

An Introduction to Revisiting Development Studies Education and an Invitation to Rethink Teaching, Learning and Knowledge Production in the Neoliberal University

Abstract

We are at a moment of growing critical self-reflection in the field of development studies – heightened by debates on decolonisation - that is opening up difficult conversations on teaching, learning and knowledge production for development studies education. This special issue augments these conversations and revisits development studies education within the context of the ‘neoliberal university’. It is our contention that we cannot engage with the expansive project of rethinking development studies education, without elaborating on higher education institutions as the site where change is mediated, managed and resourced. The articles in this volume give empirically grounded and interrelated narratives that elucidate the relationships between development studies and the neoliberal university from a range of disciplinary and geographical perspectives. They allow us to make two salient contributions, firstly, on the role of higher education institutions as a site of engagement and entanglement between development practice and development studies, and secondly, on the ways in which the neoliberalisation of higher education shapes development studies pedagogy. It is our hope that these articles are read as a timely intervention and invitation to rethink development studies education in this context.

Keywords: Neoliberalism; development studies; development education; marketization; pedagogy; higher education

This special issue is positioned at the intersection of debates on the practices of development work and development studies, through a reflection on the role of higher education as a key site of engagement and entanglement between the two. It emerged from a panel titled, ‘We want skills! You’ll get critical thinking’ at the UK Development Studies Association conference in June 2019. We argue that the parameters for the teaching and learning of development studies in higher education institutions (HEIs) are contextualised by a neoliberal logic that positions universities as a competitive actor and producer of human capital driven by concerns around student (or customer) employability and satisfaction (Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion, 2009). This affects the marketing of development studies as a pathway to employment in the sector, the multi-directional relationships between the development industry and development education, and the content and pedagogy of degree programmes that build skills for development practitioners (Woolcock, 2007).

We recognise there is a multiplicity of spaces in which learning about development occurs. These include on-the-job training, apprenticeships and mentoring within development institutions, short courses, and development studies degrees and postgraduate programmes run within HEIs that operate in and across the global South and global North. This busy landscape of education providers is situated within the context of a neoliberal logic that drives the expansion of global higher education, international student mobility and the offer of development studies programmes globally. In this special issue we focus on HEIs in Europe, not only because development studies education (through short courses and degree programmes) is long established in these spaces through disciplinary roots in European post-colonial history, but also because we consider that these are contexts in which some of the neoliberal logics shaping development studies education can be seen most clearly, particularly in the case of the UK. By critically examining development studies education within Europe, we pose a series of provocations that are relevant to HEIs globally, and to development education beyond the university. These include:

- Does the relationship between the university and development studies as a discipline, within a neoliberal context that demands financial viability, limit or border ideas of 'development' and its study?
- How do these relationships affect who teaches development in the university and from what location?
- What knowledge about development is most valued or rewarded by universities, and with what implications for knowledge production including how it is excavated and by whom?
- In what ways is development studies education complicated by its relationship to the development industry? What are the implications of this for development education more broadly outside of universities?
- How does neoliberalism shape the contours of knowledge flows and the discourses and models of 'partnerships' between development education providers in and across the global North and South?

Development studies as a discipline has a longstanding and critical engagement with neoliberalism as an ideology that has shaped the very idea of 'development' and its practice over the past 30 years (Peet and Hartwick, 2015). However, while these debates are often housed within universities and aired in classrooms, there has been very little reflection on how development studies education interacts with the idea of the university itself as both a neoliberal product and a rationality that governs how universities are run (Patel and Mun, 2017 is an exception). Through this special issue, we bring two disciplinary fields into productive conversation: critical development studies and critical higher education studies, to identify opportunities to rethink teaching, learning and knowledge production in development studies education in ways that recognise the powerful and nuanced effects of neoliberal logics.

