

BUILDING ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

In this article, **Douglas Bourn** provides the context and rationale for the establishment of a Development Education Research Centre at the Institute of Education at the University of London, the main issues it aims to address and why such a Centre is important for all practitioners engaged in development education.

Development education and higher education

Development education and its related terms of global education and global learning are becoming increasingly well supported by governments, policy-makers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across Europe. However, most of this activity has been based around the practice of a range of NGOs and, while there has been a greater level of activity within higher education linked mainly to teacher training or deepening the study of development issues across a range of degree courses, there has been no independent body of educational research in development education.

In the UK, there is a growing network of academics interested in development education and global perspectives, and a number of institutions have developed, or are considering initiatives, research centres or programmes that relate global perspectives to learning. These include a Centre for Human Rights Education at Roehampton University and one on Sustainable Development at Plymouth University. There are also a number of initiatives in Ireland and individuals and universities who have undertaken and are undertaking research under the heading of ‘global education’, including Bath Spa, Leeds, York, Bristol, Leicester and Exeter Universities (Hicks, Scott-Baumann, Clough & Holden, 2003). But there is no centre of learning that has focused specifically on the ‘international development’ aspects of education.

These trends are mirrored across Europe, although there are several courses and research groups at a number of universities, including University of Erlangen-Nurnberg, Vienna, Warsaw and Dublin.

The consequence of this lack of independent research focus on development education is that it has minimal academic profile. There is for example no academic journal for development or global education, unlike

areas such as environmental education or citizenship education. Where there has been research, such as Osler and Vincent, it has been looking at the relationship of global education to topics such as citizenship (Osler & Vincent, 2004). There have however been a number of conferences in recent years that have begun the process of engaging in debates on development and global education and their relationship to learning in a global society (O'Loughlin & Wegimont, 2002; 2003).

Policy-makers and request for evidence

The growth in political and educational support for development education and global perspectives has posed the need for evidence to justify the value of the funding and its relevance. Development education throughout the 1980s and 1990s across many countries suffered from being susceptible to moods and changes in policies from governments. Elections of social democratic governments often led to increased resources whilst conservative governments led to reductions in funding (Bourn, 2003; Cronkhite, 2000; McCollum, 1996; Marshall, 2005).

Since 2000 there has been increased support across the political spectrum for development education but in most countries, funders have increasingly posed the need for broader educational support. In the UK for example the Department for International Development (DfID) has stated that one of the aims of its funding is to support proposals that 'embed' greater understanding of international development issues within mainstream education. To achieve this, the Department has recognised that there is a need to produce evidence that development education does contribute to the 'essential learning' of children and young people (DfID, 1998).

The Education Ministry in England, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in launching their International Strategy in 2004, 'Putting the World into World Class Education', made reference to the importance of promoting the global dimension within all sectors of formal education. In planning its implementation in the summer of 2005, DfES officials have stated that a priority has to be to demonstrate the value and impact of the global dimension and 'international experience' for young people. There is also a need to promote and publicise existing academic research in this field to the wider educational world.

Similar debates and initiatives have taken place in other countries such as Finland, Austria and Netherlands. The Peer Evaluation initiatives led by Global Education Network Europe (GENE) have started an important process of reflection, analysis and strategising. GENE also organised a

series of seminars and events on the need for evaluation and quality assurance strategies (North-South Centre, 2005;2006).

But there has been no mechanism or structure that can bring together, identify and promote outcomes of research and evidence on the impact and effectiveness of development education programmes. For example, despite work undertaken in the UK and Germany on evaluation there is still recognition amongst many NGOs across Europe of the importance and value of publishing evidence and research of work undertaken. The comments made by McCollum commenting on the challenges for evaluation of development education in 2001 are still relevant:

“The key to moving forward is to identify ways for development education practitioners and organisations to work collectively to develop analyses of changes in the wider environment and their implications for their work” (McCollum, 2001).

Development education has therefore not been a subject of broader educational debate. A consequence of this is that it is vulnerable in terms of its long-term viability if it is not seen as part of mainstream learning. Without published bodies of evidence and research it is likely that development education and related terms will continue to remain on the margins of education thinking, policy-making and practice.

A comparison could be made with environmental education. That field has generated a well-respected international academic journal entitled *Environmental Education Research*. The editors of this journal are based at the research centre for environmental education at the University of Bath in UK.

There are a number of projects in many countries that engage individual academics and institutions in particular initiatives around development education. But unless evidence is gathered and learning undertaken which deepens understanding of what ‘development education’ means, there is a danger that initiatives around the theme of the ‘global dimension’ could be superficial and not grounded in understanding of international development issues (www.dea.org.uk/measuringeffectiveness).

A project that produced evidence of the need for more meaningful research initiatives was found in the Global Citizenship project at Birmingham University led by Professor Lynn Davies. The project report demonstrated the lack of clarity there is in the educational world about what is meant by ‘global citizenship’ (Davies, Harber & Yamashita, 2005). Professor Davies identified the need for more research on the long-term impact of global citizenship education. There is a need, she suggests, to

assess ‘the impact of teaching and learning on young people’s attitudes and dispositions to challenge injustice and violence’ (Davies, 2005).

