# Editorial: The policy environment for development education

Clare Bentall (iD)

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# Editorial: The policy environment for development education

Clare Bentall* – *UCL Institute of Education, UK*

This issue is based on a collaborative call for articles by four European journals focused on development education and global learning:

- *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* – Editor: Clare Bentall (UCL Institute of Education, UK) Issue 12 (2) December 2020
- *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review* – Editor: Stephen McCloskey (Centre for Global Education, Belfast, UK) Issue 31 Autumn 2020
- *Sinergias: Educational Dialogues for Social Change* – Members of the editorial board: La Salete Coelho and Jorge Cardoso (University of Porto and Fundação Gonçalo da Silveira, Portugal) Issue 11 December 2020
- *Journal for International Educational Research and Development Education* – Editors: Caroline Rau and Susanne Timm (University of Bamberg, Germany) Issue 43 (4) December 2020

These four journals are publishing articles based on a collaborative call for contributions on the theme of 'The Policy Environment for Development Education'. The call aimed to generate articles on how educators respond to both the national and global policy environment for development education. Together, the journals provide a collective perspective to contribute to this debate, through research articles, opinion and practitioner pieces.

The global context provides the backdrop for this focus on the policy environment for development education. Currently, we are facing a climate emergency threatening a mass extinction of biodiversity and social upheaval for people on the frontline of global warming. In some contexts, scepticism towards the urgency of climate change is leading to the exploitation rather than the protection of the environment. In contrast, a global mass movement, initiated by schoolchildren, is demanding action. The Maastricht Declaration of 2002 on global learning places 'greater justice, equity and human rights for all' at its heart. Yet the social component of sustainability threatens to be overlooked in educational policy and practice. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the likelihood of a long-term global economic recession present additional challenges, and international progress on reducing global poverty is very far from being achieved, according to United Nations Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston.

Globally, the dominant policy paradigm for development education's response to these global issues is found in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by United Nations member states in 2015 that provide 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future'. Development educators have seized upon SDG 4.7, with its aim to 'ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development' as a policy impetus for the sector, both locally and internationally. However, policy environments for development education and global learning are under strain. For example, within

*Email: c.bentall@ucl.ac.uk

the European Union, funding for Hub 4 on global citizenship education in Concord, the collaborative network of non-governmental organizations across Europe, is threatened.

Given these challenges, there is a need to examine critically the interrelationship between this policy environment and the work of development education and global learning educators to carry out their mission of achieving global social justice.

This issue of *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* reflects responses to the policy environment for development education in both explicit and implicit ways, through the discussion of different educational interventions. They demonstrate how education at a local level can respond to the global focus on the SDGs or be enacted through a commitment to the wider goals that policy paradigms such as the SDGs address. The focus on the SDGs, in particular, can provide a steer for approaches to education, where institutions interpret this agenda in their design of educational offers.

In the first of two articles focusing specifically on the policy context of the SDGs, Sommer Mitchell, Holly Swayne, Kara Fulton and Jennifer Jones Lister explore how the Global Citizens Project (GCP) at the University of South Florida, which aims to enhance undergraduate students' global competencies through curricular and co-curricular experiences, improves their understandings of the SDGs. In the context of internationalization agendas within higher education, which aim to produce 'globally competent' students, they argue that the SDGs provide a relevant and workable framework for helping students to think about their relationship to global issues and how they can respond to them. Through analysing the reflective responses from students to a series of workshops on the SDGs, they conclude that the main learning outcome was increased self-awareness and knowledge, achieved through students exploring their own values and actions, including how these relate to those of the United States.

Amy Strachan, looking at primary science in England, also suggests that, when combined with pedagogical practices that reflect a global learning approach, the SDGs provide a useful framework for approaching education. This, she argues, inspires teachers and makes the teaching of science more engaging and purposeful, particularly in the English context with its heavy focus on testing. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from 150 participants in the Global Learning in Primary Science Project, she concludes that teachers, student teachers and advisers were positive in relation to global learning in primary science, with pre-service teachers being the most enthusiastic. She also found that all groups felt the need to develop their own knowledge of the SDGs and related topics, as well as of appropriate pedagogical approaches. Although the global policy environment promotes the SDGs as a framework, without the guidance, resources and opportunities to develop teacher knowledge, implementing such a framework within science education remains a challenge.

Simon Hoult turns our attention to teacher education and explores the value and impact of study abroad experiences in India for UK-based student teachers. Study abroad visits are one example of how higher education institutions develop their own initiatives to provide student teachers with opportunities to develop their intercultural skills and experience, and thereby respond to wider agendas of internationalization and global learning. He interrogates what he refers to as the student teachers' 'colonial signatures', which are influenced by the power differentials between the Global North and Global South experienced by students during their visits. He illustrates how reflexivity plays a role in whether students' colonial signatures become a barrier or a help to learning. He argues that the development of the reflexive self is an important

component of global learning, for avoiding the closed readings of the 'other' that postcolonial critiques identify.

Finally, in their article, Elisabeth Barratt Hacking and Carol Taylor question our anthropocentric notions of education and argue, particularly in the context of the current global challenges, for a move towards a posthumanist perspective. The International Baccalaureate (IB), through a focus on international mindedness, is one educational response to the global imperative to achieve a more peaceful and just world that underpins policy paradigms such as the SDGs. They argue that taking a posthumanist perspective on the IB helps us to question our usual ways of thinking globally, challenges colonial inheritances and provides a new perspective on nonhuman–human relations, and thereby possible alternative understandings of current global environmental and social challenges. Drawing on a visit to an international school in Indonesia, they argue for a reframing of international mindedness as relational becoming, so that attention moves from thinking about national/international boundaries to thinking about relational spaces, and from human exceptionalism to thinking about interspecies connections. In the context of global policy drivers, such as the SDGs, international agreements and debates on climate change and sustainability, their article provides a challenge to our usual ways of educating and thinking about our place in the natural world.