

# INTRODUCING CORPORATE POWER TO THE GLOBAL EDUCATION DISCOURSE

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**Abstract:** This article asserts through a discussion on corporate power that the fundamental causes of sustained poverty and injustice in the world are centred in existing power structures, and until we address them, all attempts to improve the world will remain unsuccessful. The paper draws on a study by Andy Egan (2012) which identified a deficit in critical development education practice in the public sphere in the UK. It points out that in Canada, civil society organisations (CSOs) with a critical voice are systematically silenced and argues that education must, to use a Freirean term, *conscientise* individuals about the power structures in the world, empowering them with a sense of agency and active participation. It concludes by calling on global educators, in Canada especially, to engage more firmly in the action component of praxis, claiming that in this dark age of speech repression it has become much more necessary to unite and speak out collectively.

**Key words:** Development; education; critical; power; action; transnational; social; movements.

In an era of increased globalisation it is difficult to ignore the growing divide between the rich and the poor. The 2002 Maastricht Global Education Declaration recognises that ‘The fundamental transformations of production and consumption patterns required to achieve sustainable development can only be realised if citizens, women and men alike, have access to adequate information and understand and agree to the necessity to act’ (North-South Centre, 2003: Appendix 1). This article suggests that not only is there inadequate critical information available about the causes of global inequality, but that the current Canadian government actively hinders the capacity of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to voice critical content through taxation laws on charities and funding regulations on NGOs. It

asserts through a discussion on corporate power that the fundamental causes of sustained poverty and injustice in the world are centred in existing power structures, and until we address them, all attempts to improve the world will remain unsuccessful. The paper draws on a study by Andy Egan (2012) which identified a deficit in critical development education practice in the public sphere in the UK. It points out that in Canada, civil society organisations (CSOs) with a critical voice are systematically repressed and argues that education must, to use a Freirean term, *conscientise* individuals about the power structures in the world, empowering them with a sense of agency and active participation. It concludes by calling on global educators, in Canada especially, to engage more firmly in the action component of praxis, claiming that in this dark age of speech repression it has become much more necessary to unite and speak out collectively.

### **Critical development education and power**

Inequality in our society is largely a consequence of power relations and is often reproduced and reinforced tacitly through dominant culture. French philosopher Michel Foucault (1965) believed that dominant power is often maintained under the guise of humanitarian causes. Foucault traced current power structures back to the mad who ‘required’ treatment and help. He pointed out that the mad were placed in insane asylums and effectively separated from society under the guise of helping them. Likewise feminist scholar bell hooks (2000) pointed out that dominant power often *claims* to right an inequality while further entrenching unjust power structures. Antonio Gramsci (1971) popularised the term *hegemony* to explain the tacit nature in which power is reinforced by deliberately mainstreaming a dominant ideology and culture.

This elusive nature of power structures in our society is exactly why it is fundamental for development education to adopt a critical lens and expose power structures that inhibit freedom and empowerment. Paulo Freire spent his life working in the development field, empowering people through education. Freire (1970) believed that education was a political act, which began with a conscientisation of one’s social position as being

moulded by hegemonic forces. Stephen McCloskey (2009) has suggested that greater awareness of the world and the conditions in which poverty arises is fundamental to achieving real change and must be central to development education practice. This is not an uncommon position among development educators: Murray (2006) advocates for awareness of global social responsibility; McDonnell (2003) proposes the inclusion of human rights in education and Andreotti (2006) advances that development education should include education about underlying global issues.

For critical theorists, clarifying these underlying issues requires an understanding of power structures and dominant ideology. Foley has posited that, ‘critical education makes judgements about injustices and attempts to rectify them by addressing their fundamental causes, their deeper dynamics and determining factors’ (2001: 2). Kincheloe (2004) argues that education should help to recognise the hegemonic forces and tacit power structures of our society. Hyslop-Margison and Sears argue that ‘the moral imperatives of education within a democratic society require students to be provided with the necessary knowledge and dispositions to make informed choices about current political and social conditions, and entertain possible alternatives to improve these conditions’ (2008: 34). Giroux (2002) has suggested that education should develop political agents aware of the struggles over politics, power, and democracy with the skills, capacities, and knowledge to act, and believe that these struggles are worth taking up.