Harriet Marshall, author of a recently completed thesis on Global Education, in a review essay of this area stated that there are few contemporary books in this field, ‘despite the burgeoning interest amongst teachers, NGO workers and research students’. She says that ‘it is vital for a discourse to be developed in this area, particularly at a time when there is such a demand by young people to learn more about global issues’ (Marshall, 2003). This means that few of the academic debates that have links to development education make the promotion of greater understanding and support for development central to their agendas.

Creation of a Research Centre on Development Education

In recognition of these challenges, the Institute of Education at the University of London launched in autumn 2006 a Research Centre on Development Education with funding from DfID. The purpose of the Research Centre is to act as the hub for generating issues and areas for knowledge generation, new thinking and quality output on development education. An initial task of the centre is to develop a body of evidence that can demonstrate the value and impact of development education and to give it increased status and profile within higher education.

Its objectives are to:

- i) promote the value of development education as part of the essential learning of the twenty-first century to the academically focussed educational world through the creation of a research centre;
- ii) provide evidence to DfID as to where and how development education contributes to their strategy document ‘Building Support for Development’;
- iii) promote and encourage critical reflective engagement with the meaning and effectiveness of development education programmes with the educational community in the UK and internationally;
- iv) develop a community of researchers engaged in development education;
- v) develop a body of evidence through a series of published monographs, academic articles and seminars on the contribution development education practice can make in building public support and understanding of international development;

- vi) develop the first ever Masters degree course in the UK on development education aimed at NGO practitioners, teachers and educationalists;
- vii) develop and embed development education principles and practices across teacher training and other educational courses and initiatives within the Institute of Education, and thereby in turn to other similar institutions.

The need for published material within the educational world on development education

Very few publications on development education in the English language have been produced over the past decade. The only book produced to date with the title *Development Education* is that by Audrey Osler and that was first published in 1994 (Osler, 1994). There have been a number of books written by Pike, Selby and Hicks on this area over the past decade but they take a wider remit based around global education as it is defined within a UK or North American context (Hicks, 2005).

Perhaps the most significant of the recent publications has been Dave Hicks and Cathy Holden's publication on the 'global dimension' which includes essays by some of the leading writers and practitioners on development and global education in the UK (Hicks & Holden, 2007). There have been a number of other publications involving Osler but most of them are framed within a citizenship context (Osler & Vincent, 2002). There has been some valuable work published in development education in Japan.

There are of course journals such as *Policy and Practice* and ZEP in Germany, and up until spring 2007, the UK's *Development Education Journal*. But there has been little debate on development education within academic journals. The *Journal of International Development* had a special issue on 'Public Understanding of Development' (Smith & Yanacopolos, 2004) but elsewhere we have been limited to occasional articles covering areas such as global citizenship and global education (see Davies, 2005; Richardson et al, 2003; Holden, 2000; Smith, 2004).

This lack of material compares very unfavourably with areas such as environment education, human rights and citizenship education or even inter-cultural education. For example, in citizenship education there is now a considerable body of evidence based on research, published papers and books which demonstrate the desire and interest of young people to learn and engage more in political and social issues of today, including the importance of the global dimension (see www.nfer.ac.uk/research/citizenship, Osler & Starkey, 2005)

The reasons for this lack of material are in part due to the emphasis on practice within a context determined by NGOs as suggested by McCollum, Blum and Marshall (McCollum, 1996; Blum, 2000; Marshall, 2005). This point has also been underlined in the articles published in the *Development Education Journal* in the UK where academics tend to write the more reflective papers and the NGO workers the examples of practice.

Why a Centre with a specific focus on development education

In developing the rationale for the Research Centre a question continually posed has been why use the term 'development education'. The North-South Centre's work in this area uses the term 'global education'. Terms such as 'global citizenship' and 'global learning' could well be argued as more often used in educational discourse than development education. In addition to an increasing number of practitioners the term 'development' is seen as problematic in presupposing a linear approach to human and social development. Debates in development education are also often framed within an 'international development' and, therefore, pre-determined NGO and government agendas. It has also been argued that because the world is more complex, one can no longer see issues and debates within a North-South and 'developed' and 'under developed' context. Finally terms such as 'global education' or 'global learning' are used more than 'development education' in the majority of policy statements produced in countries such as Canada, Australia, Austria, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland (Marshall, 2005).

However the following points could be argued as the basis for the need for a research centre specifically with the term 'development education':

- It has been a discrete body of practice with its own internal dynamic and approach to learning across Europe and beyond for over thirty years: there is for example a well respected European network of NGOs on development education.
- Government bodies that fund these areas of work are interested in initiatives that build greater public understanding and support for development.
- The linkages and roots in pedagogy, methodologies and perspectives from Southern countries have always been a key element of practice.
- Definitions of the term emphasise the relationship between learning and action for social change.

