Researching, and searching for, international development in the formal curriculum: Towards a post-colonial conceptual framework

In this article, **Audrey Bryan** presents a selection of ongoing research that seeks to analyse how development education curricular content is communicated in recently produced textbooks designed for lower secondary students in the Republic of Ireland. Using specific examples extracted from selected texts, she demonstrates how development issues are often represented in contradictory ways. In response to these contradictions, she argues that in order to more critically engage with students in a formal educational setting, a post-colonial framework is necessary to better understand development issues and problems in a broader political economic context.

Introduction

This article seeks to enhance our understanding of some of the curricular resources that educators utilise in teaching global citizenship in formal education settings. More specifically, it provides a critical (albeit necessarily selective) analysis of some of the ways in which development education curricular content is communicated in recently produced geography and civic, social and political education (CSPE) textbooks designed for use with lower secondary students in the Republic of Ireland. This study is part of a much larger ongoing research project, funded by Irish Aid, which seeks to provide a representative critique of recently produced and currently used textbooks and curricular resources concerned with international development themes and issues. It draws on existing research conducted by the author into representations of diversity and interculturalism in Irish schools and society (Bryan, 2008; Bryan, forthcoming). Combining ethnographic and critical discourse analytic techniques, it focuses on the forms of development engagement these ideas or images are likely to produce.

The article will first provide a brief overview of the rationale and methodology informing the study. It will then seek to demonstrate some of the core, often contradictory ways in which development is represented in

schools, drawing on examples from two of the subjects that have a strong development focus: geography and CSPE. It concludes by advocating a post-colonial framework as one means through which more critical engagement with development-related content can be fostered in formal educational settings.

Study rationale and methodology

Development education has evolved considerably as a field over the last six decades. Mesa (n.d.), for example, identifies five generations, or periods, in the evolution of development education from its origins as a 'charitable and assistance-based approach' in the 1940s and 1950s to its present focus on a 'global citizenship education' approach, which stresses the effects of globalisation and the need for a global consciousness in the face of an escalating range of issues which transcend national borders, such as poverty, climate change, HIV, etc. Within this current focus on global citizenship, development education can be further categorised according to soft and critical versions of global citizenship education. Soft global citizenship education stresses poverty and underdevelopment as resulting from a lack of resources, skills, technology and education. This is distinct from more critical approaches which seek to redress unequal power relations and stress the structures, systems and assumptions that produce and maintain social and economic inequalities in the first instance (Andreotti, 2006).

Post-colonial theory is an example of a critical approach to global citizenship education, through which development issues and problems can be examined in their broader political economic context. Broadly speaking, post-colonialism is a theoretical framework which makes visible the history and legacy of European colonialism, including the ways in which the wealth of the global North has been acquired and maintained through a history of exploitation, and examines how it continues to shape contemporary discourses and institutions (Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006). It is closely aligned with the philosophy and aims of development education itself. As Young explains: 'Post-colonialism claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being; it seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave, to produce a more just and equitable relation between different peoples of the world' (Young, 2003:7, cited in Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006).

Development educators who adopt a post-colonial framework seek to critically engage students with, and challenge, common assumptions and dominant theoretical frameworks of international development (such as modernisation theory) that are often engrained in mainstream development

discourses, such as school texts. Post-colonial and other critical approaches to development education encourage us to consider the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of internationally derived development policies and practices, to engage deeply with the structural dimensions of poverty, injustice and oppression, and to consider alternative progressive political, economic, and social arrangements. From this critical vantage point, the purpose of development education is to ensure that 'injustices are addressed, more equal grounds for dialogue are created, and people can have more autonomy to define their own development' (Andreotti, 2006:6). This article will consider the extent to which these critical approaches to development are evident in a selection of contemporary school texts designed for use in the Republic of Ireland.

