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David Selby

Responding to Globalisation and the Global Condition

Technocratic Skills or Normative Ideals for Transformation? A Critique of Douglas Bourn's Conception of Global Education

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Beitrag reagiert auf die Erwiderung von Doug Bourn auf den Beitrag von David Selby in der letzten Ausgabe der ZEP. Der Autor gibt einen Überblick der verschiedenen Einschätzungen Globaler Bildung – ‚globale Wettbewerbsbildung, re-formerische globale Bildung und transformative globale Bildung' – und verortet die Position von Bourn zwischen einer Wettbewerbs- und Reformagenda. Selby argumentiert, dass solch eine Position zu nah an die Forderungen technokratischer oder skills-orientierter Bildung herankommt, die von Globalisierung und den Bedürfnissen eines globalen Marktplatzes beeinflusst ist. Er sieht einen solchen Ansatz auch als zu konform mit einer ‚Kultur der Erfüllung', die derzeit innerhalb der Bildung Großbritanniens vorherrsche. Selby plädiert für eine transformative globale Bildung, deren erste Prämisse ist, ‚dass wir auf einem Planeten und nicht in einem Markt leben'.

Abstract: This article reacts to the response of Doug Bourn to David Selbys article in the last number of ZEP. David Selby overviews different renditions of global education ' Global Competitiveness Education, Reformist Global Education, Transformative Global Education' and locates Bourns position as falling between the competitiveness and reformist agendas. He argues that such a positioning brushes too closely against calls for technocratic and skills-based education that are influenced by globalization and the needs of the global marketplace. He also sees such an approach as overly conforming to the ˜culture of compliance currently prevailing within UK education. Selby argues for a transformative global education, the first premise of which is 'that we live on a planet, not in a market'.

Since returning to the United Kingdom from Canada in the summer of 2003, two impressions have from time to time returned to me, one concerning society, one concerning education.

The first is that the United Kingdom, England especially so, has not fully shaken off the vestiges and mindset of Empire. The analogy of the person who has lost an arm is sometimes advanced. While the person lives on for many years after the loss of the arm, their mind never quite adjusts to the loss and continues to send messages as though the arm were still there. Anachronistic imperialistic impulses afflict left, right and centre in British politics, as well as those who would not consider themselves particularly political. Those impulses lie behind much of the negativity towards the European Union and the proposed European Constitution, and towards joining the Euro; they lie behind the language of party political cut and thrust in which politicians frequently invoke the British way as best; they lie behind the (somewhat forlorn) assumption that England should as of right rule the world on the soccer pitch.

The second concerns the culture of compliance that has come to permeate education in the last eighteen years, a culture for schools of centrally controlled curriculum; a culture for schools, and for further and higher education institutions, of accountability and performance measurement decreed by central government and overseen by organs of central government. This culture has promoted 'back to basics' within school-age education, a marketplace-oriented thrust within educational reform with a heavy 'learning for global competitiveness' skills emphasis, a largely conformist conception of the purposes and scope of citizenship education, and the insidious de-professionalization of the teacher. Both impressions re-surfaced on reading Douglas Bourn's paper.

Anglocentrism

Bourn purports to be putting forward a conception of global education that, in contradistinction to my own, is global in spread in its acknowledgment of international debate and writing, suggesting that my earlier *ZEP* article (Selby 2000b) takes "no account of debates taking place in Europe or Asia". He also asserts that the ideas of global educators such as myself have had "limited influence within educational theory and practice over the past twenty years" because they are idealistic, marginal and lack clear theoretical frameworks for learning.

A perusal of the references offered by Bourn by and large suggests that, as far as he is concerned, the world stops at the

British coastline. Of the thirty-eight works he references, less than a handful emanate from outside the United Kingdom. The evidence he draws upon, oftentimes quoting extensively, suggests that Britain is the arena where most things that matter in global education are happening. He neither details nor references the debates taking place in Europe and Asia to which he alludes.

