Chapter 4

The development sector in the geography classroom

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Introduction

'Inequalities in development' has been a significant part of the New Zealand geography curriculum since the 'pink syllabus' (Ministry of Education, 1990). Internationally, approaches to teaching this topic have been heavily criticised. Lambert and Morgan (2011, p. 66), for example, argue that many constructions commonly used in geography classrooms, such as Brandt's line and the North/South divide, strip away complexity. These constructions further represent developing countries as victims of misfortune, natural events, inertia and poor governance, rather than being part of the global capitalist *system*. From this truncated view of the world, the risk is that geography students learn that in the West they are 'lucky'. This may lead to students believing their country is superior to other nations. Inequality can become simplified to a few actors and known solutions, and students become part of donor–recipient relationships. They may not be being encouraged to question the system that creates such relationships. Bryan (2011) has noted that development education practices have often been accepting

of the status quo and have sought to prepare young people to compete and consume in the global economy—not to question it.

In New Zealand, development education and the teaching of global inequalities is supported by numerous international development agencies (commonly referred to as development or aid non-government organisations, NGOs). These NGOs provide resources, organise campaigns and speak to students about their work in reducing global inequalities. Many of them seek to align their material to the formal curriculum so that teachers will use them. Obtaining NZQA accreditation for their material is one aspect of this in the New Zealand setting. The work of NGOs is typically part of transformative-oriented domains (such as environmental or peace studies) that seek not just to impart knowledge but to change learner behaviour and the wider community. This includes developing a respect for or empathy towards certain environmental or humanitarian values. This chapter presents some of the debates concerning the NGO sector's presence in the geography classroom and the school setting in general.

This chapter is also a response to an off-the-cuff remark made by a geography teacher about an NGO-organised workshop for teachers promoting their global education resources. Despite her general approval of the work of such NGOs overseas, she wasn't entirely prepared to use their material in the classroom. I reflected on her unease and recognised that there was uncertainty about the line between education and marketing and what constituted good development education. In some respects, any NGO is part of a marketisation of development: it is an actor *within* the development sector and needs to create brand awareness and solicit funds for its mission. The teacher's unease was that she could not explain the extent to which the NGO might influence her classroom pedagogy.

Within this chapter I am presenting a case for geography teachers to consider their pedagogical framework when teaching inequalities in development. Instead of being either wary critics or staunch advocates of particular NGOs associated with aid or development, teachers should step back from the content and evaluate the purpose of their teaching. This chapter presents findings from my doctoral research, critiques from commentators, and perspectives from the NGO sector itself towards the nature of NGO material in the geography classroom.

I agree with Doug Bourn (2015) that development education should have learner needs as the priority, not the needs of the development sector, and that for this to occur, teachers need to be aware of their pedagogical approach to teaching development.

Bourn (2015) has observed that there is some confusion regarding what good development education consists of and has proposed a framework that brings together the concerns of theorists and critics. The framework sets out a structure that goes beyond an activist model or an NGO solutions-based unit plan. Instead, there are four key principles that require a holistic approach by teachers when they are planning or thinking about how development fits into their classroom. For Bourn, the principles that should underpin good development education are:

1. A global outlook—this is implicit and should move learners from concern for the poor to concern for social justice and solidarity.

2. A recognition of power and inequality in the world—this should explore the forces behind globalisation and the history of current global systems, and the implications of these for countries in the North and South.

3. A belief in social justice and equity—understanding the values base that underpins attitudes and behaviours towards others can help learners to reflect on their own perspectives and how these have been formed.

4. A commitment to reflection, dialogue and transformation—questioning of assumptions and critical thinking are crucial to good development education, which may lead to learners being transformed in ways appropriate to their learning.

Through these four principles, Bourn has teased out and given equal weight to various aspects of development education so that the learner gains a more holistic picture. For each principle there is an implied process of learning that becomes increasingly more complex as the young person transitions through school.

