Focus

Discourses and practices around development education: From learning about development to critical global pedagogy

Douglas Bourn

In this article, Douglas Bourn encourages a constructivist approach to development education that tailors its social and educational interventions to the particular pedagogical perspectives being addressed. He suggests that within the sector there needs to be greater debate and research on how development education approaches can be relevant and most effective. He particularly considers approaches addressing the challenge of the relationship of development education ideas and practices to the influences and needs of policymakers and practitioners. The article urges development education organisations to reflect upon the particular contribution they can make to learning about global issues and above all ensure that they have clarity in their approach and theoretical basis.

Introduction

Development education (DE) has been a feature of educational practice in most industrialised countries for the past 25 to 30 years. Central to much of that practice, where it has been led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), has been the goal of educational and social transformation. Inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire, development education has been seen by both its supporters and opponents as an approach towards learning that not only challenged dominant ideas in society but offered an alternative perspective and methodology (Bourn, 2008; McCollum, 1996).

Policy and Practice in recent issues has begun to address the extent to which development education is still radical and transformative or has become accommodating to dominant social and political ideas. This is in part due to the influence of government funding, for example the Department for International Development (DfID) in the United Kingdom (UK), or to a failure to tackle and relate development education ideas to broader discourses in
society, particularly recent economic developments (Selby and Kagawa, 2011; McCloskey, 2011).

This article, whilst noting these critiques, suggests that a constructive approach would be to reflect on the different interpretations of what development education is, to encourage the need for a closer relationship between theory and practice, and to undertake more research on how and what influences these forms of engagement within schools and further education. Research by the Development Education Research Centre (DERC) at the Institute of Education, University of London on schools (Bourn and Hunt, 2011) and further education (Bourn, 2008; Bentall, Blum and Bourn, 2009), for example, suggests that what is needed is to identify the particular pedagogical perspectives being addressed and then relate these to forms of social and educational interventions. Then clarify where and how development education approaches can be relevant and most effective.

**What do we mean by Development Education?**
Selby and Kagawa (2011) imply that development education needs to be much more critical of dominant economic discourses. Whilst this author would agree that a weakness of practices of non-government organisations (NGOs) in the UK has been their failure to address economic agendas such as corporate power (Egan, 2011), there is a tendency to criticise without analysing why this is the case or reflecting on the skills and expertise within the development education communities of practice. A starting point in this article therefore is to look at what are the differing traditions and approaches of development education and how they relate to broader movements and perspectives for educational and social change.

Firstly, development education practice in most industrialised countries emerged in response to the de-colonisation process. Secondly the vast majority of practice that has been promoted as development education has operated within the discourses, policies and funding of international development, whether from governments or international NGOs. This has meant that what has perhaps been missing from many of the debates in and around development education has been what is meant by development, and its relationship to global social change.

Some commentators on this area (Seitz, quoted in Hartmeyer, 2008) or NGOs such as Think Global, formerly the Development Education Association in the UK, suggest that the development concept is now outdated. Other
bodies such as the Global Education Network Europe (O’Loughlin, 2006) and bodies in Canada (Mundy, 2007) argue that you cannot divorce talking about development from talking about globalisation, human rights or sustainable development; and that the term global education is more appropriate in bringing together all of these issue based or adjectival educations.

Yet in Europe, at least, there continues to be strong support for the concept of development education as exemplified by the European Consensus Document on Development, first agreed in 2005, which has support from a range of stakeholders across Europe (European Consensus on Development). This document refers to development education as follows:

“The aim of development education and awareness raising is to enable every person in Europe to have life-long access to opportunities to be aware of and understand global development concerns and the local and personal relevance of those concerns, and to enact their rights and responsibilities as inhabitants of an interdependent and changing world by effecting change for a just and sustainable world” (Ibid: 5).

Whilst variations of this term can be seen in different national strategies across Europe and within the mission statements of NGOs, the term does reflect some common underlying principles that reflect how many academics and policymakers would summarise what is perceived to be ‘good development education’. They are as follows:

- Understanding the globalised world including links between our own lives and those of people throughout the world;
- Ethical foundations and goals including social justice, human rights and respect for others;
- Participatory and transformative learning processes with the emphasis on dialogue and experience;
- Developing competencies of critical self-reflection;
- Supportive active engagement;
- Active global citizenship (Rajacic et al, 2010: 121).
However it is suggested that these rather laudable goals and aims mask some wider divisions as to how development education is interpreted and could also be seen as little more than aspirations. What is suggested here is the need for a more critical and deeper analysis as to how development education is interpreted. It is this lack of analysis and critical reflection that can lead to comments about accommodation to dominant discourses or being too political.