Had Bourn undertaken a rigorous international literature search, he would have found that clear and detailed theoretical expositions and curricular and learning frameworks for my rendition of global education are, indeed, there, and that they lay out knowledge, skills and attitudinal/values goals as well as strategies for embedding global education in the curriculum. One such framework is offered within my first *ZEP* article (Selby 2000b, p. 9) but he would have found others (Pike/Selby 1988, p. 63 – 69; 1999a, p. 9 – 20; 1999b; 2000, p. 11 – 26). Had he cared to look, he would have found plenty of discussion of knowledge and skills and their interrelationship with attitudes and values. He would also have found clarity, albeit always of a provisional nature, about aims and objectives.

A framework discussed in the 2000 *ZEP* article, the four dimensional model for global education, has informed national curriculum renewal in a range of countries.[1]

The 1993 – 1998 UNICEF MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Global Education Initiative in conjunction with the Ministries of Education of Jordan and Lebanon is an early example. As Lebanon emerged from its 1975 – 1989 civil war, a period during which curriculum reform was frozen, the staff of the International Institute for Global Education of the University of Toronto, where Graham Pike and I were then based, worked alongside a Lebanese National Core Team appointed by the Ministry of Education to undertake national curriculum and pedagogical renewal in basic education building upon the four-dimensional model, as well as to develop linked pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. When King Hussein of Jordan instigated a process of democratization, he reaffirmed "the active role of education in the process of democratic change" (Jordan Times, 24 November 1993, p. 4). The Jordanian Global Education Initiative, again based upon the four-dimensional model, became the vehicle to drive the Jordanian Educational Reform Plan for quality basic education. A description and evaluation of the Initiative in both countries is to be found in *Global Education: Making Basic Learning a Child-Friendly Experience* (Pike/Selby 1999a). Principal outcomes of the evaluation in both countries concerned increased student self-direction in learning, significant shifts in the teacher/student relationship towards openness and mutual trust, radical shifts in teachers' perceptions of their role and vocation, and significant increases in students' socio-affective capacities as well as in their skills and conceptual attainment (Pike/Selby 1999a, p. 111 – 127). The Global Education Initiative in Syria, again based on the four-dimensional model, and again involving a partnership between UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, followed suit (1995 and continuing). This has been a principal driver of national curriculum and pedagogical reform in Syria with similar, independently evaluated, outcomes (Sultana, 2000). In Iran, the UNICEF/Ministry of Education Global Education and Life Skills Education Project (2000 to date), initially involving the development of a new curriculum and its delivery using interactive and experiential pedagogy from grade one to 10 in twenty schools in five provinces, has proven so successful that, in Autumn 2003, the Ministry announced that the approach would inform the new national curriculum of Iran (Azin Movahed, UNICEF Iran Education Officer, personal communication). Again, the four-dimensional model has framed the curriculum development process, just as it has a similar process of national curriculum renewal under the UNICEF CARK[2] Global Education Project (2001 to date) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Early evaluations within the CARK region again point to significant gains for students, teachers, and schools (Harris/Dyer 2004; Lloyd/Brewster 2004; Christophers/Gabriel, 2004). Each of the initiatives outlined above has involved a National Core Team acting as cultural gatekeeper and, following initial immersion in global education theory and practice allied with capacity building, driving forward implementation and movement to scale within the national education system.

Each national project outlined above has spawned its own academic and professional literature on global education, with its own distinctive perspectives and debates, Asian perspectives and debates of which Bourn appears unaware.

In Europe the same model informed the 1998 – 2001 initiative of the Albanian Institute of Pedagogical Studies (the curriculum, teaching and learning arm of the Ministry of Education) in its infusion of global education across the Albanian history, language, mathematics, natural science, and civic education curriculum of grades five, six and seven. "The teaching environment of the school has been improved through the application of interactive methods in teaching and learning. […] The project has reinforced the tendency of subject integration. […] The participation of teachers in the project has increased their professional level" (Selby et al. 2000, p. 9). The project has also influenced a range of other reform initiatives in Albania (Ashton 2000; Remacka 2002). In Armenia, the four-dimensional model, and pedagogical frameworks derived from it, drove the 1998 – 2001 development of the national grade one to 10 Life Skills Curriculum, now in full operation (Ashton 2001; Soukhudyan 2000). The impacts of the model upon educational developments in Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, and Japan, as well as some of the countries discussed above, are explored in a forthcoming book (Motani/Selby 2006). The Brazilian experience is particularly worthy of note in that the impact has been principally within non-formal education contexts and initiatives, such as in building socio-

