

# Viewpoint

## **‘ITS LIFE JIM – BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT’: THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION TO ‘BIG PICTURE’ SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION WITH A FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

**Dr. Jenneth Parker**

This article starts from the assumption that a key aspect of sustainability is that it requires us to connect different aspects of our lives and of our world that are often separated. Sustainability thus poses a key challenge of situating areas of knowledge and concern in the bigger sustainability picture. This piece begins to re-conceptualise development education (DE) in the context of connective sustainability and aims to tackle the following questions:

- How can we conceptualise ‘Big Picture Sustainability’?
- What does DE do best and where does it fit in Big Picture?
- Could thinking about Big Picture sustainability and education for sustainability (EfS) indicate new directions for DE?
- How can DE contribute to meeting the challenge of climate change?
- Does the holistic nature of sustainability mean that everyone has to do everything?

### **Knowledge pathology and ecology**

Our current view of life tends to separate important aspects of the world from each other according to perceived importance and categorisation. This is a kind of knowledge pathology from the sustainability perspective. This fragmented worldview generates a pathology not just of misunderstanding but also of identity. If, as holism suggests, the whole is more than the sum of its parts, then to focus only on its constituent parts rather than on their relation to the whole organism is to lose vital knowledge. This point has been heavily emphasised by those thinkers in sustainability and EfS who

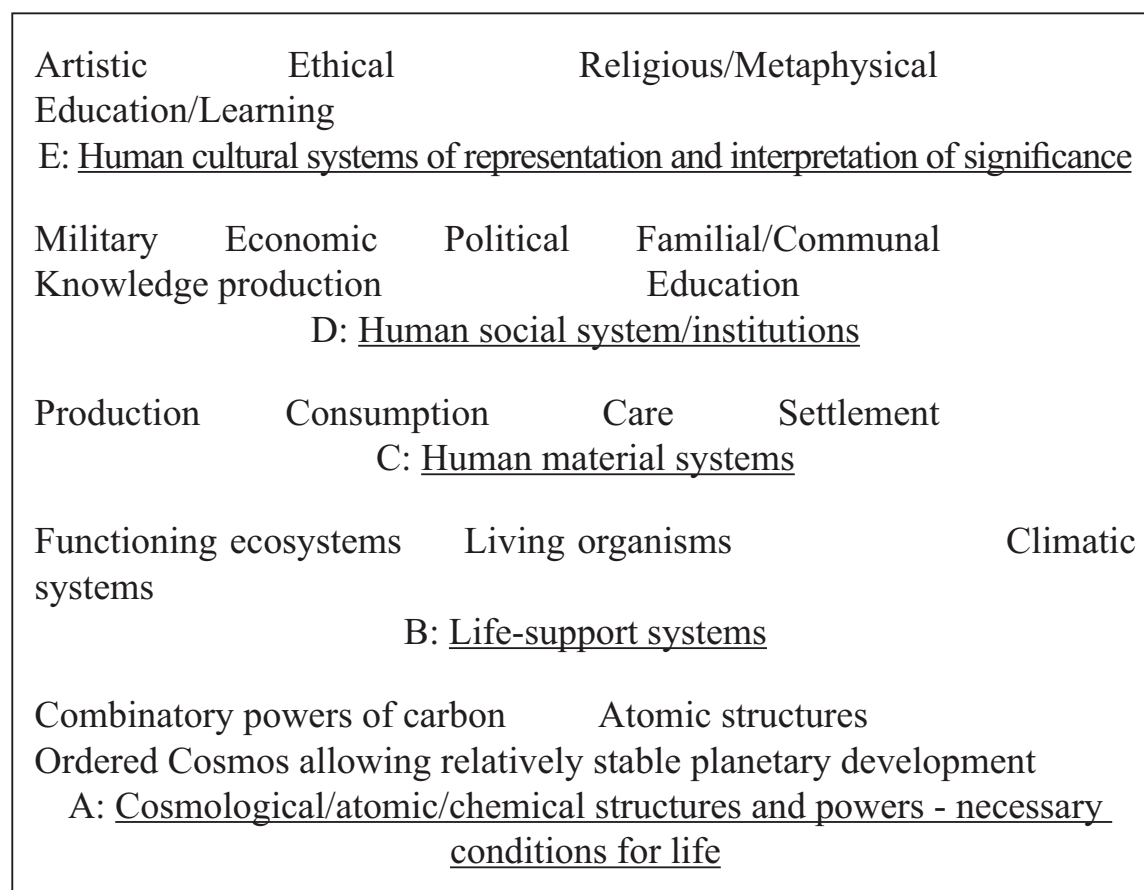
stress the contribution of ecology to joined-up thinking. Indeed, to abstract living beings from the ecological networks of life which both sustain and utilise their life-cycles is to lose vital knowledge about their reality.

