

Reviews

Development Education: Debates and Dialogues

Edited by Doug Bourn

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In the introduction to *Development Education: Debates and Dialogues*, Douglas Bourn notes that there is a dearth of academic literature on development education, and identifies that there has only been one ‘major publication in the past fifteen years that has specifically addressed the subject’. This fact alone makes this publication welcome: the terminology and language of development education need to be given renewed legitimacy in contemporary education debates if it is not to be seen as an out-of-date title for a set of out-of-date practices. We should therefore earnestly hope that we do not have to wait another fifteen years for a book to be titled *Development Education*.

Bourn’s introduction to the volume traces a very short history of development education and its definitions and policies in the United Kingdom (UK), before mapping out the ‘debates and dialogues’ which are to be addressed in (or, more often, between) the book’s chapters. The material covered here will be familiar to those working in development education, and provides an opportunity to begin to tease together the book’s chapters. However, it may be unfamiliar to those outside the sector. In both cases, readers may find it more useful to read this introduction having read the other chapters.

Annette Schenpflug seeks to explore the contribution that a Kantian philosophical position can make to development education practice. It is ground that has been covered before (a 2003 chapter by Donnelly covers similar territory) but it raises useful questions about what we actually mean by critical thinking in development education.

Barbara Asbrand’s chapter also brings a German perspective to bear, and gives us a taste of some empirical evidence in relation to development education practices. The evidence-base provided is welcome since the conclusion which Leonard draws in a later chapter that ‘there is still very limited empirical data to make any substantive observations on the impact of linking on pupil’s learning’ (2008:75) could in reality be extended to refer to much of the development education field. Notwithstanding this, Asbrand’s chapter is probably the weakest in the book, as the methodology is never made explicit enough for us to be able to value her findings (we are never told, for example, how many students took part in the study, however we do find out that her conclusions about gender and development education are

based on research carried out with students in a single school). Although Asbrand's chapter is supposed to be about 'how adolescents learn', it makes almost no reference to either theoretical or empirical literature on learning, which suggests that a different title might have better conveyed the content of the chapter.

Vanessa Andreotti's chapter brings us back onto firmer ground. It provides a post-colonial reading of the UK's development education guidance document for schools. The analysis is familiar but the point is well made and is important: if development education policies conceptualise development as a process of Westernisation and poverty as a 'lack' of what the West has, then a genuinely critical engagement with issues of power, colonialism, and inequality, can become foreclosed to students.

Andreotti's chapter connects neatly with Alison Leonard's subsequent chapter on school linking, in which she explores some of the practical realities of 'North-South' school linkages. Leonard notes on a number of occasions that there is little by way of an evidence base as to the effects of linkages between UK schools and those in the 'Third World'. In the absence of evidence she raises questions about the nature of partnership, the 'action dimension' of such linkages (and the way in which 'charitable' actions can reinforce negative stereotypes) and the depth of learning which takes place during such linkages. Throughout the chapter, she clearly identifies the need to address these questions through evidence rather than through anecdote, philosophising or gut instinct.

Temple and Laycock return to the 'action dimension' of development education and ask if this is entirely at the discretion of the learner or if they should be guided (but not manipulated) towards certain actions by the educator. They suggest that action should not be simply seen as an outcome of a critical thinking process (something which they see as the accepted position in development education) but may also be a site of learning to think critically. Theirs is a useful antidote to the 'charity bashing' that can be inferred from some development education writing: if learners are engaging in charitable actions (even those that can reinforce negative stereotypes) then educators should engage with them and help them develop a critical perspective that challenges such stereotypes rather than critiquing the charitable instinct that motivated them in the first place. Although this chapter moves us once more away from empirical evidence and returns us to the realm of argumentation, it nonetheless makes a valuable contribution to debates on action in development education.

In the final chapter, David Hicks argues for a futures dimension in development education curriculum work. He briefly traces the development of 'future studies' and of the educational interventions which are seen to be

informed by this perspective. This chapter hints at a need to explore the relationship between development education and education for sustainable development; however this relationship is not explored further.

As Bourn suggests in the introduction, the chapters highlight different positions in development education debates, however it is largely left up to the reader to identify these positions and debates. The lack of a stronger organising framework means that the book reads as a collection of disparate articles rather than as a coherent text.

Although it is undeniable that, as Bourn suggests, there has been a dearth of academic literature on development education this does not mean that the field of development education research has been largely quiet for the last decade and a half. Much of this published research has been ignored in the formulation of questions, positions and answers in the book. For example, references to the work of Osler, of Inman and Wade in London South Bank University, to the Development Education Commission's reports, to Tormey's 2003 edited collection, and to the journal *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review* are omitted here. These gaps weaken the final product.

Despite these criticisms, *Development Education: Dialogues and Debates* is a useful contribution to the field and offers opportunities to reflect on contemporary practice. The spaces between the positions elaborated by its contributors will provide fertile ground in which readers can grow their own solutions to difficult problems.

Development Education: Debates and Dialogues is available for £15.99 by contacting Hammicks Education Bookshop, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, Tel: +44(0)20 76126050, Fax: +44(0)20 7612 6407, Email: orders@hammicks.co.uk.

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