Research article

Civil society organisations and Target 4.7 of the SDGs: towards intersectionality for promoting a more just and sustainable world

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Abstract

Target 4.7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can provide an opportunity for a more transformative approach to education. To consider this requires a new approach to learning that moves beyond subjects and disciplines to recognise intersectionality as being central to providing a radical rethinking of the purpose of education. Evidence from initiatives by civil society organisations in England shows that there are examples of these practices. At an international level, the Dublin

Declaration on Global Education to 2050 provides an additional boost to calling for a major transformation in education.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been the subject of numerous critiques and debates within the development education and global learning community. These critiques have suggested that the SDGs do not challenge the dominant neoliberal orthodoxy (Belda-Miquel et al., 2019), have re-enforced the emphasis within education on measurement and testing (Brockwell et al., 2022) and have paid too little attention to Indigenous knowledges and the voices of the marginalised (Brown and McCowan, 2018).

While noticing, and to a large extent agreeing with, these criticisms, this article comes from a different starting point and reviews the extent to which Target 4.7 of the SDGs and its emphasis on education for sustainable development can become both an enabling tool for promoting global citizenship and sustainability within formal education and a vehicle for posing important questions about the purpose of education. It reviews evidence gathered from the Our Shared World network in England to identify the extent to which global and sustainability themes promoted by civil society organisations are doing more than simply encouraging increased knowledge in these areas. Target 4.7 implies to bring together a range of educational themes, which necessitates engagement with intersectionality approaches. This article aims to identify examples of practice that demonstrate the ways in which themes such as children's rights, climate change and global citizenship are seen as not only intersectional concepts and types of education, but also reflect common pedagogical approaches.

From the MDGs to Target 4.7 of the SDGs

The world is in crisis. This is a phrase that has been heard many times, whether during the nuclear threat of the Cold War age, for example, or the climate emergency of the current one. To respond to the crises, the United Nations, through UNESCO, has, over time, proposed, promoted, funded and monitored a series of global goals. Until 2015, these were termed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of these, MDG 2, set out to achieve universal primary education (UN, 2022). By 2015, it was evident that while progress had been made, there was still much to do in education globally. The focus moved from access to education to the quality of what was happening in school once children were there. This led to the Sustainable Development Goals as part of Agenda 2030. Agenda 2030 is described as 'a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future' (UNDESA, 2022a: n.p.) and at its heart are 17 SDGs, with the goal for education, Goal 4, focusing on achieving quality education: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNDESA, 2022b: n.p.).

Within Goal 4 lies Target 4.7:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. (UNESCO, 2021: n.p.)

This goal and the targets within it, while in one way providing just a wish list of desirable objectives within education, can and have provided openings, opportunities and, above all, a sense of visioning for a more transformative form of learning. Bridge 47, a European coalition of civil society organisations, has stated that for the Target to have lasting impact, there is a need for an 'action-orientated approach which bridges educator and learner through all the innovative forms of education leading to the notion of global citizenship' (Bridge 47, 2020: 2).

This coalition of organisations worked alongside the network of intergovernmental bodies in Europe, Global Education Network Europe (GENE), to lobby the European Commission, the main funder of global citizenship education in Europe. Although the Bridge 47 network funding only lasted from

2017 to 2021, its publications and approach have had lasting influence by encouraging a more holistic approach to policy change, bringing together organisations, academics and policymakers who had not normally talked to each other, through influence and promoting a transformative approach to learning (Forsbacka, 2021).

The wider significance and importance of the SDGs in terms of their relevance to education globally is beyond the scope of this article, but it needs to be noted that there have been numerous attempts around the world to also link Target 4.7 to broader themes within education, including approaches to learning and, particularly, impact on textbook content and forms of social learning (see www.nissem.org). UNESCO's promotion of the Futures of Education, its work on transformative education and the updating of its 1974 Recommendation on Education for International Understanding suggest that there has been a desire to locate discussions within a broader social context.