There is a lot of debate about whether and to what extent this view is ‘ours’ – or just who is ‘us’ in this context. Some people argue that the compartmentalised system of ‘modern’ knowledge is a relatively recent cultural phenomenon and mostly adhered to by elites. Others also propose a gender difference to ‘our’ views of life. In addition, local and indigenous knowledge has begun to be recognised as an important addition to expert knowledge in helping to produce more sustainable solutions.

### Big Picture sustainability

The diagram below was taken from ‘Situating EfS’, a chapter I authored for the forthcoming book *Journeys Around Education for Sustainability*, which contains a collection of edited work from the London South Bank’s Education for Sustainability (EfS) international distance learning Masters’ Programme. It aims to provide one way in which we can conceptualise Big Picture sustainability.

**Fig. 1 Framework approach to understanding connective sustainability**



**A: Necessary conditions for life: cosmological/atomic/chemical domain** – the relatively stable cosmological, atomic and chemical structures and powers form the basis for the development of life and the context within which the evolution of life has occurred.

**B: Life support systems/ecological domain** – this forms the material and ecological base of all life; human life forms a part of this, but also increasingly impacts upon it.

**C: Human material systems/social-ecological domain** – human groups use ecological resources, thereby impacting directly on the ecological domain (B).

**D: Human social systems/social-institutional domain** – these organisational forms contribute to shaping material practices at C and thus condition the impact of B on A.

**E: Human cultural systems/cultural domain** – helps people make sense of the world; provides value-loaded images of the world; impacts on C and B.

Development education is faced with the challenge of situating itself within, across, or between the systems represented in this diagram, and deciding which systems it can best influence on both local and global levels.

### **The development education prescription for the knowledge pathology**

The separation of things is not just a problem from an ecological perspective. Critics of individualist cultures of social identity and consumerism have also noted that to separate out human individuals from their relationships to other humans is also to lose vital knowledge that may have great practical and ethical importance. If we do not know the connections between consumption of cheap imports and overseas gross labour exploitation this is a failure of knowledge about ourselves and the kinds of social and economic relations to which we (unwittingly) contribute. Development education in its many different forms claims that to separate out the economic effects (in monetary terms) from their related effects on social justice, human well-being and rights is also to lose vital information. To be unable to make these connections prevents us from understanding the causal relationships between things and hence diminishes our capacity to find solutions.

Maybe this knowledge pathology also prevents us from knowing ourselves in some important moral ways. Are we part of the problem or part of the solution? Are we careless parasites on the suffering of others, or just powerless individuals in the grip of a juggernaut system that is denying us

moral agency? DE raises these vital issues by attempting to increase our awareness of these connections.