While recent research carried out in the Republic offers insights into the nature and extent of development education provision in Irish post-primary schools, to date there has been little systematic research into how notions of development are actually constructed in curriculum resources and mediated in Irish schools. The significance of examining textbooks and related teaching materials is highlighted by recent research on the profile and methods of development education teaching at post-primary level carried out by the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre and University of Limerick (Gleeson, King, O'Driscoll & Tormey, 2007). Despite development education's emphasis on active learning, this survey of post-primary teachers indicated that textbooks are the most frequently used methodology for teaching development issues, with over 70 per cent indicating that this was the medium they used most often for delivering 'Third World/Developing World' topics in the classroom (Gleeson, King, O'Driscoll & Tormey, 2007). While there are a range of instructional resources besides textbooks that are available to educators who teach about development issues, the reliance on textbooks as an authoritative source of knowledge in the classroom suggests that an analysis of textbooks is warranted.

Furthermore, the study by Gleeson et al. (2007) revealed that school is the second most important source of information for students on the developing world, after the media. This underscores the need to critically engage with the nature and implications of the messages conveyed in formal education settings. The practical value of such research lies in its capacity to explore the relationship between how development is portrayed and the nature and level of engagement that these representations are likely to evoke. For example, do they change consumer habits, increase charitable giving, enhance protest and political activism or engagement in other forms of broad-based collective action (Smith, 2004a; 2004b).

The following section provides a snapshot of some of the dominant

understandings of development portrayed in school texts, using a number of examples drawn from recently produced geography and CSPE texts designed for lower secondary or 'junior cycle' students in the Republic of Ireland. Similar to recent ethnographic work carried out in the United Kingdom (Smith, 2004a; 2004b), findings suggest that the formal educational domain is not dominated by a uniform understanding of development. On the contrary, students in the Republic are presented with a range of competing and contradictory narratives. On the one hand, some of these narratives and images continue to perpetuate traditional understandings of development, based on development-as-charity motifs and modernisationist assumptions. On the other hand, some narratives offer a more contextualised analysis, focused on the structural features of global inequality, often within the confines of a single text. The aim of this analysis is not to criticise specific texts, but rather to highlight tensions that exist, and to highlight educative opportunities or moments that arise from these tensions (Smith, 2004a; 2004b).

Given that the study outlined in this article is part of a much larger ongoing research project, it should be viewed as a work-in-progress which builds upon and extends the scope of previous research examining curricular representations of cultural diversity, racism and interculturalism in an Irish context. The findings presented here illustrate some of the ways in which international development is represented in some of the core subject areas and texts, but do not constitute a comprehensive or exhaustive analysis of the second-level curriculum in the Republic of Ireland. As a necessarily selective analysis of textbooks representing only two subjects, it is likely that there are other development 'storylines' presented in school texts and curriculum resources that are not reflected here.

Methodologically, the study is informed by a critical discourse analysis of a selection of CSPE and geography texts, and to a lesser extent on interviews conducted with students from majority world countries that attend a large, ethnically diverse secondary school in the greater Dublin area, which is referred to here as Blossom Hill College (BHC). The discourse analysis involved a multilayered process of repeatedly reading, writing and interpreting each of the texts to derive recurring patterns and themes. A general method employed was to examine the prevalence or absence in the texts of such features as foreground information (those ideas that are present and emphasised), background information (those ideas that are explicitly mentioned but de-emphasised), presupposed information (that information which is present at the level of implied or suggested meaning) and absent information (Fairclough, 1995).

The analysis was also informed by focus groups, and one-on-one

and small-group interviews involving 30 students, including some from developing countries, conducted at BHC. The study was conducted over the period September 2004 to December 2005.

Key findings

'Developing countries…still have some way to go': Modernisation theories and the curriculum

The following definitions of development and underdevelopment, which appear in the CSPE text *Make a Difference!,* are reflective of the extent to which a modernisation framework undergirds how global inequalities are understood in some accounts of development in junior cycle textbooks:

> "Some countries are at different stages on the road to development. While some are very advanced, others are **underdeveloped.** These countries are known as **developing countries**, because they still have some way to go" (Harrison & Wilson, 2001:91; emphasis in original). (A revised version of this publication was published in 2007; the present analysis is based on the 2001 edition).

Modernisation theories are based on a crude dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, and seek to explain how societies move from traditional to modern stages of development. They maintain that traditional societies can eventually catch up with their more advanced (capitalist) counterparts provided they adopt a series of global North-style economic, financial, social, cultural, political and psychological interventions. Modernisation theories, therefore, are based on a linear view of history, that promote a stage-like trajectory of economic growth which maintain that Northern countries are further along the path of modern development than developing countries. In describing countries from the global South as 'developing', a crude distinction is drawn between us (developed, modern, advanced) and them (underdeveloped, traditional, backward).

