

## DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND CLASS

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This issue of *Policy and Practice* coincides with and celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the journal which commenced publication in Spring 2005. Issue 40 is consistent with the journal's original aims of providing a platform for research and practice in development education and ensuring author contributions from both higher education and the international non-governmental sector. It also delivers on another journal objective of breaking new ground by supporting discourse on themes that have been mostly elided from sectoral practice. It is remarkable that class, the theme of Issue 40, has not been more central to development education research given the Marxist influence on Freire and his radical rejection of a class-based society. As Donald Macedo (2000: 13) argues in his introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire 'courageously denounced the neoliberal position that promotes the false notion of the end of history and the end of class'.

### **Class and inequality**

Far from creating a classless society, neoliberalism has deepened class inequalities. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has reported that: 'social class and processes of class reproduction remain important, particularly for the continuity of poverty over time and across generations' (Schildrick and Rucell, 2015: 1). As if to confirm this, Oxfam's (2025: 7) latest annual global economy report finds that total billionaire wealth grew three times faster in 2024 than 2023 and every billionaire saw their fortunes grow by \$2million a day on average. At the same time, global poverty has hardly altered at all since 1990 with the World Bank (2024: xxiii) reporting that 2020-2030 is set to be a lost decade with 8.5 percent of the world's population living on less than \$2.15 per person a day. Using a higher poverty line of \$6.85 per person per day, normally applied to upper-middle income countries, the same report finds that 44 percent of the world's population lives in

poverty (Ibid.).

A survey carried out across 27 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries found that children with the greatest socio-economic disadvantages grow up to earn as much as 20 percent less as adults than those with more favourable childhoods (OECD, 2022). This unequal childhood is corrosive as it also denies equal access to healthcare, employment, housing, leisure and services. The same survey found strong support for measures that could improve social mobility such as increasing taxes on top earners, expanding benefits for low-income households, and introducing or increasing the minimum wage (Ibid.) These are the kind of interventionist measures that have largely been abandoned by Western governments in the period of neoliberalism. For example, the Labour Party in Britain has recently implemented welfare ‘reforms’ that are targeting the most vulnerable in society such as cutting Winter fuel payments for all but the poorest pensioners and maintaining a two-child benefit cap (Walker, 2024; Elgot, 2024). When confronted with the political choice of either taxing wealth – and at the same time tackling inequality - or inflicting needless economic pain on the most vulnerable in society, the British government has opted for the latter. This is fuelling the sense of a political elite detached from the economic realities confronting vulnerable families, particularly when it was revealed that British members of parliament (MPs) had been in receipt of more than £700,000 in free gifts around the same time as the cuts were announced (Kersley, 2024). Can it therefore be of any real surprise that the latest YouGov (2025) opinion polls on voting intentions in Britain show the far-right Reform UK party leading the Labour government? The ‘extreme centre’ appears to be opening the political gateway to the far-right.

Another consequence of targeting welfare claimants as part of a narrative of economic ‘reform’ is the stigmatisation of the poor and working classes whose individual behaviours, fecklessness or moral failings are considered the main causes of their own poverty. ‘This is a process of negatively stereotyping those who are disadvantaged’, finds the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Shildrick and Rucell, 2015: 3), with the labels and stereotypes ‘often applied from the top down, towards those experiencing poverty by those who are not’. These stereotypes often assume that all welfare claimants are poor and those living in poverty are

unemployed. The Trussell Trust foodbank network, for example, has found that one in five (20 percent) foodbank users are from working households and using foodbanks because they are ‘in insecure work, for example, zero hours contracts or agency work’ (Trussell Trust, 2023: 8). Just as George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* was ‘horrified and amazed’ to find men ‘ashamed of being unemployed’ (Orwell, 2024, [1937]: 76) so many of those experiencing poverty today are subjected to what Elizabeth Meade (2024: 28) describes as ‘epistemic injustice’; denied the critical consciousness to identify the systemic root causes of their class condition and the freedom to imagine alternatives.

