

*Sección Dos: Textos*  
*Retos y Experiencias en la Construcción de Paz*

## **Is there space for change in Education: Perspectives and debates from critical literacy to sustainable education.<sup>1</sup>**

Hay espacio para el cambio en la educación: Perspectivas y debates, de educación crítica a educación sustentable.

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### **Abstract**

The present work explores the concept of education and engages at the same time with the re-conceptualization of it. The main purpose is to navigate in the different shifts of how education is conceptualized, understood and applied at different levels. The concepts around education and the way it is perceived may have changed but there is the need of doing a deeper analysis around the role and the structures, to sightsee the possibility of greater change in pro of education and an open education dialogue.

### **Resumen**

El presente trabajo explora el concepto de educación y al mismo tiempo se vincula con la re-conceptualización del mismo. El propósito principal es navegar en los diferentes cambios de como la educación es conceptualizada, entendida y aplicada en diferentes niveles. Los conceptos en torno a la educación y la manera en la que es percibida quizás hayan cambiado pero existe la necesidad de hacer un análisis más profundo en cuanto a las estructuras y su rol, para poder visualizar la posibilidad de un cambio en mayor beneficio de la educación y de un canal de comunicación abierto.

**Keywords:** Education Shift, Global Agenda, Post-colonial studies, re-construction of knowledge, multicultural dialogue, educational debate, structural debate.

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## First approach

*A teacher who establishes rapport with the taught, becomes one with them, learns more from them than he teaches them. He who learns nothing from his disciples is, in my opinion, worthless. Whenever I talk with someone I learn from him. I take from him more than I give him. In this way, a true teacher regards himself as a student of his students. If you will teach your pupils with this attitude, you will benefit much from them.*

Mahatma Ghandi

In the shift of century many things have been discussed about education, this proves that there is a need to bring the topic not only at a local or national level but also into the international sphere. Nowadays it has become a trend to talk about the role of education and the importance of it in the global agenda.

Taking into account that UNESCO establishes that education is a human right that has three components of coverage, access and quality, the result of this is evident. The commitment to fulfill the 2030 education agenda and with it the goal of sustainable development 4, is a clear starting point for the so-called global agenda, but it also includes the discourse and understanding of UNESCO and other organizations, there have been adaptations to the debate and to global interests, this is called the Action Plan for Education 2030.

For this reason is imperative to review the discussion around education, not only in spaces like the United Nations or Academia. There is a whole spectrum that should also be take into account like local governments, civil society and social media; the main purpose of it is to answer the question: is there space for change in education? The idea of space is not only related in terms of physical space but rather to the conceptualization of education as a model that reflects a unity between theory and practice, in an interconnected dialogue with different actors keeping open channels to be listen and to be hear.

Elsewhere in Europe, notably in Scandinavia, Netherlands and Germany, and also in Japan, there is evidence from the 1970s onwards of approaches towards education that promote a more international outlook, under themes such as education for international understanding or inter-cultural learning. In some countries there was a strong influence from UNESCO, in others from the increased role of the European Commission or in the case of Japan a conscious move from its imperial past to a

more outward looking view of the world (Bourn, 2012, p. 26)

Therefore, the construction of change in space must start from the premise that there are different starting points and different endings. The main problem around the re-conceptualization of education is to maintain the paternalistic approach of someone who is right and someone who is wrong, rather it should be understood from participation at a community level that embraces education as a practice of humanism and critical vision.

Thus, there is a lack of internal critique in the field and of dialogue with other disciplines where debates about globalisation, identity and global politics and development are in full swing. The area seems to be isolated and undertheorised, as McCollum pointed out in 1996: 'The development education debate (...) remains at a superficial level precisely because there is little discussion of the theory implicit in the practice.' (Andreotti, 2006)

The objective is not to criticize the real understanding of education for development, sustainable education, global learning or education, but to see how the dynamics around education have changed. Thinking that there is room for change implies applying critical literacy to the current system (applying the question at the micro level). Education has somehow been standardized in several conceptualizations where the instrumentalization of the "north" plays an important role, focusing it as a tool that plays an important role that can reduce the inequality and power gaps between the north and the south.

