

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

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Introduction

All activity takes place within a social context that fluxuates as it is influenced by a range of events, which can be exhilarating or frightening. I examine here both the changing context in which development education (DE) takes place (i.e. the social and political landscape) and the themes and issues that comprise DE. So the article falls neatly into two sections.

The changing social and cultural landscape

The changing demographic profile is a major factor throughout Europe. After World War II, many African and Caribbean people were invited to work in the United Kingdom (UK). Later, in the 1950s and 1960s, more immigrants, mainly from South Asia, were invited to undertake work that British people did not want to do. Today, many new arrivals are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from the newly enlarged European Union (EU) and the developing world. These demographic changes have had, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the EU, its discourse and policies, its ethnic composition and its image of itself.

In the UK this discourse has been in process since the end of World War II. Early immigrants were subjected to policies of assimilation and integration, some of which were later discredited. For example, assimilation failed and was rejected in the 1960s, and integration was similarly discarded on the basis of its assimilative tendencies.

45 years later the situation is different with Black communities a visible and articulate part of our society but questions of identity continue to dominate the debate on race in the UK and Europe. For example, I have a Black (to mean people of Asian, African and African-Caribbean heritage) friend who identifies herself as European to make people aware of the assumptions they make about what it means to be European. Black people have been in Britain for hundreds of years and, in that time, Europe has been a continent of different cultures, colours and belief systems. So there has been some negotiation and reassessment of the notion of 'Britishness' and while immigrant British people expect to change they also reasonably

anticipate some change within the host culture. Many of us argue that this has happened to some extent but the concepts of integration and assimilation as they are now used by politicians, journalists, commentators and even educationalists, seem to make assumptions and tendencies of the sort rejected in the 1960s.

Some of the current stimulus for the re-emergence of integrationist policies comes from within the EU. For example, the Maastricht Treaty which 'addressed political and economic harmonisation and integration between European nations and the rights and responsibilities of European citizens'. The treaty may have been thinking in terms of *indigenous* (i.e. 'born in or natural to a country') Europeans but there now seems to be an attempt (or hope) to integrate *different* communities into a cultural norm - an acceptance of one historical perspective. Think, for example, of citizenship tests for newcomers. Will they include questions on the Indian uprising of 1857? Or Bloody Sunday? The slave castles in West Africa? These are parts of British history after all, albeit a contested area.

There has been some insistence within the gender debate that equality must respect women's specificity; that they should not be expected to function as their male counterparts. This has lessons for the debates around integration. *Immigrant* Europeans want to see some reflection of their specific cultures in the countries in which they now live.

Alongside the debate on integration is the backlash against multiculturalism, condemned by many (especially government) as another failed policy. There has been some debate as whether the French model, which sees everyone as equal under the law and in public life, is better suited to engendering social equality. French law is secular and blind to colour and ethnicity, in principle and philosophy with equality, therefore, premised on adopting a pre-existing set of norms and values. However, in practice the model has not guaranteed equality between social groups and it is difficult to envisage how this can happen in societies where the balance of power is skewed in favour of a particular group. Immigrants from former colonies may have rights to citizenship but new cultures have not been assimilated on the basis of equality and justice which consequently fosters dissension and social unrest.

An assimilative model is unlikely to be acceptable in a society, like the UK, that recognises the existence of inequalities and need for consequent action, and where a mature discourse on the value and need for diverse perspectives and experiences exists. It is reasonable to expect that immigrants should not be adapted into an existing norm and that host societies will encourage discourse on the issues of race, identity and social integration that will benefit from the engagement between different peoples

The changing landscape of DE: Themes and content

Interdependence is a term commonly used to describe relationships in a globalising world, whether it is in business, government, the statutory and voluntary sectors or among charities. The term implies that we are *co-dependent* and sweeps the dynamic of power relations that are *fundamental* to relations between North and South under the carpet. The concept of interdependence needs to be deconstructed and examined carefully by education policy-makers and practitioners. While we are locked into a common economic and political system and, therefore, inter-connected, this does not equate to *co-dependence*. This is similarly the case with groups within national boundaries and it is not only erroneous but counter-productive and dangerous to suggest otherwise. Without addressing the imbalances of power at national and international levels, resentments will grow and social and economic problems will become more acute.

