

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: A PEDAGOGY FOR GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Douglas Bourn (2015) *The Theory and Practice of Development Education: A Pedagogy for Global Social Justice*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Review by Rachel Tallon

Doug Bourn is likely to be known by many in the development education sector in his role as the Director of the Development Education Research Centre of the Institute of Education in London. It is perhaps as an academic in this field that he has sought to write this book, having being asked by his students for some clarity concerning the field of development education. He is well placed to do so having been a part of the sector for many years. The debate on how the development education sector is ever-changing forms the backbone to this book. In this sense, one of its aims is as a ‘catch-all’ for the literature that exists on what development education is and should be. Certainly, by drawing upon leading theorists, research and casting a wide net, Bourn fills in the gaps for many readers who might be working in development education, but only know a partial account of this field. The rationale for this book is however, much more than a summary or history of development education.

Bourn puts forward the idea that development education is a pedagogical approach and so the stress is on the *education* part of development education. In this book Bourn poses and answers key questions, such as the relevance and relationship of development education to the learning skills needed for a global society. Another question concerns the impact of development education and what evidence exists to measure such impacts. To answer such questions, development education is presented as a pedagogy, ‘an approach to learning which recognises that learners come to development and global issues from a wide range of starting points, perspectives and experiences’ (5). By stressing this pedagogical aspect, Bourn sets out to outline a new pedagogical framework for development

education. He argues that instead of becoming focussed on a narrow view, we should encourage a range of different perspectives from learners. Pluralism is therefore an asset adding strength to the discipline.

From setting out the intent and rationale of the book in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 charts the historical progression from learning about development to global learning. Bourn places development education within a cohort of other ‘adjectival’ movements, such as human rights, peace and environmental education that emerged in the 1960s and 70s. The foundational influence of the non-governmental sector is described and Bourn notes that this has caused criticism of development education as being too strongly linked to a charity framework of the global South. Although this connection has often been present, radical approaches that paid attention to theorists such as Paulo Freire started to make their presence felt. Bourn notes that the evolution of development education was fraught between debates on whether development education is about informing the public in the global North or is about changing ideas about development both in the global North and South.

Bourn identifies new ‘adjectivals’ such as ‘sustainable development’ and ‘global citizenship’, as beginning in the early 1990s, and having currency today. Educators and politicians have seen how these education movements are powerful in changing young people’s behaviours and attitudes – particularly in changing their consumption practices to becoming more ethical and globally-oriented citizens. Despite the circulation of lots of terms to describe development education, global learning or sustainable global citizenship began to increase in popularity in the 2000s reflecting a maturing of the pedagogy and a realisation of its power. Bourn argues the history of development education is less than linear, but that it has always achieved its greatest impact when part of a broader movement such as sustainable development or global citizenship.

Following this historical mapping, Chapter 3 sets out to clarify what is meant by the term ‘development education’. What is vital here is that Bourn addresses the fact that perspective is all important. NGOs, education

departments, foreign affairs ministries, teachers and academics may all have divergent understandings about what development education is and its purpose. Perhaps reflecting these different perspectives, Chapter 4 describes how development education has often been seen as a loose network of interested bodies – and this is both a strength and a weakness. What Bourn is interested in, is moving the concept of development education beyond a ‘touchy-feely’ adjectival and ad hoc movement to a distinctive pedagogy, one that is based on theoretical foundations, and open to debate, dialogue and change. Bourn argues that despite the eclectic nature of the broad field, rigor can be applied, not to constrain the discipline but to create a formal discipline, based on theory that can be open to reflection and change.

With this in mind, the book segues into Part 2, in which an explanation of the theories of Annette Scheunflug and Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti are discussed. This is an interesting account of how very different theorists may not divide the theoretical base of development education, but contribute to its strength by adding unique critical analysis to understanding development. The chapter then includes discussion of other notions including postcolonialism, transformative learning and global cosmopolitanism. Together with critical thinking, dialogue and self-reflexive learning, Bourn maintains that these ideas need to be connected to the various theories so that a pedagogy of development education can evolve (99).