Because we live in a compartmentalised culture it is generally easier to deny problematic causal relationships on a daily basis. DE therefore has an important role in raising these connections between our economic, social, cultural and ecological life on this planet. To be aware of these connections and not recognise their moral significance is another kind of failure, although one based on choice. This may emanate from a sense of disempowerment arising from the conviction that we are too deeply implicated in an unjust society to contribute to meaningful change. It is important that DE promotes the joy and liberation of living in a more joined-up and ethical manner through positive examples such as fair-trade purchasing or cross-cultural dialogue and solidarity. DE could contribute more by way of showcasing cultural alternatives and engaging in debates on sustainable livelihoods.

## **The contribution of development education**

This diagram utilises the framework approach to begin to analyse the contribution of DE to Big Picture sustainability.

### **Fig. 2 Analysing the contribution of development education to Big Picture sustainability**

DE can explore ethical, cultural and identity aspects of joined-up living.

E: Human cultural systems of representation and interpretation of significance

DE can investigate, expose and disseminate information about social and human rights and the effects of economic and military institutions and social power relations; it can also investigate and disseminate information about alternatives; develop liberating and democratising pedagogies that also address key issues of people's lives.

D: Human social system/institutions

DE can investigate the material impacts of production systems on the health of workers; investigate and disseminate information on healthcare and health issues of gender and power systems.

C: Human material systems

A connective DE might investigate and disseminate information about the links between poverty and decline in life support systems.

B: Life-support systems

A connective DE might consider the possibility that the conditions for life could be disrupted by nuclear radiation.

A: Cosmological/atomic/chemical structures and powers  
- necessary conditions for life

### **Joined-up change: the example of climate change**

A key point to sustainability is that it necessarily focuses us on joined-up **change**. In terms of ecological sustainability the complex material and social factors that are contributing to climate change are being measured and studied including, importantly, predictions of likely effects on ecosystems and life-support systems. However, the economic, social, cultural and human consequences of climate change are currently receiving much less attention. In the field of economics we have had the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change in 2006 look at the implications of climate change for increasing poverty. The review estimates that without significant financial investment to avoid the worsening effects of climate change, a 20% reduction of life-support capacity for the planet can be expected in the future, which makes grim reading for the poor and affluent alike.

Some development organisations are presently making strong contributions to the cultural and ethical interpretation of climate change as a key global justice issue such as the recent Oxfam climate justice awareness-raising campaign. It is important that development education step up these efforts and determine how it can contribute to a sustainability-based analysis of climate change and advocate for positive change across its characteristic domains. What could and should be the unique contribution of DE to the increasingly voiced concern about the multi-dimensional threat of climate change? What opportunities does the greater profile and certainty about climate change present for DE in terms of influence and development?

## **Conclusion and implications for practice**

Faced by the global crisis of sustainability, of which climate change is a key part, all areas of study are encouraged to review their capacity for joined-up analysis and propositional thinking in order to make their appropriate contributions to: reduction of human impact on local and global ecologies; mitigation of current effects; and political, social and economic adaptation to predicted future conditions. DE has a lot to offer sustainability and it is crucial that these contributions continue to be made. Moreover, sustainability provides overwhelming support for the need for greater social justice, and forms of ethical development and ecological understanding that are necessary for better project analysis and planning.

NGOs of all kinds are faced with demands for joined-up practice from funders and also from the logic of our joined-up world. Environmental NGOs like the World Wildlife Fund are now taking on human development aspects, and development NGOs like Oxfam are now taking on environmental aspects to their work. Like big players in the corporate sector, large NGOs with interdisciplinary capacity may be squeezing out smaller organisations. The latter may need to enter partnership coalitions to address sustainability, but all areas of practice should examine their partnership needs in the light of connective sustainability.

The challenge of sustainability raises questions of our capacity for social learning, both within our own organisations and through partnerships and coalitions with other NGOs. Thus connective sustainability should not mean abandoning areas of expertise but re-conceptualising our fields through ongoing links with other sectors and areas of education. Can we embrace this as a learning opportunity?

