

Teaching about Development in a Post-Development Society: The Case of Geography

Alex Standish, Senior Lecturer in Geography Education, University College London, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL. a.standish@ucl.ac.uk

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Abstract

This article charts social and economic transformation in the developing world over recent decades by drawing on a number of different secondary data sources. I propose that this rapid change means that we need to re-think the teaching of development in the curriculum to move beyond a polarised view of developed versus developing. The article explores how the geography curriculum in England has been slow to capture this transformation due to the internalisation of post-development thought (the narrowing of notions of progress and human agency). Fears about environmental, social and moral limits have led to a prevailing standpoint that is sceptical of economic growth and large-scale development, and elevates consumption over the productive sphere. This standpoint is reflected in alternative theories of post-development and sustainable development which favour development that is small-scale, local and environmentally benign, all of which are embedded in the English geography curriculum. A case is made for re-claiming the meaning of development, necessitating an open exploration of how lives are being improved and cultural capital advanced as developing countries expand their productive potential and diversify their economies.

Key Words: geography; post-development; curriculum; developing countries; transformation; economic growth.

Introduction

Much of the so-called developing world has been transformed over the past two to three decades. Analysing the rise of the BRICs, Simpson concluded: “In terms of the vast creation of wealth and the speed at which hundreds and millions of people are leaving the fields and joining modernity, the rise of the emerging economies is a far more dramatic process than even the Industrial Revolution” (Simpson, 2008). The comparison is worth debating; maybe a question for an advanced class. Certainly, the rate at which some countries have lifted people out of poverty is unprecedented. The Millennium Development Goal of halving global poverty was achieved five years early because nearly a billion people were lifted above the poverty line between 1990 and 2010 (*The Economist*, 2013). Beyond poverty reduction, the lives of millions of people in the developing world have significantly improved across a number of measures including consumption, calorie intake, life expectancy, education, access to health care, jobs, improved

infrastructure, declining rates of disease and access to clean water. Dazzling his audiences with factual statistics and graphics, Hans Rosling asserts that we should “stop calling them ‘developing countries’”, such is the transformation that has taken place (Rosling, 2013).

While there are still another billion people living below the official poverty line and much more evidently needs to be done to improve living standards and the environment in the developing world, this is a story about real progress in the developing world; one that all children should be taught about in geography. However, the discipline has been slow or reluctant to engage in a positive discourse on the topic, in some cases still presenting a binary ‘developed North’ versus a ‘developing South’. While geography has been keen to explore the positives and negatives of globalization there are few teaching resources that show the ways in which economic growth has transformed people’s lives for the better.

This article has two main aims: to explore and present secondary data that illustrate improvement in developing countries, and, secondly, to explore the reasons why geography has been slow to engage in and portray this story, leaving something of a blind-spot to social and economic progress. This problem is not unique to geography. It is related to what Pieterse (2010) has called a “crisis” in development thinking in Western post-development society. Concerns about the social and environmental impacts of further development have found expression in post-development theories (Ben Ami, 2010), which in turn are reflected in the geography curriculum. I conclude by suggesting that without a positive narrative for development we lack the intellectual resources to constructively engage with change in the developing world.

Development Thinking in Crisis

Jan Nederveen Pieterse begins his book *Development Theory* with the following assertion: “everything that development used to represent appears to be in question, in crisis” (Pieterse, 2010, p. 1). He suggests that:

“The classic aim of development, modernization or catching up with advanced countries is in question because modernization is no longer an obvious ambition. Modernity no longer seems so attractive in view of ecological problems, the consequences of technological change and many other problems” (*ibid.*, p. 1).

The idea that modernity “no longer seems so attractive” is expressed in anti-development and post-development theory as well as in policy decisions about construction and development projects in the West and beyond. Analysing the Millennium Development Goals and World Trade Organisation policy, economist Ha-Joon Chang concludes that the “dominant discourse on ‘development’ really lacks any real notion of development in the sense of the transformation of the productive capabilities and structure (and the accompanying social changes)” (Chang, 2010, p. 9). Chang critiques the MDGs for restricting the meaning of development to “poverty reduction, provision of basic needs, individual betterment” (*ibid.*, p. 2) and the Doha Development Agenda for failing to offer a notion that “developing countries need to get out of what they are doing now (specialization in which is after all what keeps them poor) and move into higher-productive activities” (*ibid.*, p. 4). It is the lack of attention to the productive sphere in development thinking in particular that Chang suggests has given rise to discourses of “ersatz developmentalism”. Similarly, Bryan reports that “development NGOs and the media have been implicated in promoting mere surface-level engagement or ‘cheap participation’ in development-related causes and campaigns” (from Darnton with Kirk, Bryan, 2013). A combination of de-industrialisation in Western nations together with the spread of post-modernist thought has diminished the political capital to engage in narratives of modernisation and economic growth.