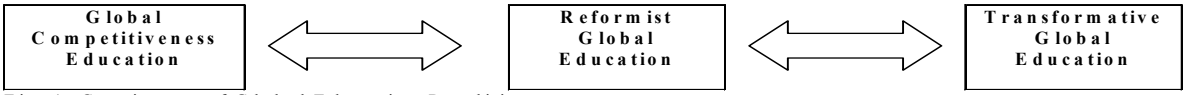

Fig. 1: Continuum of Global Education Renditions

environmental awareness and participatory democracy amongst the residents of a Sao Paulo social housing cooperative, developing awareness of environmental mal-practice and, hence, promoting action to ensure a sustainable fishery in a South-East coastal community, and involving twelve thousand at-risk teenagers in the greening of a city in Sao Paulo State (Santos 2004, p. 119 – 156).

I trust that the above places Bourn's offhand belittling of holistic and transformative global education, and his confident but under-researched assertion that it has lacked much by way of significant impact in the real world, in some perspective. It is worth recalling what Robert Moore, an influential figure in the Canadian International Development Agency in the 1990s, said about the field of global education. What global education needs most, he averred, is 'practical visionaries'. It is possible to be holistic, transformative and counter-cultural and, yet, effect significant real change.

Global Education within a Culture of Compliance

Bourn suggests that the challenges I raise in my recent *ZEP* paper (Selby 2004) "need to be framed within the new debates about what is seen as 'education for sustainable development'". He later boldly asserts that, in England, the following concepts, *inter alia*, "have been agreed within education as being central to the global dimension within education": Citizenship and Stewardship, Sustainable Development.[3] He cites, approvingly, the "human development agenda". Under the sub-title, "'Global' is here to stay in Education", he writes of the importance of "knowledge, skills and qualifications" for the global learning society and references himself in support of his statement that "Education is seen as key to both economic development and social cohesion." He suggests that myself and likeminded global educators "take no account of the impact of globalization" although globalization is a "key driver for re-thinking about education in the twenty-first century." That said, he remains equivocal as to whether global education should be directed towards resisting, transforming or accommodating to globalization. "In higher education", he writes, "[…] globalization, sustainable development and wider world agendas are increasingly being referred to as integral features of *skills* people require for the new century" [my italics; D.S.]. He concludes by identifying "four underlying opportunities" for engagement in debate. These include: "Learning and skills for the era of globalization"; "Learning for a sustainable future in the context of the decade for Education for Sustainable Development" and "Skills and competences required to be an active and caring citizen."

Fig.1 depicts a continuum I employ to map different renditions of global education. *Global Competitiveness Education* is a variety of global education designed to equip the learner with the competencies for engagement in global society and life in the global marketplace. It embraces globalization uncritically; emphasizes education for economic development and social cohesion, conceiving of the latter as a *sine qua non* of strong economic performance; has a strong knowledge, skills and qualifications emphasis while de-emphasizing values; and is muted in its criticism of the global condition. *Reformist Global Education* has an agenda falling within what Toh Swee-Hin (1993, p. 9 – 11) calls a "liberal-technocratic paradigm on global literacy" characterized by, amongst other things, a liberal appreciation of other cultures (often leaving the voice of the other, and the authenticity of our feelings towards the other, unexpressed and unexplored); an over-concentration on, and superficial embrace of, the notion of interdependence; a management interpretation of how to deal with the disequilibria of interdependence and the deleterious effects of globalization ('technocratic social engineering upon planet Earth'), and uncritical assumptions concerning the inexorability of human progress. It embraces a values set appropriate for tampering with, rather than turning around, the global system. *Transformative Global Education* is explicitly and rigorously ethical, applying the values of emancipation and liberation consistently to personal, social and political acts; it links a deepening of the individual's interior life to solidarity with crucial struggles for justice, dignity and freedom; it stresses confronting structural violence as vital for planetary survival; it makes ecological security integral to liberation; it adopts a conscientizing and empowering pedagogy to move hearts and minds (Selby 2000b; Toh Swee Hin 1993, p. 12 – 15). In its biocentic expression, it de-centres the human project per se and places the biosphere (which includes human life) at the centre of the planetary project (Selby 2000a).