Modernisation theories explain the prevalence of poverty in poorer countries primarily as a consequence of internal or endogenous factors. They lack a more structuralist approach to understanding global inequality, which would include the policy environment and power structure in which 'developing' nations are forced to operate (Greig, Hulme & Turner, 2007). Furthermore, as post-colonial critiques of modernisation theories have argued, 'far from being an innocent or neutral or objective discourse of how a society might become modern, modernisation theory was part of the conceptual architecture of a diffusing imperialistic logic', which provides

theoretical legitimisation for geopolitical intervention in Third World societies (Slater, 2008:85).

Equally lacking within the modernisationist paradigm is an appreciation of the heterogeneity of developing world societies, including their diverse social, cultural and political histories (Slater, 2008). Arturo Escobar (1995), for example, has critiqued the process of 'discursive homogenisation' prevalent in mainstream discourses of development wherein 'the complexity and diversity of Third World peoples' is erased, 'so that a squatter in Mexico city, a Nepalese peasant, and a Tuareg nomad become equivalent to each other as poor and underdeveloped' (Escobar, 1995:53). The following section seeks to develop this critique further within the context of textual representations of India, and student reactions to the ways in which it is portrayed in the Irish curriculum.

'They only show the bad, they never show the good'

The ethnographic dimension of the research revealed considerable discontent among students from so-called Third World countries in terms of how aspects of their cultures and geographical backgrounds were portrayed in school texts. Asmitha (a pseudonym) - who was born in India but had lived most of her life in Ireland - recounted the frustration she experienced during a geography lesson which sharply deviated from her own perceptions, understandings and experiences of India:

> "We are actually from the South of India, and the cities we are from are so like urbanised. They are very urban cities. They only show the bad, they never show the good. Like in that [geography] textbook it talked about [India] being a Third World country. Its being poor and the people being illiterate all the time. And they never once showed the prosperity of the country, they never showed the real riches, they never showed, just how people are in India, how intent they are on education, on getting somewhere, on getting sort of a mark on the world. They never said anything about that. Nothing about the economy or anything about that. Just that it is a Third World country" - Asmitha, aged 16.

Indeed, representations of India evident in some texts examined lend support to Asmitha's criticism that 'they only show the bad, they never show the good'. New Complete Geography, for example, contains a chapter titled 'Urban problems in Calcutta', which includes a case study of 'Calcutta and its problems' focused on the 'unplanned development of Shanty towns' and its 'lack of infrastructural services' (Hayes, 2003:272-273). The lived reality of existence in a bustee (defined in the text as 'hastily-built urban slums') is

portrayed through the voice of an Irish development worker, who was hosted temporarily by a local family (Hayes, 2003:272). Readers are informed that the Gomes family, who are described as 'kindness itself' 'generously share the little they possess with this Irish stranger and face life with a cheerfulness which to me seems quite astonishing' (Hayes, 2003:273).

Simpson (2004) critiques this well-intentioned and benignly poor yet happy storyline on the grounds that it implies a trivialisation and romanticisation of poverty, by advancing the notion that somehow people do not really mind living in poverty. Simpson argues that narratives of this nature lay the basis for excusing or justifying material inequality, to the extent that they imply that those subjected to it are not unduly concerned by their material wellbeing. Our understanding of the lived realities of bustee dwellers in Calcutta is further compromised by a narrative device which constructs development through the Northern gaze of an 'Irish stranger,' whose exposure to these overcrowded and cramped conditions, described as 'a little smaller than our kitchen in Ireland', is short-lived. This rhetorical strategy has the simultaneous effect of privileging the voice of the Irish Aid worker while marginalising and silencing local perspectives, preventing the Gomes family from describing their lives in their own terms. The comparison of the Gomes household to that of the size an Irish kitchen reinforces the us/ them dichotomy, defining the Gomes family in narrow and negative material terms.

