

Book review

The Critical Global Educator. Global Citizenship Education as Sustainable Development

M. Ellis, London & New York, Routledge, 2016, Pp. xv + 246, ISBN: 978-1-138-88780-0 (hb): £95.00; ISBN: 978-1-315-71394-6 (eBook)

The critical global educator: Global citizenship education as sustainable development by Maureen Ellis is part of the *Routledge Research in International and Comparative Education Series*. Departing from the premise that “[a]n acknowledged challenge for democratic, humanitarian education is its perceived lack of philosophical and theoretical foundation, often resulting in low academic status and reduced prestige” (book flyer), the author presents a variety of theoretical approaches intended to provide critical global educators with a tool for reflection, evaluation and action. Approaches include Critical Social Theory, Critical Discourse Studies and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The book builds on the author’s empirical PhD research (Institute of Education, University College London, UK) comprising surveys, focus-groups and interviews with over 500 international teachers, teacher educators, International Non-Government Organisations, administrators and academics. The analysis provides a rich and integral picture of the critical global educator.

After a preface, the book is organised in seven chapters and eight appendices. Eleven figures and tables related to the theoretical approaches discussed facilitate the reading of the text, addressed to researchers, academics and postgraduate students in fields such as citizenship, development, global education, sustainability, social justice, human rights and professional development. The text might however prove dense and obscure at times, particularly for the ordinary practitioner, educator and policymaker—also identified as intended readers. Aware of the magnitude of the task at hand, i.e. providing a philosophical and theoretical framework to conceptualise the critical global educator, Ellis is careful to include chapter overviews, section summaries and concluding remarks in each chapter. The appendices comprise tools, materials and research instruments that

are valuable for the researcher.

The starting point for Ellis' argument refers to the fragmented nature and origins of the term *global education* (comprising several key notions such as sustainable development, global citizenship and citizenship), which lead her to coin the acronym GCESD for *global citizenship education as sustainable development*. Her aim is powerful: "empower every discipline, each disciple committed to global learning and teaching, to realise transformational socio-political justice" (p. x). This broad focus is illuminated by her background and experience in language education and applied linguistics that includes teaching, teacher training and consultancies in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Australia.

Chapter 1 provides a biographical trajectory of the author's life revealing personal, professional and other challenges and linking this trajectory to specific theoretical perspectives. After Ellis' critical stance is disclosed in this chapter, Chapter 2 defines global citizenship education as sustainable development (GCESD). Involved in the conceptualisation is the acknowledgement and description of factors (including political, commercial, industrial, environmental and other aspects) that tend to prevent transformational socio-political justice in general education, illustrated with the UK setting. The chapter introduces three research questions that become the book's thread: What conceptualisation of a critical global educator is available from the literature?; To what extent can a methodological framework based on CHAT provide a tool for self- or negotiated evaluation of critical global educators?; What factors influence the personal and professional development of the critical global educator?

Chapter 3 addresses the first research question: What conceptualisation of a critical global educator is available from the literature? A complex philosophy and theory for critical global educators is described, which involves eight key concepts: sustainable development, diversity, values and perceptions, social justice, global citizenship, human rights, interdependence and conflict resolution. The author argues for critical transformational pedagogy aimed at addressing the "deeper purposes of education" (p.79) and critical discourse studies to "empower collective consciousness towards freedom for all" (p.79).

Chapter 4 deals with the second research question: To what extent can a methodological framework based on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provide a tool for self- or negotiated evaluation of critical global educators? The method combines life story, case study and semi-structured interviews and in this chapter the author reports findings from surveys, focus group discussions and interviews to conclude that "CHAT's analytical framework provides a principled, practical methodology for systemic, self- or negotiated evaluation of critical global educators" (p.86).

Chapter 5 analyses three key policy documents in Britain which all support teaching

the global dimension in schools. These are *Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum* (Department for Education and Skills, 2005); *Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools* (Oxfam, 2006); and *The Global Dimension in Action* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007). The author claims that a “discrete disciplinary curriculum, disconnected from the media, medium or multimodality of students’ existence, further distances powerful disciplinary knowledge and multiple literacies from agency, productivity and politico-economic global integrity” (p.115). Observing several profound weaknesses in policy, provision and practice for this global dimension, the chapter becomes a harsh critique that highlights the need for a rigorous philosophical and theoretical underpinning. The author claims that this book offers such basis.

A long chapter 6 addresses the third research question: What factors influence the personal and professional development of the critical global educator?, by presenting interview findings from 18 participants. It succeeds in portraying a complex and deep tapestry of their educational trajectories involving personal, professional, political and other dimensions illustrated in solid and multiple descriptive and narrative vignettes.

Chapter 7 emphasises once more the value of CHAT from a methodological standpoint. Stemming from the theoretical discussion and empirical evidence in previous chapters, Ellis makes eight recommendations: critical discourse studies should frame GCESD in teacher education; curriculum developers and teachers educators should bring to the foreground the political, cultural and other underlying discourses in their disciplines; policymakers should explicitly lead to GCESD; educators should get involved with critical action research; higher education institutions should implement and evaluate critical GCESD, coordinating interdisciplinary partnerships involving the school, the community and the university; they should also establish long-term alliances with international non-government organisations; university research capacity should be developed through transnational partnerships; and thematic global research networks (transdisciplinary, international, multi-stakeholder) should be developed.

Finally, the appendices are in general useful and can be seen as one of the book’s assets. Appendix 1 lists initiatives (global, regional, national—since 1928) and publications related to GCESD. Appendices 2 and 3 include sample handouts that the author used in teacher-training sessions, related to the research. Appendix 4 presents a timeline of the activities undertaken during the five-year research reported but does not really add much. Appendix 5 includes details about the survey, focus groups and interviews.

Overall, this book represents a theoretical and empirical contribution to an understanding of global citizenship education as sustainable development and a conceptualisation of the critical global educator. Drawing on rich data from a case study

involving 500 participants in the British context, Ellis' in-depth analysis gives voice to 18 interviewees in a vivid portrayal of the critical global educator. Descriptive and narrative vignettes with the participants' voices, accompanying figures and useful appendices counterbalance the dense writing at times, which presupposes a knowledgeable and well-informed reader.

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