This project to rethink development studies education builds upon nascent debates in the field on decolonising development studies (e.g. Langdon, 2013; Spiegel, Gray, Bompani and Bardosh, 2017; Patel, 2020), wider mobilisation around decolonising academia (e.g. Arday and Mirza, 2018), and debates in this journal that critically engage with knowledge production within development (e.g. Mohan and Wilson, 2005; Cole, 2006). It also stands in complement to action-orientated research projects that are working through the finer details of what decolonial development pedagogy and practice looks like from within Europe (Decolonising Development, n.d.). With reference to these ongoing and continuously unfolding debates and actions to deconstruct and reengage in relation to the history and legacy of coloniality in development education and practice, the articles in this special issue make two contributions to these debates. Firstly, on the role of HEIs as a site of engagement and entanglement between development practice and development studies, we illuminate the strength of discourses of student employability and skills tied to tuition fees, 'value for money' concerns, national higher education policy, and powerful and entrenched perceptions of development as a vocation. Such discourses may complicate meaningful and sustained student engagement with radical agenda for change and any projects arising from decolonial thinking to rethink, undo, pause or stop development practice.

Secondly, on the ways in which the neoliberalisation of higher education shapes development studies pedagogy, we suggest neoliberal logics of HEIs are likely to condition the contours of a decolonial agenda. For example, rebranding development education as 'Global Studies' or 'Poverty Studies', whilst possibly conveying a decolonial intent may also need to satisfy HEI demands for brand recognition and its subsequent impact on staff and student recruitment. Similarly, new methodologies of engagement between and within the global North and South channelled through

discourses and modalities of 'partnership' can craft new ways of working whilst facilitating a pipeline for a continuous extraction of knowledge to satisfy managerial audits of academic productivity (the insights of Marchaisa, Bazuzib and Lamekeb, 2020, are pertinent). These two contributions can usefully serve as grounded insights into meta-debates on the intertwined structures of coloniality, settler-colonialism and neoliberalism in higher education (Gyamera and Burke, 2017; Shahjahan, 2011; Shahjahan and Morgan, 2015), and suggest their impact on development studies education.

The neoliberal university as context

The articles in this special issue approach the 'neoliberal university' as an enveloping context in which entanglements of competition, employability and student satisfaction play out in the teaching, learning and knowledge production of development. We do not seek to present the neoliberal university as a definitive concept, the margins of which are illustrated by articles that interrogate articulations of neoliberalism in specific aspects of development education. Nor do we present an exhaustive genealogy of neoliberalism and its relationship to higher education and to development (see Radice, 2013). Rather, in this introduction, we explain the 'neoliberal university' as an established idea and framework in critical higher education scholarship and use the articles in the special issue to elucidate what this means for the project to rethink development studies education.

The notion of the 'neoliberal university' emerges from a decrease to public financing of HEIs that has given rise to the marketisation, commercialisation and entrepreneurialism of higher education globally. In the UK, from where we write, and where, we suggest, the impacts of neoliberal reform in relation to higher education can be felt acutely, the emergence of the neoliberal university is often associated with Thatcherism and the profound changes to higher education that responded to new ideas of public sector management and the role of government that emerged in the 1980s. For Olssen (2016, p.129), "the central defining characteristic of this new liberalism was based on an application of the logic and rules of market competition to the public sector." However, Vernon (2018) notes that it was not until the 1990s that "the practices that slowly and fitfully, remade the university in its current neoliberal reforms" were fully instantiated (p268). He associates the development of the neoliberal university in the UK from this period onwards with three processes: marketisation, privatisation, and financialisation. The first, marketisation, is linked to the emergence of an "audit culture" associated with the development of performance indicators and league tables, which aimed to "increase efficiency through competition and internal markets". This created a new "ethos and subject" (p.274), introducing the notion of students as consumers, and paving the way for processes of privatisation, with the introduction of tuition fees in the late 1990s. This, Vernon suggests, led to the development of new "technologies of financialisation – and an explosion of student debt", as the burden of funding universities shifted from the public (via the state) to private individuals i.e. students.