While the representation of radically different living standards and conditions in parts of the majority world may encourage students in Ireland to reflect critically on their own lives, analyses of this nature also run the risk of depoliticising poverty, in the absence of a concomitant critical consideration of why these differences between 'us' and 'them' exist in the first instance. In the context of this chapter, Calcutta's problems are attributed primarily to 'its rapid population growth' (Hayes, 2003:272), eclipsing consideration of inequality, oppression and injustice at multiple levels, and the nature of the global North's relationship with 'developing' countries like India. On the other hand, those representations of development which emphasise the underlying structural dimensions of global poverty, and how individuals as well as national governments and international institutions are implicated in sustaining it, open up possibilities for students to consider how the very structures and systems that underlie it can be altered (Smith, 2004; Simpson, 2004).

Another chapter in the same text about the effects of high and low population densities provides a case study of Calcutta, profiling such problems as overcrowding, a lack of open space, and a shortage of clean water and pollution (Hayes, 2003:195). It is not suggested here that such problems

do not exist in Calcutta, or that students in the global North should not be exposed to these issues. However, by mobilising a particularly negative representation of Calcutta (which comes to represent India as a whole), using bleak images of people who know only overcrowding, poverty, pollution, disease, and hunger, the text eclipses a multidimensional representation that would capture the diversity of experience which students like Asmitha describe. In other words, in the absence of other storylines about India and the experiences and accomplishments of its people, textual and pictorial representations of Indian people in poverty ensure that they will be almost exclusively associated with poverty and dependency in the minds of those lacking another frame of reference.

Other chapters in this text engage directly with the underlying dimensions of poverty and global inequality, drawing attention to the exploitation resulting from colonialism (Chapter 65), as well as the excessive profit margins generated by multinational corporations (Hayes, 2003:350), and the unfair trade policies implemented by international financial institutions (IFIs). However, the chapters on Calcutta discussed above do not address the causes of poverty but describe its manifestations, thereby providing a somewhat decontextualised and partial understanding of the problems outlined. Accounts of poverty which are disarticulated from their underlying causes are unlikely to generate the kind of understanding necessary to fuel changes in the structures and systems that perpetuate global injustice (Smith 2004a; 2004b).

Not all depictions of India paint such a uniformly negative picture. Directly following the modernisationist definition of development in *Make a Difference!* is a more progressive view of development: a case study of Kerala State, India, adapted from *The Developing World: A Study of the South* (Ashe, 1995). The passage identifies Kerala's 'secret to development' as one of 'small scale, village-based solutions to its problems…without the help of any foreign aid'. It describes its transformation from a state characterised by 'fast population growth, famine and malnutrition, poverty, unequal land ownership and a very high level of illiteracy' to one which had tackled malnutrition, developed its education system, and promoted female literacy (1995:91).

> "[Kerala] now has one of the highest levels of female literacy in the developing world at 92%. Literacy is freeing women and girls from the *traditional roles* they had in the past. Women now see themselves as *people with choices*; they can choose whether to stay at home or to pursue work outside the home. Women are now training as secretaries, accountants, nurses, etc. Because of the decline in infant mortality,

and because most of the children are now reaching adulthood, *parents no longer feel the need to have large families*" (Harrison & Wilson, 2001:91-92, emphasis added).

This passage is atypical in the sense that it is one of the few instances where development is presented as something that was realised internally, highlighting the policies of the indigenous state government and the actions of stakeholder communities in providing health, literacy and education services and preventing malnutrition. In the following section, evidence suggests that development is more commonly presented within the context of external assistance, where Northern non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and other donors are positioned as central agents in the development process.

Despite the passage's emphasis on internally-achieved development, the Kerala example offers yet another illustration of the centrality of the modernisationist framework to how development is presented in this text. Taken as a whole, the passage depicts a state which has progressed along the development ladder or trajectory, thereby ridding itself of its 'many problems'. Women as a collective have been transformed, from a group who were once ignorant, poor, uneducated, illiterate, tradition-bound, and domesticated, to a group who are now empowered and educated, with the freedom to pursue careers and make their own decisions, including about how many children they wish to have.