**Interpretations of Development Education**

If one reviews the landscape of development education in many European countries, the principles and themes outlined above could be said to summarise the aspirations of many NGOs. However if one reviews the detail of the practice a much more complex picture emerges. Recent reviews for the European Union (EU) (Rajacic et al) suggests that a great deal of educational practice is related to promoting or supporting aims of the government or NGOs or an emphasis on action and campaigning, with minimal attention given to deepening learning and understanding.

These observations are not new. Arnold (1988) in his critique of development education in the 1980s noted distinctions between those approaches that emphasised transmission of information, those that promoted critical skills and finally those that saw mobilisation as the priority. Alongside these approaches, Arnold also saw three visions that cut across these approaches: charity, interdependence and empowerment. Krause (2010) more recently, noted that aspects of these past approaches still exist. For him development education could be seen as:

- Public Relations for development aid;
- Awareness Raising – public dissemination of information;
- Global Education – focusing on local-global interdependence;
- Enhancement of Life Skills – focusing on learning process and critical thinking.

What is noticeable about the difference between Arnold and Krause is the latter’s recognition of one approach of seeing development education as closely linked to globalisation and global interdependence.
Whilst these categorisations have some value, it is suggested here that a much more complex picture exists if one looks at development education in a global context. The term, for example, is used in differing ways in South Africa (Hoppers, 2008) and India (Kumar, 2008). In the former, development education is seen as primarily about ‘promoting indigenous knowledges’. Kumar, on the other hand, sees development education as fundamentally about dialogue and reflection, influenced by a critical humanist perspective in the Gandhian tradition. There are also approaches to development education that have a greater emphasis on: universal goals around global citizenship (Oxfam, 2006); more linkages with human development (Regan, 2006); and critical pedagogy, voices for the dispossessed and excluded (Andreotti, 2010).

Within the practices of organisations in many European countries for example, you see combinations of these differing influences and approaches. In the UK for example, several Development Education Centres make reference to the influence of ideas on universal values around global justice as well as promoting critical thinking and voices of the dispossessed.

Behind these differing interpretations looms the influence of public funding, from either national government departments on international development or foreign affairs ministries. In the UK for example two interpretations of development education could be seen:

- Development Education as Development Awareness - based around building support for development, increased understanding and support for aid as exemplified by most governments who fund development education (DfID, 1998);

- Learning About Development - that essentially sees development education as knowledge and concepts around development including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as perceived by the Coalition government in the UK, and some International NGOs (CIO, 2011).

It is suggested in this paper that there is the need for more debate, understanding and perhaps a deeper theoretical basis to some of these approaches. There is also the need to relate and develop these theories from a closer relation to practice.
Moreover there is a need to identify relevance of particular theories and approaches to educational environments. It is not about saying this is the right way or this is the wrong way. Rather, it is about recognising that these traditions and perspectives have different interpretations and goals. So for example a government funded programme on development education is very unlikely to see development education as about critical pedagogy. Also if it is focussed on influencing the public in the north it is going to be less interested in seeing human development as education in a global context. Some grassroots NGOs however, whose raison d’etre is about trying to change society, to question and challenge inequality in the world, are unlikely to accept an approach that is simply about learning about the Millennium Development Goals for example.

This however does not mean that an organisation engaged in development education practice merely responds to the funder agenda or the specific policy focus; what it means is that there is a need to debate and clarify how an organisation sees its contribution to broader policy goals and objectives. Marshall (2006), McCollum (1996) and Andreotti (2006) have suggested the need for development education to give greater consideration to theory. This does not mean ignoring funding priorities or goals. Andreotti, (with De Souza, 2008) for example, who has perhaps been one of the most influential writers on development education, developed a radical series of resources that have a strong postcolonial and Freirean background, with funding from the UK government (see www.osdemethodology.org.uk and www.throughtheroeyes.org.uk).

The questions any NGO needs to consider in looking at the opportunity for taking forward their ideas through publicly funded programmes are:

- Does the funding enable the organisation to explore and develop its ideas and practices?

- Are there spaces for creativity and innovation?

- To what extent is there an opportunity for learning that might question or challenge dominant viewpoints and ideas?