The majority of Bourn's statements fall at or between the global competitiveness education and reformist global education nodes on the continuum.

Bourn's constant reiteration of the importance of knowledge, skills and qualifications, allied with regularly recurring sections in which he is *sotto voce* on values, is indicative. It affirms a status quo supportive educational paradigm in which critical thinking, leading to action, is presented as an aim but remains an unlikely outcome. Research and a commonsensical reading of the world make it abundantly clear that, a mountain of knowledge and basketful of skills notwithstanding, people remain for the most part passive and largely indifferent in the face of clear threats to planetary well being, such as climate change. Attitudes, together with emotional engagement and exploration of inner ecology, are key if the learner is to harness knowledge and skills for pro-active social involvement (Kollmuss/Agyeman 2002). "Skills and competencies" do not, in and of themselves, lead to active and caring citizenship. As I think my article in the last *ZEP* (Selby 2004) makes clear, deep social transformation and deep personal transformation stand in dynamic and mutual relationship. Unless they do, there is no transformation. Transformative social change is fundamentally ecological, modeling processes of change upon processes within the eco-systems of nature (Capra 2003, p. 200). It involves mindfulness of the dynamical relationships between *structure* (physical/institutional embodiments), *pattern* (configurations of relationships between components as well as configurations of relationships between processes), and *process* (the flow of the system through the whole, linking structure and pattern, as the

system continually unfolds) (Capra 1996, p. 159 – 162; 168). Within such an understanding, interdependence is an insufficient underpinning concept for renditions of global education of transformative intent in that, while the concept addresses structures and the relationships between structures, it ignores the process aspects of pattern as well as the flow of the whole. Bourn may be right that "'Interdependence' has to be the term to underpin global perspectives within education", but a "perspective within" is a pretty limited aspiration, falling significantly short of what a 'dimension' and far short of what a paradigm can bring to education.

His call for critical engagement notwithstanding, Bourn uncritically embraces the idea of education for sustainable development, making no attempt to explain his understanding of the term. In this, too, he clearly aligns himself with the liberal technocratic school of thought, while also locating himself squarely within the government-driven culture of compliance that has come to characterize much of British education.

The British government has roundly embraced education for sustainable development. In September 2003, the Department for Education and Skills published a *Sustainable development action plan for education and skills* (DFES 2003) designed to promote discussion of "how we generate the skills, knowledge and understanding to allow us to fulfill our duty as global citizens", while in January 2005 the Higher Education Funding Council for England published a consultation document on a support strategy and action plan for sustainable development in higher education (HEFCE 2005). Additionally, the DFES has published a document, laying out three goals for education: "Equipping our children, young people and adults for life in a global society and work in a global economy"; "Engaging with our international partners to achieve their goals and ours"; "Maximizing the contribution of our education and training sector, and university research to overseas trade and inward investment" (DFES 2004, p. 3). Anxious for a place in the mainstream, Bourn and likeminded global educators have swallowed the lexicon and ideology of global marketplace competition and sustainable development, not seeing that they are part of the planetary problem rather than the solution.

Most pieces of writing on education for sustainable development begin by taking for granted that the term is understood and uncontested or by re-quoting the well-worn definition of the World Commission on Environment and Development: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (WCED 1987). This raises a number of serious issues.

First, whose expertise, language and values are going to be given most voice as we define and enact sustainable development? The bulk of economists are pretty clear, even razor sharp, in what they mean. They see sustainable development as sustained growth in the economy. Their meaning of development emerges directly from the growth principle. So are political and social scientists. For them 'sustainable institutions' or 'sustainable societies' are ones that hold on to enough public support to be self-renewing. Whether they are kindly to the environment remains a secondary consideration. Environmentalists or ecologists who embrace the term ecological sustainability are less definite. They see ecological sustainability as a matter of identifying the carrying capacity of an ecosystem in terms of the level of resource extraction it can bear. Unlike the economists, theirs is not an exact science and new understandings of ecosystems as volatile rather than steady state have only served to increase their inexactitude.