This discourse of transformation reflects the trope of the feminist modern, with the image of an empowered woman that has become increasingly popular in development discourses since the 1990s. The feminist modern positions women as capable of transforming themselves, and their societies, often without the recognition of political and economic forces that make such development transformations difficult or unlikely (Greene, 1999:227, cited in Vavrus, 2003:25). There is a clear parallel between the transformed female Third World figure depicted in the Kerala case study and the implicit characterisation of women in the global North evident in Western feminist discourse (Mohanty, 1991). Equally, the depiction of women prior to Kerala's 'development' bears a striking resemblance to the female character Mohanty identifies as the 'average Third World woman', who leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and life in the Third World (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized, etc.) (Mohanty, 1991:56).

The foregoing example shows that school texts do not always offer a wholly negative portrayal of developing countries. However, this 'positive' representation is couched in a modernisationist framework charting Kerala's evolution along the road to development, which presupposes a particular kind of developed person, possessing modern beliefs, attitudes and behaviours predicated on assumptions of the global North (Vavrus, 2003). Meanwhile, through this discourse of 'positive' transformation, the 'average Third World (underdeveloped) woman' continues to be constructed as traditional, illiterate, uneducated, and confined to the home (Mohanty, 2003).

Development as positive self-presentation of the nation

The previous section alluded to a tendency for development-related issues to be discussed in school texts within the context of policies, institutions and practices in the global North. In CSPE texts in particular, development-related issues are typically discussed within the context of a broader consideration of Ireland and its 'links with developing countries' (Quinn, Mistéal, & O'Flynn, 2004:140). Ireland is typically presented as a developed nation which plays an important role in helping to reduce global inequality. As such, emphasis is often placed on the role of Irish governmental agencies and departments, NGOs and public figures in the development process.

The CSPE text *We Are the World* features an article from the *Irish Examiner* which discusses Irish musician and activist Bono's role in getting the 'Group of Eight top industrial countries to provider greater debt relief for the world's poorest countries' (Cassidy & Kingston, 2004:233).

> "[Irish development agency] Goal Director John O'Shea believes Bono will achieve more in ten days than the international community has in ten years. 'Bono has been a phenomenon, he is another Bob Geldof. To get the alleviation of the suffering of the poorest of the poor to the top of the agenda, to get into the White House and places of that nature, has been sensational. Now he must find the courage somewhere over the coming ten days to look directly into the eyes of these African leaders and tell them he wants to advise the World Bank to relieve the burden of debt on these countries, provided the Third World countries agree to conditions'" (Cassidy & Kingston, 2004:233).

Elsewhere, Irish non-governmental institutions as well as the Irish Defence Forces are depicted as fearlessly championing the cause of human rights around the world. In *New Complete Geography*, for example, Irish NGOs are described as famous, widely respected, and fearless defenders of human rights:

"Many of Ireland's NGOs are famous for the outstanding work they do on behalf of people in the majority world…Many of our NGOs are widely respected because they are politically neutral and yet fearless in championing the cause of human rights. Trócaire, Oxfam and Afri, for example, do much to inform Irish people about the causes of and possible solutions to poverty and oppression in the Third World" (Hayes, 2003:354-355).

We are the World carries a story from the *Irish Examiner* on the pullout of Irish Troops from Lebanon:

"The pullout brings to an end twenty-three years of peacekeeping in southern Lebanon by Irish troops. But they leave behind concrete evidence of their deep involvement in this poor and formerly war-ravaged corner of the world, from the orphanage in the nearly village of Tibnine to the goat farm up the road towards the coastal town of Tyre, to the savagely destitute family successive battalions adopted, to the monuments to the Irish who died, to the Irish brogues of some of the locals" (Cassidy & Kingston, 2004:235).

In an interview with a former Captain of the Irish Defence forces, quoted in the CSPE text *Impact,* readers learn that there is something about the temperament of Irish people and their ability to communicate, that has resulted in their 'considerable reputation as excellent peacekeepers and the respect with which they are held in many trouble spots around the world' (Barrett & Richardson, 2003:164).

These extracts are saturated with a discursive strategy known as 'positive self-presentation of the nation' (Van Dijk, 1997). These development narratives are often utilised to describe Ireland's role as a generous and compassionate provider to the less fortunate in the world as much as they are to raise awareness and understanding of development issues themselves. This has the effect of obfuscating the complicity of the Irish state in Third World exploitation, fuelled in part by exaggerated claims about Bono's ability to 'achieve more [for the Third World] in ten days than the international community has in ten years'.