Nevertheless the need to conceptualize the north and therefore the south creates the first dichotomy around the role of education, it has been argued that as part of the discussion education in terms of development should be understood as global learning and there is a strong reason for that. The term development has implicit on it some kind of undergone process that need to be fix, therefore to talk about development education is to talk about education for the underdeveloped, the process of this simply dichotomy is part of the power roles or relations between the north and the south. The benevolent position from which education is provide as aid for the other, for the one that is consider less and need the help to be brought into development.

This part of the debate is even clearer when is put on contrast with the Millennium goals and later on with the sustainable goals. On the other hand global learning or sustainable learning involves a better interaction between the subjects. There is the opportunity to learn from the experience of the south, one thing is the connection with nature and the sustainable need in indigenous knowledge as a valid system from where the concept development could have a better interpretation. A clear example of this is the idea of *sumak kawsay* –well being- but this is not the space to expand that idea.

Back to the debate the shift from one concept to another and at the same time the lack of success of development education in the global south maybe lays on the simply fact that solutions coming from the North are still not well connected to the south, there is still a lack of intercultural connection rather than multicultural. The problem is more complex that only taking the models to apply them in develop countries and see if it works in Africa or South America, there must be a multilingual dialogue an interested in understanding the other, not

only to bring the other to what is conceptualized as good but to feel and be part of that other space.

Therefore, there are (at least) four different possibilities for thinking and action. The first possibility is ‘think as I do, do as I say, there is only one right answer’. The example from development education I use is a quote from a teacher: ‘I teach my students that people in poorer countries lack technology, education and proper work habits. I make sure my students understand that we have a moral obligation to help them by providing assistance through charity and expertise.’ The second possibility is ‘think for yourself and choose responsibly what to do, but there is only one right answer’, which is illustrated in the quote: ‘I teach my students that they need to be critical thinkers – to separate facts from opinions and to search for impartial, objective information to construct their arguments. I believe rational and scientific reasoning is the only way to achieve a just and prosperous society. (Andreotti, Critical literacy: theories and practices in development education , 2014, p. 18)

A test of a better connection, even taking into account the lack of resources, is the application of better programs among the global south. There are many examples that should be taken into account in the so-called South-South cooperation. There is a narrative between the different regions of the world that, due to the similarities (Colonization and colonial structures) talk to each other in a better way, there are no simple solutions, but at least there is a better effort to understand the other.

“Within the wisdom language of a collective Mestiza/o Body, curriculum lives and breathes to defy and ultimately heal a colonizing curriculum of “ illegal histories, rape, murder, slavery, bad pronunciation of the names of streets, rivers, towns, the loss of our names entirely” (Sosa-Provencio, 2018, p. 98)

Therefore, the lack of success is also found in the ambiguous spaces where the discussion of education takes place, theory and practice are not related to real spaces and real needs, in a clearer sense what development or Sustainable means means the academy is not so close to what it means in small communities in the Amazon rainforest or in small island countries of Oceania. The space of discussion around education is full of incomplete narratives.

From this point to re-think education is important and for that is necessary to: learn how to unlearn, to learn what to learn and to learn how to listen. The problem of change in education is that nothing has changed in the base of education, there is still the idea that there is a good system and a bad education system, there is also a strong relationship between language and education, It is for this that there is the strong believe of some languages are more important than others, and that with some languages people will achieve more than with other and this is only the result of the lack of space in the shift of education.

There must be a re-appropriation of the space, there is not bad education but bad system in which education take place, because what is taught in the jungle of Ecuador is crucial in terms of cultural identity, life learning and roots understanding for that people and is this process

of global learning that must put the rest of the world in a clear perspective of not only one development education but a multi education system.

So the dialogue must take place in different spaces, the indigenous space, the intercultural space, the progressive space, the technological space and others. The connectivity of these spaces at different levels and situations could lead to a true global learning and therefore to a positive answer to the most important question. Is there space for change in education? And if the answer gets lost in theory may be something is wrong.