Response to the SDGs in England

Within England, there has been for several decades a strong body of practice within schools concerned with themes such as sustainability, peace, global citizenship, human rights and cultural understanding. At various times, there has been funding and political support, most notably from the Labour government between 1997 and 2010 for some of this work. From 2012 to 2018, even under a Conservative government, there was support for perhaps one of the most innovative projects, the Global Learning Programme. Despite this support, however, the curriculum became increasingly narrow, with subjects taught in silos, despite the creativity and imagination of many teachers, and initiatives such as the World's Largest Lesson, developed in the UK by a not-for-profit communications agency, Project Everyone, set up by Richard Curtis, the film producer and campaigner.

Since 2022, climate change and sustainability education have begun to have a higher priority within the education ministry in England. However, the resultant strategy, although well resourced, has had limited objectives. These include an emphasis on influencing the science and geography curriculum, a new examination for nature studies and support for outdoor learning. The strategy focuses on climate change and makes no mention of the wider themes of Target 4.7 (DfE, 2022). Themes such as global citizenship have disappeared from UK government policy statements on education, although they are still prevalent in programmes in Scotland. The UK government was also one of the few governments in Europe not to attend or support the Dublin Declaration on Global Education launched in 2022.

Overall, the framework of the SDGs in education has been questioned for its lack of critique of existing educational paradigms and for the neoliberal influences that underpin and arguably stint progress towards real and sustainable change (Odell et al., 2020), leading to the themes becoming add-ons to existing curriculum topics (such as to science and geography, as in the Department for Education's strategy), rather than being woven through a school's ethos and pedagogy (Sterling, 2004). There is merit to this critique, and in response there are certainly sustained calls for themes to become part of school ethos, as well as for pedagogy to become learner centred, active and participatory (Bourn and Hatley, 2022). The review of evidence from civil society organisations on which this article is based suggests that, despite the constraints of the current English education system, there are examples, influenced by the SDGs, that suggest approaches towards learning that move beyond a merely transmissive style of teaching and learning, as well as efforts and initiatives that influence school ethos. This provides evidence that a more effective form of education to achieve Target 4.7 is possible, and indeed is being enacted in some schools in England.

Evidence and research for Our Shared World in England

Our Shared World is a coalition of civil society organisations, academics and professional bodies that was formed in 2019. It emerged in part to fill the gap in England caused by the demise of Think Global (formerly the Development Education Association) and due to the opportunities created by the growth of collaboration between environment, human rights, peace and development non-governmental organisations. Although the first two years of the coalition were seriously hampered by the global Covid-19 pandemic, from the informal discussions emerging, there was a recognition that if any change was going to come about in terms of policy support, then a body of evidence needed to be published that could inform both governments and practitioners. Above all, it was felt that there was a need to

develop a narrative that was counter-hegemonic to that which dominated educational policy debates on testing, inspection and standards.

The evidence on which this article is based comes from data gathered from a combination of existing resources, such as reports of projects, academic articles, websites and material submitted from a range of civil society organisations. The aim was not to undertake primary research, but to bring together what was currently known or available to assess how practice was reflecting international debates and discussions on Target 4.7. For example, to what extent was evidence contained within Bridge 47's call for more action-oriented practice? In addition, within the Our Shared World network, there were groupings of organisations in each of the major themes of Target 4.7: human rights, environment, peace, culture and global citizenship. An aim of the research was therefore to identify from existing practice in each area to what extent these different themes were evident or contained examples of intersectionality, and whether and where themes overlapped, interconnected and linked together.

The collection of evidence was undertaken in three phases. In Phase 1, a team of academics and researchers who were connected to some of these themes were identified. They were used to identify examples of practice, to both review and assess the evidence gathered and to consult with relevant practitioners. In Phase 2, a series of consultative webinars were held with the membership of Our Shared World to critically review the draft findings. These consultation events were organised by the authors of this article in consultation with the Our Shared World coordinating group. In Phase 3, once their review had been incorporated into the draft, this was sent out again to members for final feedback.

The process of gathering the data in Phase 1 was iterative, using a combination of keyword searches for academic-based material linked to the themes of Target 4.7, plus interviews with, and requests for evidence from, civil society organisations that were known to be active promoters of the SDGs. Key questions that formed the basis of the research at its outset were:

- In what ways was Target 4.7 reflected within civil society's engagement with schools?
- What does the evidence from existing research tell us about the ways in which the themes of Target 4.7 were interpreted?
- To what extent were they seen as providing opportunities for a learner-centred approach?