These interlinked processes have had profound – and multi-dimensional - impacts on higher education. We recognise that these effects play out slightly differently in HEIs in different national contexts across and beyond Europe (see, for example, Pritchard, 2011 on Germany; Pekkola, 2009 on Finland; Andresen et al, 2015 on Norway). However, we suggest that it is not only in the UK that the public university increasingly plays out a set of logics that privilege competition across scales from individuals, to institutions, to countries, producing a "competition fetish" that traps universities into political, intellectual, and financial strategic responses for corporate relevance and advantage in a global knowledge economy (Naidoo, 2016). From the position of the institution and looking outward, the competition strategies employed by the neoliberal university may include aggressive student recruitment globally and domestically; the global expansion of HEIs to new territories through branch campuses and partnership agreements; and the courting of corporate multinational

sponsors for public-private partnerships (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Looser, 2012). Within the neoliberal university is “the displacement of public good models of governance, and their replacement with individualised incentives and performance targets” (Olssen, 2016, p130) engendering new individualistic forms of accountability and monitoring within a spirit of corporate managerialism. The effect of these strategic manoeuvres is that “learning is a commodity, a private good and an opportunity for profit” (Ball, Dworkin and Vryonides, 2010, p.527), albeit in response to progressive underfunding by national governments (Ackner and Wagner, 2019).

The implications of the neoliberalisation of higher education for academics working in research and teaching are far reaching. Ball (2012) argues that the neoliberal reform of higher education not only has a “very, very real economic and political dynamic... a business dynamic which seeks profit from the buying and selling of education ‘services’” but also a more human dynamic associated with the way in which “neoliberalism gets into our minds and souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others” (p18). For academics, as Ackner and Wagner (2019) describe, there is an audit and accountability culture enacted through a set of processes that continually measures research productivity and outputs, to which academics must submit at risk of loss of market value within the research academic marketplace (as Morley, 2018, examines with reference to uneven gendered effects). The value of teaching is also measured and audited for quality assurance via student satisfaction scores, enrolment numbers and contact time, with teachers disciplined accordingly (Lucas, 2014; Shore and Wright, 1999). For Ball, the effect of this focus on performativity is “to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measuring performance outcomes and are a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value” (Ball, 2012, p20). The power of accountability and governance in this framework is underwritten by a shadow of precarious employment, where “job security and expectations of academic freedom traditionally underlying university teaching and research are undermined by an increasing preference for hiring casual staff who have no guarantee of permanent work” (Ackner and Wagner, 2019, p.63).

The neoliberal university has significant implications for students too. The governance and audit mechanisms of academics affects pedagogy and student-teacher relations. Narrow managerial conceptualisations of the ‘student experience’ and the institutionalisation of ‘student engagement’ into pre-approved spaces can limit expression and students’ own academic freedoms (Smeltzer and Hearn, 2015). The affordability of higher education and, in the UK context, transfer of payment model from state to student, produces greater numbers of student-workers compelled to approach higher education as a tactic to “cultivat[e] their ‘employability’” (Beban and Trueman, 2018). And, within the ambit of an internationalisation agenda, which is woven throughout the relationships between neoliberalisation and higher education (Bamberger, Morris and Yemini, 2019), students as a category are also imagined and actively pursued as hypermobile consumers, ready and willing to travel around the world in pursuit of higher education. Within development studies education, this has presented new opportunities, for (a minority of) students from the global South to access ‘elite’ northern HEIs and their development studies programmes (Prazeres, 2013). This has implications for widening inequalities between HEIs and between those who are - and are not – able to access ‘elite’ programmes, reinforcing inequalities both between and within countries.

The neoliberal agenda that has shaped higher education over the last few decades has also had far reaching implications for development practice. Since the 1980s the rollout of neoliberal development policy has been integral to the transformation and marketisation of the global political economy (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015 p 282). Governments across the global South have increasingly

adopted market focused policy agenda, leading to the reorganisation of state elites and restructuring of “social arrangements between the state and the wider population” (Connell & Dados, 2014). Meanwhile, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), have played a key role in shaping development policy and practice through processes of liberalisation, particularly those associated with the Washington and post-Washington consensus (Carroll & Jarvis, 2015). Although NGOs and civil society organisations have often been sites of critical engagement with these processes, they have also found themselves co-opted within programmes with “core ideational projects focused on market fundamentalism”, often under the guise of ‘participation’ (ibid, p 294). At the same time, increased ‘professionalisation’ of the development sector, sometimes linked to what has been termed the ‘NGOisation’ of civil society organisations’ (Lang, 2013), has led to growing demands for ‘skilled professionals’ equipped to compete in the global development industry labour market.

