

The changing development landscape and new development paradigms: the end of development education or a chance to find its voice?

Opening address to the conference, Global Justice Through Global Citizenship: the Role of Global Education and Public Awareness, Brussels, November 20th 2013

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Introduction

It is important that we are here and that we are talking about research, because the development landscape is changing, because there is persistent and entrenched exploitation and marginalisation in global South and North, because there is a paucity of critical public understanding and debate around development and because there is a need, as scholars, to be part of a process of crafting new knowledges to challenge the ones that underpin the and unjust world order. It is also important to be here, because Development Education (DE) is at a critical juncture which means we either need to find our voice, or risk being consigned to oblivion.

(Dis)locating Development Education

Radical and critical forms of engagement in global justice are more important now than ever because the development landscape is changing. This presents risks and opportunities for DE and critical engagement with global justice, and make our cause all the more urgent.

At one level, established ideas of who is rich and poor, and who does development and who needs developing, are being unsettled. The celebration of the 'rising power' of Brazil, Russia, India and China is doing this. The World Bank's focus on the 'new middle classes' is doing this (Fletcher, 2013). There are also new development actors on the block – from corporations leading aid processes, to the military, celebrities, diasporas and volunteers (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2013). None of this is to ignore the politics behind these celebrations – such as in the celebration of neoliberalism's successful creation of new consumers. But this is shaping how global poverty and justice are perceived and understood – evidenced in the public rows and debates around UK aid to India, for example. And this is happening in the context of austerity in the global North leading to the growth and increased visibility of poverty in countries such as the UK. And so if development and public understanding of development is exclusively about giving, charity and help to distant 'others', it is going to lose the argument. And indeed, it has never been a good argument on its own. That isn't the same as saying get rid of development – it is about rethinking what development should be.

It is no surprise that there has been an intensification of what has previously been called 'development pornography' (Arnold, 1988) – graphic representations of poverty through established stereotypes of victimhood and the 'deserving poor' - as NGOs race to the bottom in the hunt for donations. In the UK, cuts in public funding have closed critical spaces for debate around development with Development Education Centres losing staff and closing (Baillie Smith 2013).

But there is also hope, as activists and scholars start exploring what development might mean post-2015. There are ongoing attempts to construct more postcolonial knowledges, and critiques of the privileging of Northern interventions (McEwan, 2009) and I have been in a range of fora where people are now asking, "Should we be talking about 'world development' and 'global justice'" – which we as development educators should answer, yes, and you should have been talking about it for the last 60 years too.

Research is important in all this, which is why we are here. But research isn't only about improving the effectiveness of our practice, or about critiquing existing practice. It is about creating and shaping knowledges and making sure that there are alternatives to the knowledges that dominate existing debates around development, poverty reduction and citizenship. Research can be a source of hope and resistance. There is growing scholarship that critiques representations of development (e.g. see scholars listed in Baillie Smith, 2013) – something that has only recently been mainstreamed and again, something we as DE researchers have been saying for years, but perhaps not in ways that got our voices taken seriously. There is ongoing public opinion polling on aid and increased recent interest in development communications. But what I don't see is a scholarship and politics of hope.

There are silences - where is DE research in the big debates around global justice? Have we won the argument about citizenship and stereotypes and charity, and can go home? Has our voice been mainstreamed into development thinking? Have we changed development thinking?

Clearly the answer is no. As I have argued recently (Baillie Smith 2013), despite the new interest in representations of development, development scholarship has failed to engage with the ways development narratives are negotiated through complex subjectivities – through class, gender, locality, history – i.e. at the levels DE activists work. The new focus on communications risks being about getting a better 'story' or communicating more effectively – not about questioning the very terms of debate around engagement.

There are important new critical voices in DE and the quality of research is growing, particularly through the work of doctoral students. But where are we in the big debates around post-2015 and the global campaign for education? What is our offer or big story? What are the unique knowledges that DE scholarship brings to the table? With that, we could perhaps identify where we can make our best contribution. But to do that, we need to be clear about what we mean by, for example, global citizenship, and to be clear about the

politics of our definitions of citizenship. This isn't only about policy – it is about theory grounded in the every day struggles of activists and the communities they work with.

