

# DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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This issue of *Policy and Practice* on the theme of ‘Development Education and Social Justice’ comes at a time of great global upheaval and turmoil. The world is still grappling with the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Climate change is at the top of the global agenda and as world leaders gather in Glasgow for the COP-26 United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2021) has issued a stark warning about impending climate catastrophe if countries are not more ambitious in their climate policies. Issues of inequality and social justice continue to dominate discourse as the two most recent United Nations *Human Development Reports* (United Nations, 2019; 2020) lay bare.

The 2019 *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 2019) was clear that many inequalities in human development have been increasing. The report warned that a new generation of inequalities is opening up, around education, and around technology and climate change (Ibid.). In his introduction to the report, Achem Steiner noted that inequality is not just about income, it is about the unequal distribution of wealth and power, and entrenched social and political norms that leaves power in the hands of a few (United Nations, 2019: 5).

The 2020 *Human Development Report* (United Nations, 2020) finds that trends continue to go in the wrong direction with deprivations, underdevelopment and inequalities persisting globally despite progress in some areas. The UN reports that today, average life expectancy is 20 years higher for people in the richest countries compared to those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, almost one in three adults in Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are unable to read. These inequalities are also reflected in the sizeable differences in income levels. The report shows that the interaction of the

impacts of climate change with existing inequalities threatens significant reversals in sustainable development.

A new normal is coming and a great transformation is needed to change the path we are on (United Nations, 2020). But how do we make this transformation, how do we change our path and more importantly how do we all influence the shape our future should take? The 2020 *Human Development Report* (Ibid.) reiterates the case that people's agency and empowerment can bring about the action we need to take if we are to live in balance with the planet in a fairer world. Development education is key to shaping this new path, delivering social justice and challenging inequalities.

'Values are fundamental to our personal understanding of what it means to live a good life. But people cannot realize their values without having sufficient capabilities and agency' (United Nations, 2020: 8). Education and educators help us to build capability and agency which supports our participation in society. Education not only benefits the individual, but all of society. Education is one of the key public services that enables participation in society, in the economy and in public life. Development education is key to building capacity and agency which are essential to the realisation of social justice. It is essential to delivering the changes required to build a better future, which will allow us to live in balance with the planet, and with it we can help countries and communities realise the Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). In an era of change and upheaval, delivering better outcomes for people, locally and globally, must be at the core of human development.

A common theme of all three Focus articles in this edition of *Policy and Practice*, is that while global citizenship education (GCE), development education and education for sustainable development (ESD) are complex, all three are essential to addressing issues of social justice, and delivering better outcomes for people globally.

Shawna Carroll examines an anti-oppressive approach to global citizenship education in her article. She explains how teachers must be supported to both understand their role in systematic oppression, as well as their role in dismantling it. Carroll's framework for anti-oppressive GCE helps us to understand the interconnections of privilege and oppression, both on a local and global scale. The ability to link the local to the national and the global is key to realising social justice, addressing inequality, and delivering on the ambitions of the SDGs (United Nations, 2015). Carroll reminds us of the important role of teacher educators, not only in delivering important content, but in applying this content to the realities of complicated local and global social justice issues. Understanding the context is key, as is the ability to critique this context.

Resolving issues of inequality, locally and globally is complex and multifaceted. Carroll notes the importance of modelling the kind of teaching pre-service educators hope that students will practice and build on. She outlines a framework for building an anti-oppressive foundation in GCE and the critical conversations this entails. The framework aims to assist understanding the interconnections of privilege and oppression, both on a local and global scale. Carroll's article also ties the importance of these critical conversations to the inclusion of the SDGs into national programmes.

Joyce Raanhuis in her article 'Empowering Teachers as Agents of Social Cohesion' emphasises just how important development education has become in equipping teachers and learners for a socially just world. She reminds us that 'educational efforts towards social justice emphasise the need to provide teachers and learners with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to promote positive action'. This involves capacity building, and providing people with the skills to enable critical analysis and advocacy. It also involves equipping people with the skills to challenge the status quo and stereotypes, an understanding of the societal context (past and present) which influences the dynamics of inequality and power, and the ability to engage with how global issues impact on our daily lives. Building capacity and supporting agency will help to ensure that all of us can influence the shape of human development.

Raanhuis reminds us that many of the perceptions of development education emanating from the global North are not suited to the conditions and the understandings of people from the global South. This point is often forgotten in the discourse around development education and social justice. The knowledge, conditions and understandings of all people, must be valued equally. Raanhuis notes that the level of social cohesion is inversely correlated with the level of inequality. Raanhuis explores how educators and teachers for global development, global citizen education and development education have to address and incorporate unconscious bias, anti-oppressive approaches and the dynamics of inequality and power both locally, nationally and globally. They must also pass this knowledge on to their students. Raanhuis details how the principle of lifelong learning is embedded in development education and social justice education in South Africa. Teachers have a key role to play in capacity building, dialogue, critical thinking and community building to promote social cohesion. Lifelong learning should be an integral element of all types of education, and to see an example of this principle embedded in development education is very positive.

Raanhuis makes the salient point that enabling teachers to make meaningful connections between their local realities and global contexts is what will deliver social justice. This is why supporting development educators through lifelong learning is essential. In a world where vast amounts of information are just a click away, it is vital that teachers are supported to develop student's capacity for critical thinking, to question where information is coming from, who it is coming from and why.

Lochlann Attack in his article on recalibrating SDG 4.7 on Education for Sustainable Development examines the role of ESD within the history of the UN's strategies for achieving sustainable development and how this might be improved within the context of the SDGs. In order for global citizens to be able and willing to act for and promote change, they must be supported to see things differently through critical analysis of both global and local contexts. Attack's article echoes the point made by Carroll on the importance of understanding context, and the point made by Raanhuis on the importance of

lifelong learning and continuous professional development of development educators.

The Incheon Declaration states that education is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2015). Indeed, SDG 4.7 aims to ‘ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development’ which is crucial to the success of all seventeen SDGs. Attack goes beyond education for sustainable development as a tool to support individuals. Through his exploration of the concept of epistemic responsibility in recalibrating SDG 4.7, he makes the case for supporting communities through ESD. He argues that by increasing the capacity of communities to engage with sustainable development, and by equipping them with the knowledge that allows them to act in ways to support Agenda 2030, this in turn will increase their capacity to mobilise for the SDGs.

Attack does not shy away from addressing some deficiencies in ESD including the challenge of including environmental content in education. He argues that recalibrating SDG 4.7 through the lens of epistemic responsibility, and adapting ESD to address these deficiencies and meet these challenges would mobilise communities and individuals to deliver on the ambition of Agenda 2030. Development education is crucial to empowering people and communities to bring about the action needed to live in balance with the planet (United Nations, 2020).

The common thread running through these articles is the importance of critical analysis to social justice and the importance of education as an agent for change. The ability to challenge the dominant narrative, to make the link between global and local policy, to communicate this to people and communities, and to support action is the foundation of development education. Without development education, and the teachers that deliver it, we will never deliver social justice. Capacity and agency building needs development education. It needs teachers to continue acting as agents of change, making those connections between the local reality and global context to deliver social justice.

## References

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