In this context, we suggest that the logics of neoliberalism governing higher education have particularly significant implications for the field of (critical) development studies. Academia has long represented a space for critical reflection on development practice and (critical) development studies as a field has played a key role in questioning logics of neoliberalism and engaging critically with the normative ideas of neoliberal development policy and practice. However, pressures of neoliberal reform within universities, combined with the shifting nature of the development sector and development labour market, have brought with them tensions in relation to the critical, independent, positioning of development studies vis-a-vis the development industry and forms of development practice. We recognise that there have been a range of responses to this. In some cases, development studies programmes have developed radical critical responses that seek to decentre the development industry, by, for example, taking up a post-development or explicitly decolonial approach. In other cases, however, development studies programmes may increasingly align themselves with the neoliberal university, for example, through changes in marketing, and increased efforts to demonstrate ‘industry relevance’. As highlighted, by Schmoll’s paper in this special issue, a concern with enhancing student ‘employability’ (addressed by student consultancy projects for development organisations), for example, may raise difficult issues regarding the nature of relationships - including partnerships and different forms of collaboration - between universities and the plethora of private and non-state actors in the development industry (Sims, 2018).

In this special issue we argue that in a development education landscape that is competitive and demands profit, there are profound implications for the parameters of teaching, learning and knowledge production for development studies education in universities especially and elsewhere. In this special issue we identify and explore three core implications of the neoliberalisation of higher education on development studies education: (1) how development studies education is framed (what it is and who it is for); (2) the effects of entanglements between the development industry and degree programmes (what it can do for you); and (3) the content of development studies education (what is taught and by whom). We explore each of these in detail through a three-part discussion across six empirical articles.

Implications of the neoliberal university on development education

The first implication is understanding how competition between universities to recruit and satisfy fee-paying students affects how development studies is framed as a product in course marketing and imagined as a practical discipline that provides a pathway to development sector careers and employment. Carefully curated representations of development shape how development studies is framed as an altruistic field of study, practical and grounded in developing key skills for equity and social justice in the 21st century (Patel and Mun, 2017). These in turn, and alongside issues of access and affordability, affect who is attracted and recruited to formally study development in HEIs. The

efficacy of dominant representations of development, are embedded in a wider neoliberal logic that drives academic competition for research funding, publications and citations, that in turn determines what knowledge of development is valued, by whom and from what location.

The two articles from Patel and Demeter illustrate neoliberal logic in a European higher education context, where competition for fee-paying students and amongst academics for publications and citations, is highly visible and its effects on the framing of 'development studies education' are particularly pronounced. In the first article, Patel considers the marketing of development studies, examining how 'development' is represented and sold in postgraduate development studies courses at two UK universities. Her analysis of marketing materials and the responses of students to them, leads her to argue, in the context of the neoliberal university, "representations of development engender a cosmopolitan desire among mainly international students and project a cosmopolitan virtue of the university through its development activities and associations". Rather than seeing cosmopolitanism as a progressive political concept, she concludes in the marketing of development studies, "Cosmopolitanism as a concept, and its relationship to branding and development, remains rooted in Europe, and its institutions, looking out to elsewhere and marking themselves as worldly." The paper thus draws attention to the geographies of neoliberal logic and longstanding postcolonial critique of representations of development.