The results of the evidence for Our Shared World were published (Bourn and Hatley, 2022) and included sections on environment and sustainability, peace, human rights, culture and global citizenship activities within schools. The report also compared the lack of progress among policymakers in England to promote the themes from the SDGs to that being made elsewhere in the UK, and also in several countries in Europe. One of the key findings is that in addition to the evidence for the impact for each theme individually, the themes must also be seen holistically. They are connected and interrelate. All the themes of Target 4.7 complement and support each other. This principle also applies to each of the 17 SDGs, and this mirrors the view of the UN, who, in their commitment to achieving Agenda 2030, note that 'the traditional siloed approach to development would not be adequate' and, when seeking case studies for the success of implementing the SDGs, asked specifically for contributors to include one case study 'demonstrating practical applications of the interlinkages across goals and targets' (UNDESA, 2022a: n.p.). Boeren (2019: 279) affirms that 'while "quality education" is a goal, it is important to avoid regarding the 17 SDGs as fragmented "work packages". Many of the goals can, in fact, be interpreted as correlating with each other.' She further states that institutions should adopt a 'cross-course approach to themes of sustainable development' (Boeren, 2019: 296). This, then, poses the need to think of implementing Target 4.7 not as a series of concepts or terms, but as being interconnected and crossing disciplinary boundaries, leading to what can best be described as intersectionality.

Emergent from the evidence, then, were questions about the degree to which an intersectional approach may be needed, and is in places already being enacted, to move towards the achievement of Target 4.7. The evidence gathered therefore suggests that a key area that needs further review and discussion is how civil society organisations are thinking holistically in their practices with schools, and how they are seeing themes such as the environment, human rights and global citizenship as interconnected, and as part of a distinctive learner-centred pedagogy that is transformative and seeking systematic change.

It is this review of the evidence gathered for Our Shared World to address these questions which forms the basis of the rest of this article.

What is meant by intersectionality?

The term intersectionality has become a bit of a buzzword in radical educational debates in recent years. For example, there has been a recognition of the need to break down the barriers between race, gender and class. Kimberley Crenshaw (2016), in her TED Talk, refers to the dangers of the divisions between race and gender. Intersectionality means much more than interdisciplinarity. The latter is seen in terms of ways in which different disciplines may work together but retain their own identity. Intersectionality is much more about ways in which themes interconnect and learn from each other, and consequently are enriched in the process. As Tefera et al. (2018: vii) state, intersectionality should be seen as 'both a conceptual aspiration and a research imperative for education researchers'. They suggest further that:

> Engaging with intersectionality in research demands that our scholarship be oriented toward (a) accounting for the ways that race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, ability, and age, among other things, shape the structural dynamics of power and inequality in social spaces and individual identities ... and (b) strengthening the synergy between critical inquiry and praxis. (Tefera et al., 2018: vii)

But, as this article will suggest, talking about intersectionality is much more than showing the linkages between race and gender, for example; it is also about showing how by working with these linkages towards a common aim, openings for new thinking towards the purpose of education are provided. Bešić (2020: 114) states that intersectionality asserts that *all* aspects of one's identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other and affecting one's perception within a society. Intersectionality does not simply acknowledge passively, but acts with intention towards a different future.

However, intersectionality should not only be seen in relation to different identities, but also in bringing together different disciplines and educational traditions. It can also mean bringing into the debate discussions about power, where it lies and how it is used. For example, within various areas of educational discourse, certain traditions, such as concern for the environment, have gained greater political support than, say, human rights or global citizenship, because of their acceptability among decision makers. As De Vries (2020) comments in reviewing the relevance of intersectionality to discussions in and around global citizenship, the term should be seen as much more than about identities, but also about structures of inequality. She goes further and states that there should be a connection between intersectionality and social justice: 'it aims to translate the knowledge derived from the analyses into an action that disrupts the oppressive structures' (De Vries, 2020: 8).

