

CAN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES BE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION?

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In 1980, I completed a BA in Education and Political Science, and was certain that it was time to have a break from university. But I was just as sure that I'd be back for more at some stage, and I even knew the area: political education, a fusion of my two main subjects. I wanted to know how people came to hold the understandings they did about the workings of the world. I posed questions like: What were people's analyses of the world, where did these perspectives come from, and how did they shape the ways people sought to influence the world around them?

Part of my curiosity arose from the fact that my circle of friends in Christchurch was constantly trying to analyse and change the world, a key part of which was to engage other people in our endeavours. One of the many focuses of our political work in 1979 and 1980 was the anti-apartheid movement. The following year, we ended up in the epicentre of a momentous point in political history, on the Hart Committee organising opposition to the 1981 Springbok Tour.

Our organising meetings grew from a few people, to a few dozen, to a few hundred. The number of people we mobilised grew from a few hundred to almost fifteen thousand. Our demonstrations intensified to become twice-weekly events that routinely ended in civil disobedience, an approach that led to 653 court cases in Christchurch.

By the end of 1981, I had become even more intensely interested in political education. However, I had also become convinced that the issues involved in this were ones that belonged out in the real world. My work building the anti-tour movement provided a real insight into Freire's notion of political education, particularly the idea that conscientisation arises from praxis. In other words, I came to

see that people learned about social injustice and inequality, about the institutions and mechanisms that perpetuated imbalances of wealth and power, and about effective forms of social intervention by engaging with these issues. It was a process of being moved to address an injustice, taking action, evaluating its effectiveness and then taking more, possibly different, action. The political education people developed through this process during the Springbok tour and other campaigns seemed far superior to anything that could be acquired through university study.

In the years that followed, my experience working as National Education Officer within the New Zealand development organisation, Corso, reinforced this belief. In fact, while I had previously thought that I could see possibilities for a new academic focus, I found when I joined Corso that something very close to my interest in political education already existed. In fact, it had a name and a tradition; it was development education.

Defining Development Education

The concept of development education has its origins in the early years of the development debate when the issue of overseas aid came under scrutiny. Progressives challenged the common belief that the growing problem of world poverty could be solved by charitable donations from the rich to the poor. Why could it not? Because no amount or kind of aid could address the root causes of world poverty and underdevelopment, many of which originated in the 'developed' or 'first' world. What were these causes? In large measure, the problem was the policies and practices of first world governments and the lifestyles and attitudes that underlay them.

Those in the 'first' world were challenged to go beyond aid and address the causes of underdevelopment within their own countries. Those who sought to take up this challenge defined their task as one of 'development education'. While aid tended to make wealthy people feel warm and satisfied, development education tended to be more disturbing. Despite its rather innocuous title, development education became as politically perilous as aid was palatable.

What made the task of development education particularly difficult was that it was mainly non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the form of aid agencies that were charged with its implementation. For their own institutional survival, these agencies were reluctant to bite or do anything else unpleasant with the hands that fed them. Aid agency donors had been reared on a diet of publicity and fundraising materials, most of which projected humiliating or degrading images of 'Third World' people and presented misleading or glib ideas about the nature of world poverty and the strategies needed to overcome it.

In a famous study of thousands of agency publications in several different languages, Jurgen Lissner (Lissner 1977) found a remarkably similar underlying message that tended to reinforce widely held myths about development and aid. The message:

The development problem is all 'out there'. It is caused by endogenous factors inside the low-income countries. We in the high-income countries are outside spectators; our present standard of living is the result of our own efforts alone. The only, or most important, thing we can do to reduce world poverty and human suffering is to provide more aid resources (Lissner 1977: 158).

As I have previously argued (Small 1997), events in Aotearoa/New Zealand over the last two decades could have provided fertile ground for effective development education, particularly the debates over Treaty claims and the relentless imposition of a neoliberal

development model within the country and its promotion at the regional and global levels. These issues lend themselves to moving away from relationships that are essentially charitable towards ones that build solidarity. My impression of agencies in Aotearoa/New Zealand is that many, particularly those that advertise on television, still seek to exoticise poverty and promote a variation of the kind of message Lissner identified 25 years ago.