Historically speaking, the turn against modernisation and related economic growth is relatively new. Ben-Ami (2010) notes that since the Enlightenment support for growth has been integral to the idea of social progress. Although the optimism of the Enlightenment period waned, “the prevailing outlook until the 1970s was one of widespread support for growth” (Ben-Ami, 2010, p. 18). This was true for many on the Left of the political spectrum, as well as people on the Right.

In the 1970s a growing sense of limits to the Western model of growth and social progress found expression in several forms. Emphasising *environmental* or *natural* limits to growth, the Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.*, 1972) was an international best seller, as was Rachel Carson’s (1962) *Silent Spring* and Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful* (1973). Such publications reflected burgeoning neo-Malthusian arguments asserting natural resource limitations to economic development and population growth, despite historical evidence to the contrary.

In addition to natural limits, Ben-Ami suggests that “growth-scepticism” has been fuelled by popularising ideas of *social* and *moral* limits to economic growth. In his book *The Social Limits to Growth* (1976), Fred Hirsch argued that society could only ever deliver for some people rather than the whole of society because there can only ever be so many opportunities at the top of society and so many social goods. Today, Ben-Ami finds the notion of social limits expressed in discussions of growth leading to inequality or damaging traditional ways of life and family relations.

The idea of moral limits to growth has expanded since the economic recession of 2008, suggests Ben-Ami: “This is the notion that a culture of excess or greed will, sooner or later, have damaging consequences on society” (2010, p. 35). This may be one reason that development theory has turned away from economic growth and modernisation. Writing for the OECD, Lester Brown asserts that, “The western economic model- the fossil fuel-based, auto-centred, throwaway economy - is not going to work for China” (Brown, 2006). He adds that, in his opinion, neither will it work for India or the rest of the developing world.

The drift away from economic growth in development theory has taken place over several decades, and is reflected in the school curriculum. In the 1970s academics and policy makers began to focus on meeting basic needs rather than stimulating growth. Sustainable development became the new model in the 1980s. In the 1990s, human development or human potential linked to increasing capabilities, as in Amartya Sen’s theory of expanding human capabilities. In the 2000s, development theories shifted to rights-based approaches. For example, in the World Development Report of 2000/01, spiritual and mental well-being sat alongside economic growth as development targets. Instead of stimulating growth and redistributing resources, the new therapeutic role for the state is “to help the poor cope in both material and psychological terms” (Ben-Ami, 2010, p. 206). More recent development theory has turned towards resilience-thinking, whereby individuals must address complex social and environmental problems by developing “capacities for self-reflection and reflexive understanding of how one needs to adapt in an ever shifting environment” (Chandler, 2014, p. 4).

While economic growth and modernisation may not have disappeared from the development literature they are no longer central to the theory and practice of development in the Anglo-American context. Yet, as explored below, many developing countries are growing and

diversifying their economies and witnessing related changes to social practices, attitudes and living standards.

Development in the Geography Curriculum

A brief survey of the English geography curriculum as presented in leading textbooks, teacher resources and examination specifications paints a very static and conservative view of development that does not adequately engage with transformation in the developing world. Here, some examples have been selected for illustrative purpose (for more detailed analysis see Lambert and Morgan, 2011; Standish, 2009). While some materials do discuss development in terms of a continuum of countries, in general, the curriculum still presents a binary world of a developed North versus a less developed South. The Brandt Report from 1971 is still cited and the core versus periphery model is used to show differences in development, which are a long way from the reality of the new developing world. We can hardly continue with models that place China, the world's second largest economy, in the periphery.