Using the term ‘development’ enables the debates to be framed within the policy agendas from both government and NGOs and this is likely to result in the outcomes of any research having a more receptive audience. For example central to the work of the Research Centre is the development within higher education of *knowledge and understanding of the major challenges and prospects for development, especially the poverty reduction agenda* (DfID, 1998). Also, if there is to be a greater understanding of *our global interdependence* within education and learning, then academic support is essential to secure recognition of its importance in the skills and knowledge people will need for the twenty-first century. Finally to *strengthen public confidence in, and support for, the fight against global poverty* requires leadership from educational thinkers and policy-makers. This requires the engagement and involvement in the debates from academic figures in the UK and elsewhere in the world.

Research issues and themes

An early activity of the Research Centre was a seminar for 40 UK academics that identified the following key research issues and questions and from it the following themes as the basis for ongoing debate and dialogue:

- The relationship of policy and practice and to look at approaches in different countries as to what and how development education practice mirrors and reflects government and NGO policies.
- How greater understanding and engagement with the global dimension can be reflected within the training and education of teachers.
- Relationship between themes and perspectives of development education to the internationalisation of higher education.
- The concept of development education and its framework and relationship to other concepts.
- Partnerships and linkages between schools in the North and the South
 - value, influence and impact (see http://ioewebserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=4381&4381_0=14597).

In assessing the first activities of the Centre, the following observations could be made:

- A key need is to encourage and support NGOs, practitioners and professional bodies to work with higher education institutions to ensure the outcomes of their practice are made more widely available.

- Different motives and agendas from governments, NGOs and practitioners have meant that in many areas of development education, the learning outcomes can appear to be confused and contradictory. An NGO might, for example, be looking for evidence to demonstrate increased understanding and support for their key messages, whilst an educational body would be seeking outcomes related to curriculum and personal development.
- Where there are initiatives that encourage greater public engagement in development, there is evidence to suggest that learning becomes secondary to giving money or demonstrating your support via some form of lifestyle action.

These are all areas the Centre intends to address in the future.

International debate and dialogue

Key to taking forward these research ideas and themes is the need for debate and dialogue at an international level. The GENE network has been an important initiator of such debate as can be demonstrated by its support for the Global Education in Europe conference at Maastricht in 2002 and the Learning for a Global Society Conference in London in 2003 (O'Loughlin & Wegimont, 2002; 2003).

The network was also a supporter of the *Development Education Theory, Policy and Practice* conference organised by the DEA and the Institute of Education in November 2006. This event attended by over 150 academics, NGO practitioners and policy-makers from around the UK and elsewhere in Europe identified the need for more debate particularly around the areas of dealing with complexity, multiple perspectives and critical engagement. Presentations and comments from participants noted the need to move on from seeing development education as about responding to agendas of government and NGO needs to that of recognising the centrality of the learning process. Development education should not be about changing people's behaviour to pre-determined goals and aspirations, but opening up minds to enable them to critically re-assess their own views and perspectives on the nature of the world in which they are living (Bourn, 2007 for main papers from the conference).

As Morgan has commented, development education and its related disciplines need also to engage in wider educational and philosophical debates, particularly in the context of dealing with complexity and debates around place and scale (Morgan, 2004). These points have been reinforced by Andreotti who has stated that 'in order to understand global issues, a

complex web of cultural and material local and global processes and contexts needs to be examined and unpacked'. She goes on to suggest that the key to debates are notions of power, voice and difference: 'we need to engage with our own and other perspectives to learn and transform our views, identities and relationships' (Andreotti, 2006).

Long-term benefits of a Research Centre

Establishing a research centre around a theme that at present has minimal academic profile is a great risk. But if it is successful it could play a major role in changing not only political and educational support for development education and its related terms, it will also provide evidence of its value to the educational needs of societies.

The following could be argued as the outcomes the Centre is working towards:

- i) Governments will have bodies of independent evidence and research that could be used to justify and support more resources and work on the 'global dimension' to education.
- ii) National organisations responsible for policy development on development education and related subjects will be more aware of development education through publications, events and engagement in strategic initiatives.
- iii) NGOs engaged in development education practice will be able to refer to independent research and publications that demonstrate the value of their work. A wider educational audience will know their work.
- iv) The educational research community internationally will be more aware of development education and the contribution it can make to learning. Those members of the academic community who are interested in development education will be encouraged to undertake more research work in this area and publish papers on these themes.
- v) The development studies community internationally will be aware of where and how development education links to public support and engagement with development. They will also be better informed as to the linkages between development education and development studies.
- vi) A learning community in development education will be created including academic staff, research staff, masters and doctorate students.

As one of the leading thinkers and practitioners on geography education commented in his support for the research centre, development education ‘needs to build a body of evidence that can inspire and motivate and contribute to raising standards of educational attainment. It is likely that such evidence does exist in fragments, locked away in dissertations and the experience of individuals. Building academic support and understanding will enable greater communication and help bring development education into mainstream debates’ (Lambert, 2005).

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