile than their parents or grandparents, being more aware of wider world issues and above all recognising the integrated nature of UK within Europe and the wider world. It is likely that education has played an important role in this with considerable resources and opportunities being made available within formal education for cultural understanding and joint projects with partner schools elsewhere in Europe.

At a broader level, young people more than any other sector of society, have been the most direct recipients of globalisation (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). This can be seen through the influences on their sense of personal identification, consumption patterns or use of social networking (France, 2007; Nayak, 2003). This influence of globalisation however does not automatically make young people global citizens. Many of them feel isolated, disenfranchised from decision-making processes and secure employment opportunities are by no means an option. Also, as a range of studies and research on global learning has shown, young people have also been influenced by the media and other forms of communication that perpetuate traditional and negative images about people elsewhere in the world (Brown, 2014; Cross et.al, 2010).

It is where development education and global learning has been well resourced, and provided opportunities for young people to develop their understanding about the wider world, that there is evidence of a global outlook and one that challenges perceptions and stereotypes (Bourn, 2015; Hunt, 2012). This evidence shows particularly that the impact is strongest and most long lasting where young people see their connections between this learning and their own lifestyles and personal situations.

Role of and response from education

Education is therefore an important response to Brexit. In purely economic terms, the UK education system has to address the challenge of Brexit by encouraging learning to look beyond the British Isles. 'Insular isolationism is not a viable option and we need to be part of larger entities that have the reach and resources required to tackle global problems' (Elliott, 2016). The benefits that the education system has gained from being part of the European Union must not be lost. Young people, teachers and schools need to continue to have access to learning about other cultures, understanding different perspectives on issues and recognising the value of broadening horizons beyond their own community and nation state.

The importance of these themes has been recognised by policy-makers around the world through for example the planned PISA study on global competencies in 2018 and the inclusion of concepts such as global citizenship in the United Nations UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Terms such as global and twenty-first century skills for example are not part of the vocabulary of educationalists around the world. Of course, globalisation has brought with it many negative consequences to education, including the emphasis on examinations and testing, measuring performance and promoting competition. But at the same time it has created opportunities for young people to have access to knowledge from a wide range of sources around the world, to be able to communicate with people and see that we live in an interconnected and interdependent world.

Development education and global learning and Brexit

A feature of development education and global learning practice over the past decade has been the promotion of an approach towards learning that moves beyond increasing knowledge about global and development issues to one that challenges assumptions, questions stereotypes and shows the underlying causes of inequality and injustice in the world. The growing popularity of terms such as global citizenship for example reflect this emphasis on making connections to the individual learners' sense of place in the world.

As already mentioned, the work of Vanessa Andreotti has been particularly influential. However, the influence of postcolonialism has not always been translated through to making links and connections to themes such as power, inequality and the ideological influence of colonial forces within, say, British society. There may be a number of reasons for this including funding constraints and the priorities of NGOs, but this is clearly an area that needs to be addressed in the light of Brexit. Through the Global Learning Programme in England there has been a number of initiatives around the British values debate but this is, of course, framed within an approach in which it is difficult to address some of the more underlying causes of racism and xenophobia in UK society (Bowden, 2016). There has also been some innovative work looking at influences of postcolonialism on educational partnerships and study visits (Leonard, 2014; Martin and Griffiths, 2014).

Development education and global learning in response to Brexit therefore need to be based more on promoting learning that looks at the issues and causes of inequality, understanding power relations and the ideological influences that underpin much of the dominant political ideas in UK society. Too often development educationalists have tended to respond to the challenges of globalisation by encouraging action against the influences of multi-national companies and global forces. What this has done is to ignore the complex influences of globalisation and the conflating of globalisation with neoliberal forces. Whilst there is a danger of education being seen as the panacea for addressing these issues of racism and

alienation, there is no doubt that formal education particularly through schools can play an important role in promoting approaches towards learning what globalisation means, why there is economic migration from East to Western Europe and also the broader undercurrents in British society regarding a sense of superiority over other cultures. Merely encouraging and promoting cultural awareness it is suggested here is not enough. What cannot be denied is that some have perceived Brexit as permission for intolerance and racism in society. This makes schools' role in promoting respect and mutual understanding that much harder.

Concluding thoughts

Brexit has laid down major challenges to educationalists throughout the UK and probably beyond. It has raised major issues and challenges in terms of the relationship between themes and viewpoints from within British society to what is taught within schools. To say that education should broaden horizons, encourage a sense of tolerance and cultural understanding whilst laudable in itself is perhaps not enough. Living in a complex, globalised world needs to be recognised within education but unless there is also a discussion about understanding why some communities feel left behind and excluded, then we are not equipping learners with the relevant knowledge and skills to make a positive contribution to society.

Development education and global learning theories and practices need to take far more account than they currently do of the complex influences on societies. Racism and xenophobia need to be tackled and debated within schools. But the issues need to be addressed in a way that connects with young people's everyday lives and shows that the challenges many communities are facing need to be understood in the context of global forces and influences.

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