Demeter's article draws on a world-systemic model of analysis to examine issues of diversity in relation to publication in leading development studies journals, and the career trajectories of those working in highly ranked development studies departments. His analysis reveals the systemic inequality that exists in terms of both research output and accepted education trajectories, with dominance of scholars and scholarship that privileges the global North. He found 85% of Scopus-ranked development studies journals were published in the US and Western Europe, with the UK alone accounting for more than a 45% share. 83% of the articles (n=61,781) published in these journals were written by scholars in US and Western European institutions. Drawing on QS World University Rankings and analyzing the education trajectories of faculty at the top 10 universities for development studies, he found, "an unquestionable dominance of British universities" with more than 70% of all faculty holding a doctorate from an elite British university. The article draws attention to the implications of such lack of diversity for a purportedly global discipline on not only what and whose knowledge is valued, but the wider effects of knowledge of development that is partial and privileges Euro-American ways of knowing the world for critical perspectives on mainstream narratives of development within higher education spaces.

The second implication concerns complex dynamics within the neoliberal logics of competition and how these affect dialogues and interactions between development studies departments and the development industry. For example, industry actors are variously funders, competitors (for research and consultancy), and partners in relation to HEIs. These relationships can result in innovative forms of partnership between development organisations and HEIs, the co-development of curriculum, and opportunities for students to develop professionally relevant experience through placements or consultancy projects. However, they are also associated with tensions between a focus on the teaching of technical skills perceived to be required by dominant actors within the development industry, and more critical – research based - perspectives on development. Relationships with the development industry raise important questions regarding power, independence, whose voices and ideas are valued, and the nature and purpose of academic study alongside the nature and purpose of development practice. These questions carry implications for student employability, curriculum content, and the kinds of development actors and organisations that do or do not get profiled in academic study.

The two articles from North et. al. and Schmoll explore the relationships between the development industry and development studies education programmes, probing how such programmes interpret industry needs and code them into their educational offering. Together, the two articles highlight some of the challenges associated with maintaining a focus on criticality, and a concern with issues of equity and social justice, while meeting student expectations with regard to developing 'skills' and networks seen as important for employability in the context of the neoliberal university. North et al's article explores the perspectives of alumni on their experiences of studying postgraduate degrees concerned with the interface between education and development studies. Through exploring the narratives of groups of differently positioned alumni, they consider how the experiences that students bring with them to post-graduate study shape their engagement with the ideas they encounter during their academic programmes, and the extent to which they are able to connect these with practice as they move (back) into work in the development sector. Their analysis problematises common assumptions regarding the perceived disconnect between academic theory on the one hand and 'skills' linked to practice on the other, and instead points to the need to better understand how different groups of students may be supported to develop as 'liquid learners' moving and making connections between academic learning and development practice. This, they suggest, requires "learning spaces that encourage critique and facilitate students' engagement with a range of voices and perspectives, including critical engagement with theory" as well as opportunities for peer learning, the sharing of experiences and reflection on practice.

Schmoll's article reflects critically on experiences of student consultancy projects for development organisations, and their role in development studies teaching. The paper suggests that, in the context of increased pressures to provide students with practical experience and skills associated with employability, the use of consultancy projects for students, in partnership with development organisations, is likely to become increasingly popular. However, Schmoll argues that although such projects can play a very positive role in "bridging the gap between theory and practice" they pose "challenges to three core tenets of academia, namely scientificity, fairness, and ethics". Given these challenges, to which he suggests there may not always be easy answers, he calls for greater reflection on the "pedagogical, ethical and political implications" of consultancies as a teaching device in development programmes, and for "a more active conversation... about the role universities and their teaching play in maintaining or challenging current flaws, inequalities, and injustices in the development sector".

The third implication concerns pedagogy and teaching practice including curriculum content and an appetite for critical development studies, alongside an exploration of who teaches development studies and what they are allowed to teach, particularly when precariously employed. Pedagogic practice, and the content of development studies education, are affected by, and carry implications for, what knowledge is valued and what knowledge is not in the teaching of development studies. For example, this may play out in the foregrounding of 'the [western] canon' of key development theorists, theories and approaches, to the exclusion of other forms of knowledge from or at the margins, including Indigenous knowledges or Southern feminist approaches, which may be presented as 'alternative' theories in the background of development studies.