Although most agencies now acknowledge the importance of development education and many claim to be doing it, much of what passes for development education is little more than disseminating information about problems in other countries and the agencies' response to those problems. For others, development education goes beyond publicity and includes the provision of some quality educational resources and programmes about development issues. However, very few engage seriously with what I consider to be the imperative of praxis within development education; that is, the enactment of the principle that development education involves an ongoing process of reflection/action/reflection.

It would be useful, by way of illustration, to examine some definitions of development education. The first three come from British groups that are oriented towards development education but are not providers of aid.

Development Education aims to enhance people's awareness of global issues, enabling them to explore issues of change and development in depth, and make links between their own lives and those of people in other countries and communities (www.hampshiredec.org.uk/Wh_at_is_DE.htm).

Development education aims to raise awareness and understanding of how global issues affect the everyday lives of individuals, communities and societies and how all of us can

and do influence the global (www.dea.org.uk).

Development education attempts to explore the links between our own lives and those of people throughout the world, helping us to recognise ways in which we are all dependent on each other. It also aims to point out inequalities in the world at all levels and seeks to explain some of the reasons for this (cdec.ucsm.ac.uk/cdecwrrw/pag e2.html).

Each of these definitions emphasises the interconnectedness of the lives of people in different parts of the world, and the notion of common purpose that makes it possible to build relationships of solidarity, not charity. However, only the third definition is specific about an aspect of human society that needs addressing, or at least explaining – inequalities. All three define development education solely in terms of levels of awareness and understanding. Even the Development Education Association whose motto is 'promoting change through education' does not define 'change' in terms other than something that occurs within the minds of the recipients of the education.

Other British organisations, such as the Lancaster-based development education centre, Global Link, defined development education in terms that included 'working towards achieving a more just and sustainable world in which power and resources are more equitably shared' and expressed their aim as 'to promote awareness and understanding of global issues and to empower people to take positive action for justice, development and sustainability' (www.globallink.org.uk).

The definition I consider to be the most oriented towards the sort of solidarity that is fundamental to development education is that of the Oxford Development Education Centre (ODEC):

Development education means learning about how people are improving their quality of life, in

Britain and other countries. It also means taking action – to develop your own community and support other people doing the same in their own countries (atschool.educweb.co.uk/rmext 05/#Education).

This clear articulation of the integration of education with action, coupled with the explicit identification of local development issues within 'first world' countries is more common in Europe. Ingénieurs Sans Frontières, for example, declares:

The objective of development education is to incite each of us to act individually and collectively for the construction of a world of solidarity. The action of each individual, citizen, voter, consumer, tax-payer, parent, worker can have repercussions as much in France as on at the other end of the planet. This action is, of course, more effective when it is organised (ifsparissud.free.fr/site_web/ead/ead.htm; my translation).

Another European development education network produced a comprehensive and hard-hitting set of nine principles of development education. Principle six reads:

Development education gives rise to actions of solidarity which permit collective change in the functioning of the North (including at school). Being in solidarity with the Third World involves first taking action in one's own society (www.ue-acp.org/fr/forum/archives/2000-03/msg00026.html; my translation).

A Development Studies Course

In 1994, I ended up back in Christchurch with an academic position at the University of Canterbury. Five years later, I brought a group of other academics together to mount a 200 level course in development studies. The course introduced students to development theory, examine a few

development topics and allowed them to do projects on some aspect of development that was of interest to them. The course worked well and was popular with students. However, by the end of its fourth year, there was a recurring question from students along the lines of 'this is all very well learning about the woes of the world, but what can we do about it?' I found myself telling people what sorts of things I and various other people and groups, were doing about it. However, these responses were largely improvised and I felt uncomfortable offering them. I felt that, if people were motivated to want to take some form of action on the issues raised by the course, they needed to work that out themselves and not follow the advice of an 'expert'.

These kinds of concerns led me to reorganise the course in 2002. In the second semester, students were required to, themselves, address the question: 'what can we do about it?' through what I called a 'development education project' (DEP). I described the DEP to students in the following terms:

The history of development studies is one of theoretical, academic debate. The subject matter of those debates is the lives of real people. For most of those real people, life is about survival. It is about long hours of hard work eking out a living and trying, often unsuccessfully, to provide possibilities for their children to have a more secure and fulfilling life than they have had.