It is therefore essential that global education conscientises people to their role as political actors in a global world. Feminist scholar Judith Butler (2012) interprets power relations through vulnerability. Butler suggests that vulnerability is subjective, and she defined the vulnerable as those who require aid from the invulnerable. In this way, the invulnerable *depend* on the vulnerable to sustain their aid efforts. Critical development education should use Freirean cognition to empower people as responsible agents of change in a global world. The next section will briefly investigate the dominant neoliberal ideology and the ever increasing power of corporations within the neoliberal economic system.

## **Neoliberalism and corporate power**

Jim Schultz, Director of The Democracy Centre suggests that there are two fundamental challenges that we face in the world today: ‘One is to enable billions of people across the world to lift themselves from the sufferings of poverty and the other is avoid pushing the planet off a cliff toward dangerous and irreversible environmental changes’ (2013: iii). He goes on to clarify the difficulty of achieving such a task because of the imbalance between powerful international corporations with legally binding trade agreements seeking profit at any cost, and citizens, social movements and non-binding international agreements.

Rowlands (1997: 3) states that neoliberalism is associated with a loss of faith in the state and growing privatisation. Banya (1998) argues that in neoliberalism market forces are seen as supplanting national economies. Noam Chomsky asserts that current conceptions of the free market are rooted in Adam Smith. He has distinguished that, ‘the version of him that’s given today is just ridiculous’ (1997: 19), admonishing that Smith would be appalled by our current system, and even warning that the consolidation of power through policy by merchants and manufacturers would be used to ensure that their interests were attended to, no matter what the impact on others. According to Chomsky, Smith specified that equality of condition – not just opportunity – is what we should be aiming at, warning that the state needs to ‘take some measures to prevent the division of labour from proceeding to its limits’ (ibid). Chomsky ascertains that corporations were consciously designed through the courts and worked as Adam Smith said whereby, ‘the principal architects of policy consolidate state power and use it for their interests’ (ibid: 23). He asserts that corporate power is a major part of twentieth century history.

Clover (2002) has exposed a more ominous facet of neoliberalism whereby transnational corporations cooperate with governments. She points out how governments support corporations through international trade agreements against the will of the majority. Clover refers to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States,

Canada, and Mexico as an example, but more recent examples include: the ‘below the radar’ (and democratically questionable) negotiations on the Comprehensive European Trade Agreement (CETA) between the European Union and Canada (Patterson, 2014a); the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and Europe (McKeagney, 2014); and the twelve nation (and counting) Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (Council of Canadians, 2014). These deals threaten to step up the deregulation of trade, privatise public services, encroach even further on rights to public health and access to medicine, erode environmental protection measures, and undermine access to knowledge and the open internet. The Council of Canadians (2014) has exposed an investor rights chapter of the TPP deal that would extend, beyond NAFTA limits, corporations’ latitude to sue governments over policies that get in the way of their profit-making.

Vandana Shiva notes we are ‘seeing the replacement of government and state planning by corporate strategic planning and the establishment of global corporate rule’ (1997: 22). Andy Egan (2012) has outlined the intricate role that corporations play in all aspects of our lives from what we eat, to our health, the environment and even the subjects taught in schools. He explains that ‘Global corporations and national governments are often working closely together to shape the lives we lead and the world in which we live’ (2012: 45) and suggested that often corporations have more control than governments, especially in the global South, where governments ‘are often more accountable to global corporations, international financial institutions (IFIs) and even development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) than their own people’ (ibid: 46). To illustrate this problem of accountability and thus dependency, he exemplifies Mozambique where foreign sources make up half of the national budget.

