

THE CRITICAL GLOBAL EDUCATOR: GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Review by Majella McSharry

Maureen Ellis (2016) *The Critical Global Educator: Global Citizenship Education as Sustainable Development*, London: Routledge.

Set against the backdrop of a personal, professional and political (auto)biographical journey, this text represents an attempt to establish a framework for critical global educators. Acutely aware of her upper-middle-class upbringing, the author's ontological perspective is significantly shaped by her parents' interest in education, quest for knowledge and engagement with literature. Working as a linguist and teacher, Ellis became increasingly invested in theory and simultaneously critical of the social inequalities that remain unchallenged by teachers and learners who are silenced and disempowered by instrumentalist, neoliberal education systems. The author adopts the acronym GCESD not to combine global citizenship education and sustainable development but to conceptualise global citizenship education *as* sustainable development. Immersion within theoretical sociology, psychology, philosophy, theology, anthropology, history and science roots the global citizenship educator within critical realism, eliciting the potential for truly open, radical and sustainable transformation and development. Sustainable development thus emerges as a mind-set from trans-interdisciplinary engagement with theories that form the tapestry of human development. Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) provides a methodological framework through which transformation can be realised.

For Ellis, a negative impact of globalisation is the dominance of Euro-American corporate, military and industrial governance that has become the ultimate arbiter of knowledge, prioritising short term goals over long term investment in liberal education and academic freedom. Such knowledge, assumed to be neutral, in reality espouses an imperialist language that is ill understood by many of its indigenous consumers and completely

void of their valuable contributions. Well-regarded OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) states act as guardians for offshore assets, protecting the very system that receives its lifeblood from terrorism and corruption, while media organisations use glossy images of disaster and abuse for their own capital gain. Critical citizenship education enables a critique of even the most seemingly worthy policies and practices, empowering learners to access alternative perspectives and to experience global democracy through globally networked communities.

Lack of philosophical and theoretical grounding that denies global citizenship education (GCE) a genuine status, as well as fragmented policy and initiatives, are identified as key barriers to unleashing the transformative potential of the GCE. Media literacy, environmental sustainability and engagement with controversial topics are features of citizenship studies curriculum in the UK that align productively with such transformative potential. However repeated studies of initial teacher education have revealed ‘acceptance, obedience and uncritical patriotism; reluctance to address sensitive, complex issues; teachers craving further knowledge, training and expertise; and indeed, specific absences of economic and political literacy related to government and the EU’ (33). Keen to take up these issues empirically through critical ethnography, the author embarked on a sustained period of research involving surveys, focus groups and interviews with pre-service and in-service teachers, teacher educators, academics, and INGDO (international non-governmental development organisation) and DEC (development education centre) administrators.

Undoubtedly resonating with her own personal journey, she identifies ‘deep frames’ (63) formed in childhood as shaping an individual’s being, thinking and seeing and, as educators, ultimately shaping their propensity to unquestioningly accept knowledge or to critically probe it. The findings suggest that in spite of educators’ positive and committed ontological framing of global education, narratives frequently avoided theoretical discussions. While they celebrated potential transformation, many head teachers and subject teachers remained uncertain of their role in

bringing this about and unable to justify their own purpose. Their eagerness to position themselves as politically neutral, evidenced a lack of critical awareness of teaching as a political act in and of itself where curriculum and pedagogy are culturally shaped making social and political neutrality a mere illusion. Engaging with theories such as systematic functional linguistics (SFL) (52) would enable educators to critically identify personal interpretation and political orientation of supposed discourses of truth. Theoretical, multi-model approaches were evident amongst many academics and INGDOs but this lessened amongst teacher educators who blamed the sanitisation and dilution of theoretical input on structural, financial and temporal constraints of the university.

For Ellis, global educators grounded in critical theory will be continually stimulated to undertake rigorous action research aimed at acquiring personal knowledge in the social world; subsequently moving from consumers to producers of knowledge. This further motivates educators to participate in cyber-alliances and ‘collaborative multi-stakeholder COPxs that promote GCESD’ (73). These alliances have the potential to critically interrogate the likes of ‘attention philanthropy’ (28) and so-called corporate responsibility and act as evaluative global monitoring movements providing real and tangible support for global democracy and GCESD.

Although stimulating and energising, this text is at times challenging to access and bewildering to process. Ellis’ love of linguistics and trans-inter-disciplinary theory simultaneously facilitate and obfuscate the central tenets of the book. The layout of the text follows that of a traditional research dissertation moving from personal impetus to theoretical, philosophical and political frameworks to an exploration of methodology and findings and ultimately to key recommendations. This format lends itself to a sense of repetition that a more integrated approach might have avoided. Nevertheless Ellis provides signposts throughout the text in an attempt to assist the reader to move through genres. Overall this book offers an insightful window into the emancipatory potential of GCESD. The author’s insistence on the transformative capacity of global education that is aligned

with academic disciplines and rooted in philosophical and theoretical frames, resonates with the foundations and aims of the new *Politics and Society* programme for senior cycle in the Republic of Ireland (introduced from September 2016), generating a certain excitement about its transformative potential. Ultimately, this text sets out an optimistic framework for mainstreaming GCESD through critical teacher ‘education’ (as opposed to training), Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the formulation of appropriate critical alliances.

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