

DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND MIGRATION

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The myths of migration

Migration is often framed negatively in political discourse as an impediment to development, competition for native employment, a drain on resources or a threat to border security. The British Home Secretary, James Cleverley, for example, wrote in December 2023:

“It is clear that net migration remains far too high. By leaving the European Union we gained control over who can come to the UK, but far more must be done to bring those numbers down so British workers are not undercut and our public services put under less strain”.

This kind of immigrant framing is becoming increasingly common across Europe. In a longitudinal study drawing upon data from 22 countries over 18 years, Schmidt-Catran and Czymara found that ‘anti-immigrant attitudes increase when political elites express more exclusionary sentiments towards immigration’ and they result in ‘polarisation along political and socio-economic dimensions’ (2023: 85). On the other hand, inclusionary political rhetoric toward migrants can result in more public openness to inward migration (Ibid.: 101). This tells us that disinformation about migrants, refugees and minority ethnic groups can set ‘the tone of the political discourse surrounding the management of migratory phenomena and the policies governing them’ (Neidhardt and Butcher, 2022).

Incendiary political statements and policies on migration can spread racism and hostility toward migrants and put wind in the sails of the far-right. Hope Not Hate, an anti-fascist organisation, found in an analysis of 3,500 articles on migration in the far-right print media ‘a growing symbiotic relationship’ between British government politicians and the extreme right (Townsend, 2023).

The British government's plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda has been described by Amnesty International (2022) as 'shockingly ill-conceived', and by the UN Refugee Agency as 'at variance with the country's obligations under international human rights and refugee law' (UNHCR, 2023). 'Migration is an ideal topic for those pushing lies and half-truths to spread confusion, fear, anger, or prejudice', argue Neidhardt and Butcher (2022), which makes this issue of *Policy and Practice* particularly timely and important. Development education (DE) is a sector concerned with challenging myths and stereotypes that are designed to condition our passivity and silence, or used to invoke suspicion, fear and resentment toward the 'other'. As Paulo Freire argued, myths are 'indispensable to the preservation of the status quo' and are presented to the oppressed 'by well-organized propaganda and slogans, via the mass "communications" media - as if such alienation constituted real communication' (1993: 140). As Soye and Watters suggest in their Focus article for Issue 38, 'challenging mainstream media constructions concerning migration should be a key priority for development education'. Indeed, all three Focus article contributions to Issue 38 of *Policy and Practice* alert readers to deficits in development education responses to migration when it is being increasingly appropriated by the far-right to feed anti-migrant rhetoric (Townsend, 2023).

Culture wars

Development education has the tools to awaken critical consciousness and reject the 'slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions' that Freire associates with a 'praxis of domination' (1993: 66; 126). Critical to this endeavour in the context of migration is challenging the culture wars stoked by politicians and the media using contrived or fabricated stories, to create societal divisions in order to advance political agendas (Walker, 2021). Culture wars are often targeted at working-class communities in economically blighted, post-industrial communities stirred up by attacks on 'woke' culture that 'distract the public from a low tax, low regulation, libertarian worldview' (Ibid.). They are the kind of communities that Elizabeth Meade's Focus article regards as subjected to 'epistemic injustice', lacking the pedagogical and critical skills and 'capacity to make sense of their lives'. A pedagogy for epistemic justice could draw upon the positive and, in some cases, essential roles performed by migrants in societies across the world. As the World Bank argues: 'Migration has proved to be a powerful force for

development, improving the lives of hundreds of millions of migrants, their families, and the societies in which they live across the world' (World Development Report, 2023: 1).

Remittances

The remittances sent by migrant workers to low-and middle-income countries amounted to \$647 billion in 2022, an increase of eight per cent on 2021, overtaking Foreign Direct Investments and Official Development Assistance to these countries (IOM, 2023). For some countries in the global South, remittances represent a substantial percentage of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and significant source of development finance. The top five countries with the highest remittances to GDP ratio are: Tajikistan (48 percent of GDP), Tonga (41 percent), Samoa (32 percent), Lebanon (28 percent), and Nicaragua (27 percent) (World Bank, 2023: 4). Moreover, migrants boost the economies of their host countries with the OECD (2022) finding that migrants promote 'trade flows of their host economy and boost total imports and exports of their host region'. Additional to these economic benefits is the diversity brought by migration through new languages, lifestyles, faiths and cultures. The development education sector in Ireland and elsewhere has arguably yet to fully embrace the pedagogical possibilities represented by the rich cultural diversity added to societies across the world by migration.