Equally problematic is the way in which these tropes simultaneously mark the 'Third World,' and other 'war-ravaged corners of the world' as trouble spots requiring Ireland's humanitarian interventions (Montgomery, 2005). Furthermore, the emphasis devoted to the loss of Irish life in the Lebanese account has the simultaneous effect of glorifying 'self-sacrificing' representatives of the Irish nation while eclipsing the loss of Lebanese

victims during the conflict.

Development-as-charity, consumer aid and structural change

The development-as-charity motif, exemplified through such NGO programmes as child sponsorship and disaster relief, is one of the most contentious and pervasive representations of international development in the public domain (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that representations of development-as-charity should also be evident in the formal curriculum. In *We are the World*, the development-as-charity theme is illuminated through an article on the *Bóthar na nGabhar* campaign, which is described as 'a primary school project that children all over Ireland are taking part in...[where]...each class, or school,…raise[s] €320 and sponsor[s] an Irish dairy goat for a poor family in a Third World country' (Cassidy & Kingston, 2004:236).

A recent study of knowledge, attitudes and activism among young people in post-primary schools in Ireland suggests that donating money is the most popular form of development activism in Irish schools, thus demonstrating the prevalence of the development-as-charity motif (Gleeson, King, O'Driscoll & Tormey, 2007). During the fieldwork period at BHC, senior-cycle (upper secondary) students and teachers spearheaded a number of highly successful fundraising campaigns, most notably in the wake of the 2004 South Asia Tsunami, when students raised almost €30,000 towards the replacement of fishing boats destroyed in the disaster. Such efforts should not be criticised, but it is important to question the understanding of, and response to, development that charitable and fundraising efforts of this nature are likely to foster. The framing of development in charitable terms portrays majority world inhabitants predominantly in the context of their dependency and need for immediate financial assistance.

The enduring popularity of the development-as-charity motif is, of course, in part related to its strong practical appeal. Programmes such as *Bóthar na nGabhar* make international development 'doable, knowable and accessible', even to very young children (Simpson, 2004:681), rendering individual schoolchildren active agents of development. However, this activism is rooted in a particular relationship to the poor and representation of development based on charitable donations, pity, compassion and dependency.

As with the modernisationist framework, development-as-charity leaves little room to address the underlying factors that produce and perpetuate poverty. The *Bóthar na nGabhar* segment, for example, in describing education provision for children in the developing world suggests that 'the biggest dream that most…children [in the Third World] have is to go

to school...but [that] schools are not free in most of these counties' and hence 'unaffordable for the average boy or girl' (Cassidy & Kingston, 2004:236). The segment is suggesting that problems with accessing education pertain across the developing world irrespective of regional and national differences in provision. Moreover, these problems are disassociated from the underlying issues that present barriers to educational access such as the material, political and economic conditions that constrain families' from sending their children to school (Vavrus, 2003). The development-as-charity framework is therefore problematic in the sense that it privileges decontextualised and 'do-able' notions of development and individualised solutions to what are in effect highly complex structural problems.

These decontextualised accounts of poverty coexist alongside more structural analyses of poverty and inequality in school texts, suggesting that multiple and often contradictory meanings of development are articulated in the formal sector curriculum. In *We are the World*, for example, the *Bóthar na nGabhar* segment is juxtaposed with an article on fair trade, a development theme that features prominently in CSPE texts. The article highlights issues of interdependence and inequality as a consequence of unfair trading policies and practices:

> "Trade 'liberalisation', enforced by the World Trade Organisation, makes it increasingly difficult for small traders to compete. 'Free trade' is supposedly in the interests of increased competition, but when multinational companies are able to benefit from subsidies and protections denied to small economies this competition is unfair" (Cassidy & Kingston, 2004:237).