In the past, due to constraints on their funding, NGOs were keen to raise awareness and then behavioural change in learners. The learning was often for short-term financial gain for the NGO and temporary social action for the student. This narrow approach, ostensibly for the

benefit of the NGO, has led to incomplete and inadequate development education, according to research (Bryan, 2011; Marshall, 2005). Bourn argues that the NGO sector is not an unbiased presenter of development and needs to be couched within a pedagogical framework that neither reifies nor rejects what the sector has to offer. Geography teachers will recognise that the sector does influence how students learn about parts of the world and their relation to them.

Locating myself in classroom development education

Since the 1980s, after the landmark concert of Live Aid in 1985, NGOs in the global North placed increasing emphasis on educating their northern constituencies about issues concerning poverty, social and economic justice and the work they do in terms of international development and humanitarian relief. This has included resourcing the formal education sector about their work. The emphasis in classroom material has often been on the issues or problems people or places face and the work the NGO is doing to alleviate them. Aid via the NGO sector is often portrayed as being a significant aspect of international development, whereas in reality loans and remittances make up the greater part of foreign aid income for many countries. Materials present positive accounts of the work NGOs do, and by default they can become a key provider of information on development issues. During my geography teaching in the 1990s I needed to be alert to the fact that countries could become one-issue stories, and, more narrowing still, people and places could be framed by a single NGO narrative.

From 2005 to 2009 I worked at the Global Education Centre (GEC) writing resources and educating teachers on pedagogical approaches to teaching development. This period provided me (and, I hope, the geography teachers I worked with) a different view regarding international development and aid. Established in 1992 (as the Development Resource Centre), and funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the philosophical underpinnings of the GEC were different from NGOs and were based on radical theories of development education proposed by Paolo Freire and furthered by Vanessa Andreotti, who visited in 2006. The centre produced resources that debated global issues and provided teachers with greater theoretical knowledge and critiques

relating to development (see, for example, Beals, 2009). Fundraising or support for particular types of development was not part of the mandate; instead, a greater conceptual understanding of ways of seeing the world was encouraged. To some extent this included critiquing New Zealand's involvement in international aid.

Funding for the centre was withdrawn in 2011, and contested funds that had been available for the sector to provide development education material were gradually discontinued over the next few years. As a result, resources on development issues have been provided largely by the NGO sector and a few independent publishing houses, and for many teachers the Internet has filled the gap. This contraction has meant that critical thinking on development education pedagogy is often only present in some teacher training materials provided by either the NGO sector or Initial Teacher Education providers.

From many conversations with teachers I recognised a range of views towards NGOs in the classroom: some positive, others wary, and some very dismissive of NGO material, including resources from the Global Education Centre. Other teachers also reported that NGO material, although easy to come by and use in the classroom, did not represent countries holistically, and students from these places often challenged these representations (Tallon, 2008). They also commented that using NGO material was often the easiest, and only, source of information about issues in developing countries. Finding people from the developing countries who spoke about their issues without the intermediary of an NGO was difficult to find on the Internet, mostly due to language and cultural barriers.

In 2010 I began a doctorate in development studies to research how young people and their teachers in New Zealand schools were interacting with NGO materials and what messages they interpreted from these materials. I found that many social studies teachers were not fully aware of how best to incorporate and evaluate NGO materials in their classroom. They did, however, appreciate the materials the NGOs provided, if at times they had to adapt them to make them fit their purpose. The seven teachers I interviewed understood the power of the NGO materials and campaigns to raise interest in and promote emotional connections to people and issues very distant to their students' daily lives. Any critical thinking concerning development was

generally within the umbrella of how effective NGOs' proffered solutions were. It was only on very rare occasion that teachers criticised NGO power, their role in development or ideology and the representation of others. Humanitarianism as an ideology is not, itself, immune from criticism (Fassin, 2014), but I found that within the classrooms of my research it was beyond criticism for all but a couple of the teachers. In the following section I present several concerns regarding the NGO sector's role in the classroom that arose in my research and that are also reflected in the literature.

Issues, tensions and criticisms

Educators have argued that both the content of NGO material and the way it is presented to students form a pedagogical practice that is often little understood by the classroom teacher (Andreotti, 2011; Bryan & Bracken, 2011; Smith, 2004). One of the key concerns is that the NGO approach to development maintains the donor–receiver divide. If students are shown a deficit view of a country and then called upon directly or implicitly to assist, the students' understanding of their place in the global hierarchy is ahistorical and apolitical. They come to see themselves as uncritically superior. This extract from my research illustrates this mind-set as two students discussing the role of NGOs in a focus group consider the idea that NGOs exist to improve the Other:[1]

> Ben: I reckon they're good [the NGOs], they help out the poorer countries that can't afford the luxuries that we have over here.