It is this approach to intersectionality that is used as the basis for discussion in this article. This means more than just bringing the silos together; it also means identifying the extent to which there was evidence of addressing power and inequalities towards a common goal that was transformational. This article now looks at the evidence of the usage of intersectionality among initiatives by civil society organisations in England.

Evidence of intersectionality

Civil society organisations in their educational work are often criticised for promoting only one perspective or having narrow objectives, seeing their activities as above all about promoting the agendas of their organisation (Weber, 2012). While the research for Our Shared World found some evidence of this, what was more revealing were the ways in which these organisations in their educational work were moving beyond the silos of development, human rights, environment or peace, and encouraging a more interdisciplinary approach. Examples of organisations making progress in the intersectionality of the themes are the Fairtrade Foundation and UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award. They have been chosen from the evidence gathered for Our Shared World because both organisations have secured a considerable amount of evidence to demonstrate the value and impact of their programmes. Both programmes have been in existence for over a decade, and both have the engagement of several thousand schools between them. They also have a values base of social justice and present issues as interconnected. This is challenging because it requires teachers not only to break down silos between curriculum subjects, but also to adopt a more learner-centred pedagogy. However, what was noticeable with both programmes were the opportunities for support for teachers.

The Fairtrade Foundation has an award programme in which 14 per cent of schools in the UK have been involved. It operates across three stages, with a self-assessment for the first two stages and an independent assessment for the third. The first stage is the FairAware Award, including a learning audit which explores explicitly linking fair trade to global issues. The second is the FairActive Award, through which learners and schools begin to take action. The final stage is the FairAchiever Award. As described by the Fairtrade Foundation (2022: n.p.), 'at this point the school has fully embedded Fairtrade into their daily life and work to raise awareness of Fairtrade in their local community.' They have also incorporated campaigns around global themes and youth action that have come to prominence in recent years, including climate justice. Support is provided to teachers through online resources. The focus on action from quite an early stage and the embedded nature of global themes linked to fair trade across the school enable learners to link personal and school choices to their local communities and global issues.

Research into the impact of the award shows that students linked awareness of fair trade to issues of global injustice (Bourn, 2018). Specifically:

> One secondary school noted that its more senior pupils had, through geography, examined: causes of world poverty, indicators of development, globalization, the impact of transnational corporations, issues of ethical fashion, trade and fair trade. Another school noted that the pupils already had a knowledge of fair trade through geography and so the follow-up activities took the learning to greater depth by looking at trading inequalities in the world, especially in the developing world and the effect of unfair commodity prices on people's livelihoods. (Bourn and Hatley, 2022: 75)

The work of the Fairtrade Foundation identifies that to engage with schools means demonstrating how themes such as trade are not only environmental, rights and development questions; they also require looking at issues in terms of understanding power and inequalities in the world. Their award programme also inevitably leads to schools and students beginning to ask wider questions, such as how to achieve a fairer and more just society.

Over 500 schools across the UK have taken part in UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award. This programme places children's rights along with peace, sustainability and global citizenship as central to the practice and policy of schools. It has had a major impact on empowering children to act for social justice, with learners extending their learning at home and running local campaigns on social justice topics. They learn about the links between different rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and what this means in practice, not just for them, their school and community, but globally too. Part of the success of this programme is the continuing professional development for teachers, leading to increased confidence in dealing with global themes, and the very rigorous approach to advancement through the programme – schools can begin with the bronze award and progress through to gold, with personalised support and guidance from UNICEF.

By addressing children's rights, questions of power and inequality inevitably emerge. Rights also increasingly bring in questions of access to healthy lifestyles. A feature of UNICEF's work in recent years has been on climate justice (UNICEF, 2021).

Perhaps the best example of UNICEF UK's approach to bringing the various Target 4.7 themes together within a participative and empowering pedagogy is their OutRight Campaign, which aims to:

> Empower children and young people to learn how climate change threatens children's rights and how we can protect them … This campaign is filled with hope and solutions – we'll be looking at innovative ways that children's rights are being protected from the impacts of climate change through adaptation and campaigning for climate action!   (UNICEF, 2022a: n.p.)