While some textbooks still discuss economic development and include Walt Rostow's model of modernisation (e.g. Edexcel International GCSE/Certificate in Geography), this is often presented as an outdated view as development has 'moved on'. Echoing changes in development theory, contemporary development is frequently presented in terms of helping individuals, limiting environmental impact and changing consumption patterns. Further, development is often discussed as a relationship of Western nations helping out 'poorer' countries. Elsewhere, it has been noted that "there is a tendency to promote particular values in school geography which favour 'local' development projects, focus on 'sustainable tourism' or persuade pupils that Fair Trade is the solution to issues of poverty" (Lambert and Morgan, 2011, p. 13). For instance, the Edexcel GCSE Specification A has a section "Sustainable development for the planet" which outlines the need for large organisations to recycle more and reduce air pollution, sustainable transport schemes like "park and ride", and the effects of resource extraction from tropical rainforests. The specification also outlines "challenges" presented by water consumption and waste disposal. Recycling schemes are encouraged, as are ways of saving water. The specification raises concern about the impact of economic growth noting that "greater wealth and increasing levels of development" are "major contributors" to increasing waste and water consumption (Edexcel, 2014, p. 24/26), and therefore problematized.

In the Assessment and Qualification Alliance (AQA) *GCSE Geography Specification A* there is again a strong emphasis on the environmental impacts of consumption. The specification notes the “larger carbon footprints due to increased number of ‘food miles’ travelled” and hence requires that pupils study a campaign for locally produced food (Assessment and Qualification Alliance, 2012, p. 20). The specification also has a section on the “Development Gap”. This requires pupils to learn how “global inequalities are exacerbated by physical and human factors” and also that “the reduction of inequalities will require international efforts” (Assessment and Qualification Alliance, 2012, p. 19). Examples cited include buying Fair Trade products, decreasing debt, conservation swaps and aid. Developing countries are presented as dependent upon Western aid and intervention, with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) playing a key role (see Marsden, 1997; Standish, 2012; Tallon, 2013; Bourn, 2015). Yet, as explored below, the developing nations that are making significant economic and social progress are those that have lessened their dependence on the West by forging trade links with other developing countries and diversifying their economies.

While it could be argued that the geography curriculum is simply out of date with changes in the developing world I think the mismatch is a product of a more fundamental problem: our own loss of faith in the modernist project and our potential to change the world for the better. It is these values that are colouring the approach to development in the geography curriculum rather than a search for *truth* and an engagement with human potential.

Transformation in the Developing World

This section explores in brief several indicators of transformation in the developing world, such that we can glean something about how lives have changed over the past couple of decades.

Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction

One of the most significant changes is the reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty. In 1990, 35 percent (1.85 billion people) of people in the developing world lived in extreme poverty (subsiding on less than \$1.90 a day, measured in purchasing power parity at 2011 U.S. dollars) (World Bank 2016). By 2013 the figure had more than halved to 10.7 percent

(767 million people). It may not sound like much money, but in developing countries \$1.90 can mean the difference between living with or without basics like food, clean water and clothes. However, *The Economist* (2013) cautions that moving the remaining millions over the poverty line will be more difficult as many people remain well-below the \$1.90 a day mark. What accounts for the dramatic fall in extreme poverty?

“The driving force behind the reduction of worldwide poverty was growth” reports *The Economist* (2013). On average, developing countries have increased their GDP by 6 percent a year over the past decade. Even after the recent recession, economies have been growing at 8 percent in East Asia, 7 percent in South Asia and 5 percent in Africa (*ibid.*). *The Economist* suggests that “as a rough guide, every 1 percent increase in GDP per head reduces poverty by around 1.7 percent” (*ibid.*). Having sustained growth rates near 10 percent over three decades, China is responsible for three-quarters of global poverty reduction, lifting approximately 680 million people out of poverty between 1981 and 2010; a historically unprecedented rate and scale of improvement in living standards. Nevertheless, all regions of the world have seen declining rates of poverty over the past two decades (Figure 1).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

While economic growth accounts for much of the poverty reduction income distribution also matters. While increasing GDP is frequently correlated with poverty reduction there is not always a direct relationship. Usually, countries that manage to redistribute more wealth cut poverty further. Hence, it is worth looking at other measures of living standards. Martin Ravallion, of the World Bank, looked at 900 surveys of household consumption. He found that consumption in developing countries had grown by just under 2 percent a year since 1980, with a sharp increase since 2000 (*The Economist*, 2013).