Egan also demonstrates the dependency of Western governments on corporations as neoliberal economics drive politics. A 2013 report, *State of Power 2013*, by the Transnational Institute (TNI) identified that forty of the top one hundred economies in the world are corporations. The report is

based in part on 2011 quantitative research conducted by Stefano Battiston, James Glattfelder and Stefania Vitali, which maps out ownership of the top Transnational Corporations (TNCs). They use a rather complex series of mathematical formulae which determine ownership of companies based on percentage of shares owned. Their research showed that 737 TNCs control, through both direct and indirect ownership, 80 percent of the value of the 43,000 TNCs included in the study. They further refine this group to 147 companies with near complete control over themselves plus 40 percent of all the TNCs studied. Fifty of these corporations are identified as ‘knife edge’ that could send the world economy into a major recession if they were to fail (George, 2013). The forced bailout of major financial institutions and large corporations such as General Motors in the United States is a good example of this (Amadeo, 2013).

Not only do these corporations wield immense power, but they directly contribute to the human and environmental rights abuses that international development seeks to address. I have selected a few recent examples of social and environmental injustices below, documented by independently funded organisations and campaigns that have greater liberty to blow whistles because they are not limited by funding conditions. I have chosen these examples because they are recent, have at least passed through the public eye, are specific to Canada, and urgently require attention. The 2001 tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) and Social Policy of the International Labour Organization (ILO) states rather delicately that MNE operations may lead to abuse of concentrations of power, conflict with national policies, conflict with the interests of workers, and sometimes give cause for concern. The language used by the ILO is careful not to state the problem outright, but only gently suggests alternative options for MNEs that would improve the social impact of their work. While it may not be explicitly stated, the declaration by virtue of its necessity inherently bares the discrepancies in social justice of MNEs, and the current campaigns displayed on their website against child labour and for the rights of indigenous peoples to free prior and informed consent demonstrate some the urgency of some of the negative

impacts of MNEs. Chomsky (1997) is more direct in stating outright that many large corporations are neither socially or environmentally responsible. Indeed, groups like MiningWatch and GRAIN document atrocities and the exploitation of peoples and the environment all over the world through land grabbing, seed patents, large scale agriculture, and extracting resources to name a few. Oxfam Canada has a current campaign about land grabbing and groups such as Avaaz.org and Sumofus.org try to raise awareness about fair-trade and human rights.

The entire garment industry is an example that has finally caught some public attention internationally in the wake of the April 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh that killed 1,138 people and severely injured another 2000. However, despite mounting international pressure some major clothing retailers such as Walmart and Gap have refused to sign an international, UN endorsed accord to ensure worker safety in the garment industry in the wake of Bangladesh (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013).

Canadian mining corporations are especially well known for their poor social and environmental policies (MiningWatch, 2013) and therefore represent a strong example of exploitation both environmentally and socially. The Canadian mining industry has one of the worst reputations in the world for exploitative trading policies, with little transparency and few regulations holding them accountable (Publish What You Pay, 2012). For example, The UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Human Rights James Anaya (2011: 2) has expressed his ‘grave concern at the situation [in Guatemala]’. His report specifically referenced the Marlin mine, owned by a Canadian mining company and documented human and environmental rights violations:

“The repercussions include numerous allegations concerning the effects on the health and the environment of the indigenous people as a result of the pollution caused by the extractive activities; the loss of indigenous lands and damage to indigenous people’s property and houses; the disproportionate response to legitimate acts

of social protest, and the harassment of and attacks on human rights defenders and community leaders” (ibid: 1-2).

Likewise Ward (2012) has called attention to 2012 human rights reports published by the UN and Amnesty International which suggests that Canada has stonewalled human rights for international trade, stating that ‘There are no binding legal standards for the conduct of Canadian companies operating overseas and human rights standards are seldom written into trade deals’.

