

# Editorial

## REIMAGINING DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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### **DE and the Changing Geopolitics of Development**

Ideas of change have always been central to development education (DE), but it is less clear whether DE itself responds well to change. As individuals, communities, regions and nations in Europe face brutal austerity measures and growing marginalisation, as citizens in North Africa struggle and suffer in seeking to alter their political systems, as some countries of the global South begin to flex new economic and geopolitical muscle, and as poor communities already feel the effects of climate change, it is not always clear if or how DE is responding to this changing landscape.

The relatively small number of DE practitioners and researchers, the scarcity of resources and fragility of programmes and projects in the face of government cuts or changes to non-governmental organisation (NGO) policy, are more likely to encourage a retreat to familiar spaces and practices. This makes a reimagining of development education for this changing world all the more challenging. A key part of meeting this challenge is to understand how development education is shaping and could be shaped by the big debates and questions. Where, for example, might DE fit into the Beyond 2015 agenda, not only in what follows the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but also the processes that shape this?

At the 'European Development Days' conference in Warsaw in December 2011, I participated in a panel entitled 'Beyond 2015 - a citizen driven agenda' (European Development Days, 2011), where a United Nations (UN) representative noted that there would be an expansion of citizen engagement in the global South as part of shaping what follows the MDGs. This is to be welcomed. But, as I suggested at the time, there is surely a strong case to engage citizens globally if we are to move beyond frameworks that continue to locate the problems of poverty and development, and their resolution, in the global South. This demands a serious project of engagement and deliberation which explores and addresses the factors shaping marginalisation, inequality and injustice, wherever they may be found. Since

DE has a history and expertise of engaging citizens, principally in the global North to date, on these issues, surely this is an example of where DE's voice needs to be heard, and where DE practice should be brought to bear in helping shape a new global development agenda.

### **A Relational Understanding of DE**

To reimagine DE for a changing geopolitical and development landscape, we need a better *relational* understanding of DE – that is, an understanding of DE as it is defined, practiced and changed as it works in relation to wider social, cultural, political or economic settings, actors and ideas. This requires DE scholarship to be more than aspirational and normative. Whilst DE practitioners constantly negotiate DE through various partnerships and relationships, this is rarely captured in scholarship and writing on DE. This means that understandings of DE remain shaped by analyses of particular projects, their mechanisms and measurable impacts. This means we have a limited understanding of how the social, cultural, economic or political situating of DE shapes how DE is produced, how DE organisations function, how DE connects with everyday lives in expected or unexpected ways, or how the people doing DE shape and are shaped by it.

Without this understanding, it is hard to connect DE ideas and practices to the shifting social, political, and economic changes shaping people's lives in the global North and South, and difficult to argue for the relevance and importance of DE in these changing times. Yet DE has significant resonances with key ideas and ideals being explored by scholars and activists. For example, we can find resonances between DE and emergent debates around what a cosmopolitan politics might look like that goes beyond bland claims to universalism and references to global humanity (Baillie Smith et al., 2011). This can result in a politics that works across spaces, connecting a transnational politics to the complexities and contradictions of everyday life, community, history and tradition (Calhoun, 2002: 77; Baillie Smith, 2012: 16).

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The articles in this issue of *Policy and Practice* locate DE in relation to some of the diverse imaginaries, institutions and policy contexts in which it is positioned, through which it is produced and against which it is sometimes struggling. Rachel Tallon's article explores the ways young New Zealanders negotiate and receive NGO messages, Anne Dolan's article considers the relationship between DE and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the context of the Rio+20 summit and initial teacher education (ITE), and

Richard Scriven analyses DE resources in relation to ‘popular’ and ‘non-popular’ development discourses.

The Perspectives articles explore DE in relation to international volunteering (O’Neill), consider the need for a European DE strategy (Lappalainen), reflect on learning around global health in second level education in Ireland (Porter et al.), explore the challenges of enhancing research capacity through the International Doctorate in Global Health (Uduma et al.), and offer critical reflections on how we can understand the *Indignados* movement in Spain (Viejo and Delclos). Whilst not all of the articles are about DE, what they do collectively is force us to ask questions of DE and what counts as DE. Examining the Focus articles, and those by Lappalainen and O’Neill in particular, helps us understand DE relationally, and as something dynamic, contested, unpredictable and produced through multiple voices, power relationships and decisions. This may not provide a straightforward sales pitch for DE, but provides a more nuanced and multi-layered picture of DE and its practices, something that is critical to ensuring we have the capacity to make a robust case for its importance in a changing world, centred on what it offers and how it does it.

### **DE and Popular Discourses on the Global South**

Whilst the articles cover a wide range of seemingly disparate issues, the relationship between DE and wider public imaginaries of development, the importance of paying attention to voice and the different levels of struggle in which the sector is engaged, all come through. Since its emergence in the second half of the twentieth century, DE has explicitly sought to tackle dominant representations of development and the global South. This has been founded on critiques of the ways the global South has been represented through the prisms of charity and pity, with the global North as saviour, and NGOs experiencing internal tensions with fundraising teams (Baillie Smith, 2008: 9). This is not to say that DE has been without fault; Biccum has suggested that, in the UK, New Labour’s DE focused ‘Development Awareness’ policy was based on producing ‘little developers’ (2007: 1114).