Narratives of this nature, which highlight the role of political-economic forces in shaping development problems, are important as a means of stressing the need for fundamental change in the nature of the global North's economic relationship with developing countries (Tikly, 2001). Yet despite the structural analysis offered in such segments on unfair trade, there remains the danger that the fair trade storyline could be reduced to the realm of yet another individualised response to development-related problems; in this case that of development-as-consumer aid. In one CSPE text, for example, students are presented with possible Action Project ideas, such as organising a fair trade event at their school or surveying their local supermarket to see what fair trade goods are available (Harrison & Wilson, 2001:169). Activities of this nature, considered in the context of the development-as-charity framework, raise questions about the extent to which individual acts of making ethically informed consumer choices or promoting the sale of

fair trade goods is likely to foster structural and systematic change. While learning to make ethically informed consumer choices may alter individual attitudes and behaviour, the danger resides in limiting activism to the level of personal support, and thus undermining the need for broad-based political organisation and action (Mohanty, 2003).

Implications: Post-colonialism and development education

This article offered a critical analysis of how development knowledge is constructed in recently produced textbooks designed for use with lower secondary school students in the Republic of Ireland. In recent years, the Irish government has invested heavily in a range of development education initiatives, in both the formal and non-formal education sectors, in an effort to increase public understanding of development issues and the underlying causes of poverty and underdevelopment in the world (Irish Aid, 2008). As an educational process, development education aims to '…challenge attitudes which perpetuate poverty and injustice, and empower people to take action for a more equal world' (Irish Aid & Trócaire, 2006:6). A critical examination of how development issues are represented in curriculum materials is particularly important for a sector that encourages action for change by promoting understanding of global issues. It is precisely because the level and nature of one's engagement with the developing world is linked to one's perceptions of this world that we need to examine how these perceptions are constructed in the classroom given that they are influenced to a large degree by what is learned in school.

The study on which this article is based suggests that multiple and often contradictory meanings of development are at play in school texts, some of which rely on more traditional modernisationist and development-as-charity frameworks, while others draw on narratives which focus attention on the need for structural change, based on a reformulation of the global North's political-economic relationship with so-called developing nations.

In order for development education's agenda of empowering people to take action for a more equal world to be fulfilled, development-related curricular content must convey what Mohanty has called 'emancipatory knowledge' about the developing world and global issues (Mohanty, 2003:1). The findings presented here raise questions about the emancipatory capabilities of some of the development narratives in the curriculum, to the extent that they adopt homogenising discourses which fail to capture the diversity and complexity of the developing world, trivialise poverty, and prioritise individualised responses to development problems. Representations of development which emphasise difference and reinforce

us/them dichotomies between the 'First' and 'Third World' are unlikely to establish global interconnectedness or inform the practice of solidarity with the majority world; concepts which are central to development education's radical agenda. It is suggested, therefore, that some development narratives need to engage more deeply and critically with the structural dimensions of poverty as well as the international political-economic contexts and conditions that impact on society's capacity to 'develop' (Vavrus, 2003).

The processes that shape the multiple meanings of development in the classroom and limit teachers' capacity to engender reflexivity and critical engagement with development have not been examined here (Humble & Smith, 2007). The study's analysis is further circumscribed by the limited attention it devotes to what happens when instructional materials interact with their intended audiences, and how development messages are understood by recipients. As Olneck has remarked in the context of multicultural educational content; '[A]t issue is not only *what* is in the curriculum, but what is *done* by teachers and students with the curriculum' (2001:345, emphasis in original). For example, the lack of analysis of the underlying causes of poverty highlighted above could be used as a context for opening up alternative storylines that privilege the role of international economic policies in producing and sustaining global inequality in the context of the classroom. Similarly, existing representations of development could be problematised by asking: how could this issue be otherwise imagined? This question is central to a post-colonial orientation to development education (Andreotti, 2006). Exposed to development issues through a post-colonial lens, students will be empowered with the skills, values and understanding needed to challenge the perception that the developing world is continually in need of saving or intervention, and that 'we' in the global North have all the solutions (Andreotti, 2006).

The post-colonial orientation to development education offers a powerful counter-narrative to functionalist, modernisationist frameworks which are privileged in the existing curriculum. If exposed to this orientation, students will be better equipped to interrogate accepted understandings of development problems and solutions and to critically evaluate widely held ideas about the so-called 'developing' world that might otherwise go unquestioned. Understanding the ways in which existing development ideas are mediated and produced in schools in different geographical contexts is a small but necessary step in building alternative storylines and curricula, grounded in more emancipatory frameworks of this nature.

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