Can we go beyond critiques to offer tangible ways forward, given our history? Can we offer a hopeful politics and scholarship of development?

I would argue that we should not throw out international development as a frame for transnational action on injustice and poverty - a planned international effort to shape processes of change in ways that benefit the poor - because efforts to date have failed to escape the colonial spatialising of poverty and agency along North South lines, and have become characterised by top down managerialism rather than a challenge to systems and ideologies that perpetuate marginalisation.

Global justice needs international action, and such a project needs firmer roots across the globe than international development has managed to date. DE activists are surely key to this - close to the ground, mobile and flexible, working through local institutions.

Development and development education: neoliberal separations

However, in both scholarship and practice, DE and Development have been going through something that isn't quite divorce, but has certainly been a sustained separation. Of course, what we mean by DE and development is a problem as both are broad. Whilst some elements of the development industry are top down and managerial, there are important critical voices and alternatives – which means we cannot just avoid development as a single entity. If we think of DE in terms of its institutions and policy frameworks and languages, and development in terms of the industry of NGOs, think tanks, multilaterals and other actors working to eradicate global poverty, then it would be fair to say that DE has been largely absent from high level public fora and debates, and mostly absent from mainstream development scholarship. If we want to challenge this, we need to know why.

I have argued elsewhere that there has been a dual separation (Baillie Smith, 2013). As development has become increasingly neoliberalised, managerial and de-politicised and development scholarship is inevitably shaped by its frequent location within marketised Higher Education systems, little space is left for the 'political', which is where DE might operate. DE is rarely perceived as a subject for mainstream development scholarship, as a marketised development world focuses even more on development as 'over there'.

But at the same time, and due to similar processes of neoliberal professionalization, DE has increasingly been mainstreamed into education with a focus on curricula, quality and towards learning (Bourne, 2003), with a move away from the languages and debates of development (Bryan, 2011, Baillie Smith, 2013). So we have a political vacuum.

A new research dialogue needs to challenge these trajectories. At the heart of this is a need to go beyond either evaluation or normative pleas, to raise the quality and criticality of scholarship, and to speak to the key and emergent big debates in development. This will mean we gain a presence in the high profile academic journals, with wide readerships in the international development policy and research communities. This is not to say I think these outlets are intrinsically better and should be the only thing we do - there are problems with access for a start – but they can help foster wider debate and engagement and help us to be taken seriously. It also doesn't mean throwing away critical and ethical ways of working, nor only validating particular types of authorship and scholarship – we have capacity but do not make enough of the potential for the co-production of critical academic knowledges through activist-research partnerships. But we need to be honest about the constraints on all this. One of the great frustrations in DE is the limited amount of research informed critical and conceptually rich debate – although this is changing. Fears for our survival and the potential loss of funds from central government have meant we have sometimes tried to present a united front and be consensual, but this has meant theorization and debate have not moved forward, in plural, complicated and productive ways. So at this conference, we must get out of our comfort zone, but in a spirit of moving forward, opening new conversations – and not just conversations with and amongst ourselves.

Development education as solidarity?

I want to conclude with some reflections on a new DE research agenda, centred on solidarity. This might not sound new. It is a term that is regularly invoked by civil society actors and social movements and often used by DE activists and practitioners. Solidarity is often posited as a counterpoint to dominant development languages and practices. But when we dig below the surface, what is actually meant by solidarity becomes less clear.

Different conceptualisations of solidarity mean different things – different strategies and different types of politics. At the start of David Featherstone's book (Featherstone, 2013), he highlights the roles of UK dock workers in the American Civil War and fight to end slavery – an example of the poor and marginalized acting as global citizens. Key social theorists and sociologists have written about solidarity – Richard Rorty, Craig Calhoun, Zygmunt Bauman and Gramsci, for example. In sociology, the term was used by its founding thinkers – if problematically – to capture what held society together.