While poverty reduction was a key United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Barder (2011) notes that most developing countries have lifted their own populations above the poverty line rather than because of western aid. This they have achieved through liberalising trade restrictions and forming trade partnerships or blocks to expand markets and stimulate economic growth. Much of the increase in trade and investment has taken place within the developing world itself. While investment by some western companies has played a part,

developing countries have grown by reducing their dependence on the West. Economist Paul Sumner similarly finds that “poverty is increasingly turning from an international to a national distribution problem, and that governance and domestic taxation and redistribution policies become of more importance than overseas development assistance” (Sumner, 2010, p. 1). In some cases, two-way trade and capital flows have replaced loans and aid, which previously locked many developing countries into a cycle of debt-repayment, giving rise to theories of dependency (Pieterse, 2010). For many developing countries, relationships of interdependence are superseding relationships in which they were dependent on the West (Barder, 2011), which also strengthens their agency to shape their own futures.

A significant factor for a number of countries, especially in Africa, has been Chinese investment as an alternative to loans from the International Monetary Fund/World Bank. Chinese investment and resource diplomacy with Africa nations have been well-documented (Lee *et. al.*, 2007; AidData, 2014). Much of this investment is tied to China’s need for natural resources and energy to feed its industries and growing consumption. Both China and Brazil have invested in agriculture in Africa, helping countries to raise their production of food (Tran, 2013). China has invested in schools, hospitals, energy production and transportation infrastructure, including a high-speed railway in East Africa. As is the case with capitalism, foreign investment comes with external influence which can lead to resentment and clashes with local populations. As educators who value truth, we must be sensitive to both positive and negative outcomes.

Economic growth and associated poverty reduction in developing countries has therefore occurred in spite western involvement rather than because of it. Hence, *The Economist* suggests, “At best, aid and MDGs were marginal” to global poverty reduction (2013). The growing independence and economic autonomy of emerging nations has been described as the “decoupling” of the developing world from western nations (Simpson, 2008). This is best illustrated by graphing economic growth in the G8 versus growth in the developing world (Figure 2). Until 1990 world economic growth was closely matched with growth in the G8 countries. From the early 1990s growth in the developing world began pulling away from that of the G8. Inter-developing country trade and investment provided these countries with a certain degree of resilience to the economic downturn in the West. Although few escaped a significant dip following the financial crisis of 2008, emerging economies are growing at an average rate of

5 percent compared with around 2 percent in the developed world (International Monetary Fund, 2014). The outcome is that half of the global economy and most of the world's economic growth now lies outside of Western Europe and North America (Rosling, 2013). What about the hundreds of millions of people who are being left behind?

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Paul Collier (2008), author of *The Bottom Billion*, suggests that we have moved from a world of one billion rich and five billion poor to a world of five billion rich, or on the way to getting rich, and one billion poor (he was writing before the global population reached 7 billion). His book is about the one billion who “missed the boat” of economic globalisation. Collier identified 58 countries who account for the Bottom Billion, the majority of whom are in Africa. He asserts that these countries are caught in one of four poverty traps: conflict traps (civil wars, coups and regular violence that inhibits investment and development), natural resource traps (sometimes lack of resources, but often resource abundance generating revenue undermining the case for reform), landlocked countries with bad neighbours and, finally, poor governance. The characteristics of these countries are that which are typical of low income countries (poverty, economic stagnation, dependence on primary commodities, corruption and violence) and hopefully taught in geography lessons. Nevertheless, pointing at other countries who have escaped poverty, Collier is at pains to insist that all the “traps” he identifies are not insurmountable, but emphasises the need for change to come from within if reform is to be lasting and successful.

Developing the picture of global poverty further, Sumner (2010) found that three-quarters of the global poor live in middle-income countries. His thesis is that only a minority of the Bottom Billion (some 370 million) live in 39 low-income countries (LICs), like those described by Collier. In contrast to Collier, Sumner found that most poor people live in countries like India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Indonesia, where economies have been growing at modest rates. This is surely good news as the chance of escaping poverty is likely to be greater in countries that are growing versus countries that are not. While it is true that growth tends to favour some sections of the population more than others, thus raising inequality within the country, over time the absolute level of poverty normally declines as resources and opportunities spread. For instance, Indonesia is making strides towards universal health care in 2019.