**Dr. Jenneth Parker's** background is in philosophy, feminist and environmental activism, and adult and community educations. She has been learning and teaching about sustainability issues since 1992. She worked for nine years as Co-Director of the Distance Learning Masters Programme on Education for Sustainability at London South Bank University. She is currently researching Leadership for Change in Higher Education at Bristol University, writing on climate change and sustainability and would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to engage in further discussion of the issues raised above.

# Reviews

## **Experiences of Childhood**

Reviewed by Mervyn Hall

In January 2007 I attended a seminar in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, facilitated by Michael Brown, the Director of Development Media Workshop (DMW). What originally attracted me to this event was its focus on child labour in the Third World. I was told that there were filmed examples of child labour, as well as supplementary educational material. As Citizenship Coordinator for my school, I had already identified key areas from my citizenship teaching that required attention. These included the need for fresh educational material on Third World poverty, which would enhance the Citizenship teaching to our Year 9 groups (12 to 13 year olds). I also felt that more contact was required with outside agencies, such as DMW.

Michael Brown's presentation and suggested classroom materials immediately won me over and I agreed to pilot his work. Working within Mr Brown's time limit I decided to create three new lessons based on his work and to incorporate these lessons into my existing Year 9 Citizenship programme. In total I was to spend five lessons on child labour and poverty in the Third World which included one of DMW's films on child labour. The aims of these sessions were to capture the spirit of DMW's work and, at the same time, inform students about Third World poverty and the wider concept of rights of the child.

*Experiences of Childhood* is an attractive and robust teaching package, which is clearly laid out and is divided into five progressive content themes:

- What is childhood?
- What are Child Rights?
- Child Stories
- Why, and how, are children denied their rights?
- How can children's rights be protected?

A matrix is provided at the beginning of the resource which outlines the pack's theme, content, suggested activities, and the resources provided. This is complemented by a curriculum rationale within the core area of local and global citizenship which is one of three strands contained in Learning for

Life and Work as part of the Northern Ireland post-primary curriculum.

The teaching notes contained within the pack are clearly set out with headings, bullet-pointed sub-headings, as well as a description of the activities contained within the resource. Recommended lesson times and methods for teaching the various activities are provided in addition to summary points at the end of the activities. The notes and activities are complemented with colour photographs, including website pages, examples of children's work and teaching exemplars. A DVD of four childhood films and a CD containing teaching materials is also included comprising a visibly superior teaching aid.

In piloting the resource, I was fortunate to have an existing one hour teaching time slot per week for half the school year. This afforded good quality contact time with students enabling effective and wide-ranging active learning to take place. The lessons in the teaching resource are allotted between 35 and 45 minutes although the structure of the resource activities allows for teachers to be flexible and adapt the materials, activities and timeframes to meet their own needs.

My first session equated with Section One of the resource on 'What is childhood?' This lesson was well-received by my Year 9 group as it involved them in group work and feedback. It asked the students to analyse their own childhood and to draft a general definition of childhood, both tasks requiring a degree of introspection. The pack's second activity on exploring childhood invites students in groups to draw a picture of a child and place his or her 'physical, emotional and social' needs around the illustration. It is a fun activity but also forces students to focus on the basic rights of children. Weaker students may need support with some of the terminology in this activity.

Section Two is titled 'What are Child's Rights?' and addresses more closely this fundamentally important issue while complementing the work completed under Section One. The activity in Section Two represents a valiant attempt to make what can be quite a dry topic into an enjoyable experience for students. The activity engages students in decision-making exercises on the basis of statements drawn from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Section Three on 'Childhood Stories' is undoubtedly the strongest aspect of the resource. The students watched spellbound the film on Meera, a 15 year old Nepalese student who earns a pittance working alongside her parents breaking stones with a small hammer in a quarry. The film's sparse narration does not distract the viewer from Meera's story which shows her combining her workload with attendance at a school with very limited facilities. The issues arising from the ensuing classroom discussion were wide-ranging and included Meera's lack of rights, her work conditions,



and the contrast between her rights and ours. Section Four examines how children are denied their rights through the example of a civil war scenario. This particular lesson may be more appropriate for an older age group, perhaps at Key Stage 4.

