

Editorial

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION WITHOUT BORDERS

Frank Geary

The context for development education, development and civil society activity is undergoing significant change. Many of the central concerns of development education have broken across the borders which hitherto contained them and become central to discussions about the future of development and human rights. This is a crucial moment for development education and it is essential that policy and practice respond to it. The convergence of the post-2015 process to replace the Millennium Development Goals, and economic crisis and austerity in Europe has contributed to major changes in the context, the policy environment and practice of development education, development and civil society. The post-2015 framework, in particular, will influence policies towards the development education sector for many years to come. Core development education concerns – participative approaches to decision-making and civil society; universal approaches to global problems of inequality, sustainability, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights – have become central elements of the post-2015 discussions. There is therefore an essential role for development education to play both by contributing expertise in participative and universalist approaches to global justice issues, and by drawing on its central position as a bridge between development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society. Development education is central to the growth of civil society and international frameworks for human development, human rights, and sustainability.

Issue 17 of *Policy and Practice* addresses this shifting situation by examining approaches to development education and related fields such as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Social Work. In examining the borders of development education, alongside aspirations to move beyond borders, the articles in this issue address core questions which development education must be aware of in order to contribute to civil society, human rights and development beyond 2015. This issue of *Policy and Practice* has curated

diverse responses to these questions. Atkinson and Wade explore the benefits of cross-disciplinary approaches and a ‘more symbiotic relationship between Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Political Science’. Drawing on key developments in ESD, such as the United Nations (UN) Decade for ESD, they explore the benefits within ESD and within Political Science of an interdisciplinary approach, and the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches to address the complexity of global issues. Briskman, Martin, Kueck and Jarema propose a movement for Social Workers Without Borders connecting local action with global consequence as well as connecting local and global activism. Drawing on the work of Jim Ife they focus on ‘internationalist community development’ to move beyond both disciplinary and geographical borders.

John Hilary calls for a more radical approach to development education and social justice, in particular within development NGOs. Drawing on cases studies such as the Make Poverty History campaign, he calls on development NGOs and development education to reframe activity to address ‘international NGOs’ almost total disconnection from grassroots social movements’. Mags Liddy explores development education practices in different geographic locations and how the context in which development education is delivered fundamentally alters approaches taken. Focusing on education about, for and as development she explores the possibility that interventions ‘which impact most on the learner and create the most significant long-term attitudinal change arise from the inclusion of less global content’. Troll and Skinner call for development education to move ‘from the margins to the centre of development discourse’. In outlining the work of the DEEEP project, they argue that development education ‘can enhance its relevance to civil society precisely by sticking to its core values, instead of trading them away’.

Development education and civil society

Development education is a fundamental element of civil society activity. Development education, as both a discipline and a sector, creates connections between a broad spectrum of global justice actors. It connects NGOs, state and civil society institutions, community groups and practitioners, social movements, and individual learners. This spectrum of activity and this interaction between a range of actors is essential for effective development education. Development education is therefore both an exemplar of civil society and an engine for

strengthening civil society bonds, networks and cohesion. With its central focus on global justice, development education is instrumental in creating a civil society without borders, not only internationally, but across the multiple sectors and interests who make up civil society in local, regional and global contexts. The spectrum of activity within development education and the diversity of actors are essential and enable development education to facilitate learners in both education towards global justice and education towards participation in civil society.

Atkinson and Wade highlight the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to global issues of inequality and sustainability:

“An interdisciplinary approach is essential if we are to deal with the multi-faceted challenges of combating climate change and building a more sustainable world. Specialist disciplinary knowledge is always going to be relevant but at the same time our assessment of positive ways forward and strategies for adaptation, mitigation, and restoration of life systems (including human social systems) must be based on more joined up forms of knowledge”.

Like ESD, development education is ‘by its nature interdisciplinary and can offer experience and expertise of this way of working’. Debate and discussion are central learning tools within development education. Diverse viewpoints, as well as diverse actors, are therefore fundamental to development education just as is the case for civil society. Hilary as well as Troll and Skinner call on development NGOs to draw on the diversity of opinion and the radical strands within the development education community. Both articles argue that the practice of non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) will be enriched by engaging with the debate within development education and regard development education as a bridge to broader civil society and broader debate. Liddy and Briskman et al. address these questions from a geographical as well as a disciplinary point of view. Liddy looks at the question of diversity in development education in the international context, asking what development education needs are found in differing contexts, comparing Ireland and Liberia, and identifying approaches to ensure that development education can function across geographical borders. Briskman et al. call for social work to

internationalise and create a global movement for social work without borders. They provide an interesting analysis of ‘without borders movements’.