What is summarised below are some examples from recent research by the Development Education Research Centre, all funded directly or indirectly by the...
UK government, which aim to demonstrate the different ways in which the principles and practices behind development education are being interpreted.

**Engagement with Schools**
In most industrialised countries where development education has some status, it is because of its influence within schools. It would not be difficult to find examples of development education in a school in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria or Finland. This could take a variety of forms. Table 1 summarises some examples of engagement in schools identified from research with a number of secondary schools in England.

**Table 1. Global Dimension engagement and activities across schools**
(Bourn and Hunt, 2011: 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission Statements and strategies</th>
<th>Whole School Approach</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Extra-curriculum</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Statements and strategies</td>
<td>International strategy</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff member responsible for Global Dimension</td>
<td>Advisor for International work and sustainable development.</td>
<td>Curriculum advisor</td>
<td>Global Awareness Club</td>
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<td>School Assemblies</td>
<td>Speakers or talks on global poverty, climate change.</td>
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<td>International Partnerships</td>
<td>Long standing link with a particular</td>
<td>Using a link for specific curriculum projects e.g.</td>
<td>Involving local community and parents</td>
<td>Teacher visits. Attending GSP training</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work with local community groups</strong></td>
<td><strong>Award programmes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Working with NGDOs or DECs or other similar bodies</strong></td>
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<td>school, promoted via whole school projects.</td>
<td>Local people from refugee communities giving talks in English, Geography or History.</td>
<td>Working with organisations such as Red Cross on curricular projects. Running sessions in the classroom e.g. Red Cross, Plan UK, Practical</td>
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<td>water, climate change.</td>
<td>Cultural Festivals</td>
<td>ActionAid’s ‘Send My Friend to School’ programme.</td>
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<td>in raising money for partnerships.</td>
<td>Eco-School Award</td>
<td>Using local DE Centres for training sessions.</td>
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<td>Pupil Based Initiatives</td>
<td>School Councils acting as focus for discussions and debates.</td>
<td>Supporting external campaigns on themes such as fair trade and climate change.</td>
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These examples by themselves tell us only about activities. As Edge et al (2009) in their research on secondary schools stated, the term global dimension, used in most English schools to promote the principles behind development education, has been interpreted in a variety of ways:

- Awareness of and exposure to other and different cultures and the world context; and a sense of global social responsibility;
- Helping students to understand that they are citizens of the world and to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the world we are living in;
- Teaching about global issues and understanding the impact of our actions;
- Promoting and sustaining international links;
- Understanding the bigger picture and their place in it;
• Helping students to link their complex and different identities and their place in the world.

Behind these different interpretations are the motivations of teachers that relate closely to perceptions of development education. The following observations from teachers from secondary schools in England demonstrate first, a more charitable and development perspective; second, a more intercultural perspective; and third, a more critical approach:

“We’ve also got a link with a school/orphanage in Madagascar. That has really kind of opened people’s eyes as well, like when we’ve set up pen pal contacts. If our pupils haven’t received a letter recently and been complaining, we’ve told them there’s civil unrest there at the moment, all the ports are closed, there’s no import of food or fuel, not even any baby milk for the orphans” (Bourn and Hunt, 2011: 32-33).

“Because we want our pupils to understand that other people do have their different ways of looking at life, they have their own cultures, religions, lifestyles, etc. And we’re helping them to be able to communicate with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and helping them to respect others that is not something they would automatically do, but to understand, to respect and be able to communicate with those people” (Ibid: 18-19).

“I am very concerned that the Global Dimension agenda is currently driven by NGOs, not teachers and their agendas have not been acknowledged. Rather than giving children a better picture of the world and their place in it, I’m worried we are confirming the perception that the Global South is a place of powerlessness and poverty. I’m also worried we are giving children the impression that they are more powerful than they are by over-emphasising campaigning” (Ibid: 24).

These viewpoints demonstrate that the issue is not about encouraging development education activities in the classroom, but rather about debating what it means and the extent to which the practices are questioning and challenging dominant educational thinking. This would mean including learning activities that moved beyond a traditional view of seeing the global South as ‘just about poor people’ who were helpless and needed aid and charity. Positive examples would be where learning questioned, challenged assumptions
and stereotypes, and located poverty within an understanding of the causes of inequality and what people were doing for themselves.