Criticisms of DE are well established, and resonate with those expressed in postcolonial and other scholarship, but they also need updating, something that Scriven’s article engages with. Popular imaginaries of development are being ‘stretched’ (Baillie Smith, 2012), with ‘positive’ images becoming more popular – notwithstanding some recent changes from NGOs as their fundraising teams face the impacts of recession and austerity – and the Northern ‘consumer’ being privileged, over the stereotyped poor person

(Cameron, 2008: 225). Development has also been popularised through events like Make Poverty History and the growth of international volunteering (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011).

There have also been attempts at more hybrid development communications, evidenced in the *Guardian* newspaper's *Katine* initiative (2007-2010), whilst a growth in celebrity involvement in development communications and advocacy has often reinforced ideas of the agency and authority of the global North. However, there have been some changes in media reporting of the global South, such as in the recent 'Welcome to India' series on BBC2 in the UK which personalises and attempts to give voice to some of India's rural poor. Jonathan Dimbleby's BBC series, 'An African Journey', similarly explores Africa in terms of change rather than 'need' or lack of development. None of this is to deny the persistence of fundraising and disaster dominated images and representations of the global South. But as Tallon notes, what has also been popularised is a critique and scepticism about charity dominated representations. All of this then complicates the picture for DE, meaning 'popular' and 'non-popular' development discourses are perhaps less clear cut than they used to be.

This plurality risks a 'babble of voices' (Smillie, 1995: 144) that is likely to serve to confuse rather than enable a coherent and effective engagement with and action on global justice and inequality (Baillie Smith, 2008: 14). Tallon's article makes an important move in this context, urging us to locate what DE does and can achieve in relation to popular development ideas. In particular, she shows how DE can be interpreted by reference to wider imaginaries, something that moves debate beyond 'blaming NGOs' and requires us to address reception and 'reading' of images and ideas of development with more subtlety and complexity; something that can only be achieved through sustained qualitative and in-depth research. The latter is particularly important, since, as Tallon also shows, we need to pay attention to the agency and voice not simply of actors in the global South, but of young people in the global North as they negotiate and sometimes resist the information they receive. As one teacher interviewed by Tallon notes, these negotiations need to be understood in context, with the location and cultural make up of the school being important.

### **Connecting with Communities**

My own work with the NGO CAFOD on their 'Connect2' initiative, which connects Catholic parishes in the UK with El Salvador, Ethiopia, Brazil, Rwanda, Bangladesh and Cambodia similarly highlighted the importance of

paying attention to the subtleties of locality, and the make-up and histories of particular parishes, in shaping engagement in development. The importance of having or developing a detailed understanding of partner or ‘beneficiary’ communities has long been recognised, if not practiced, in relation to development interventions in the global South; communities and actors involved or brought into development in the global South have long been the focus of ethnographic enquiries. But there is much less evidence, in terms of research and practice, that such detailed understandings are deemed necessary to engaging citizens with development in the global North (Baillie Smith, 2012). As I have argued elsewhere, if ‘Development needs citizens’ (Dare Forum, 2011), then we had better get to know them (Baillie Smith, 2011).

In different ways, Dolan’s paper on the relationship between EDS and DE in the context of initial teacher education and the Rio+20 summit, Lappalainen’s discussion of a European DE strategy, and Scriven’s critique of DE texts and resources also highlight the need to explore DE in terms of its relationships with other actors, institutions, ideas and initiatives. Scriven notes how there is a need, in some of the materials he explores, to strengthen the links between identity and global citizenship, whilst Dolan’s article makes the case for greater collaboration between DE and ESD, strengthening the connections in teacher training and practices between issues of poverty, justice and sustainability. But what Dolan and Lappalainen also highlight is the importance of DE’s relationship to infrastructures of government and governance. They show how policy frameworks can play a role in providing spaces for DE to act, although such spaces may not always enable the kind of politics that many DE practitioners may seek; mainstreaming and the neoliberal professionalisation of DE have had significant effects (Humble, 2010).

What we can see through the papers are the different kinds of struggles that DE faces in maintaining its voice, presence and relevance. Lappalainen’s article illustrates how complex European level frameworks can be, and the importance of the struggle for policy recommendations and commitments. Dolan’s paper similarly highlights the struggle of achieving policy change. Tallon, on the other hand, reveals the struggles that teachers may face in seeking to foster a more critical perspective both in terms of the positioning of a school and curricula guidance, but also in terms of the wider discourses of development that can give meaning to young people’s perceptions and impressions.

This all highlights the scale of the challenge for DE in seeking to negotiate a changing development landscape. As DE works between disparate

actors and frameworks, there is the risk of a dislocation between those whose relationships centre on engaging with everyday experiences of a changing world, and those lobbying for policy support. But the current juncture also opens significant new opportunities. As established imaginaries of development are unsettled, there is now both an opportunity and urgent need to help shape what comes next, and to ensure citizens have a voice in that process. If DE isn't able to work out how to do this, and to assert its importance confidently and effectively at all levels, perhaps DE scholars and practitioners had better go back to school!

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