

**Education, democracy and development: does education contribute to democratisation in developing countries?** by Cliver Harber and Vusi Mncube, Oxford, Symposium Books Limited, 2012, 189 pp., £24 (paperback), ISBN 978-1873927717

The question of whether education either is or could be democratic is not a new one. As this book itself details, thinkers from developing countries such as Paulo Freire in Brazil or Julius Nyerere in Tanzania have provided us radical ways of re-thinking our understanding of how education might function, while influential texts such as Sen's *Development as Freedom* have perhaps started to challenge the hegemony of the discourse which conceives education solely for economic growth. What this recent book from Harber and Mncube offers is a review of the disparate texts and bodies of work which focus on the political implications of forms of education, providing a good introduction to some of the key theoretical debates and historical approaches to education and development, as well as usefully drawing together a wide range of empirical studies conducted over the last 20 years or so, focusing on 'so-called "developing" countries' (7).

The book begins by setting out two polarised versions of what states might look like – either democratic or authoritarian – and maps these onto forms of ideal citizenship and the resulting variations in the models of education. This first chapter goes on to unpack the notion of democracy, acknowledging that there are a number of different forms of governance which might fall under the broader definition of 'democratic', and that a 'thicker' notion of democracy requires permeation of democratic values into both the state and wider society. Reflecting upon the relationship between these forms of democracy, and the 'development' work which has characterised the post-Colonial moment, the authors describe what they see as an 'emerging consensus' that democracy should be the goal of development (24). The following chapter then reviews some of the ways in which thinkers have conceptualised the work of education within this autocracy/democracy binary, teasing out some of the implications for pedagogy, school governance and the curriculum.

In Chapter 3, the authors start to question how we might educate for democracy and what a democratic school might look like, before discussing some of the common barriers and obstacles to democratic schooling in chapter four. Chapters three to five thus turn usefully to a more practice-orientated discussion, giving examples and cases from particular schools and research studies, before taking a holistic perspective in the final chapter to the case of democracy and education in South Africa. All three of these final chapters afford central roles to pupil voice and participation and the need for good quality teacher education, and the ways in which schools and forms of education can 'prefigure' democracy (68–69, citing McCowan). These chapters also helpfully draw out the kinds of ways in which knowledge and the acquisition or transmission of knowledge can be conceptualised, whether as 'safe, fixed and discoverable truths', or conversely 'controversial and critical' forms of knowledge which draw on experience and creativity. The authors thus work hard to debunk the myth that education is ever politically or ideologically neutral – whether in terms of the curriculum, pedagogical and student engagements with texts, aspects of teacher training and practice or school governance.

Authoritarian ideologies are also linked in chapter four to key obstacles to democracy such as violence in schools, highlighting the interrelationship between schools which work to 'discipline bodies as well as to regulate minds' (113), and broader forms of social and political control. The discussion of violence and social control has particular salience for the case study of South Africa, which forms the basis of the final chapter and brings some of the key debates throughout the book together in one context. The case of South Africa serves to

highlight well that democratic education is often partial, involving a highly complex set of negotiations between different actors with different levels of power.

While I felt that the overall structure and content of this book worked well, I felt that there were some key absences which would have enriched the depth of perspective. My critique of this book is thus twofold. Firstly, while I very much welcomed the inclusion of a range of empirical research to support analysis and theory, I think that there were points in the book in which the authors left the research to stand, without building sustained critiques and dialogue between studies with opposing results. In chapter 2 for example, the authors cited research from Malawi which found a positive relationship between respondents' 'understanding of democracy' and education level (44), but which was closely followed by a discussion of research in a number of countries which found a weak, and sometimes even negative, effect of primary and secondary education on 'the emergence and consolidation of democratic regimes' (45). While the authors acknowledged that these studies were 'measuring different things' (46), there could have, in my view, been more analytical work done to tease out the differences in the ways and contexts in which the studies were conducted, and how this might impact upon our understandings of their contradictory findings.

My second concern is that there were some key debates and forms of analysis which I felt were absent from the book, and which I felt would have added nuance and richness to the authors' discussion. While I found the idea in chapter one of a general historical shift from economic motives for development to democratic ones quite useful, this analysis rested with Sen in 1999, leaving out the more recent contested process around the Millennium Development Goals. While the authors may not see these as related to democracy, they are certainly central to development, and some of the discussion around how they do or do not promote democracy would have added a more up-to-date feel to the discussion, particularly by engaging with the debates around the absence of equity or violence from the MDG framework. This might also have taken the authors into useful ground exploring whether some form of democratic values should find its way into the targets and asks of the post-2015 agenda, or whether, as some of the case studies seemed to suggest, radical democratic values can only find their way into education at the margins.

I also felt that while the book does at points mention gender and race, that the absence of a dynamic gendered or intersectional critique of some of the debates and case studies would have been useful. An intersectional perspective on the discussion of curricula, for example, would have opened space for reflection on the ways in which students' and teachers' engagements with curricula are gendered, raced and classed, as well as ways in which curricula can either explicitly or implicitly marginalise particular groups, exploring the links between these processes and democracy. In my own research in a Maasai school in Tanzania, for example, I found that particular aspects of the Civics national curriculum, presented as fixed truths about health, were resisted in classes by both students and teachers when they were seen as irrelevant to the needs or norms of the community. Conversely in a literature curriculum, the discussion of the same topics through a variety of characters' perspectives led to more lively and engaged pluralist debate, which particularly drew in female students. A gender or intersectional analysis often offers a way to better understand the complex processes which take place in classrooms, and how both form and content can enhance or stifle democratic development.

This kind of gender approach would also have been useful in the discussion of violence in chapter four, which did not reflect enough, in my view, on the complex ways in which violence is experienced. While the authors stated that discrimination against 'females' occurs in a variety of different educational contexts and settings (111–112), they did not do enough analytical work to tease out ways in which boys and girls experience violence such as

corporal punishment differently, with very different consequences in terms of drop-out and results, as well as in terms of rights and identities. Nor did the authors make links between sexual violence and broader forms of gendered inequalities. Some of this analysis might lead to useful discussion of the potential convergence with notions of 'thicker' democracy and social justice, which is, in my view, a central component of a properly functioning democratic system.

I do not think that the critiques which I have offered here mean that this book is not useful or interesting, particularly to students, academics or practitioners who are looking for an introduction into theories and case studies around education and democracy. My sense is more that for academics who are familiar with the existing debates, there are other texts which take on our thinking in new directions, which this book does not set out to do.

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