### **Race and class**

Issue 40 of *Policy and Practice* challenges the notion that a Marxist, class-based analysis alone is equal to the challenges of racism, inequality, colonialism and injustice. Freire, who constantly re-evaluated his class analysis, recognised that ‘material oppression and the affective investments that tie oppressed groups to the logic of domination cannot be grasped in all of their complexity within a singular logic of class struggle’ (Macedo, 2000: 13). In her Focus article for Issue 40 on the colonial legacies of racialised class formation in the education system in Jamaica, Giselle F. Thompson argues that:

“Too often race is not taken up in discussions about class because it is dismissed as a form of ‘identity politics’ – as though the identities that define human beings are not important or somehow irrelevant for class formation and the ways in which people experience class”.

Freire, too, argued that just as ‘one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class, one cannot understand racism fully without a class analysis’ (Macedo, 2000: 15). This coalescence of race and class is, according to Thompson, ‘vital to understanding the emergence of capitalism’. She strongly argues and evidences that the racial and class-based discriminatory practices imposed on Afro-Jamaican children by colonial practices and institutions continue to manifest themselves in the poverty, inequality and disadvantage experienced by African-descended communities today. Thompson calls for an end to racialised class formations that create a two-tiered education system in Jamaica and reparatory justice for communities that continue to bear the injustices of

colonialism. She finds that post-independence, Jamaica remains in the grip of neo-colonial international financial institutions (IFIs) that have entrenched colonial practices in education through debt and structural adjustment programmes. She calls for an anti-colonial development education praxis that can support the kind of policy-based interventions that are needed to disrupt the colonial lineage evident in the divergent pathways to education in Jamaica based both on class and racial inequalities.

### **Class apartheid**

The second Focus article in Issue 40 written by Sandra Altenberger also seeks to interrupt colonial continuities but from a feminist post-colonial perspective. Drawing upon her doctoral research and Spivak's (2007) concept of class apartheid, Altenberger considers the extent to which global citizenship education (GCE) 'stabilises class apartheid as defined by UNESCO, and what is needed to counter this continuation/reactivation of class apartheid'. She offers a deep analysis of the constructions of class-based subjectivities in GCE policy and discusses how the sector can address 'uncritical conceptions' of GCE by, for example, drawing upon Andreotti et al's (2018) 'HEADS UP' social cartography. It is a welcome contribution to the debate on GCE and post-colonialism and concludes by calling on the sector to identify and characterise 'the conditions of world society as postcolonial'.

Educational censorship and de-skilling by the political right in Brazil is the urgent topic debated in the third Focus article written by Abdellatif Atif. A conservative social movement called *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without a Party) is masking its aim of removing political consciousness and Freirean praxis from the school system in Brazil under the guise of neutrality. Drawing upon the concept of 'antagonism', Atif argues that education is 'inherently political' and essential to a democratic vision of society. While the neo-conservative right in Brazil is claiming to depoliticise education through neutrality, it is intensifying politicisation toward right-wing ideological control evidenced through the targeting of courses on sex education, multiculturalism, and climate change education and adoption of a moralising campaigning that condemns the 'instrumental agendas' of the left. Atif draws upon an analysis of legislative proposals for adoption by the Brazilian National Congress that mirror the

principles of *Escola Sem Partido*. These bills aim to restrict teachers from ‘expressing political, ideological, or religious views in the classroom and limiting discussions on topics such as gender and sexuality’. This article serves as both a warning of the threats posed to education by rising authoritarianism across the world and a rallying call for educators to ‘address political questions in a way that highlights their complexity rather than reducing them to binary oppositions’.