There are, of course, significant challenges and inequalities attached to migration which development education should not ignore. They include the loss of highly skilled workers from countries in the global South, particularly from crucial public sector services like healthcare. The journalist Patrick Cockburn (2021) described Britain as a 'a parasite on poor countries by poaching their doctors and nurses'. He argues that Britain trains fewer doctors and nurses than it needs and makes up the shortfall by recruiting trained medical personnel in low-income countries, which not only impact health services but their economy (Ibid.). Cockburn, for example, finds that Kenya, a country with twenty million people living in extreme poverty, loses \$518,000 for every doctor and \$339,000 for every nurse who emigrates to the UK (Ibid.). There are also challenges to local councils, education and health sectors in the global North in meeting the social and economic needs of migrants and new communities, which can feed

into negative, false and sometimes racist, media and politically motivated narratives.

The migration push factors

However, the International Organisation of Migration argues that for centuries migration has been ‘a cornerstone of development, prosperity and progress for many people’ (IOM, 2024: 4). It estimates that there are 281 million international migrants who represent around 3.6 per cent of the world’s population, and contribute 9.4 per cent of global GDP (Ibid.). And, we should never forget that millions of migrants are fleeing global inequalities created or accelerated by extreme wealth accumulation in the global North, with Oxfam reporting that ‘the wealth of the world’s five richest billionaires has more than doubled since the start of this decade, while 60 percent of humanity has grown poorer’ (Oxfam, 2024: 4). Oxfam found that 21 percent of humanity lives in countries in the global North, yet these countries control 69 percent of private wealth (Ibid.: 5). This extreme wealth accumulation in the global North has been attended by high levels of carbon dioxide emissions, with the richest one percent of the world’s population producing as much CO₂ in 2019 as the five billion people who made up the poorest two-thirds of humanity (Oxfam, 2023: viii). This in turn will result in the massive displacement of people on the frontlines of climate change owing to extreme weather events that reduce crop yields, create water scarcity and increase poverty. In 2022, a record 32.6 million people were internally displaced as a result of weather-related disasters such as floods, storms, wildfires and droughts (Siegfried, 2023). Nor should we forget the terrible human loss of life among migrants fleeing these disasters, inequalities and conflicts in the global South, estimated by the IOM to be 6,060 in 2022 (IOM, 2024: 9).

Rather than erecting barriers to migration and forcing migrants to take life-threatening risks to find sanctuary, countries in the global North should provide safe routes through government re-settlement programmes that assist family reunions (Refugee Council, 2024). Instead, the number of safe routes, at least in the UK, appear to be dwindling, forcing migrants into the hands of people smugglers and the prospects of greater trauma than that which they fled in their countries of origin.

Neoliberalism, migration and racism

The first of three Focus article contributions to Issue 38, from Elizabeth Meade, debates the systemic causes of global poverty and inequality in neoliberal economics. The far-right in particular has seized on the effects of neoliberalism – flatlining incomes, declining public services and growing poverty – to foster identity politics and attacks on the ‘other’. As Meade suggests: the ‘absence of a critique of neoliberalism can easily be filled with anti-migrant and anti-refugee narratives’. The far-right does not offer an alternative to neoliberalism but draws upon the well of public dissatisfaction and social upheaval caused by its chaotic policies, to stoke culture wars and division. Meade finds that the absence of a ‘sustained public discourse’ on neoliberalism and its discontents represents a form of ‘epistemic injustice’ for communities abandoned by political elites and ‘restricted in their capacity to make sense of their lives’. Where Ireland once may have been an outlier in the scourge of racism, an outbreak of serious street violence in Dublin city centre on 23 November 2023 blamed on ‘far-right agitators’ and a series of anti-immigrant protests around the country, represented a wake-up call for many (McDermott, 2023). The protests and Dublin riot seemed to eerily anticipate the disturbing portrait of an Ireland in the grip of a totalitarian regime, presented in Paul Lynch’s Booker prize winning novel, *Prophet Song* (Lynch, 2023). A line from the novel seemed to capture the idea of a nation in denial: ‘All your life you’ve been asleep, all of us sleeping, and now the great waking begins’ (Lynch, 2023: 38).