One of the reasons for the discrepancy in where those in poverty live may be that Sumner was doing his research a few years later than Collier. During the 2000s a number of African countries witnesses economic growth rates in the range of 3-10 percent, and some like Angola above this rate. By the time Sumner was writing a number of countries that were included in Collier's Bottom Billion had moved from low-income countries (LICs) to middle income countries (MICs), passing the World Bank threshold of approximately \$1000 gross national incomes per person: "Over the last decade the number of LICs has fallen from around 60 to 39" (World Bank, 2010, p. 8). This includes Angola, Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Nigeria and Sudan. By 2012 the number of LICs had dropped to 36 (25 of whom are in Africa, including the recently formed South Sudan). Barder (2011) showed that over the previous decade Africa became the continent with the fastest growing economies. Many of these countries are still very poor and whether they will be able to sustain economic growth is a huge question, but at least many LICs are heading in the right direction.

Fertility

In 1960 the global fertility rate was approximately 5 children per woman (2.5 in developed countries compared with 6 in the developing world). In 2012, globally, the average woman had just 2.5 children in her lifetime (UN Population Division, 2013). The changing picture of fertility perhaps most starkly illustrates the end of a clear division between developed and developing countries. When we examine fertility rates plotted against life expectancy for 1960 a clear division is apparent between developing countries with an average fertility rate of over 5 per woman and a life expectancy of below 50 and a small number of developed countries with fertility rates of less than four and life expectancy over 60 (Figure 3). When we view the same statistics for 2012, 80 percent of the world's population live in countries where two-child families are the norm and in most of these countries life expectancy is over 65.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

The global picture of total fertility rates captures the rapid spread of lower fertility rates. Only in Sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan do we find countries that buck the trend. But, even in these countries fertility rates are declining and expected to drop further over the next five years.

Consequently, the number of children in the world is levelling off at around 2 billion. Why have fertility rates come down in developing countries?

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

There is no magic formula to uncover here. The short answer is economic growth, economic diversification and associated development, especially the transformation of the role of women in society. Take Bangladesh, whose fertility rate declined from 6.9 in 1970 to 2.2 children per woman in 2012 (Gapminder World, 2014). In the 1980s micro-lending by the Grameen Bank enabled many women to start small businesses. Since then millions have found work in the garment industry and other businesses (often with inadequate safety standards as the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Savar revealed). “Bangladesh is undergoing a structural change in the economy, from agricultural to manufacturing,” reports Stefan Priesner, of the United Nations Development Programme in Dhaka (Wassener, 2012). He adds that, “Women have played a huge role in this”. Today, women in Bangladesh are ambassadors, doctors, engineers, pilots and prime minister.

Again, maintaining sensitivity to different moral perspectives on fertility, we should not assume the lower rates of fertility are in and of themselves good for countries. Indeed, some countries (such as Russia, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Italy and Germany) are experiencing fertility rates well below the replacement level (2.1 children per woman) leading to possible future challenges of a different nature, such as undersupply of labour. Declining fertility in some countries can be a symptom of a troubled society in which adults are reluctant to take on the responsibility of parenthood (Derbyshire, 2013). Nevertheless, the trend towards lower fertility rates in developing countries is a sign that more couples are taking control of reproduction and feel less need for a large family upon which to depend.

Health and Life Expectancy

Lifespan is a positive indicator of development as it is a proxy measure for improved calorie intake (strengthening natural immunisation), better access to healthcare or a generally less gruelling life. In 2015, the world average lifespan was 71.4 years (World Health Organisation

2016). According to the Global Burden of Disease Study, between 1970 and 2010 global life expectancy increased by 11 years for men and 12 years for women (*The Lancet*, 2014). The study, which claims to be the largest ever systematic study of global disease, injury and health risk factors, concludes: “The results show that infectious diseases, maternal and child illness, and malnutrition now cause fewer deaths and less illness than they did twenty years ago” (*The Lancet*, 2014). On the other hand, more people are dying from heart disease and stroke, but this is frequently because they are living longer.