> Joe: And they sort of take our way of living over there and are helping to improve their way of living. (Tallon, 2013, p. 111)

This relates directly to Bourn's concern and his framework presented earlier. Without an overarching conceptual framework for teaching about development, simplistic ideas that reinforce power structures become the key learning outcomes.

A second concern is the use of images and messages that elicit certain emotions to engage the hearts of students. This emotional work is often short lived and the disadvantages long term can outweigh any short-term benefit (Bryan, 2011; Joffe, 2008; Tallon & McGregor, 2014). The emotional pull of NGO campaigning was evident in my research as the young people reported being tired of continuously being

placed under pressure to carry out social action following learning. The following extract from a group of students examining a poster from an NGO campaign illustrates this frustration as the tone of their voices becomes increasingly sarcastic towards the end:

> Tali: I have a question—why are they [the NGO] asking us now?
>
> Bex: Yeah, we're kids, we can't do anything major we can't …
>
> Tali: Yeah, like how can they hang those posters in our classroom? We can't do anything.
>
> Bex: Yeah, like what we gonna do? Stop what we're doing and all start crying … well let's do something as a class, shall we walk to Africa? What can we actually *do*? (Tallon, 2013, p. 162)

As found in similar research with adults (Seu, 2010), the students displayed emotions akin to donor fatigue. This can cultivate a negative predisposition to the sector and, of more concern, to people overseas. Commentators argue that seeing the Other through a pitiable lens, where one is moved/forced to help, hinders a more objective lens on issues concerning poverty (Jefferess, 2002; Orgad & Vella, 2012; Shah & Brown, 2010; Standish, 2009). In the use of emotion, a moral force can be enacted within the classroom that becomes too powerful to question. Students can be led through a range of emotions, from pity through to anger, then guilt. This can develop into different outcomes: from a positive reaction, to one that is negative or cynical, and anywhere in between. NGOs run the risk of cultivating feelings that may lead to social action, but, as the extract above shows, young people can become frustrated when the demand appears too great. Indeed, the learning that takes place may be how the student might avoid or mitigate the demand placed on themselves. This natural 'defence system' is a very real, if unintended, educational outcome.

Andreotti (2006) mapped how differing pedagogical approaches to the teaching of development could result in varying learning outcomes, not all of which were desirable. Negative learning outcomes are difficult to identify because students are not forthcoming with criticisms of the sector. In my research, students sought confirmation that they could speak freely, and a release of some emotions resulted in talk, including thoughts and opinions, usually kept to themselves. The following

hypothetical talk (which is an amalgamation of conversations across two schools from my research) might conceivably be overheard by teachers of geography students after a unit on global inequalities:

Dan: We learnt about x last term. They have bad water / population / air / hygiene / housing / fighting. [choose a deficit]

Jackie: We did a bake sale for them. Glad we helped. Who were they again?

Dan: I dunno, Thailand people or Vietnamese or something.

Jackie: Their country sucked.

In this example, even the NGO that organised the fundraising activity after the unit is not recalled. What has been learnt is that that type of people, 'over there', struggle—their key identifier—and in our position here we are able to assist, if we choose to. In my research I found that students reported feeling empowered that they were able to help but had scant recollection of the recipients of their aid. What was clear was that key learning outcomes from social action were often more about the student being able to close down feelings of guilt and impotence and become a 'change-maker'. Thus, aid and global inequalities became a means by which one is expected to give from time to time, and this was empowering. The system remains the same and the student learns to adopt the mantle of giver, perpetuating inequality through unquestioned action, a donor–receiver relationship that geography should seek to question (Sharp, 2009; Slater, 1997).