So, you have a situation where economists, in particular, are very certain and go about promoting development, and where environmentalists, in particular, are very uncertain but go about promoting sustainability. So understood, environmentalists have embraced sustainable development and environmentally conscious educators have embraced education for sustainable development but not on a level playing field. Donald Worster has written: **"**In the much-acclaimed partnership between advocates of ecological sustainability and development, who is going to lead whom? I fear that in that partnership it will be 'development' that makes most of the decisions, and 'sustainable' will come trotting along, smiling and genial, unable to assert any firm leadership, complaining only about the pace of travel. Sustainability is, by and large, an economic concept on which economists are clear and ecologists are muddled. If you find that outcome unacceptable, as I do, then you must change the elementary terms of the discussion." (Worster 1995, p. 424).

'Development' has become such a part of economic discourse that other renditions of its meaning we might bring to the table – for instance, cultural development, personal development, and spiritual development – are all too easily drowned.

If we accept the finiteness of the planet – that the planet is not an inexhaustible cornucopia – and if we interpret 'sustainable development' as 'sustainable growth', then the term becomes an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. You cannot continue having sustained growth within something that is finite. Given the above considerations, some prefer the terminology 'education for sustainability' or 'education for sustainable futures,' both of which go some way towards taking the development out of sustainability (Sauve 1995). Others propose that we explore notions of 'education for retreat' or 'education for contraction,' involving a rethinking of goals, values, competencies, and notions of the 'good life' that would be necessary for a society turning its back on growth and consumerism, where GNP (Gross National Product) might be replaced by GNH (Gross National Happiness) as an indicator of the good society (Bakshi 2005).

Second, there are anxieties over what definitions of education for sustainable development explicitly or implicitly say about our valuing of nature**.**

There has long been controversy and argument over why we want to save nature. A bald example concerns the tropical rainforests. 'Save the forests', some exclaim in that the plants might carry a cure for human diseases such as Aids. 'Save the forests', others say, not because of their potential usefulness to humans but because the plants and creatures there have intrinsic value – value in their own right – given they have their own urges, motivations, and life trajectory to fulfill. This argument is often put as one between those, on the one hand, adopting a human-centric view of nature, in which value is given according to human needs, and a bio-centric

or eco-centric view of nature, in which the needs of the biosphere take primacy.

Definitions and explanations of sustainable development are largely underpinned by the assumption that the natural world is primarily there to meet the material demands of the human species. Returning to the WCED definition above, we can be sure that 'future generations' refers to future generations of humans. Throughout the WCED report, and in most sustainability documents since then, the use of the word 'our'[4] refers to people exclusively. Extending the same point, the concept of sustainability, at least in most renditions, embraces the assumption that humans have both the ability and capacity to manage the future of the Earth. It is in our power and purview, it is assumed, to do the sustaining. There is an implicit managerialism, a continuance of the Earth mastery dimension of the mechanistic worldview, in the concept of sustainable development, which reveals itself in Bourn's easy embrace of the Christian/Judaic concept of stewardship as core to global education. His conception of global education is planet-light and certainly fails to give due recognition to critiques of the overt and covert anthropocentrism of much writing in the field.

Conclusion

Transformative global education addresses globalization directly, not liking what it sees in terms of the deleterious impact of the global marketplace on communities, cultures, long-valued ways of life, and the natural environment. It is suspicious of a shriveled conception of the field that overly courts the marketplace in its emphasis on skills and qualifications. It calls for an organic planetary framing for education, the first premise of which is that we live on a planet, not in a market, and that all of us, and not least educators, need to inform our thinking, proposals and endeavors with a deep mindfulness of life processes.

Annotations

1 Bourn fails to identify expressly that the model emanates from Graham Pike and myself, the later variations by Hicks and Scheunpflug he cites and references notwithstanding.

2 Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan.

3 He does not say who has been party to and who has embraced the agreement but implies unanimity.

4 'Our needs', 'our communities', 'our world'.

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