Developing a Pedagogy of Resistance in Development Education

Stephen McCloskey[1]

In July 1984, eleven shopworkers in a Dublin branch of the supermarket chain Dunnes Stores, came out on strike action following a trade union directive that members were not to handle South African produce in protest against apartheid. Mary Manning, just twenty-one at the time, was the first to leave her post having refused to handle the sale of South African grapefruit. Mary and her co-workers remained out on strike for nearly three years surviving on strike pay of just £21 per week. Over that time, their industrial action became the focus of international media coverage that was only amplified when they were refused permission to stay in South Africa by the apartheid government having been invited by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Manning, 2017: 159). The strike ultimately resulted in the Irish government introducing a ban on the import of South Africa produce in April 1987 illustrating the power of non-violent direct action at a local level carried out in solidarity with a global campaign against injustice. Forty years after the start of the Dunnes Stores action in July 2024, Mary Manning addressed a national protest for Palestine in Dublin calling for a boycott of Israeli goods in response to the genocide in the Gaza Strip (O'Sullivan, 2024). She recognized parallels between Israel's apartheid of Palestinians - designated as such by Israeli human rights organisation, B'Tselem in 2021 and Amnesty International in 2022 – and the oppressive system of segregation and domination perpetrated by the white minority South African government against the majority Black population between 1948 and 1994.

The Gaza genocide has sparked solidarity activism across the world from the thousands of workers who observed an industrial day of action in Italy in September 2025 (Kassam, 2025) to the 553 student protests held on university campuses across America between 18 April and 3 May 2024 (Beckett, 2024). Most state solidarity for Palestine has come from the global South, particularly The Hague Group (2025) of eight nations that have united to take 'coordinated legal and diplomatic measures' against Israeli violations of international law. Only Spain and Slovenia of EU member states have implemented sanctions on Israel to date while the EU as a bloc has steadfastly refused to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement, a lucrative trading pact that could be used as leverage to stop the genocide (Magee, 2026). There has been a contrasting response to the genocide in countries across the global North between civil society organisations and the public on the one hand, who for the most part have stood in solidarity with

[1] Stephen McCloskey is Director of the Centre for Global Education and Editor of the journal, *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review.*

Palestine and, on the other, complicit governments that have supported and sustained Israel's barbarity in Gaza and expanding settler colonialism in the occupied West Bank.

Breaking the silence on Palestine

But where does the development education sector stand on Israeli war crimes? If 'Palestine is a moral litmus test for the world', as suggested by the political activist and academic Angela Davis (2023), then does the development education sector pass or fail that test? A growing clamour of voices in the sector have pointed to a 'non-response' to the genocide and a worrying detachment from the sector's Freirean roots in an authentic political pedagogy of liberation and transformation. 'Political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word', argued Freire, 'and, therefore, action *with* the oppressed' (Freire, 2000: 66). In her analysis of the non-response from development educators to the genocide, Caroline Murphy (2024: 136) asked whether the sector 'has become depoliticised from its radical foundations and reified into a system where it is "safe" and more "comfortable" to be collectively silent and non-responsive during periods of extreme settler-colonial violence and oppression'.

Five early career researchers in global citizenship education (GCE) have joined 'the increasingly explicit critique of the field that exposes its hypocrisy: employing value laden terms without accompanying action' (de Vries et al., 2026: 140). They have called for solidarity *with* and *for* Palestine and Palestinians that involves 'working alongside Palestinians in collective struggle' and taking 'actions that disrupt the erasure of Palestinian voices within curricula, research, and institutional structures' (Ibid.: 141). They pose a series of self-reflective questions for GCE practitioners that offer an 'entry point' for introducing Palestine into their practice (Ibid.: 151).

In her reflections on a 'pedagogy of non-silence', Su-ming Khoo argues that 'Silence is an outcome, a symptom, as well as a root cause of oppression and injustice' (2024: 146). So, why the silence on Palestine in a sector committed to social justice? Part of the 'why' lies in the humanitarian mission of the international development sector, the parental influence on development education with funding toward global learning often funnelled through aid budgets. For example, global citizenship education funding is dispersed in Ireland by Irish Aid, the arm of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs responsible for development assistance (Government of Ireland, 2024). If our analysis of the Gazan genocide is refracted purely through a humanitarian lens then we are left with a partial and inadequate understanding of its root causes necessary for any kind of effective remedial action. As United Nations Rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian Territory, Francesca Albanese (2026: 102-103), posits:

> *"For too long the Palestinian issue has been reduced to a humanitarian crisis, instead of being dealt with as a political issue to be resolved in accordance with international law. To confine ourselves to giving aid without addressing the structural causes of the crisis is to perpetuate injustice by normalising it, rather than doing everything possible to eradicate it".*

Many of our international development agencies have framed Gaza in terms of its humanitarian deficits such as food, water, shelter and medicine rather than analysing their political causes and critiquing the role of Europe and North America in sustaining these war crimes. For example, former British prime minister Keir Starmer (2023) said that Israel had the right to deny Palestinians water and electricity in Gaza despite that being a collective crime against a civilian population in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention (ICRC, 1949). This callous disre-

gard for international law since 7 October 2023 has become normalised and by depoliticising their activities, those global educators and international development agencies that framed the Gazan genocide in purely humanitarian terms rather than one rooted in settler-colonialism have become complicit in that genocide.

Decolonising development education

Another significant dimension of the 'why' question regarding the non-response to the Gazan genocide has been the dominance of a Eurocentric approach to development in the international non-governmental sector. A 2024 study by political economists Surbhi Kesar and Ingrid Kvangraven of INGOs affiliated to BOND, the UK network for organisations working in international development, found that 'Eurocentrism dominates the INGO sector as a whole' (Kesar and Kvangraven, 2024: 5). Eurocentrism 'assumes development in the Global North was based solely on improvements in scientific and technical progress, rationality and productivity'. It conveniently ignores 'all forms of oppression that contributed to the development of capitalism, such as dispossession, exploitation, colonialism, the slave trade, patriarchal structures and other forms of structural oppression' (Ibid.: 11). By removing political memory and uncomfortable truths from their practice, international NGOs could be co-opted to implement neoliberal paradigms of development that by-passed 'inefficient' governments in the global South as part of an 'NGO-isation' of development interventions (Ibid: 8). An unwritten compact of Eurocentrism is that INGOs limit their critique of governments to acceptable areas of policy discourse such as overseas development assistance (ODA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More contentious and political aspects of development such as colonialism, neoliberal structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), tax havens used by corporations and the super-rich to evade taxation, and unpayable global South debt are out of bounds for all but a minority of INGOs.

As the dominant policy instrument for international development, the SDGs are emblematic of a sector shorn of transformative approaches to development. The Goals are wedded to the traditional growth paradigm measured by profit rather than social need and devoid of a historical framing that could contextualise the problems they have been established to address. Without historical memory and transformative solutions, the Goals are trudging toward inevitable failure with only 35 per cent of the SDG targets on target or 'making moderate progress' ahead of their end point in 2030 (UN, 2025: 2).

Global capitalism

A fatal flaw at the heart of the Global Goals and contemporary development education practice is their failure to critique global capitalism and its systemic impact across society including class inequality, the climate emergency, the suppression of labour rights, privatisation of public services, the hollowing out of democracy and rise of the far-right. These crises have coalesced as capitalism entered a new accelerated period of rampant globalisation, financialisation and corporatisation since the 1980s with the adoption by the Euro-Atlantic economies of neoliberalism. What distinguishes neoliberalism from previous forms of capitalism is its predatory nature that commercialises all public goods into profit-making entities which service the market rather than the needs of humanity. Cradle to grave services including healthcare, education, transport and utilities are privatised, often disastrously so for citizens and the en-

vironment, to return a profit rather than maintained as state-owned public goods free at the point of delivery. The natural environment is externalised and subjugated to the imperative of the market and the tyranny of gross domestic product (GDP), the metric against which all aspects of society are "valued". Under neoliberalism, society becomes atomised and individualism asserted over communities. Poverty becomes a measure of personal rather than systemic failure which creates an epidemic of loneliness, addiction and mental health problems. In 2018, following a decade of austerity, the British government appointed a minister for suicide prevention as 4,500 people took their own lives annually (BBC News, 2018).

