

DFID and development education

After decades of government neglect, development education has in recent years experienced a dramatic increase in support and funding from the Department for International Development. **Ben Hammond** examines the possible impacts that this evolving relationship may have on the ownership and direction of DE.

The Department for International Development (DFID) and wider government set a context – through commission or omission – within which development education (DE) operates. Our understandings of government are important as these shape our interactions and eventual outcomes.

Following the resignation of Clare Short and the appointment of Valerie Amos as the new Secretary of State within DFID, and potential changes in focus and strategy, it's a good time to think about the Department and the DE sector's past, present and potential relations with it.

The research orientation taken here is largely based on my MA thesis, which examined how DFID and wider government's theoretical underpinnings may be influencing DE (see Hammond 2002).

DFID's standpoint

If DFID's over-riding aim of poverty eradication is to succeed, the Department must 'build support for development' in order to mobilise the political will necessary to put in place policies to achieve it. This task is approached through a combination of (1) lobbying, negotiation and partnership within central and ministerial government, (2) internal policy designed to demonstrate organisational credibility and bolster belief in development (commitments to increase the aid budget, to end tying of aid, to target aid and make it more effective), and (3) communications of various forms – public relations, programme communication and more general advocacy on development issues.

Development education has been seen – not least because of support from former Secretary of State for International Development Clare Short – as a major channel through which DFID's development awareness programme should proceed. In addition to satisfying DFID's aim of supporting development, its job is to increase public understanding of our global interdependency and globalisation (Calvert 2001), so people can 'understand the key global considerations which will shape their lives' (DFID 1997: 77). The precise form of DE DFID are looking to use is governed in part by its development awareness objectives which form the base criteria for funding applications: to promote knowledge and understanding of development, our global interdependence, the poverty reduction agenda and efforts to achieve it via the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and of the role individuals can play on the basis of informed choice (see DFID 2003a). These DE parameters are framed by DFID's DE strategy, the essence of which comprises five elements: (1) prioritising formal education and schools above all else,

(2) communicating more 'user-friendly' messages, (3) separating education and advocacy, (4) approaching organisation and delivery strategically, and (5) targeting resources to achieve 'sustainable impact' (see Calvert 2001, Vereker 2000) – impact which sees the DE baton taken up and implemented over the long term by actors within educational circles.

Determining factors

This strategy and DFID's engagement with DE more widely are products of the interplay of many related factors, a brief tour of which is necessary in explaining the Department's standpoint:

- History highlights how (1) *actions of the state have been key in determining the course of DE* (Conservative administrations between 1979 and 1997 viewed much DE as leftist propaganda and cut its funding – leaving a DE community rooted within a defensive voluntary sector; the centralised, subject-based national curriculum (from 1988) has provided ongoing challenges and opportunities for DE and has formed the basis of formal sector work), (2) *forms of DE have evolved with concepts and practices of both development and education* (see Hammond 2002, McCollum 1996) – DFID's view of these will impact upon the DE they sponsor; and (3) *DE has been rooted within the development sector* – witness historical primacy of the development NGO and the overseas development ministry; the continual accusation of DE isolated from multi-cultural, human rights, environmental, community, informal and popular educations, education sector funding and participation, and a broader public constituency. This marginality of DE in relation to educational structures and processes is a fundamental challenge informing DFID policy.
- Globalisation is said to be the most significant context influencing government policy – development, education and DE included (see for example Calvert 2001, Short 1998, DfEE 1998). Yet it is the government's reading of this phenomena – a realist take on globalisation as inexorable, an apolitical construct – which forms their developmental (competing in a global marketplace) and educational (means to achieve this) orientations. In development and education, redistributive and equality-based concerns are added to a core of neo-liberal fundamentals: emphases on participation, transparency, specificity and local

ownership are added to a Washington Consensus bedrock (see Batt in BOND 2000), schools observe a governmental mainstreaming of sustainability, social inclusion and citizenship (among others) occurring within a context of competitive forces, a controlled, fragmented and standards-driven curriculum, and a vocational-instrumental educational orientation. Crucially for a DE enshrining the idea that development is contested, the DFID voice is one of determinism – paths to success are known and owned; lying in their way is simply the task of mobilising others to follow these prescribed routes (see for example DFID 2000, Short 1996, DfEE 1997: 12).

- Government and DFID are not monolithic entities however: mainstreaming of a globalisation orientation through ‘joined up government’ negotiates a mix of (often competing) interests, objectives and interpretation largely determined by relations of power (see Hewitt 2001, Short 1998, Mosley 2000). DFID’s decision-making is highly decentralised (Cox and Healy 1998), lacking a clear, overarching, implementation strategy for some time (see Flint *et al* 2002). Its directive coherence to internal departments including the Information and Civil Society Department (ICSD) and the team responsible for development awareness is questionable. However there have been changes as can be seen from the 1997 and 2000 White Papers where there is movement from a strong vision/weak strategy to a more strategic take on policy to guide implementation. Similarly in DE terms, DFID has moved from a high level of openness (DFID was new to a previously ostracised DE field, and needed to learn) to a more strategic orientation. The Department used a Development Awareness Working Group (DAWG) to help formulate its 1999 strategy. The Development Awareness Fund (DAF) criteria has over time become more specific and directive as can be witnessed and experienced in the rolling out of the strategic Enabling Effective Support (EES) initiative.
- If DFID interacts with others in the DE field, the actions of both must determine the impact of DFID: both must be scrutinised, bringing the actions of players such as the DEA, UK development NGOs and DEC’s into view.