What makes this educational activity transformative is its learning objective:

> Understanding how other children and young people are using their voices to advocate for climate action. Young people recognise that it's their right to give their opinion about climate change – or any issue they care about, without discrimination. (UNICEF, 2022b: 40)

These two examples show that when engaging teachers and young people in issues such as climate change or fair trade, there is a need to ensure that they see the process of learning as being about

much more than just gaining bodies of knowledge. These issues naturally lead to learners wanting to do something about the injustices and inequalities about which they are learning. Here, it is seen that when intersectionality is at the heart of learning, it can lead to action for social change.

Intersectionality and systems thinking

Findings from the evidence report and these two examples provide weight to Sterling's assertion that systems thinking is needed, requiring seeing that 'valid knowledge and meaningful understanding comes from building up whole pictures of phenomenon, not by breaking them into parts' (Flood, 2001, as cited in Sterling, 2004: 1), and that without this approach, education's response is likely only to be 'accommodatory rather than transformative'. In other words, education adapts to the problem through content changes, but with little impact on values or ethos (Sterling, 2004: 2).

The themes addressed in this article suggest that in taking forward the discussions on intersectionality, a consideration of systems thinking would enrich the debates and provide a potential approach that is forward thinking and demonstrates how to move from learning to action. Systems thinking is not just a discursive shift; it is also a change in the ways in which the many factors influencing and being influenced by education are understood and analysed. It recognises the 'reality of the complex messiness of the education system it is addressing' (Faul and Savage, 2023: 15), with an acknowledgement that outcomes are unpredictable and emergent from the processes undertaken, rather than prescribed at the outset through often inflexible action plans, curricula organisation and donor restrictions. As described by Faul and Savage (2023: 15), 'Systems thinking enables a more sophisticated understanding of problems and system dynamics by focusing on the interactions and feedback between components and emergent properties.' Intersectionality is at its heart. An impact on values and ethos, a focus on analysis into action to disrupt oppression, the ways in which a learner's perception may be challenged and changed, the generation of opportunities for new thinking, including the impact of intersectional thinking to enrich and progress current ideas, can all be facilitated by applying systems thinking. This can help to generate the transformative education needed for the achievement of a more just and sustainable world, purposed in Target 4.7, and help to avoid the inadequate siloed approach discouraged by the UN through Agenda 2030.

Seeing how the themes of Target 4.7 interrelate can be powerful, because this makes visible aspects of justice which may have been previously invisible and enables calls for justice to be raised. The question asked is, what is made visible in the intersection? Perhaps in examining global citizenship and sustainability together, for example, active citizenship comes into view. In examining the intersection between peace education and education for sustainable development (environmental education), conflict because of climate change becomes more prominent and new ways to tackle it are considered. If then combined with cultural education, the voices of the marginalised, who are often living in and dealing with these conflicts, can be heard. As a result, acting for social justice goes beyond an arguably surface level learning of content, that accommodatory response, to equipping learners with the deeper awareness and connections necessary to effect social change.

Challenges in implementing this change of approach

The evidence presented in this article has identified that, while there is some evidence from civil society organisations of thinking about learning in a more holistic, intersectional and systems way, there are still major challenges. The school curriculum in many countries, including England, is organised into subjects that are then timetabled into discrete sessions. Education for sustainable development, for example, which is usually narrowly interpreted as education for climate change, is traditionally covered in geography or science, but is not widely seen outside these areas. From the perspective of interconnection, schooling is fragmented and, to overcome this, needs a new way of thinking. Sylvester (2022a: 12) reports evidence from the recent Times Education Commission Report and quotes Sir Jeremy Farrar, Director of the Wellcome Trust:

> The challenges of the modern age from pandemics to climate change require an interdisciplinary approach but the education system is still boxed into traditional curriculum subjects. Sir Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, said Covid-19 had shown the limitations of narrow subject-based teaching. 'The critical voices that you need are those

people that have an ability to bring expertise across dimensions, rather than just within narrow dimensions,' he said.

Sir Jeremy is not alone. The commission's report describes evidence from many voices pointing out that aspects of the current system, such as a focus on testing to the exclusion of enquiry, creativity or critical thinking, is stifling the very skills needed to deal with complex problems (Sylvester, 2022b).