In *Paved with Good Intentions*, Barry-Shaw and Ojay (2012) argue that NGOs are often subject to corporate power. They posit that NGOs often work through international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF and in so doing uphold dominant power structures in international development. They point out that development aid has been tied to privatisation policies and the reduction of public services. This creates a void in public services, which is filled by NGOs and in turn develops dependency on foreign aid. Similarly Choudry and Kapoor (2013) explain that NGOs often function as a soft arm of foreign policy, essentially fulfilling the responsibility role in corporate responsibility, often openly lobbying foreign governments on behalf of corporate interests. In her article ‘Canadian Development No Longer Tied-Just Shackled to Corporate Mining Interests’ Moore (2014), from MiningWatch, identifies the direct and open role of the then existing crown corporation responsible for development aid in Canada, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), in sponsoring a project aimed at ending a moratorium on mining in the Honduras in 2012. Moore has also traced \$6.7m allocated to World Vision, Plan Canada and World University Services Canada (WUSC) for partnership projects with Barrick Gold, IAMGOLD, and Rio Tinto Alcan in 2011, and another \$20 million committed to foster mining-NGO partnerships in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. The 2013 Canadian budget went so far as to merge all international development initiatives (and funding for NGOs) into the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFADT), effectively declaring that all international development projects supported by Canada will be tied to Canadian business interests (Leblanc, 2013). There have been



attempts to alter policy in Canada: John Mackay an independent MP tried to introduce bill C-300 in 2009 as an attempt to hold Canadian mining companies to Canadian standards overseas (MiningWatch, 2009) and New Democrat Party MP Peter Julian tried to introduce a similar bill (C-323) in 2011 that would hold Canadian companies operating overseas accountable to Canadian human rights standards by allowing foreign entities to sue Canadian companies in Canadian courts for breaking Canadian laws. (Openmedia.ca, 2013). Both were unsuccessful, but with greater understanding of these issues initiatives like these could become successful.

### **Deficit in critical development education**

Chomsky (1997) has suggested that people have largely become ignorant to the injustice and imbalance of power. He contends that educational systems and media induce this ignorance. Egan (2012: 57) suggests that the value of our efforts to create global citizens will amount to very little ‘as long as the DE sector remains largely silent about corporate power in both its discourse and practice’. He identifies some inconsistencies in current development education in the UK and provides a framework for UK NGOs to include corporate awareness in their education and promote active participation to resist injustices caused by abuses of corporate power. NGOs questioned by Egan nominated corporate power as the most important of twenty-seven global issues, while development education centres (DECs) ranked it 18th. Egan has identified that there are only a handful of smaller organisations whose principles of transformation and supporting action for institutional change are generally superseded by larger groups. He asserts that those who are interested in the role of corporate power do not produce many educational resources on the matter. Some constraints identified by these groups included: a lack of capacity and expertise; school agendas; funding; and politics (ibid: 54).

In Canada, we face similar problems as the limited development education activity is staunchly restricted by government through funding and taxation policy. Joseph Ingram (2012), CEO of the North South Institute (NSI), a renowned international development research institute, has pointed

out that Canada's poor record in international development is linked to a lack of public engagement. In 2009, Michael Stephens compiled a comprehensive report on the state of public engagement by CSOs in Canada for the Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), an umbrella organisation representing 100 Canadian CSOs. It arrived at conclusions similar to those in Egan's article, noting that CSOs in Canada do not have the capacity to speak out on corporate issues, and are severely limited by threats of diminished funding to engage the public. This is a strategy that has taken the bottom away from many Canadian CSOs, which are largely dependent on government funding, and by removing resources, or threatening to do so, has effectively silenced most critical voices.

The author has researched the role of Canadian civil society organisations (CCSOs) in engaging the public about the fundamental causes of poverty. He notes that CCSOs identify with the role of global education but 'Unfortunately, the current Conservative government severely restricts any criticism of its foreign policy creating a catch 22 situation, whereby Public Engagement becomes more urgent for greater citizen engagement, but this very engagement is being reined in more than ever' (2013: 53-54). The author's research examines the case of several larger CCSOs like Kairos and CCIC, both of which lost all of their funding as a direct result of criticising foreign policy, sending a message to other CCSOs. Reilly-King sums it up well in a report as a consultant for CCIC:

"In recent years, the space available to civil society to discuss and debate government policy and positions has shrunk considerably. A number of organizations who have critiqued the government's positions, including Alternatives, Climate Action Network (CAN), CCIC, and KAIROS – Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, as well as countless women's groups, have seen long-standing core and project-related government funding drastically cut or cancelled" (2011: 4).