For Meade, there has been ‘a failure in hermeneutical responsibility’ as a lack of class and economic analysis from political left discourse has allowed cultural and identity politics to prosper. Development education, too, has gone missing in this debate as evidenced by Harm-Jan Fricke’s (2022) research on neoliberalism which found that the sector had failed to engage the public with the economic causes of poverty and inequality. As Meade suggests:

“Perhaps if people were armed with an understanding of neoliberal globalisation, and an awareness of how the system creates mass involuntary migration, displacement, racism, and inequality both at home and abroad, communities could work together to grow solidarity and direct their collective energies to addressing the real culprit”.

Indian academics Swadesh Kumar and Prachy Hooda share Meade's concerns about a surge in support for the far-right and its damaging consequences for migrants. Their article contrasts media representation of two distinct refugee groups in India: Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, and non-Muslim religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and other neighbouring states. Their article is framed by the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), legislation sponsored by Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as he seeks a third term in office. The CAA offers an amnesty to non-Muslim illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries but not the Rohingya Muslims fleeing repression in Myanmar. Kumar and Hooda employ a discourse analysis to show how the media lens of right-media print and social media platforms have fuelled the divergent framing of the Rohingya and non-Muslim immigrants. Myths and stereotypes have been employed to smear the Rohingya as criminals involved in drug trafficking and 'terror activities' while positively depicting non-Muslims. The proposed legislation violates the secular principles in India's constitution which 'guarantees all persons equality before the law' (BBC, 2024). Kumar and Hooda believe that development education 'can promote empathy, solidarity, and goodwill toward migrants fleeing war zones or facing tragic events'. Their article warns of the dangers of enshrining religious discrimination in law and the need for 'challenging misleading narratives, cultivating empathy, and nurturing a more humane perspective towards the "other"'.

The third Focus article in Issue 38 by Emma Soye and Charles Watters draws upon qualitative research carried out as part of a European Union (EU)-funded project in two English secondary schools that examined 'the impact of school-based interventions on young people's peer relationships in contexts of migration and displacement'. The research used focus group data and ethnographic field notes to capture the perspectives of students in response to development education interventions on migration and displacement. The development education projects involved both students and teaching staff in a rich mix of activities that included a classroom drama course and a 'Peer Integration and Enhancement Resource' (PIER) programme. The project outcomes reflected the capacity of development education to challenge prejudice and stereotypes toward migrants in the global North, and also the need to

encourage self-definition among young people who reserve the right to reject the ‘refugee’ or ‘migrant’ label. The project outcomes also pointed to the need for development education projects to engage ‘with situated social dynamics’ rather than ‘adopt apolitical, culturalist approaches’. Soye and Watters offer valuable perspectives on how development education can support effective school-based initiatives on migration.

The Perspectives articles in Issue 38 draw upon rich examples of development education research and practice. Barry Cannon shares the outcomes of a research project titled ‘Going Global’, carried out in partnership with Irish international non-governmental organisations and development education practitioners ‘to gather views from participants on the meaning and content of global citizenship’. Project delivery included two interactive workshops with personnel in the development education sector in Belfast and Dublin, that included theoretical inputs on global citizenship and discussion on these inputs in the context of participants’ practice. The main finding from the project was that participants’ attitudes to global citizenship could be grouped under three headings: pragmatic, agnostic and sceptical. This suggested that there is a deep unease, at least among some participants, at the adoption of ‘global citizenship education’ by the DE sector in Ireland. None of the research participants ‘unreservedly endorsed the concept’, but some found it ‘useful to help understand or frame activities which connect local with non-local experiences’. Others, however, considered global citizenship a ‘depoliticised concept’ lacking a ‘critical edge’. It is very likely that Barry Cannon’s valuable report and article will provide a basis for further research and discussion on the implications of adopting global citizenship for the sector’s policy and practice.