The Our Shared World evidence report echoes this, and while there are examples of schools that have embraced some of the themes of Target 4.7, often inspired and influenced by external bodies, in the main an overemphasis on examinations and testing, and a focus on a siloed subject-based curriculum, are obstacles to making progress on raising the profile of the SDGs and Target 4.7 in the practice and ethos of many schools (Bourn and Hatley, 2022).

The focus on testing is a logical outcome of a neoliberal view of education which, over time, has drowned out other voices and ways of doing education; so much so that this one view of how education should be – to prepare young people for the economy amid an aggressive individualism – has become merely common sense to many. As described by Sterling (2017: 37), there is a:

> prevailing and baffling blindness to the global existential crisis, to the global threats and 'grand challenges' that are already affecting, and will increasingly dominate, all people's lives – particularly those of the younger generation. With such assumptions in place and apparently widely shared, a particular cluster of policies and practices follow logically – to the exclusion of alternatives, and the marginalization and squeezing of critical and explorative discourses, and of non-conformist practices. Rather, there appears to be a rush to be part of this paradigm, which is increasingly accepted as the 'obvious' norm.

It seems that a young person's purpose in life is to serve their employer! Anything related to exploration of who they are as human beings, their connection to others and the planet, where and in what they may find joy, and the act of being empathetic and caring for others are drowned out in favour of the hegemonic, dominant paradigm. An alternative is described thus by Faul and Savage (2023: 2): 'The dream is that all children, youth and adults everywhere learn and love learning, not just to get a job but because a positive journey of lifelong learning is how humans thrive.'

As mentioned, sustainability has become synonymous with climate change at the expense of the other themes of Target 4.7 needed for a quality education. Climate change is a welcome addition to the Department for Education's sustainability strategy. However, it is a convenient response to a complex problem because it does nothing to challenge the ideology behind education, which is at the root of barriers to the achieving of quality education. As such, a narrow interpretation of sustainable development as only being concerned with climate change serves to depoliticise the issue and suggests that there is no need for behaviour change. Climate change education alone will not solve the complex global problems for which society needs to find answers. Governments can be seen to be following a 'green agenda', but in fact the structures, direction and overall ideology of the current system remain unchanged. This has the effect of making the challenges more difficult, because the need for change is obscured beneath the appearance of well-meaning initiatives. Not only do these seem to be common sense, but they also arguably further reinforce the ideology, because change is not seen as being needed. As explored by Martínez-Rodríguez and Fernández-Herrería (2016, as cited in Sterling, 2017: 34) 'a key ideological effect of neoliberal thought is to "deny the possibility of alternative ways of organising both societies in general and education in particular"'.

Towards a common purpose and transformative education

Target 4.7 and the broader international discussions around the SDGs have provided opportunities for moving beyond this silo mentality and for beginning to ask questions about the wider role of education. UNESCO's discourse has begun to talk about transformative education as a way of moving beyond the themes of Target 4.7 to a broader vision of the purpose of education. For example, UNESCO (2019: 6) has defined transformation as referring to:

> a change, more or less radical and deep, in form, nature or appearance ... at two levels: first, in the learner, regarding the process s/he undertakes towards meaningful engagement; and second, to the impact of a learner's engagement on established institutions and norms, which may produce more or less change depending on its nature, its objectives and its sustainability.

There is a recognition within UNESCO (2022) that there is much more to be done in this area, and the extent to which this is a starting point to pose questions about the need to challenge the dominant neoliberal ideology within education remains open to debate. What is evident, however, is that by talking about and showing evidence of intersectionality, the SDGs and Target 4.7 can at least provide some openings for these wider questions.

This can be seen in the research conducted for Our Shared World. The evidence gathered shows that within the practices of civil society organisations, there are common themes that connect to the wider purposes of education, and to a more distinctive participatory and learner-centred pedagogy. There is an acknowledgement that education cannot operate separate to context. Education must prepare learners for the realities of the world they are facing now and will face in the future. Learners need not only to be made aware of issues, but also to be equipped to engage with them. In doing so, education's social purpose comes to the fore where in many places it has been lost. Education is a common good and a public good, 'which can empower learners to co-construct change, foster innovation and creativity and take action towards sustainability and collective human wellbeing' (Bourn and Hatley, 2022: 5). The evidence also showed the perspective of teachers, who want to move away from the instrumentalism of knowledge acquisition to a pedagogical approach that is learner centred, participatory and connects learners to social issues. In this view, topics such as climate change would not be seen as add-ons, as feared by Sterling (2004), but as a thread running through all subjects and linked to a broader social purpose, with learners empowered to construct change.