The two articles by Gasper and Schofield explore some of the tensions and challenges associated with developing a critically engaged pedagogy and curriculum in the context of the neoliberal university. However, they also point to the potential for innovative practices and pedagogical responses. Gasper's article provides a methodological discussion of the potential for using Critical Discourse Analysis in the teaching of development studies, outlining its value as a tool for enabling students to develop their critical awareness and analysis skills, and providing guidance on

operationalising this approach within development studies teaching. He writes of discourse analysis as “tools for ‘making strange’ (defamiliarization), so that we view both texts and social realities in a fresh independent way and start to discern better their blindspots, and our own.” Gasper writes in conversation with postcolonial and decolonial critiques of development studies education and their call to unlearn, reposition and rethink. This article is a study in reframing and positioning critical thinking tools as useful and useable for development students as (future) practitioners.

The special issue concludes with Schofield’s autoethnographic article where she reflects on her experiences of leading a student field trip to Uganda as a precariously employed Black woman academic. Her article explores how precarious employment intersects with her identity to produce a difficult and compromised learning environment. She movingly and powerfully asks, “what does it mean for precariously employed Black staff to face and challenge racialized acts and have their expertise questioned by students?” Schofield explores the limited avenues of response available to her, as an educator mindful of performance evaluations and racialized stereotypes of Black women in academia, and their impact on her employment prospects. Schofield’s article is an important reminder of what is at stake in the queries we raise of development studies education in the neoliberal university.

Setting a research agenda: development studies education in the neoliberal university

The articles in this special issue, when taken together, illuminate some of the intricate relationships between development studies education and the neoliberal university and begin to sketch a research agenda that builds on these initial explorations. The foundation of this agenda comes from two salient contributions drawn from the six articles that touch upon the vast landscape of the neoliberal university. The first is on the role of HEIs as a site of engagement between development studies and development practice. Across the articles there is a common theme of HEIs as facilitators and mediators between the study of development and its practice. This includes the draw of development studies education as an appealing vocation for globally minded students (Patel), the use of consultancy projects to give ‘real life’ skills to learners (Schmoll), and the careful crafting of programme learning objectives that are transferable to development professions (North et al). Drawing on these insights, we ask what political projects are advanced by the role played by HEIs in Europe, particularly in the UK? This question feeds into wider critical debates on the purpose of higher education and its production of northern workers for the global knowledge economy (Guruz, 2011). We ask, where does development studies education – and the production of development workers - sit within these debates, and is this the same, desirable, position we arrive at following critical self-reflection?

The second is on the ways in which the neoliberalisation of higher education shapes development studies pedagogy. This shaping is underpinned by the knowledge (Demeter) and knowledge holders (Schofield) permitted into development studies education in European HEIs. The modalities of reward and recruitment, and the cyclical relationship between them, drive the neoliberal university and subsequently uphold a system of skewed voices and partial knowledge. In conversation with the role of HEIs as mediators of development study and practice, and its effect on agenda-setting in classrooms and of development studies curricula (to focus on skills accumulation for students, relations with external stakeholders and wider debates on student employability in the development sector), we ask where is anti-neoliberal political-activism located in development studies education in Europe and elsewhere?

Through this special issue, our aim has been to initiate a conversation between the neoliberal university and development studies education to identify the logics of the former and its effects on

the latter. The articles have given us an insight into the pervasiveness of the logic within development studies education in European, particularly British, HEIs. They cast a light on where and how it is that we have come to accommodate the neoliberal university and service its intentions, sometimes without conscious intention to move towards an alternative vision. Deliberately, we do not set out this alternative vision to the neoliberal university, the enormity of the task is too great for a single special issue. Instead, we raise a challenge to locate a more compelling set of logics for development studies education in HEIs. Such a challenge comes with its own questions such as for whom are these logics compelling: university management vs development studies academics vs student-consumers? Nonetheless, the task is a necessary one, which we suggest is picked up through two strands: Firstly, through querying where are alternative logics in development studies education in European HEIs, what do they look like and what is their effect? And secondly through more detailed study on what neoliberal logics look like in development studies education outside of Europe, recognising opportunities for common cause. We hope this special issue is read as an invitation to rethink development studies education in relation to the contours of the neoliberal university and, for ourselves as academics at a British HEI, to remain hopeful of change from within.

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