

# DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND TRANSNATIONALISM

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In the course of writing the editorial for Issue 32 of *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, I recalled the title of an opinion piece written by a Portuguese historian and politician titled ‘What have we learned from the year that felt like a century?’ (Tavares, 2021). I am certain this (poetic) phrase finds resonance in each one of us and could be an adequate frontispiece of this current issue of the journal. As Issue 32 of the journal suggests, the world has never before been so interconnected and so interdependent. To the countless challenges that humanity has been facing together in recent years - from economic crises to climate change, to gender inequality and the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean - 2020 added others such as spikes in racism and the global response of the Black Lives Matter movement, the toppling of memorials linked to colonialism, and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, worsening pre-existing inequalities and creating new ones.

As citizens, researchers and/or activists in the development education (DE) field (or other adjacent fields like global citizenship education, global education, intercultural education, peace education, among others), we feel the urge to engage in deep dialogue aiming to find ‘reasons to be cheerful while the future is unwritten’ (Wegimont, 2020: 1), which drive us to participate in its writing. The articles published in Issue 32 are valuable contributions to this dialogue.

Chris O’Connell, Benjamin Mallon, Caitríona Ní Cassaithe and Maria Barry, in their article titled ‘Addressing the complexity of contemporary slavery: towards a critical framework for educators’, highlight the importance of critical DE (Andreotti, 2006) in the processes of understanding and calling for action on slavery. Starting from a discussion on key concepts of ‘modern slavery’ and ‘unfree labour’, the contexts of their use and institutionalisation, and main limitations and critiques, the authors focus on the challenges of addressing the complexity of slavery in educational processes, as it is a ‘troubling global phenomenon’ and a historical continuity, even with different

contours over time. Therefore, from a critical DE perspective and the lenses of transnational and *trans-chronological* historical enquiry, the researchers propose a pedagogical framework to the problem at hand. From a conceptual and a didactical point of view, some interesting connections emerge between past and present forms of slavery; between the analysis of singularities to the analysis of the global structures sustaining it; and between the global and local scales (a very dear methodology to transnational and global historians). These connections allow a deeper reflection within the educational process on the roots of slavery. They similarly support an analysis of current effects of colonialism in the contemporary world, such as ethnocentric discourses, power relations, racialisation, inequalities, and the establishment of interconnections between several subjects (e.g. slavery, global economy, work legislation, climate change, etc.). Finally, the authors propose an affective and active engagement with the problem, moving from a single content-based approach to a competence and value-based one by developing a critical but empathic positioning based on a more conscious and well-founded perspective.

Son Gyoh's article, titled 'NGO Representations Versus Mediation: A Learner Centred Approach to Public Understanding about Global Development', analyses communication strategies of two types of non-governmental organisation (NGO); international and small, youth-led campaign organisations. The objective is to identify which modes are more adjusted to promote public deliberation, understanding, learning and, eventually, action about complex development issues. Departing from some theories of knowledge, the author argues that campaigners engaged by the above organisations can be knowledge actors, participating with different levels of involvement in the different phases of the 'knowledge cycle', in processes that can be 'thick' ('deep') or 'shallow' ('surface'). Consequently, there will be different results between 'heightening public awareness' and 'increasing public understanding'. Debating these two different levels, the author argues that whereas the international NGOs tend to implement a 'representation' top-down approach, focused on influencing policy-makers, creating sound-bites to increase awareness in a superficial way, and mobilising people to prescribed actions (and consequently to a more passive role), the

small youth-led organisations are oriented to play the role of ‘mediators’ between their campaigners and diverse sources of knowledge, aiming for a deeper learning process that impels citizens to find individual and collective ways to intervene and build a group identity. Also, the role played by international organisations’ *agendas* presented conflicted outlines navigating from a charity approach and a social justice one (e.g. using images to inspire compassion), while the small youth-led organisations tend to employ a message based on social justice and the pursuit of change (e.g. using protest images). The author advocates for a single-issue approach since it allows for more ‘clarity and density’ in the public engagement process.