Far from raising all ships in a sea of prosperity, neoliberalism has created unprecedented levels of inequality. The *World Inequality Report 2026* found that the richest 10 percent of the global population currently takes 53 percent of global income, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8 percent (Chancel et al., 2026: 5). Global wealth inequality is even more polarised with the richest 10 percent of the global population owning 75 percent of all wealth and the bottom half of the population owning just two percent (Ibid.). These grotesque levels of economic injustice are unsurprisingly fermenting a disconnect with government and a loss of faith in democracy. Oxfam (2026: 10) predicts that there will be five trillionaires within a decade while 3.6 billion people live below a poverty line of $6.85 a day. This is resulting in the 'rise of a new oligarchy in which inheritance, cronyism and monopoly power generate extreme wealth' (Ibid.: 10). The capture of political power by oligarchs such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos to rule in their own interests is resulting in a collapse into authoritarianism. Without the critical consciousness and class solidarity needed to attribute inequality to a broken neoliberal economics, working-class communities are being led by the far-right and toxic social media platforms into an othering of migrants and racism toward minoritised communities. We saw clear evidence of this in local elections in England held in May 2026 that resulted in the far-right Reform UK party surging to the highest share of seats and councils on a policy platform dominated by anti-immigrant policies (BBC News, 2026; Reform UK, 2026).

This shift to authoritarianism is attended by a criminalisation of protest and dissent. In Britain, Palestine Action, a direct action protest movement was proscribed by the government using terror legislation when its members broke into an RAF base in June and spray-painted two military aircraft. The ban was subsequently ruled unlawful by the High Court (Casciani, 2026) and deemed 'disproportionate and unnecessary' by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Turk, 2025). It was a disturbing mirror into an authoritarian future unless we use our power as educators and activists to change our destiny to one of hope over despair, activism over apathy, and democracy over oligarchy.

Pedagogy of resistance

The meta crisis impacting our world should alarm us but not to the point of paralysis and inaction. Educators and activists need to draw upon Freire's pedagogy of hope as a mainspring to activism but not the kind of action undertaken in a 'kind of naïveté', which would be an 'excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism and fatalism' (Freire, 2014: 2). Hope alone will not enable us to transform the world but without a 'minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle' (Ibid.: 3). As Henry Giroux (2026a) argues:

> *"Hope is the conviction that memory matters, that the future is not predetermined, and that collective action can transform the conditions under which we live. Without hope, there is no agency. Without agency, there is no resistance. And without resistance, there is no democracy".*

A pedagogy of resistance for the development education sector means embracing the discomfort that comes with stepping outside the established parameters of discourse with government. Modest improvements to the aid budget or delivery of the SDGs offer ephemeral and incremental change that will fail to prevent the reproduction of inequality and concentration of power and wealth among the super-rich. Development education needs to target its practice at the systemic causes of inequality in neoliberal economics, the hollowing out of democracy by the capture of political power and institutions by economic elites, and the peddling of racist, anti-migrant messaging on social media that inflames racism and public disorder. Henry Giroux (2025: 152) invoked the Palestinian academic, Edward Said, to call for a 'pedagogy of wakefulness' that 'emphasises the need for intellectuals to remain vigilant, awake to the realities of power, work with an array of social movements, and actively engage in resisting systems of oppression'. This is precisely what is needed from the development education sector at this critical juncture in history to renew our pedagogical commitment to Freire's reflective action, critical consciousness, decolonialism and liberating education.

The sector needs to challenge Eurocentric perspectives in international development that ignore the role of colonialism, slavery, ecocide and genocide in industrialising the global North and pushing the global South into a permanent economic peripheral status dependent on supplying commodities and cheap labour in a process of unequal exchange. Hickel at al. (2022) estimate the drain from the global South through unequal exchange to the global North in the period 1990–2015 at a staggering $242 trillion. The massive expropriation of wealth by the global North from the South has barely registered in development education discourse or the legacies of colonialism that continue to manifest themselves in hierarchies of race, class and gender today. As Oxfam (2026: 38) argues:

> *"The fall of colonial empires did not dismantle the structures they imposed; instead, the fruit from the poisoned tree continues to spread its toxic influence, systematically enriching the Global North at the expense of the Global South and deepening inequalities within and across regions".*

A pedagogy of resistance therefore demands historical memory, systemic thinking, a critique of global capitalism and a long overdue debate on an alternative economic system that limits growth within planetary boundaries and respects international targets for carbon emissions. Navel gazing debates on short-term goals like increasing the aid budget or effecting limited purchase on policy reform need to be jettisoned for direct engagement with the systemic and existential questions impacting our world. In the age of genocide:

> *"Strikes must rattle the foundations of this authoritarian malignancy. Boycotts must starve the machinery of fascist cruelty. Militant ideological, cultural, and economic resistance must pierce the heart of this new barbarism" (Giroux, 2026b: 155).*

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