### **Final remarks: Education of the west, the rest and new possibilities.**

Andreotti (2014) presented in her critical literacy important questions like: Why development education was created, who created and with what purpose, where was it focused on which regions, how and why is presented to local governments. The main purpose of these questions is to re-frame ourselves in the debate not only of development education but in the continuity of it nowadays, may be there is a shift in the terminology but this questions are a solid starting point for any research in terms of structural change.

It has generated a dichotomy, a duality as to what represents the notion of development education of the west and what would be the rest, a category in which Latin America has also been framed on several occasions (Hall, 1992). Here the importance of being able to offer categories as a mechanism of oppression or control (Freire). The categorization granted to Latin America and Africa impels the necessity of studies not only postcolonial but decolonial taking into account theirs own history, under this premise it sustains the idea of relation between both regions beyond colonization in terms of education systems (Rodney, 1973).

The concept or idea of "the West" can be seen to function in the following ways: First, it allows us to characterize and classify societies into different categories... Secondly, it is an image, or set of images. It condenses a number of different characteristics into one picture... Thirdly, it provides a standard or model of comparison. It allows us to compare to what extent different societies resemble, or differ from, one another... Fourthly, it provides criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster... the West itself was produced by certain historical processes operating in a particular place in unique (and perhaps unrepeatable) historical circumstances... (Hall, 1992, p. 277)

The social protest from a cultural and historical point of view gives the necessary arguments for the construction of critical thinking around the phenomena of each region, hence framing political reality, social protest and emancipation as universal principles falls into the Marxist logic that does not allow to land these phenomena as principles that are not universal and that have their own characteristics "Instead of this limiting approach, analysis should start from political reality and locate education with in that reality rather than presuming that educations is a universal phenomenon with a fixed politics" (Branch & Zachariah, 2015, p. 7).

The Papua New Guinea narrative illustrates the gamut of a comparative education research agenda as it demonstrates the translations and dialectics of global agendas in a postcolonial setting. International goals for education are designed to address real educational issues; however, the contextual complexities that impede successful translation of global imperatives are deeply entrenched with ongoing uncritical acceptance of educational priorities and models, dependency on foreign finance and conceptualization for leading educational change (Mohok McLaughlin, 2017, pp. 217 - 218)

The construction or search for an identity based on other (Alteraty) or on the differentiation of the other, from the colonizer, allows us to notice in a first instance certain brushstrokes or similarities in the narrative of both continents. Take the example of Oceania and the relation between what was taught and what was need it, this plays a very important role in the life of the different communities. In the same line, but with different results, the colonizer's tax agenda to control the educational system of the "mestizo" does not show the creative impact of education but the destructive impact of pedagogy without a sense of construction but of imposition.

In the lives of Indigenous and Indigenous-heritage Mexicana/o youth, the imposed curriculum that ordered colonial schooling has been one of the strongest weapons in the cultural and political conquest of the Americas (Gonzales-Berry, 2000 ; González, 1999 ; Kleyn, 2010 ; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006 ; San Miguel, 1999). Anzaldúa (1990 ) characterizes this imposed infiltration of the colonizers' language, worldview, religion, and knowledge systems as forced cultural penetration (Anzaldúa, 1990 , p. 143); (Sosa-Provencio, 2018, p. 95)

Is in the role of the educator to give birth to a new society this through the implementation of his full roll with new generations, there is the need of critical education, which will create critical attitudes in students, from here the process of using new spaces for re-shaping education is more feasible that in other kind of framework. The question at the beginning of this essay was to open the possibility of change in the space of education. There are several debates today about education and the role of education, these debates should be adopted in the sense of giving birth to more complex, dynamic and comprehensive education systems.

The special contribution of the educator to the birth of the new society would have to be a critical education which could help to form critical attitudes, due to the naïve conscience with which people had emerged in the historical process have made them an easy prey of irrationality.

From a realistic approach there are structures and superstructures in the sense of Marx that must be overcome, however, critical literacy combined with a more curious world has accelerated the emergence of many movements to challenge this, in favor of a new dynamic system, not Only dynamic but more respectful and conscious (aware), for a more sustainable development.

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