The third Focus article by Romina De Angelis, titled ‘Global Education and Migration in a Changing European Union’, discusses the concept and meaning of global education (GE) and its contribution to building an intercultural world (overcoming ‘the dichotomy between *we* and the *other*’). The author also debates ‘migration’ definitions, according to different approaches and different institutions. The article assumes that ‘the movement of different types of migrants with different backgrounds and reasons to migrate’ brought many challenges to the educational systems of host countries. These challenges demand educational responses, not only of more intercultural curricula but also ‘ensuring access to education for all as a fundamental human right’. With this drive, global education can be an educational and pedagogical approach to these challenges, based on global social justice (Bourn, 2020), the principal of equity and the appreciation of diversity. Through GE, it is possible to move the dialogue from assimilation and multiculturalism to a real interculturalism, grounded in human rights, democracy, and pluralism. The main research findings call our attention to the challenge of the predominance of negative perceptions related to migrants in a wide range of European countries and in certain sociodemographic groups. On the other hand, the article concludes that better results exist in countries where there is a joint effort involving several stakeholders, especially within the context of national strategies or specific educational policies. The persistence of challenges related to the shrinking of public funds, the political agenda and lack of a multi-stakeholder policy in several European countries are discussed, as is the lack

of adequate teacher education to build real spaces of inclusion. Based on these findings achievable recommendations are proposed.

The fourth Focus piece reflects on ‘Using the Collective Memory Work in Development Education’, based on the personal experiences of the authors, Nita Mishra, Jenny Onyx and Trees McCormick, by sharing their experiences of the pandemic in lockdown. In this simple yet evocative tale, one is summoned to glance at the authors’ process of self-reflection, as protagonists in their research, not only as *subjects* but also as *objects*. Within this methodology ‘which offers the possibility of reinterpretation on an individual case basis’, space is created for the design of different forms of knowledge and new ways for a more meaningful learning. A cornerstone of the process is critical thinking about settled definitions of knowledge, how it is produced, and where and when it happens. Recognising their implication in the research, the authors reflect about their own backgrounds, in line with what is named ‘positionality/situatedness’ by Momodou Sallah (2020) – in this case status, sex, age, labour conditions, and colour.

Revisiting their memories of confinement during COVID-19, they identified some categories of analysis – solidarity; awareness; racism; homes and homelessness; fear, anxiety and risk; losing control versus alienation; having control; and human agency and the new normal. The reflections that struck me most were: a focus on solidarity from an optimistic view of the emergence of small daily gestures of kindness (‘solidarity is an essential condition for humanity’); the acknowledgement, made more visible by the pandemic situation, of the inequalities around us – as it was disseminated by some posts in social media, ‘despite being all in the same storm we are in extremely different boats’; the presence of ‘contradictions or different truths’ of different participants in the process; the exposure of racism by the fear of the unknown (‘people who do not mirror you become a threat’); the recognition that a confinement requires a home and that is, *per se*, a privilege; the intimacy and invasion of privacy brought by the circumstance of working from home; the appreciation that a situation we take for granted can change very quickly; the balance between a *momentary lack of reason* and alienation and moments of regaining control through personal processes or collective moments; the

‘new normal’, provoked by disruption, anxiety and reflection can and should also be the ignition for new, fairer, models of society.

Having read and reflected upon the four Focus articles in Issue 32, some key questions emerged.