Increased lifespan in the developing world has been helped in particular by declining rates of death from malaria and HIV, two of the globe’s biggest killers (in 2012 there were an estimated 1.6 million deaths from AIDS (UNAIDS, 2013) and 627,000 malaria deaths (World Health Organisation, 2013)). Since 2001 HIV prevalence (the percent of people aged 15-49 who are infected) has stabilised at 0.8 percent and the number of new infections has decreased by 30 percent (UNAIDS, 2012/2013). Deaths from AIDS have declined in part because of scaled-up use of antiretroviral drugs. Today, there are approximately 35 million people living with HIV, many of whom live longer with improved drug treatment. However, HIV infection is high in only one region of the world: Sub-Saharan African, which accounts for 71 percent of global HIV infection, according to estimates from UNAIDS. Contrasts can also be found between countries in this region. Thirteen countries in Southern and Eastern Africa account for 50 percent of global HIV infection (Rosling, 2009). On the other hand, some African countries have a similar level of HIV infection to the rest of the world.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), increased financing and expansion of malaria control programmes between 2000 and 2012 reduced the malaria mortality rate by 42 percent in all age groups and by 48 percent in children under five (World Health Organisation, 2013). Fifty-two out of 103 countries, including 8 in Africa, are on track to reduce incidence of malaria by 75 percent between 2000 and 2015. The WHO estimates that some 3.3 million malaria deaths were averted between 2001 and 2012 (*ibid.*). However, this still leaves some 40 countries that have failed to arrest deaths from malaria. Particularly effective in reducing the incidence of malaria have been the use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets, indoor residual spraying of insecticide, rapid diagnostic testing and artemisinin-based combination therapies, used for the most dangerous parasites (*P. falciparum*) to infect humans (*ibid.*). Regrettably, the

WHO reports that financing for malaria treatment decreased in 2011 restricting the spread of the malaria control programmes.

Improvements in health and welfare do not stop with HIV and malaria. There are plenty of other indicators of how many developing countries are working towards the level of care expected in the West. For instance, 84 percent of one-year old children in the world are vaccinated against measles (World Bank, 2014b). Gapminder graphs help to capture the relationship between improved income (GDP per capita, using inflation adjusted Purchasing Power Parity) and life expectancy and how this has changed over time. A comparison between 1954 and 2012 illustrates this transformation (see Figure 5). Again, we can see that a number of African nations are lagging behind other developing countries.

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

Education

In education there are strong signs of progress if we look at the number of children attending school. World-wide, the number of primary age children out of school has fallen from 107 million in 1999 to 57 million in 2011 (UNESCO, 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, progress has been slower with a decline from 42 million to 30 million over the same time period. Taking a different measure, the global primary school completion rate for girls has increased from 76 percent in 1996 to 90 percent in 2011 (World Bank, 2014c). The equivalent figure for boys increased from 88 percent in 2004 to 91 percent in 2011 (*ibid.*). These figures do not tell us anything about the quality of education, but we know that more resources in more countries are being put into schooling children.

Reclaiming the Meaning of Development

While this article has spent some time exploring indicators of change and development in countries, we must however remember that they are after all only “indicators” of a more profound multi-dimensional process of change that is social, economic, environmental, political, cultural and technological in nature. Capturing and communicating such transformation is indeed a challenge for both academics and teachers alike. Underpinning development there must be some discussion and understanding of what it means to progress or to “change for the better”, as

one of my students put it. Within the discipline there is a need for both academics and teachers to engage with such questions. This should be an open discussion (because it involves subjective viewpoints), but it should include the idea that progress is *social* not just individual, that it is tied to *economic prosperity* and that progress means developing *cultural capital* (Chang, 2010).

While individual entrepreneurship is important, what we can achieve as individuals is limited by the opportunities available to us in society. Whether we are speaking about education, health care, culture or work, less developed countries like Haiti, for example, provide fewer opportunities for their citizens. Initiatives that target individuals may make day-to-day life easier for them, but for people to have access to resources and opportunities through which they can make a life of their own choosing a more fundamental transformation of social and economic provision is needed. Chang notes that changes in the productive capabilities of society are achieved through collective endeavour: public, private and co-operative productive enterprises (Chang, 2010, p. 8). In collaborative enterprises, not only is there a cross-fertilisation of ideas and division of labour, but it is the larger scope of productivity that can make a significant difference to how society functions and the opportunities available to citizens.