The McLeod Group (2010, 2011), an independent group of international development policy experts in Ottawa, points out that the government issued a clear public warning not to criticise government policy. Human Rights Watch (2014), a respected independent international human rights organisation, has revealed that in Canada ‘Recent federal government actions undermining the ability of civil society organizations to engage in advocacy impede progress on a range of human rights issues’. The actions to which the report refers are likely to be the 2012 amendments to the Income Tax Act, which have severely inhibited charities’ ‘political activities’. This extended governmental control of critical education beyond government funded projects and, as Fitzpatrick (2012) points out, represses freedom of speech. It is not surprising, then, that critical development education is available on a severely limited basis in Canada.

### **Active critical development education as a solution**

This article has argued that a critical understanding of corporate power is an essential component of development education. In the section on critical development education it argued that a critical understanding of power structures and positionality increases agency and inspires action. It has also pointed out that the task in Canada is difficult because the Canadian government appears to have a corporate agenda, and is working hard to silence any groups who speak out to deliver a critical message against corporate power. In this section I would like to argue that in this time especially, as the Canadian government is shifting its development assistance policy to a model that is tied to Canadian economic interests, it has become ever more important to raise a critical voice and develop public awareness through development education. Development educators and NGOs need to conscientise themselves, become aware of their own agency for change, and speak out rather than allow the status quo to proceed unchallenged. In doing so educators will be living the active component of critical development education and thus practicing what they preach. There are a plethora of grassroots organisations in Canada like the Council of Canadians and the Mining Justice Action Committee that provide excellent examples of what this can look like.

There is certainly a stage set with a receptive audience for a critical voice, evident in a growing wave of indignation around the world whereby citizens have taken to the streets to protest against inequality and stand up to power. Initiated in Tunisia with the 2011 Arab Spring, protests quickly spread across Europe and the world through the Occupy movements. In Québec this was called the *printemps érable* (maple spring) and came hand in hand with the 2012 student strikes in Québec which mobilised hundreds of thousands of people (not just students) on to the streets and forced out of power the then Liberal (provincial) government which was attempting to raise tuition costs. The Idle No More movement is the latest wave of activism in Canada, initiated in 2012 by Aboriginals in Canada standing up for their rights, largely against the development of the Canadian tar sands. This has quickly been supported by a wave of environment groups who have allegedly been muzzled and spied on by the current Canadian regime that is intent on pursuing an agenda of resource extraction at all costs (Miller, 2013; Patterson, 2014). People are tired of their democratic rights being infringed on, and there is a sense of change on the horizon with protests and public rallies taking place all over the country. The value of social movements has been well documented by adult educators as important spaces for challenging dominant power and catalysing change in society (Clover, 2002; Crowther & Shaw, 1997; Foley, 2001; Hall, 2009; Hall, Clover, Crowther & Scandrett, 2012). This is the forum that development educators need to join. There is space to include a global connection to local questions, and this is where development education needs to take place.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion I would like to draw attention back to the goals of development education and point out that there is a strong link to be made in terms of what is advocated for and how to break the hegemony of power addressed in this paper. The 2002 Maastricht Global Education Declaration suggests that global education is ‘education that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the globalized world and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all’ (North–South Centre, 2003: Appendix 1). Likewise Cabezudo has linked transformative learning with

global education, suggesting that it create citizens who take on the responsibility that cannot be left to governments. She argues that global education ‘involves a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and action’ and must challenge the dominant discourse, envision an alternative and process a change. It must bring people to understand their real power to influence the future and act on it. Participation and partnership are central to Cabezudo’s vision (2010: 9-10).

Egan (2012: 51) posits that a challenge for DE is to juxtapose learning with action, asking: ‘How can DE develop processes that link critical understanding of corporate power to collective action as citizens to engage with and challenge global corporations identified as contributing to global injustice, inequality and poverty’. The answer I think is clear: development educators need to think critically about their own positionality, develop confidence in their own agency, join the wave of indignation and speak out against abuses of power despite the possible repercussions. In so doing we can become active proponents of our own philosophy, inherently completing the link between critical awareness and action to catalyse change in this world. This is not easy, but it is possible; and indeed it is essential, for if we don’t, then who will?

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