It is in Chapter 6 that Bourn outlines four principles that could form the foundation of a new pedagogical framework. They are: a global outlook; recognition of power and inequality in the world; belief in social justice and equity, and a commitment to reflection, dialogue and transformation. In expanding on these, Bourn makes an important distinction between serving the needs of the learner, and serving the needs of the development sector. This is an important aspect linked to the ideas around transformative learning. The transformation of the learner in some form of behavioural change is often seen as the goal of development practice, often tied to a campaign or desired non-governmental organisation (NGO) outcome. The

discussion gains interesting momentum as this simplistic approach and rationale needs to be questioned as its full impacts are hard to measure.

Part 3 of the book begins with a clear warning that education programmes that do not consider understanding the different interpretations of development as well as basic data about global poverty are too narrow to be considered good development education. The crux of the matter is that a truncated learning may lead to partial understanding of development, short term thinking (a focus on the issues of the day) and strong linkages with emotion that may not always be productive. This aspect of Bourn's thesis may raise the hackles of some in the NGO sector, but I felt that this was a sympathetic deliberation on one of the key tensions in development education. In Chapters 8 and 9, which explore more thoroughly the role of NGOs and debates concerning global skills, Bourn underlines this by arguing that for many NGOs in their educational work, '[they] make an assumption of a causal linkage between learning, empowerment and social action' (159). This assumption leads them to consider that greater awareness will equal greater commitment to their cause and proffered actions.

The issue is about transformative learning, related to the desires of development educators to enact transformative learning to bring about behavioural change in learners. Drawing upon the literature, Bourn asks to whose end is this transformation intended, the learner or the provider? Two examples, from Plan International and Save the Children, show that objectivity is increasingly difficult for NGOs. A critical pedagogy may be seen as detrimental to the very aims of an NGO. Bourn notes that Oxfam is still able to approach development education with the stress on education, aiming to encourage critical learners. Many NGOs promote positive stories about their activities as to do otherwise may cause their constituents to doubt their legitimacy.

This leads to Chapter 10 which addresses the question of impact and evaluation. Bourn's reflection on the history of development education is that the measure of success has often been on changing learners' behaviours

rather than on deepening their learning, something underlined in research by Darnton and Kirk (2011). The twin goals development and education are brought into focus here and, and the impacts of development education are be characterised as hit and miss in some cases and nebulous in others. Indeed, a subheading in the chapter is: ‘How do we know it’s working?’ (171), a pertinent question for funders of development education. It is the measure of impacts against the aims of the providers that causes concern for Bourn and, in Part 4, he stakes his claim by arguing that with his new pedagogical approach outlined in Chapter 6, good development education broadens and deepens the learner’s knowledge first and foremost: the learning *about development* is the transformative change. This includes critical and reflexive thinking. Outward behavioural changes are an added bonus, not the central aim. Giving examples of good practice, Bourn then finishes this chapter by making a note that teachers are not just impartial deliverers of content, but need to be active in coaching development education in a wider curriculum framework.

Bourn finishes his book by summarising how he sees this evolving field of development education and what it needs to do to strengthen itself. Rather than an eclectic, diverse range of topics that are currently fashionable, development education should be an approach to learning about the world that requires reflection on the part of both the educator and the learner (203). Instead of being yet another flimsy boat bobbing in the sea of good causes concerning development, Bourn has built a solid ship and has set a course. In my own experience, teachers often see education for global social justice as random, emotive and media-driven. Bourn’s argument is for a solid pedagogy that takes young people forward so that they are better able to deal with the complexity and insecurity of our modern, unequal world. Such a framework deepens their engagement with the world in a positive manner that invites both critical questions and grounded action.

I found this book useful and encouraging. Significant debates are clarified, unspoken concerns brought into the limelight, and the tensions and critiques are positively and considerately portrayed. At all times the

discussion refers back to research and evidence for what is working and what is going on in the classroom. For students of development education this book is a must and in my opinion those in the NGO sector who struggle with, at times, an unidentifiable tension between wanting to educate people about issues of global social justice and the swirling critiques about their practice and how it can be measured, this book will be of immense value. Bourn gives both sides of the argument a sympathetic hearing and argues that the way forward is not to dismiss the debates, but to engage in them. The transformation is that perhaps at the core, we are all learners.

References

Darnton, A and Kirk, M (2011) *Finding Frames: New Ways to Engage the UK Public in Global Poverty*, London: BOND, UKAID and Oxfam.

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