**Global Skills and Further Education**

Further education is an area that has been tackled by few development education practitioners. A consequence of this has been that where references are made in either policy statements or research to themes such as ‘global learning’, ‘global citizenship’ or ‘global skills’, conclusions can easily be drawn without an understanding of the contexts of the usage of the terminology or how they are interpreted by practitioners. Selby and Kagawa (2011), for example, have criticised this author’s work in this area, most notably his report on Global Skills (Bourn, 2009) for its failure to critique or address neo-liberal agendas and economic growth models. Whilst there is some validity in their comments, any engagement in the debates in this area needs to start from a recognition of where further education programmes are located in the UK and probably in most other European countries, in relation to equipping learners with the skills for employment. The question to pose for development educationalists is in what ways could one intervene in these areas of educational practice, and with what aims in mind? Some of these issues have been addressed in our Research Centre’s report for Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) (Bentall, Bourn, Blum, 2010) and the aim here is to look at different areas and forms of intervention and the potential challenges this creates. Three different interpretations of the usage of global skills are suggested and suggestions are then made about potential areas for intervention by development education organisations.

The starting point has to be the usage of the term ‘global skills’. A large number of small training providers are increasingly using the term partly as a way of marketing themselves but also because there is increasing recognition that new forms of skills are being required by companies. An example of this in the UK is The Global Skills College in London (http://www.lpi-global-skills.org.uk/workshop_schedule.php). This institution runs training workshops on areas such as teamwork, information technology (IT), conflict resolution, and problem solving skills. KPMG, the international audit company, state the following:

“So what exactly are we looking for when we recruit new people? Naturally, we want you to have good technical skills, problem-solving abilities and commercial focus. We're also looking for people with a lot of integrity - good team workers who can build effective
relationships, learn from experience and bring out the best in others” (KPMG, 2008).

A second approach to the usage of the term within further education is one that sees global skills as about intercultural understanding and developing a more global outlook, often related to international experience. Whilst elements of this can be seen in some of the comments made from companies above, they have a distinct tradition and approach that is based on a broader humanistic approach towards education, linked to cross-cultural education and cosmopolitanism.

This tradition is rooted in discourses around intercultural education which is based on preparing learners to ‘act as interpreters and mediators between different cultures on mutual bases’ (Lasonen, 2009). In the context of further education, for example, this can be interpreted as adopting a ‘co-operative and team-working approach as mediators, interpreters and active agents between different cultures’ (Lasonen: 196). One of the main manifestations of this approach within further education is international partnerships between colleges. (see Bentall, Bourn, Blum, 2009)

The value of these international initiatives and exchanges have however been critiqued in relation to school education (Martin, 2007; Leonard, 2008). They question the extent to which this form of learning can merely reinforce existing dominant ideological perceptions of the partner country and culture. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) have noted in regard to higher education that there is little evidence that student exchanges and overseas visits challenge dominant orthodoxies between the rich and the poor in the world. They state that despite much talk about global interconnectivity and interdependence, ‘international contact remains within globally differentiated cultural communities - the west versus the rest’ (Ibid: 175).

Behind the strategies for partnerships and links is therefore the assumption that mere intercultural experience can help to gain greater understanding of the wider world. Based on evidence from Martin (2007) and Leonard (2008), it is suggested here that all too often these exchanges and experiences reproduce dominant notions of cultural superiority. Intercultural dialogue is not really dialogue, but rather a form of reproduction of cultural domination. Only when the exchange and the partnership is part of a broader process of learning and engagement with global issues and questions, and when
it addresses questions of power and domination, can such experiences lead to a broader and more questioning global consciousness.

A third approach and usage of the term within further education is one that sees it is as a way of promoting global perspectives and critical thinking. Here global skills can be seen as an approach that recognises complexity and critical thinking, and is linked closely to a values-based approach around social justice. Building on the work of Paulo Freire and Giroux (2005) this approach is based on recognition of an approach towards learning that is open, participatory but also deeply political, including recognition of power. Giroux (2005) talks about critical pedagogy starting, not with test scores, but with questions. He states that it is also about recognising competing views and vocabularies and the opening up of new forms of knowledge and creative spaces. This approach to global skills involves the following:

- Recognising the value of learning about different perspectives and approaches;
- Equipping the learner with the skills to question and develop the ability to enquire about and reflect critically upon a range of social, economic and cultural influences;
- Emphasising the importance of positive social engagement and of seeking solutions;
- Recognising the impact of globalisation on people’s lives and the need to equip them with the ability to make sense of a rapidly changing world;
- Making reference to the forces that shape societal and economic change.