Alison Lloyd Williams, Corinna M Peniston-Bird and Karen Wynne’s Perspectives article about a development education project in North West England on migration titled ‘Migration Stories North West’, is a valuable example of how the migrant experience can be effectively incorporated into a rich learning resource. The authors were part of an interdisciplinary team of development educators who mined the long and diverse history of migration into their region to highlight multiple local and global interconnections. Their research on migration ‘from the past to the present to the future’, fostered ‘a sense of solidarity

that stretches not only across space and place but across time'. The stories researched by the project were captured digitally on an interactive map and reveal the 'push and pull reasons for migration including conflict, conquest and colonialism as well as the search for economic or educational opportunity and adventure'. The authors found that their methodology is 'readily replicable' and so could inspire development educators in other regions to become migration cartographers.

Maria Inmaculada Pastor-García, Antonio Francisco Rodríguez-Barquero and Juan González-Alegre are Spanish economists and have persuasively argued in their article how development education and the Sustainable Development Goals can be incorporated into economics teaching. They specifically argue that a development education approach to economics can enable learners to understand the positive social and economic benefits of migration. This article is yet another example of the flexibility of development education in supporting learning in a range higher education subjects and settings. The article concludes with the affirmative message that development education 'is well positioned to incorporate a positive economic narrative about migration into its programmes and activities thus ensuring that the public is better informed about this critical development issue'.

Migration and Palestine

Israel's military onslaught in Gaza, since the Hamas attacks that claimed 1,200 lives on 7 October 2023, has been unparalleled in our lifetimes and resulted in the industrial slaughter of civilians. At the time of writing (20 March 2024), 85 percent of the Gaza Strip's 2.3 million people are internally displaced, 31,819 are dead, 73,934 injured and 1.1 million 'are projected to face catastrophic levels of hunger and be at risk of famine' (Reliefweb, 2024). The combination of a complete siege of Gaza by Israel including food, water and fuel and an incessant military bombardment and ground invasion, has been described as a breach of the Genocide Convention by the government of South Africa (Swan, Symons and de Hoog, 2023; ICJ, 2023). More UN staff have been killed in Gaza (160) than in any other conflict in the organisation's 78-year history, and over 100 journalists, mostly Palestinian, have also died while bearing witness to the slaughter (Aljazeera, 2024). The civilian infrastructure in Gaza has been decimated with

360,000 residential units and 392 educational facilities damaged or destroyed; only 12 out of 35 hospitals partially functioning; 267 places of worship damaged; and 132 ground water wells damaged or destroyed (Ibid.). In short, all essential public services needed to sustain life in Gaza have been deliberately targeted which means that the combination of disease, hunger, water scarcity and lack of shelter are propelling an entire people to eradication.

The question for development educators is how do we respond to the crisis, and this is addressed with typical passion and insight by Henry Giroux's Viewpoint article in which he rejects the 'lens of false equivalency' that suggests 'all sides are equally guilty in the war on Gaza'. The conflict in Gaza and the West Bank did not begin on 7 October and is rooted in the 'long legacy of Israel's colonialism and politics of disposability'. Giroux urges educators to 'reject attempts at censorship' and 'to refuse to run away from topics that are controversial, especially in a moment of disaster, war, and mass suffering'. Remaining silent in the face of this war, argues Giroux, will enable the 'politics of right-wing racists, antisemites and Islamophobes' to prevail. These comments resonated with me when Aaron Bushnell, a 25-year-old active-duty member of the US Air Force, self-immolated outside the Israeli embassy in Washington on 25 February 2024, in protest against the 'genocide' in Gaza. His final words were 'Free Palestine' (Stieb, 2024). Bushnell posted this message on his Facebook page before he died. His words warrant careful reflection by all those in the development education sector who have stayed silent on Gaza these past 166 days.

"Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'What would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Jim Crow South? Or apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?'

The answer is, you're doing it. Right now" (Ibid.).

There are two other insightful contributions on the migration debate in Issue 38. Emma Soye, Assistant Editor of *Policy and Practice*, interviews Frank Berry, the director of the feature film 'Aisha', which tells the story of a Nigerian asylum seeker caught for years in Ireland's Direct Provision immigration system. And, finally, Gerard McCann reflects on the devastating impact of the COVID-

19 pandemic on the education of migrant children who 'lost an average of almost a year's worth of education' owing to major failings in international policy architecture including the UNESCO Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4. McCann argues for 'properly managed and supported migration policies' particularly in the area of education which is critical in 'building a positive migration experience'.

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