### **Development education approaches to class equality**

Fiona Creedon and Sally Daly have contributed a Perspectives contribution to Issue 40 from the global youth work sector which argues that ‘poverty, particularly its intersection with class, is under-represented within a non-formal education context in Ireland’. Their article presents evidence of a ‘deeply unequal’ Ireland that appears not to be meeting its national and international targets and obligations in regard to child poverty and welfare. Creedon and Daly argue that a global youth work approach premised upon development education’s radical learning tools can enable young people ‘to reflect on class as a site of struggle’. They conclude that class and poverty have been largely invisibilised in Irish society which makes it essential that young people have the learning tools to ‘challenge their own experiences of oppression’ and the ‘current reality of inequality’.

Maria Gallo’s Perspectives article presents research on the long neglected epistemic community among global alumni networks which are valuable contributors to development education and ‘collective actions for equality, social justice, and environmental action’. Gallo presents research on global alumni networks across six countries (Czechia, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Denmark, and Ireland) that have supported rich intersections ‘between local community impact and social class’. As networks ‘that embody the aspirations of a country’s higher education system’, Gallo believes they effectively combine the local and the international by raising awareness of global issues through local actions and events.

The Viewpoint section of Issue 40 carries a wealth of reflective, radical and solidaristic writing from many of the leading practitioners in our sector. Audrey Bryan and Yoko Mochizuki critique the alignment of development education with the increasingly pervasive social and emotional learning (SEL)

advanced by the OECD and prominent economists such as Nobel Laureate Professor James Heckman. Underpinning SEL is the idea that children from low-income, working-class backgrounds are lacking non-cognitive social-emotional skills – a form of pre-distribution – rather than the economic poverty caused by neoliberalism which entrenches class inequalities. What attracts SEL to policymakers is that it finds the root causes of poverty in the social-emotional deficits of working families rather than demanding the kind of interventionist, economic models that will redistribute wealth and sustain public services. Bryan and Mochizuki are concerned that the growing alignment of development education with SEL will have a ‘major depoliticising effect that forestalls political dialogue and undermines an appreciation of the material and economic determinants of various local and global injustices’. Research by Fricke (2022: 77) indicated that the development education and international development sectors in Ireland already ‘give little attention to engaging the public in educational processes that attempt to explore, discuss, reflect on and respond to such structural economic issues’. Sectoral alignment with SEL will only deepen that inertia.

The foreboding created by the prospect of a second Trump presidency has already been realised with multiple assaults on democracy and human rights at home and overseas including: putting USAID through the ‘wood chipper’ (Giorno, 2025); sanctioning Israel’s ethnic cleansing of Gaza (Reiff, 2025); the mass deportation of immigrants (Ward, 2025); and cancelling \$400m in federal contracts and grants to Columbia University as a warning to other universities to stay in line on Palestine and other issues (Conroy, 2025). As Henry A. Giroux writes in a tribute to his friend and colleague, Paulo Freire, in this issue of *Policy and Practice*: ‘Right-wing politicians and authoritarian regimes are not merely attacking the classroom - they are waging an all-out war on critical education’. He adds that: ‘These forces understand, as Freire did, that whoever controls education holds the power to shape the future’. As a sector that has been plagued for too long by inertia (Stein, 2024), development education needs to respond to Giroux’s call to ‘see education not as passive consumption but as an active, revolutionary process - one that involves critically reading both the word and the world and taking collective action to dismantle the conditions of oppression’.

Laurie Macfarlane's Viewpoint article also reflects on the implications of a Trump presidency in a new era of 'authoritarian capitalism'. He considers how Trump is likely to react to the threat posed by China to the United States' (US) technological supremacy which has underpinned US hegemony. Given China's transformation into one of the world's largest and most dynamic economies, Trump's reactive use of tariffs in an economic trade war could potentially destabilise the global economy. Macfarlane considers the implications of Trump 2.0 for 'peace, prosperity and the planet'.

Finally, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Policy and Practice*, the Centre for Global Education circulated a special call for 500-word articles from academics and educational practitioners on 'The Future of Development Education'. It has resulted in a collection of fifteen short articles from authors representing a range of education sectors that offer rich and reflective perspectives on how the sector can approach the future. These articles are published in the Viewpoint section of the journal under the title 'My 500 on "The Future of Development Education"'.

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