Taken together, a third concern is that of negative learning outcomes, which are often part of the unknown element in development education: evaluating the actual outcomes of what is learnt is often difficult (see, for example, Andreotti, 2011; Bourn, 2011; Bryan & Bracken, 2011). For many commentators, the type of talk by students presented above signals troublesome 'deficit thinking' as an unintended educational outcome. It reveals a truncated perspective of global geography and history, leads to false ideas about cultural superiority and closes down ways of thinking about inequality. In addition, it suppresses the voice of the Other and limits international relationships across difference. It is likely that NGOs would agree that this is not the long-term outcome they have in mind, but in a very real sense many are

constrained to present the work they do without encouraging deeper questioning. Bourn (2015) notes that, for many NGOs, having an educational programme that is "rooted in an open-ended learning process that can incorporate critical thinking, reflection and dialogue … may be a luxury that cannot be afforded or tolerated" (p. 163).

This is the question that Bourn tackles: for whose benefit is development education? This is the fourth and central concern that arises for this discussion. Sociologists of education and geography educators present concerns that education *about* development and *support* for development activities are not the same (Baillie-Smith, 2008; Lambert & Morgan, 2011; Standish, 2009). Standish (2009) has argued that NGOs or "activist-centred" political organisations are often presented without criticism in the classroom, causing him to speculate that the discipline is being hijacked by outside forces. Geography can become subject to the "promotion of good causes" (Lambert & Morgan, 2011, p. 14). This raises the pedagogical question of what knowledge about development is being presented to students and how students should be taught about development, including what resources should be used. Geography should help clarify the messages about development in order to give students a way of understanding global inequalities that reflects some disciplinary rigour. A pedagogy that enables teachers to position the NGO material within their classroom and not the other way around may address some of the unease that is expressed by concerned teachers.

Change within the NGO sector

There is a tension within many NGOs regarding their fundraising activities and their education activities among their Northern constituents. How education officers within NGOs see their mission often reflects their background, as either a development or education practitioner. I have personally known many New Zealand NGO education officers who struggle to convince their marketing colleagues of the value of critically informed development education.

From my own observations as a teacher who used many NGO resources, from working at the GEC, and from my subsequent doctoral research, NGO material today has shifted in style and purpose since the early 1990s. A key influence for New Zealand NGO staff involved

in education has been the work that Vanessa Andreotti carried out in staff training while she was in New Zealand in 2006.[2] In addition, training manuals for educators by Oxfam (2006) have also been useful for informing the sector what is good development or global education and what is not. The focus of some of today's NGO material is less about individual actions and NGO projects and more about ensuring students gain a greater understanding of global systems, although certainly some of the previous methods exist. For most established NGOs, long-term thinking through a deeper attitude of solidarity is the aim, rather than instant sign-ups or short-term behavioural change. Having said this, there is not really a comprehensive framework of the sort that Bourn proposes that NGO staff follow. Nevertheless, NGO education staff appear better informed and aware of the criticisms and concerns than prior to the early 2000s.

The NGO sector may have expanded its view towards learning outcomes, but campaigns and one-off fundraising events still occur as part of wider school activities and influence learning about the world. NGO campaigns can present a narrow and deficit view of the people or countries they are concerned with. In my research, a teacher was aware of this and made a comment about the impressions visiting NGOs leave behind after they have spoken to her students in school-wide assemblies:

> I think they're left thinking this is a group of people who live in another country far away, who are poor, who are needy and we are the givers who come in and make their lives better. That they don't have stuff, they live in dirty conditions, yeah. (Tallon, 2013, p. 190)

This teacher identified a tangible learning outcome from an NGO talk to the school's assembly, and it was linked with an emotive response, which was varied. She was keen to ensure a balanced view that did not detract from the intent of the NGO in terms of their mission, and not dismiss the emotions (good and bad) experienced by her students. By doing so, she was able to move out of the humanitarian ideology that shapes NGO material and take a more critical and objective perspective. This enabled her to consider what effect their presentations may be having on her students' learning about other people and development, including their emotional responses. This teacher had noted a

discrepancy between the development education and campaigning. In addition her practical experience of seeing students passionate about an issue one week, and then lose all interest the following week, meant that she was keen to ensure deeper learning took place.[3]

Comparing images: evaluating media representations of development

The teacher mentioned above knew that NGO messaging had a mission and told a particular story. She deliberately sought to balance the view of developing countries by providing her own images of countries she had travelled to. The following images show elements of slum life, a reality for many in the developing world.