## **Context**

All of the articles reflected on *Transnationalism*, as ‘a set of processes relating to social, economic and political connections between people, places and institutions, across national borders, potentially spanning the world’ (Drinkwater, Rizvi and Edge, 2019). Therefore, globalisation is considered not only by its advantages but also by its negative externalities – the global economic model that opens doors to the ‘modern slavery’; the increasing commodification of everything driven by the market economy; the rising levels of xenophobic and populist attitudes; the resistance to the free flow of migrants across the world; the pandemic situations of racism, of COVID-19 and other dangers that risk our lives but above all our diversity, dignity, and social cohesion. Are we, in line with Thomas Friedman’s work, considering that the ‘world is flat’ (2007), and the result of a hegemonic process led by the dominant ‘monocultures’ (Santos, 2007: 9)? Or do we want to propose a world of ‘ecologies’ (Ibid.: 32), opening up spaces to make visible what is invisible? Could we relate the increasing levels of xenophobic, racism, ultra-nationalism and populist attitudes to the perception of this hegemonic globalisation of the powerful that is being imposed?

## **Terms and Concepts**

Due to the proliferation of terms used in DE, our field is often considered in need of more conceptual clarity. The articles presented in Issue 32 prove this point: development education, global education, global learning, global citizenship education, are all used in the various articles. Moreover, the use of these terms is not always linear. One could point out some movements criticising the concept of *development* – see, for instance, the new designation of the European Commission’s Directorate-General that encompasses these fields, formerly called *International Cooperation and Development* and recently baptised as *International Partnerships*. The same with the concept

*global*, ‘especially amongst certain central European countries as the North-South Centre reported’ because it ‘may carry a meaning of absorption into a larger entity with a sense of uniformisation (as a process of globalisation) that is disliked, especially in countries where national discourses are rising’ (Destree and Čajková, 2021: 8), which may be related to what was said earlier about perceptions of globalisation.

Besides the importance of the discussion about the terms used in different contexts, usually related to historical and institutional national processes and traditions (Global Schools, 2016), it is fundamental that we define what we mean by them. The articles point out the existence of conceptual clashes: i) between a ‘soft’ and a ‘critical’ approach, as proposed by Andreotti (2006), that can be seen also in the distinction made between charity/compassion and social justice approaches; ii) and between a vision based on ‘learning aimed at influencing change’ (Gyoh, 2021) or ‘challenge unjust structures of interdependence’ (Bourn, 2015: 19-20, cited in Gyoh 2021) and the ‘learning aimed at acquiring skills and attitudes to live in a global society’ (Ibid.). This warning has been already addressed by Coelho and Franch (2020) and De Vries (2020), in their reviews of *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Global Education and Learning*:

“Another point of friction is the aim of GE: some contributors affirm that GE should focus on civic virtues to foster responsible citizens, while others refer to the improved employability of students as a result of GE. Consequently, as the handbook wants to include a multitude of perspectives, it allows for contradicting interpretations to coexist, which may lead to prevailing criticism” (De Vries, 2020: 201).

Can GE/DE/GCE be used as a means to increase competitiveness in the global market? Could it, or should it, accommodate the national or international policies regarding the international interests and economic relations? Can the concept *global*, possibly be perceived as linked to a de-characterising globalisation, by making anti-bodies grow around our field of research and action? A further reflection about concepts is urgently needed.

## Methodologies

The Focus articles in this issue reinforced the idea of critical DE/GE/GCE as a long-term learning process to address the complexities of the contemporary world, facing against superficial approaches, ‘soundbites’ or a ‘quick-fix for urgent situations’. It is needed as a tool to challenge Eurocentric perspectives, to better understand interdependences and interconnections, between past and present, global and local, and individual and collective. DE is also required to question the traditional process of creation, validation and dissemination of knowledge, valuing the integration of different actors, tools and methodologies of collecting and analysing data, erasing the subject and object artificial barrier, in order to achieve great personal and collective meaningful transformation. As Mishra, Onyx and McCormick suggest:

“As co-producers of knowledge we have shown that the production of knowledge is a combination of serious reflection and action between equals, a horizontal dialogue guided by love, humility, faith and mutual trust”.

Arundhati Roy invites us to think about the opportunities brought by moments of crisis. She calls this pandemic a ‘portal, a gateway between one world and the next’. What the future may hold is up to us:

“We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it” (Roy, 2020).

Are we capable of believing enough to take advantage of these difficult times to commit ourselves to the social change we really want?

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