Section Five examines how children's rights can be protected, looking particularly at the targets set out in the United Nations' Millennium Declaration. The lesson again encourages discussion through group work and asks the pupils 'to consider how achieving the Millennium Development Goals will help to protect Child's Rights'. The pack ends in an uplifting note with the DVD showing how Meera's life has changed for the better.

*Experiences of Childhood* is an excellent teaching aid that fully complements and dovetails neatly into the existing local and global Citizenship curriculum. Its strengths lie both in the real life examples of child labour shown in the DVDs, as well as the breadth of teaching suggestions and activities included. The pack allows for flexibility that permits many of its lessons to be taught to a wide ability age range.

For the teacher the resource is neat, succinct and self-contained with resources that can be easily printed from a CD. Recommended websites are provided that could enable students to carry out research and project work with the support of the teacher. The subject matter also supports cross-curricular work encompassing subject areas such as geography given the resource's focus on developing countries such as Kenya and Nepal. Development Media Workshop has provided teachers with a resource that is fresh, original, thought-provoking and workable. I strongly commend this resource.

*Experiences of Childhood* can be purchased for £10 per pack, to include packaging and posting. Please send cheques to: Development Media Workshop, Fermanagh House, Broad Meadow Place, Enniskillen, BT74 7HR, N. Ireland. For further information, please contact: [info@developmentmediaworkshop.org](mailto:info@developmentmediaworkshop.org).

*Experiences of Childhood* (2007) Development Media Workshop, Enniskillen.

**Mervyn Hall** is Head of History and Coordinator for Learning for Life and Work at Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen. He has been teaching for over twenty years and has taken citizenship training. He implemented citizenship into his school at an early stage of its development and has represented his school at education events in Britain, Ireland and the USA.

## ***An Inconvenient Truth***

Reviewed by Jenna Coriddi

“There are good people...who hold this at arm’s length because if they acknowledge it and recognize it then the moral imperative to make big changes is inescapable” (Gore, 2006).

This documentary film about global warming was inspired by the campaigning work of Al Gore, the former United States Vice President, to raise awareness of the issue and encourage action against climate change. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in Sundance, Utah in 2006, and has since won an Academy Award and become the fourth highest grossing documentary of all time. The content of the film largely derives from lectures delivered by Gore at a number of universities and schools around the world. The presentation includes impressive visual supports which demonstrate the level of climate change already wrought from our consumption of carbon. He details the elements of the modern environmental movement and traces the development of his interest and involvement in climate change from his university days onward. The film’s title alludes to the hesitancy of politicians and governments to address climate change because of the tough and potentially unpopular actions that are required to tackle the issue, the financial cost of changing to less environmentally damaging energy sources, and the need to alter our lifestyles and means of production. Gore details some of the elaborate and underhanded efforts by United States government officials to hide the truth about global warming from the American people.

The film is accessible and communicates the science of global warming in a manner that is understandable even for those without a scientific background. Gore explains the basics of how the earth’s temperatures are kept constant, but how human interaction with the natural environment since the Industrial Revolution has caused carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels to rise and with it the planet’s average temperature. He also illustrates how warmer temperatures cause the melting of glaciers, which in turn affect the salt levels in the sea, increase ocean temperatures, affect currents and strengthen storms.

While understanding the science is important, it is often easy to disregard the direct impact that these incremental changes are having on a daily basis. The film does an excellent job of addressing how the effects of global warming have affected millions of lives around the world: deaths due to extreme heat waves, homelessness due to flooding, and the more regular occurrences of drought, mudslides, hurricanes and typhoons. Gore also outlines the impact of minute daily temperature rises on ecological cycles

such as birds that starve because caterpillars hatch early and forests that are destroyed by extended feeding periods of pine beetles. Most frighteningly, the film points to a catastrophic future for the planet, its ecology and inhabitants unless immediate action is taken. The viewer is horrified by scientifically calculated images of China, San Francisco and Manhattan, all partially submerged by rising sea levels which will result from rapidly melting glaciers, and by a computer-generated image of a polar bear, swimming miles in search of ice on which to rest.