Universalism and participative approaches

Universalism and participative approaches are two key concepts that support the idea of working ‘without borders’, and are central to the ethos and practice of development education. These are both now central to the post-2015 discussions on a post-MDG framework. Even if this is not carried through at UN level, the debate to date has greatly altered thinking on NGDO practice, and the prominence of these ideas within the post-2015 debate ensures that they can no longer be dismissed as marginal concerns. It is important for the development education sector to examine our approaches to these topics so as to identify key learning that can be shared within the post-2015 debate; to identify and share expertise and experience from development education which will help to enshrine these values in international civil society and international institutional frameworks; and to closely interrogate development education practice to ask whether these ideals have been fully applied within our own practices and policy positions, and if not what we can learn and change.

Discussion on the post-2015 framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals has focused on the need for a universal approach to global issues that will include and place requirements on all parts of the world. The emphasis in post-2015 discussions, including the UN Special Event on the MDGs and the post-2015 Framework in September 2013, on participation in decision-making, rights-based approaches and shared global responsibilities reflects the priorities of development education.

Universalism and global approaches to global issues are likely to underpin the post-2015 framework. Universal approaches to global justice are at the heart of development education which has created a place for universalism at the heart of the development sector. Local to global connections are the basis of development education interventions across a variety of sectors. The sense of shared responsibility which underpins the post-2015 framework has been promoted and fostered by development education practice for many years. Global solidarity is central to development education in adult and community settings, trade unions, and formal education. Development education has an

important role in communicating this to the development sector and civil society; sharing methodologies for exploring and exemplifying global solidarity and the universalism of global issues, promoting methods of communication and education which can be shared with a wider audience and can be utilised by a broad range of partners in development and civil society.

Equally, development education must interrogate its own practice to ensure that it is based on solidarity and does not reinforce educational hierarchies between North and South. Mags Liddy explores these questions in her article in relation to her study of development education practice in Ireland and Liberia. Briskman et al. highlight Jim Ife's definition of global development which suggests that 'the oneness of all people transcends national and cultural boundaries, and the social and environmental policies of other nations are the potential legitimate concern for all'. The novelist Teju Cole (2012) has forcefully expressed the need to address the complex root causes of global and local injustices through local and national action, as well as international. Responding to the Kony 2012 viral video, he calls on idealistic young Americans to first start with United States' foreign policy and to support advocacy movements such as the petrol protests in Nigeria in 2012: 'If we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement'.

Participative learning, debate and diversity of viewpoints are fundamental to development education practice. Participation in decision-making and a rights based approach are likely to be central themes in the post-2015 framework. As with universalism, the experience and expertise of development education in this area should be shared within the development sector and broader civil society. Development education methodologies can illustrate the strengths and pitfalls of participative approaches, and can provide helpful models. Troll and Skinner directly call for the creation of a global citizens' movement drawing on the ethos and practice of development education. Hilary calls for the radical inclusiveness of development education and social movements to be applied to the practice of NGDOs and campaigns.

It is equally essential to examine practice within the sector and whether it is participative or didactic. This applies especially to approaches where there

is a tension between ethical aims of development education and participative methods. In these cases, participative learning and methods must be safeguarded as these provide the seeds for participative decision-making processes and civil society engagement as envisaged in the post-2015 framework. These create robust debate, and enrich democracy and civil society in doing so. The importance of these participative approaches within development education and their contribution to the democratic functioning of society must be communicated to policymakers. Accountability at home and abroad is a goal within many development initiatives from the Global Transparency Initiative to *One World, One Future*, Ireland's policy for international development (2013). Just as democracy needs an educated electorate, accountability requires an educated public who are literate in global justice and development issues. Therefore participative development education is central to accountability and to strengthening global civil society.

Conclusion

Given the changing context for civil society and development, it is essential that development education avails of the opportunities to lead, to share expertise, to learn and develop practice. To achieve this it is essential to come out of the 'shadow spaces' that Troll and Skinner refer to, to step away from the perception of development education as marginal to development or civil society practice, to assert the centrality of development education. This may require a change of language, a change in communication approaches, but it does not mean that the ethos of development education should be sacrificed or altered, that the radical aspects of development education should be declawed, as Troll and Skinner assert. The crutch of attributing marginalisation may need to be jettisoned without losing the content of development education's radicalism – which increasingly is reflected in the discourse of NGDOs, the UN, and the development sector (Phillips, 2013). If the changes which development education purports to bring to society are to come to fruition it is essential that development education engages with 'mainstream' debate and brings change to all of society.

All of these changes require development education to explore where its borders lie, whether it has them, whether it should transcend them? The title of this issue poses several alternative questions. Should development

education be ‘without borders’ in its scope? Should it recognise and move beyond the borders which it has? Are the borders of development education geographical or disciplinary? The articles in this issue of *Policy and Practice* grapple with these questions, both directly and indirectly addressing challenges and opportunities faced by development education. As a discipline, development education must ask itself different questions when it comes to acting ‘without borders’. As a discipline concerned with global justice, development education must ask itself how global are our perspectives and what borders do we need to transcend, internally and externally, in order to further global justice?

References

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