The changing geopolitics of development which I discussed at the start of my talk might be seen as complicating the ways solidarity could be institutionalised; the race to the bottom for funding might be understood as responding to the challenge presented by an unsettling of traditional ideas of who is rich/poor and who is doing the developing. I would argue that we can understand one of the central problems of dominant modes of public engagement in development in terms of their fixing of identities for solidarity; as centred on “linking given, already-formed identities” (Featherstone, 2013: 37). The focus on fundraising effectively fixes people's identities, with some being in and some being out. We could understand this

as broadly flowing from an idea of solidarity as ‘shared concern’, ‘empathy’ or ‘shared identity’. But if we think, following Featherstone, of solidarity as “transformative political relations” (p.16) that are “worked through and constructed in and between different sites” (p.31), something that requires constant renegotiation without a pre-determined outcome (p.16), then we have a framework for solidarity which can work productively in a changing geopolitical setting. It is here that I see the future of DE. And I believe DE holds the key.

To this, we need to add a critical understanding of citizenship. This means placing less emphasis on behaviours - which mean we can fix identities and activities - and more about what regulates and shapes citizenship as a process (Staeheli, 2011: 6). Without this, our focus on DE as shaping action becomes a search for particular behaviours that are effectively regulated and named and sanctioned by us, rather than ones borne through a process of relationship formation and negotiation rooted in the local and everyday. If we don't do this, we are doing the same thing as marketising and corporatised NGOs - regulating not empowering. This is not saying anything goes, but is about thinking seriously about process. An example from some past research illustrates this – one was a DE NGO celebrating how a project had made young people feel confident enough to challenge a loss of local open space, but the funding NGO felt this was not a sign of success as they were looking for identification with the organisation and its corporate activities over time.

This idea of solidarity is not then about the top down delivery of better or new stories about development or the environment, or about celebrating fair trade as the ‘answer’, or offering pre-set critiques – it is open ended, risky and unpredictable. It is a solidarity rooted in everyday struggles and experiences in different places and the relationships between them. Which takes us back to my argument that in shaping engagement, we need a better socially, culturally and economically nuanced understanding of the citizens and communities we might work with. It means we need to understand those daily struggles, and to support them to form new and politically meaningful relationships that can shift and evolve.

Thinking of solidarity in this way is then about more than being hopeful or normative. It provides an analytical frame for understanding the relationships we are and could be fostering. It also offers scope for practice and research centred on co-producing new knowledges.

What I am suggesting is not straightforward. There are big investments behind the established ways of seeing and doing development – epistemological, emotional, financial and political. As Bauman (Bauman, 2013) argues, contemporary capitalism is antithetical to solidarity in the workplace and everyday, meaning making any sorts of connections and relationships across and between scales is a big political challenge. This means we need new alliances within and beyond international development, and new knowledges that connect DE to and are rooted in the lived realities of our contemporary world. DE and DE research can play a critical role in working across the dominant spatialising of development, whilst being embedded in locality and helping generate meaning and action through people’s

identities and histories. Without the development narrative, AND the local engagement, DE to me ceases to have meaning. How DE is rooted in and works through the local and the everyday, is critical.

I want to finish with how this might connect to my locality – the North East of the UK – and what DE might offer to the city. We have two big universities with histories of research on international development. Traidcraft – the fair trade company – is based here, as is the ethical investment cooperative, Shared Interest. The Northern Regional Trade Union Congress has an international forum and has a tradition of working with labour unions in Sierra Leone. Newcastle is a Fair Trade city and there are strong regional offices of international NGOs. There are histories of maritime labour solidarity, and the historical presence of a Yemeni community in South Shields has shaped particular forms of international and local connection. And we also have severe deprivation in the city – “life expectancy is 13.7 years lower for men and 10.8 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Newcastle upon Tyne” compared to the least deprived ones (Health Profile Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2012).

So what does DE offer here? I don't have the answer. And I don't think the answer will come from changed NGO stories or national initiatives such as Make Poverty History. But there will be people in the city who might have some answers, rooted in their identity, locality, history, class and gender. They will have knowledges that can help us form new political relationships in these changed times. My question is whether it is DE and DE scholars who need to mobilise these knowledges to change development into a struggle for global justice?

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