Our differences are as significant as our similarities and we should respect the rights of nation states and their citizens to opt out of the neo-liberal panacea of choice, economic wealth and over-consumption. Wealth can be measured in terms of family, friendships, support networks and sufficiency rather than the limited financial classifications of inter-government organisations. Moreover, economic poverty exists in the North as well as the South and DE practitioners know that materially poor people may be wealthy in other contexts – family and community structures, lifestyles and values - and have much to teach us in respect to current urgencies like climate change and land degradation. People in the South have been feeling the impact of colonial industrialism for generations which is now extending across the world in the form of floods, freak weather patterns and water scarcity.

We *all* collude in the actions that produce climate change and inter-governmental initiatives such as the Kyoto protocol are only a *starting* point. Governments may need to take radical steps toward reducing carbon emissions and addressing climate change, but *we, the citizens*, need to recognize our rights and responsibilities in this area as well. Children have to understand the urgency of this and educators and parents need to reinforce the messages.

In respect to issues like climate change and fair trade, and development education practice in a broader sense there is an overarching question: ‘How do we move people from feelings of empathy to a quest for justice?’ Here are some suggestions:

- Support people in the global South as agents of their own change by challenging the notion that Southern people are disempowered and incapable of their own agency.
- Reclaim the history of developing countries and raise awareness of the freedom struggles and personal sacrifice that secured independence from colonialism. For example, The Abolition Act legislated for the inevitable as slaves made slavery impossible through their own activism and sacrifice.
- Challenge yourself to faithfully represent the oppression and emancipation of peoples in the global South as part of your own practice.
- Involve Southern people as *equal partners* in DE and development. An informed perspective from Southern activists can be a meaningful contribution to DE practice and *demonstrates* that people are involved in their own struggles at different levels – as activists, analysts and researchers.

Future opportunities and challenges

I have proposed below some of the challenges for DE organisations in involving Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups in their work:

- There needs to be more genuine partnerships between long-term resident Southern and Black people and DE groups. There appears to have been less progress in this respect in the DE sector than in other sectors of our society. However, there are a greater number of Southern and Black groups that have DE as part of their activities. This will mean looking at areas where seemingly different agendas can overlap.
- Greater engagement with new immigrant and BME communities within the development education and development sectors. We need to ensure that DE is delivered in a way that helps to meet the needs of these communities and supports their contribution to development education.
- Even with the best intentions, campaigns like ‘Drop the Debt’ and ‘Make Poverty History’ can compound stereotypes of the global South. Campaigning needs to become more subtle and campaigning methodologies and images need to complement the aims and methods of development education. The messages often contradict each other so there is a case for discussion between the DE and charity sectors.

- Different sources of information need to be explored, particularly from the South, to provide a more comprehensive overview of development.
- The contrasting agendas of agencies and groups that fund DE organisations can have a detrimental effect on practice. It is important that DE practice supports the needs of target groups and is not compromised by the competing demands of funders.

Conclusion

I believe that the urgency of change in all contexts is a defining feature in DE. The future may sometimes look bleak or unmanageable. but the changing landscape also presents huge *opportunities* – the world on our doorstep. As educators, it is our responsibility, our rationale for existence, to engage with the challenges presented by contemporary issues like social inequality. There is a need to develop *real* partnerships, i.e. processes seasoned by dialogue and engagement between people willing to disagree, take risks and negotiate. In our personal lives the increasing diversity of cultures offers a huge and salient pool of wealth to dip into and leave undepleted. It offers deeper understanding, complex and nuanced friendships that teach us, not only about other groups and individuals, but also about ourselves. Astonishingly this is a wealth that renews itself. It never needs to end.

Notes:

¹ My organisation, Southern Voices, uses the terms inter-cultural, cross-cultural or trans-cultural. All terms imply engagement between peoples. The last (trans-cultural) implies a unifying set of values, something that holds us together. By ‘multicultural’ we mean a multiplicity of people from different backgrounds, sometimes engaging with each other, sometimes not but, sharing, learning and increasing our understanding, developing new creative forms from this engagement as well as valuing what is specific to our source cultures.

References

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Two documents that will be important to us are the new National Curriculum and the Report from the Commission for Integration and Cohesion that was launched on 14 July 2007 to which the Government has yet to make a response.

Jaya Graves trained as a Steiner teacher. She has worked for an organisation called Southern Voices (SV) since it was founded in 1992. SV was set up to make the perspectives of the South more visible in the processes and policies that affect us. This is how SV describes its learning process: ‘We are agents for and objects of change. Our practice and perception owes much to the Southern notion of education for development where it is necessary to be within the development process and change with it’.