For each of the images in Figure 4.1, consider these questions as a subset of the bigger question 'What is development and how does it occur for people who live in slums?'

- Which images show people active in their own futures? How does this empower the subjects in the photo? How does this make you, the viewer, feel?

- Which images refer to institutions of development and how?

- What are you learning when viewing each image—about the nature of slums, people who experience living in slums, and development itself?

- What emotions does each image evoke: pity, curiosity, cynicism, fatigue, boredom, a sense of distance, warmth, encouragement, other feelings?

- Which images strengthen stereotypes, which disrupt them and which images cause more questions to arise in the mind of the viewer? What stereotypes do you have about people who live in slums?

Figure 4.1: Living at the margins
a. Preparing a feast. Image courtesy of Pedram Pirnia.
b. Female literacy class. Image courtesy of Stephen Anderson.
c. Shanty town outside of Madrid. Image courtesy of Rafael Robles.

a.

b.

C.

By considering these questions, the wider process of development and representation is brought to the surface. The key point is that rather than view a unit on slums through a deficit lens, the geography student can start to see people working at various levels towards their own development. The giver–receiver role is diminished, and wider perspectives on a particular aspect of poverty are enacted. The NGO sector is expanded to include both global mechanisms and local grass-roots organisations, and the Western-based NGO is not the centre of attention. In these images the people of the South come to the fore, rather than the NGO sector. This is an important shift in subjectivities.

Conclusion

By standing back from the NGO sector it is possible to consider that, instead of presenting ideas about development, international aid and charity *within* the auspices of an NGO, an alternative approach may deconstruct development as both an industry and as an ideology. This would mean moving away from a formula of 'problems followed by NGO solutions' to mapping how development is a way of thinking about the world that requires consideration by teachers. Bourn unequivocally states that:

> Any educational programme that aims to be located within the traditions of development education has to include a knowledge base around understanding different interpretations of international development, and basic data about global poverty. If it does not, then it cannot be called development education. (2015, p. 125).

Knowledge about development aid includes studying its neo-colonial beginnings and contested aspects of key events, such as the Ethiopia famine of 1985, the Make Poverty History campaigns and the Millennium Development Goals. By exploring the sector it is able to be mapped with known actors (including celebrities) and critics. Voices from the South can be better represented and the NGO sector becomes part of development's bigger picture, rather than its frame. This over-arching mapping would provide geography students with context-independent knowledge, which allows them to transfer under-standing about aid provision between settings. If knowledge is limited to supporting an NGO's campaign messages, this serves the purposes

of the NGO rather than the learner, and the teacher becomes a missionary not an educator (Standish, 2009).

Development studies is a discipline with its own history, theoretical background and active and ongoing debates, in the same way that tourism or migration studies are disciplines in their own right under the broad umbrella of geography. By going beyond the dominant voices and knowledge from the NGO development sector, students may be given the opportunity to critically examine the influence of the sector. This way, geography teachers do not have to choose to become either campaigners or critics; instead, they become educators *about* development. If students are better equipped to view the development industry analytically, then they will be able to make better choices about their relationship to various actors within the industry. Having wider and more powerful knowledge may offset the negative knee-jerk reactions of fatigue or cynicism and provide a much more nuanced understanding of the ways in which global society works, and their role as young people in New Zealand within it.[5]

I began this chapter hoping to explore some of the unease expressed by a fellow geography teacher. The valuable resources and information the NGO sector provides to geography teachers needs to be part of wider scaffolding of what constitutes learning about development: NGOs are not in the best position to provide that scaffolding. Geography teachers are, however, and should consider their conceptual frameworks for studying development so that ideas and actions that result have a solid foundation. Considering how the study of development inequality is guided and asking students questions about the true learning outcomes of their unit may prompt teachers to reflect on the underlying messages about development being learnt in their classrooms. Bourn's four principles of good development education are a framework for teachers to consider. They can help guide teachers in terms of how and for what purpose NGO material may be used in their geography lessons. This way, teachers retain their professional autonomy and their students engage critically and constructively with ideas about development.

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