Ann McCollum’s research (see McCollum 1996) posited that DEC’s own agency went a long way to determine a circumstance of continual insecurity, vulnerability, high dependence on the external policy environment, and marginality in terms of educational structures. While the main criticisms of the research (of generalising what’s happening in a widely varying field) are valid, a key question posed – to what extent the structure within which DE operates is determined by its own constituents’ actions – remains highly relevant. Is causality ever fully unidirectional, responsibility one-dimensional?

Impacts and challenges

In formally recognising a previously marginalised DE fraternity, including the regional DEC network, DFID has added-value: bestowing legitimacy upon its funding recipients and enabling greater influence in dealings with wider audiences and new stakeholders. It has also engaged and responded to many expressed needs – witness the creation of the DAF, an open and evolving application procedure encouraging dialogue, the locally embedded small-grants scheme, and the prioritising of key areas in response to participatory DAWG deliberations. DFID itself has also taken up the DE baton and argued its corner within other important sectors of government, facilitating wider and deeper reach of DE messages in higher decision-making echelons – although relevant curricular guidelines remain at a level of (subordinate) recommendation and funding from other areas of government simply isn’t there.

Relative to the previous administration however government funding for DE through DFID has seen a dramatic quantitative scaling-up: from approximately £1.3m annually (1996/97) to a figure consistently in excess of £5m per year by 2000/01 (which, with more DE going on, should mean a greater DE impact), supporting over 125 one to three-year projects through DFID’s DAF (from 1999–2003) and approximately 50 smaller projects per year through its small-grants scheme (representing a increasingly broad directory of project ownership). Government is now by far the biggest single funding source in the UK, raising important questions as to the ownership and direction of DE: diversity, autonomy and sustainability are increasingly relevant.

In prioritising the formal education sector, DFID has directed and mobilised resources (most significantly via EES) where it feels it can best foster added-value to its investment, and where it may be able to ascertain most tangible outcomes. Yet does DFID’s prioritisation result in the neglect of important areas – are languages of informal and youth and community-based DE neglected because of the actions of DFID, or should others be funding more of this work?

‘Talk[ing] the language of formal education’ (Calvert 2001) – reflected primarily through DFID’s promotion of the term ‘global dimension’ – does represent a serious effort to move away from both the isolated ivory towers of development-speak (to bring DE more immediacy and relevance in educational contexts) and DE’s historical association with advocacy and pre-determined outcomes. But does DFID recognise the contradictory and political nature of its preferred form of DE? The tying of DE to support for *their* development agenda; the realisation that DE must provide choice, yet DAF guidelines pre-determining this choice (see Cameron and Fairbrass 2000); the Department’s ongoing drive to ‘inform’ a ‘misinformed’ public (DFID the owner of ‘real’ understanding) (Vereker 2000); the global dimension potentially constructed as a content-based formula for cognitive understanding versus a

critical educational process for active participation in change (see for example Shotton 2002) – these evidence the political nature of the choices being made. Yet to give balance to these concerns, it is DE players who are predominantly responsible for the delivery of DFID's objectives, and who interpret, filter and act within the spaces and contradictions of these criteria.

Seeking to 'unlock the creative potential from within the education sector' (DFID 2003b), Enabling Effective Support attempts to build a framework of regional support for teachers in their delivery of the global dimension, and is essentially a *strategic response to the ongoing challenge of educational marginality*. The scheme's early life was criticised for lack of transparency and clarity (shifting goalposts perhaps an expected result for an initiative looking for local ownership yet simultaneously providing many of the terms upon which the initiative would proceed) – although now in its implementation phase, it has stimulated significant new partnerships between development and educational protagonists. However, while there is partnership, questions of ownership remain – whether the structures built will be sustainable without continued support for DFID as initial criteria stipulated – questions which have serious implications for continued DFID funding. The DE field might point to a fallacy of ambition when contrasting lofty aims with funding and timescale: for an initiative looking to foster long-term educational ownership, the Department for Education and Skills provides no funding, DFID what funding there is. Where does DFID's DE work then turn after five years? How far are DE protagonists responsible for EES outcomes? Is the debate that was hoped to be stimulated by EES still there?

Considering the resignation of Clare Short and installation of Baroness Amos as Secretary of State for International Development, what impact will this have on both the importance of 'Building Support for Development' within development policy, the team responsible for development education within DFID, and the funding allocations and parameters of the DAF?

But with the changing views as to what DE can be (increasingly to foster a global literacy in the wake of globalisation), and the expanding list of those with a stake in its delivery, the question as to who is responsible for funding DE must be increasingly asked. If DE deals with global development, can and should its lobbyists and traditional practitioners, complete with the conflicting interests of self-preservation/enhancement and the task of uprooting (what must become a fluid) DE from its traditional home to new educational waters, continue to seek the vast majority of funding from donors who retain a predominantly 'overseas' focus?

The DFID experiment is neither a wholly negative or positive-sum game – opportunities and threats pervade: engagement is essential. Traversing fine lines between agendas of both development and education, and those of young people themselves, is fraught with difficulty: risks of

co-optation and constriction flow from co-operation. The challenges are immense. By joining with others, by finding those spaces, by building, recognising and working with our agency, by questioning the necessity of our structural boundaries and by analysing our own discourse, is it possible to move towards placing an inclusive 'education as development' at the heart of young people's experience – no longer clambering for a foot in the door of a disinterested or unable home?®

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