It includes recognition of concepts and approaches using the first and second lenses outlined in this paper, but takes this to a new level in terms of critical thinking, understanding of and valuing different perspectives; and above all recognising the impact of globalisation on relations between people and communities around the world. It also acknowledges the consequential differentials in terms of power and access to resources and learning opportunities.
These influences can be seen in the work of the Lancashire Global Education Centre and the Development Education Association (DEA)’s ‘Global Learning for Global College’ initiative. A small voluntary organisation in Lancashire (England), the Lancashire Global Education Centre developed a three year programme for tutors in their local college linked to language skills, most notably for migrant communities where English was a second language. They did this through the production of resources and training materials that related learners’ skills needs to their own experiences and global issues. Themes covered include Fairtrade, the Millennium Development Goals, What You Can Do and the Global Drugs Trade (Lancashire Global Education Centre, 2008)

Newell-Jones (2007) for the Development Education Association suggested also:

“That education and training for a global society should lead to the acquisition of skills is not in question. However unless this includes essential skills in critical engagement and also leads to the adoption of impact-orientated behaviours, learning will be ineffectual” (Ibid. 5).

The inclusion of linkage to understanding of global issues and questions of critical engagement bring the global skills concept back to the impact of globalisation on a person’s life and how they make sense of the rapidly changing world around them - and have the confidence, knowledge and values-base to make a positive contribution to both the economy and society more widely. These elements could be summarised as:

- Understanding what globalisation means, particularly in relation to the individual, their community and their employment;

- Ability to understand and engage with global issues, such as climate change and poverty, in order to become a more informed and engaged citizen;

- Development of skills to understand and respect a range of cultures and values, and to be able to reflect critically upon one’s own values base.

There is some evidence in England within further education of a desire to recognise this more person-centred learning based on critical thinking
perspectives, within strategies around global skills. One example is Regent’s Park College in Leicester, England, which promotes itself as a Global Citizens’ College. This outlook is summarised by the institution as follows:

“The college is a diverse and successful learning community and this makes it the ideal setting to offer a broad education for global citizenship. Our students achieve excellent exam results and they also want to contribute to changing things for the better and to develop the confidence, knowledge and skills to make a real difference in society. They develop skills of leadership, co-operation, communication, questioning, critical thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution. They learn to understand global, local and individual perspectives and to critically examine all points of view; in other words to be informed, skilled and active global citizens” (quoted in Bourn, 2008).

This approach towards critical skills builds on the work of Andreotti and De Souza (2008) in posing the need to move from fixed content and skills that conform to a predetermined idea of society, towards concepts and strategies that address complexity, difference and uncertainty. It also means moving from an approach to learning that accepts given knowledge, to one that questions and moves positions and views. Finally this approach means moving from a universalist and ordered view of the world to one that recognises complex, multifaceted and different means of interpretation (Bourn and Neal, 2008).

There are therefore opportunities within the spectrum and forms of intervention in further education, but they pose questions around the extent to which you operate within the dominant discourses on globalisation and global skills, or seek a more radical and transformatory approach. Organisations engaged in development education practice could engage in further education, reflecting these different approaches. Their input would in part depend on the perspective of the organisation, but also on what opportunities, openings and above all spaces exist for more creative and transformatory approaches.

Conclusion
This paper has aimed to address the challenge of the relationship of development education ideas and practices to the influences and needs of policymakers and practitioners. Development education is a well-established body of practice in many European countries but unlike areas such as environmental education it has found it difficult to effectively establish itself independent of government or NGO funding. Yet as this paper has aimed to show there is
now evidence in several areas of education of openings and opportunities that have demonstrated differing interpretations and understandings of learning about global and development issues. The extent to which these ‘spaces’ could be valuable for development education could only be measured by the extent to which they enable opportunities for participatory approaches towards learning, critical reflection and respect for different voices and perspectives.

Above all, what organisations engaged in development education need to consider is their particular contribution to learning about global issues and questions. It is not about identifying one universal approach but about clarifying what is feasible and possible, and above all ensuring that the organisation has some clarity about its own approach and theoretical basis. There are many interpretations of development education and what is needed is to debate what they are, which approach is most appropriate within a given educational arena and on what basis the pedagogy is introduced. Development education should not be seen as some form of monolithic approach to education but as a pedagogy that opens minds to question, consider, reflect and above all challenge viewpoints about the wider world and to identify different ways to critique them.

References


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