Most people who are interested enough to develop an awareness in this area are also moved to want to do something about it. If they then take the next steps of taking action and evaluating the effectiveness of that action, they begin the cycle of action/reflection/action that distinguishes those who are engaged in the issues from those who are observers.

To this end, the development education project (DEP) that is

the focus of the second half of the year is designed to have students working in groups planning, implementing and evaluating an intervention on some aspect of development. There is wide scope for what form this intervention might take. It may be producing a booklet, making a video, conducting a survey, building a website, organising a public meeting, making a submission, or some other kind of project approved by the course coordinator. The only kind of activity that is precluded from consideration is fundraising.

During the first half of the second semester – while people were preparing their projects – I arranged for a series of people from community groups engaged in some aspect of development to address the class. This gave the students the opportunity to meet people from GATT Watchdog, Trade Aid, Christian World Service, Campaign Against Foreign Control in Aotearoa, and the Refugee and Migrant Service, as well as Amelia Dapulang, Vice-President of the Filipino trade union, KMU. The speakers were asked to explain what aspects of development they sought to address, how they operate, and why they work in the ways they do.

The class formed into six groups, all of which chose campus-based projects. Four of the groups included library displays in their projects. One of these, which had also written an article in the student newspaper, was aiming to provide background information and analysis on the World Bank and IMF at a time that they had thought would coincide with massive anti-World bank protests in the US. Although the protests did take place, they were not prominently reported in the New Zealand media. Another of the groups with a library display was part of a broader group establishing a community garden on campus. They tried to use this project to raise awareness about issues related to seeds. One group organised a series of activities culminating in a screening of 'In a Land of Plenty', which attracted 200 people.

Another targeted engineering students to raise gender and technology dimensions of development.

As well as planning, implementing and evaluating their project, students were also required to explain their work to the class and submit a written report. However, the assessment was based solely on the project itself – how well they thought through the issues, came up with a plan, implemented it and evaluated it.

Two students hated the course, although they did not express this during the course, preferring to wait until the formal evaluation and then writing a formal letter of complaint to the Vice-Chancellor about me and the course. The rest of the students were very satisfied. In the last class, I asked students to respond to four statements related to what they achieved from the course:

1. I feel more knowledgeable about the causes of world poverty and injustice
2. I have a better understanding of the kinds of things that individuals and groups can do to have an impact on development issues.
3. I feel more motivated to get involved in some form of action for development.
4. I have greater confidence in my own ability to have an impact on development issues

Their responses were recorded on a five-point scale; 5 being 'strongly agree', 1 being 'strongly disagree', 3 being 'unsure'. Of the total number of responses to all four statements, less than 6% disagreed and just over 7% were unsure. The mean scores (with 5 meaning that everybody strongly agreed with the statement) were 4.48 for statement one, 4.43 for two, 4.19 for three, and 3.81 for four.

These results show that the students learned a great deal from the course, especially considering that they include the two malcontents out of 21 students. However, the scores also show that the

more one moves beyond knowledge and towards the motivation and confidence for action, the less positive people become.

Conclusion: Development Studies as Development Education?

Since education is the *raison d'être* of universities, one might argue that when that education is about development, then what is taking place is development education. However, as I have argued above, development education has an important dimension that includes but goes beyond understandings of development. On reflection about what I have achieved with the course in question, I think that it is not and never could be development education.

Although the course may lead people to have many thoughts and actions that are similar or even identical to those of people who are involved in development education, the bottom line is that students are in the course because they paid money to the university to acquire knowledge and a qualification. As the course coordinator and examiner, I set the assessment tasks and then decide how well the students have met them. There is a fundamental imbalance of power between the students and me that goes beyond any superior knowledge of the subject material that I may have. There is also a lack of voluntarism, in the sense that this is a free association of people who have come together for the purpose of working together towards an agreed objective.

Although this course does not constitute development education, it is, in part, a course about development education. By introducing students to issues and approaches in the way it does, it can contribute to the base of knowledge, motivation and skill that are important components to effective development education. However, just as the study of any area or discipline is not the same as the practice of it, so too development studies should be distinguished from the practice of development. Development education needs to be recognised, not as the study of development, but as an important part of the practice of development.

References

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