The film intersperses the lecture with personal and professional reflections from Gore that include a family history in the tobacco industry, family loss, bereavement and a high profile career in politics. Gore frequently revisits his controversial loss of the US Presidency in 2000, including in the film a short montage of images from the disastrous Florida election which first gave Gore the presidency and then took it away. While his reflections are meant to illustrate his personal motivation to educate about climate change, the bitter political undertone does detract from what the film is supposed to be about: global warming. Students who are unaware of American politics could also become confused about what happened in the 2000 elections and the pertinence of these segments to the film as a whole.

The film closes on an optimistic tone that suggests that there does not need to be a choice between the economy and the environment. Humanity has the technological and scientific knowledge to address the problem, and what is needed is the determination and public will to change our life-styles and consumption patterns. The closing credits are used to highlight small but effective actions that viewers can take to make a difference: walk, ride your bike, use green energy, plant trees, vote, drive a hybrid, *learn*, and put that knowledge into action. Some development educators may argue that the film does not go far enough in proposing actions that will support good educational practice. It could be described as disempowering in the sense of highlighting the enormity of the problem but not responding with the required radical actions needed to address it. Conversely, global warming sceptics say that the film was exaggerated and that the effects will not be nearly as drastic as portrayed. Animal rights activists questioned the omission of findings from the United Nations *Livestock's Long Shadow* report, which stated that 65% of human-related nitrous oxide comes from the world's livestock industry, more than from transport (Steinfeld, Gerber, Wassenaar, Castel, Rosales & de Hann, 2006:114).

These criticisms do not appear to have slowed down the educational impact of this film. In fact, it has begun to be integrated into several colleges and high schools as part of the mandatory curriculum. It was added to the science curriculum for fourth- and sixth-year students in Scotland

and has been made available to schools in Spain as well. As part of the Sustainable Schools Year of Action to promote sustainable development and environmental awareness, copies of the film were distributed to secondary schools in Scotland, Wales and England despite legal battles over factual accuracy in parts of the film and schools' responsibility to present an approved opposing view.

*An Inconvenient Truth* has played a significant role in raising public awareness of climate change to a new level and has been a significant educational tool in upper post-primary schools and at third level. Al Gore's recent Nobel Peace Prize for his campaigning work on climate change will add weight to the message of his film which, despite shortcomings, represents an important starting point in engaging the public with the issue of global warming.

## References

*An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) [Film]. Guggenheim, D. Lawrence Bender Productions.

Steinfeld, H, Gerber, P, Wassenaar, T, Castel, V, Rosales, M & de Haan, C (2006) *Livestock's long shadow: environmental issues and options*, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

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## ***Bamako***

Reviewed by Jonathan Penson

A shot rings out across a dusty wasteland. The shot ends a wasted life. The driver of a luxury car passing by hears the bang, halts his car, and checks his tyres, so oblivious is he of the desolation of his surroundings and so protective is he of his acquisition.

A Malian bride gasps for breath as she is trussed into an ill-fitting, white lace bridal gown, as she sits beneath a Tannoy relaying an impassioned voice bemoaning the crushing of the Negro by the white world economy.

The words of a young man relating the loss of his journeymen as they crossed the Sahara to enter Europe are interspersed with the blood-red run-off from newly dyed sheets spiralling down a drain.