Chang also reminds us that the transformation of the productive sphere is a key to unlocking dependence upon primary commodities, diversifying the economy and widening social opportunities. Beyond economic stability, the significance of economic growth is the resulting changes in social structures – “urbanisation, dissolution of the traditional family, changes in gender roles, rise of the labour movement, advent of the welfare state, and so on” (Chang, 2010, p. 8). In short, economic growth matters because it provides the resources necessary to enhance living standards *and* potentially improve the environment. In accounting for the condition of the Bottom Billion and why they have not achieved the improvements to living standards in emerging economies, Paul Collier found that “the central problem of the bottom billion is that they have not grown” (Collier, 2008, p. 11). While the relationship between growth and improved living standards and a better environment is not always straight-forward (for instance, poverty remains high in Saudi Arabia despite rising incomes, see Sullivan 2013), in most cases economic growth provides the resources societies need to improve provision of education, healthcare, welfare, care for the elderly and disabled, infrastructure, energy, clean water, sanitation, quality housing, security and higher wages.

While industrialisation generates pollutants and environmental challenges governments in China and Brazil have been able to devote more resources to such problems as they become wealthier and attitudes towards the environment change. For example, annual deforestation of in the Amazon rainforest has fallen from 28,000 square kilometres in 2004 to 5,000 in 2012 (Duncan, 2013). While developing countries have a long way to go to improve environmental standards in cities it is worth reminding ourselves that, “in the 1930s and 1940s London was more polluted than Beijing, New Delhi, Mexico City are today” (Ben-Ami, 2010, p. 133).

In reviewing the meaning of development we also need to recognise that increased wealth is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. It provides the basis for improved living standards and *potentially* a better environment, but not necessarily fulfilling lives. It is also not just a case of “*what one has but how one has got it* that determines whether a country is developed or not” [author’s italics] (Chang, 2010, p. 5). Here, Chang cites the example of the Philippines which exports a lot of high-tech products, but this industry uses someone else’s technology. Given time, Philippine firms may well learn to develop their own high-technology, however, the important question is whether the country has the cultural capital to maintain production for itself.

Finally, in reclaiming the meaning of development, we should take care to note that what matters is improving standards and quality of life, including the environment, not necessarily Westernization. While Western nations made significant gains through the advent of capitalistic production and cultural advance, today their capacity to lead by example has diminished. This is true at a material level, with curtailed economic growth and productivity meaning younger generations are no longer automatically better-off than their parents. And, it is true at a political and cultural level where knowledge, ideas and historical thought have become diminished (Fukuyama, 1992; Laïdi, 1998; Ferve, 2000; Furedi, 2005). For this reason, Zaki Laïdi (1998) describes our globalised world as “a world without meaning”. Lacking a foundation of belief and goals, Western society is characterised by *presentism* and a loss of *telos* (Laïdi, 1998, p. 4). Discussion of social, economic and moral progress has been replaced by narratives of sustainability, the precautionary principle, safeguarding, risk aversion, preservation, austerity and evidence. This post-modern view of limited human agency underpins the loss of progress from contemporary development discourse, and the discipline of geography.

Conclusion

Disciplinary knowledge is the most important value in education. Disciplinary knowledge provides ways of looking at the world and conceptual frameworks for understanding the object of study, in this case changes to people's lives and livelihoods. Michael Young posits that the objectivity of truth claims are dependent upon "their external validity – that they explain something in a convincing way...their internal consistency," and, "support from a community of experts and with a wider legitimacy" (Young, 2008, p. 9). This article questions whether current development thinking in geography is adequate for the task of capturing changes in the developing world and if it therefore lacks wider legitimacy. This happens when disciplines allow subjective values (including fears about industrialisation) to dominate epistemic relations (Wheelahan, 2012).

The second conclusion is that the idea of development needs to be reviewed and re-constituted. The notion of *development* was theorised and applied to the global "South" in the post-World War II Cold War period as a way of promoting Westernisation, including capitalism. Today, we live in a very different, non-binary world, with living standards in some Chinese cities outstripping those in some Western urban centres. With Western development theory "in crisis" we need an open discussion about the meaning of progress and development, and young people should be a part of that discussion. One way to approach this is to look at how different countries have and are continuing to change. Young people need to explore the relationship between economic growth and wider social and environmental changes in societies, rather than being burdened with responsibility and guilt for inequalities (Tallon, 2013). And, they need to be taught that progress is much more than meeting targets, but is about transforming cultural capital and the opportunities available to citizens such that they can take control of their lives.

This does not mean the curriculum should ignore the ways in which capitalistic development has caused environmental destruction (Niger delta) or caused unnecessary loss of life (Savar, Bangladesh). As educators, we need to be sensitive to both the positives and negatives of human actions. It is in the very nature of geography that we must listen to and engage with the aspirations and achievements of people in different countries.

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