These are the images which remain with you from *Bamako*, a new film by the Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako. The film is set almost entirely in a typical Malian courtyard – the same courtyard where Sissako grew up. In the yard people come and go, fetch water, celebrate a wedding, chat, argue, children play. In the rooms on its fringes, a couple are breaking up; a man is dying; a child lies ill with fever; a woman chats on her mobile with her mother. Intermeshed with these tableaux of ordinary Malian life are court proceedings which, despite their extraordinariness, are enmeshed with these lives just like another storyline, treated with the same amount of concern to some and indifference by others. The International Finance Institutions (IFIs) and the Group of Eight leading industrialised countries (G8) are on trial, accused by African society of being the cause of its woe.

Dressed in full regalia, a judge hears evidence against the IFIs from Malian intellectuals, writers, peasants and activists. As one would expect in a courtroom, where the machinations of persuasion frequently eclipse truth, the testimonies are eloquent, passionate and convincing. Yet the arguments are most powerful at the points where language breaks down. A former teacher, his school closed by the World Bank's policies, is rendered literally speechless at the witness stand, his *raison d'être* taken from him by the loss of his vocation. And by far the most powerful moment in the film – of almost any film I have seen – is where Zegué Bamba, an aged chief, half-sings-half-speaks his testimony: a lament for Africa. This extraordinary moment is not subtitled, as the rest of the film is. Instead, one is forced to focus on the emotion, not the words: the grief, the anger, the bitterness, the passion, the love for his homeland, the sense of loss, the resentment. The sense of injustice. It is by far the most eloquent statement on Africa I have heard. It spoke to me as no words could have done. The film is worth seeking out if only for this one moment.

This, then, is a film about the power of images over word. In some senses, the film thus undermines its own conceit. Despite the passion and righteousness of the rhetoric, in the end, convoluted arguments rehearsed in cloistered courtyards, relayed through tinny loudspeakers to an indifferent audience only in the immediate vicinity, are meaningless. The wrangling of Western-style legalese is made irrelevant even at its most relevant. Lives lived out in poverty in the periphery of the courtyard take centre-stage in the moral landscape. As Zegu  Bamba says, ‘Words are something that can seize you in your heart. It’s bad if you keep them inside’.

How can this film be used for global education? My first reaction is, with difficulty. The film is long, and paced according to African conventions of narrative, a long way from Hollywood formulas (a distinction cleverly made explicit in the film, by the interjection of a Spaghetti Western style intermission, *Death in Timbuktu*, in which African cowboys kill meaninglessly, catching civilians in the crossfire). I feel the average school-age audience would struggle to engage with the film. Moreover, the courtroom discourse requires a high degree of familiarity with IFI policy, and the sophisticated language comes at you quickly. So I would tend to use extracts from the film as a springboard for other activities. The film’s website (<http://www.bamako-themovie.com/home.html>) has some excellent ideas, and includes Zegu  Bamba’s lament (click ‘open testimony click’ at [http://www.bamako-themovie.com/fe\\_05\\_legal.html](http://www.bamako-themovie.com/fe_05_legal.html)). Opening a lesson with this clip, asking students to write down adjectives which describe the testimony and then asking them to speculate on what he is speaking about, would be a powerful introduction to a class project staging its own trial of the IFIs.

*Bamako* (2006) [Film]. Sissako, A. Paris: Archipel 33.

**Jonathan Penson** is a Researcher/Consultant with the CfBT Education Trust, where he is currently researching education reform in fragile states. He has previously worked as a teacher and teacher trainer in the UK, Botswana, Nepal and Rwanda. He is on the DfID Global Educators Register. Contact [jonathanpenon2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jonathanpenon2000@yahoo.co.uk).

This review was published in issue 5 of *Policy and Practice* and incorrectly attributed to Yvonne Egan. The review was in fact written by Jonathan Penson. The editor extends sincere apologies to Jonathan Penson for this error.

## **Contributions to Policy and Practice**

The Editorial Group invites readers with experience of development education and related areas to contribute:

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- suggestions for resources of any type to be reviewed;
- letters.

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