For example, in relation to global citizenship and teaching, 'Global learning approaches can be a valuable way of securing teacher retention, to give them confidence and motivation, and to remind them of the wider social purpose of education' (Bourn and Hatley, 2022: 71). Global citizenship has also been seen to raise standards:

> There is evidence from a range of studies that demonstrate that global citizenship themes help to raise the quality of teaching and learning, improve OFSTED ratings, and increase the engagement and support of parents/carers and the wider communities around schools. For example, Alcock and Ramirez Barker (2016) provided evidence of how global learning approaches improve writing in a primary school that had been inspected as unsatisfactory by Ofsted. A follow up inspection showed the value of this approach: 'The school uses global education themes very effectively to set pupils' learning in a worldwide context and broaden their views of the world. This makes the learning more relevant and interesting for pupils, and so it contributes to their enthusiasm for learning. (Bourn and Hatley, 2022: 72)

Target 4.7 and the purpose of education

To empower learners to co-construct change and connect with a wider social purpose, education needs a sense of positivity. Otherwise, learners may feel disempowered and lacking in agency to affect change. A sense of agency has been shown to be crucial in avoiding some of the reported side effects of a focus on the negative sides of crises, rather than on what learners can do about it to make a difference. There have been several studies that have investigated the extent to which children and young people feel anxious about the state of the world, particularly in relation to the environmental crisis (Global Action Plan, 2020; Lawton, 2019; Ojala, 2012). The conclusions of these studies pose questions that go beyond the scope of this article, not least the overemphasis on psychological influences to the detriment of social and cultural factors. But what is evident from the research in England was that various organisations were conscious of these perceived issues, and saw that what was needed were initiatives that focused on action and meaningful agency. For example, the Fairtrade schools award programme stated:

> Fair trade is a 'practical starting point' for global citizenship that is clearly an attraction for many teachers. It provides an opportunity for pupils to make a connection between global issues and their everyday lives and buying and selling fair trade goods gives them something practical to do. (Bourn and Hatley, 2022: 75)

If Target 4.7 is to have any impact within schools, it must be promoted and used in a way that suggests a pedagogical approach that is about transformation and social change. As UNESCO has stated, education should be seen as a common good, which engages people and communities towards a

common purpose. These themes have been noted by, among others, Nóvoa and Alvim (2020), who see a linkage between a common purpose and transformation, and Sobe (2021: n.p., emphasis in original) in providing '*the right moral coordinates*' that '*give good reason for hope*'.

The desire to consider this wider purpose of education has not only engaged UNESCO; it has also become a feature of considerable debate in the light of the convergence of several global crises: the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and the re-emergence of war in Europe. There has also been an increased interest and engagement with issues of diversity, race and gender equality as a result of Black Lives Matters and the MeToo movement. Educational bodies around the world have responded to these challenges in different ways, some by giving greater emphasis to themes, but others, such as in England, through encouraging debate about what education is for. As Gerver (2019: 33) has stated:

> As educators, we cannot insulate ourselves from the world, or pretend that we have no role to play in it. Similarly, we cannot endeavour to protect our students from it. We must do all that we can to prepare our children for it and to do that, we need to find ways to understand it and then to use our expertise to create learning opportunities for them.

The importance of the need to change education to achieve a more just future is summarised by Sterling (2022: 1):

> Any possibility of a safe, humane and ecologically sound future depends absolutely on the type of learning that individuals, groups and entire societies are able to experience now and in the coming years ... We are entering a different age and a different world, one we are hardly ready for.

The importance of the practices of civil society organisations to promote this desire for more systematic change that is also learner centred and potentially transformative can be seen in the actions of Bridge 47 (Arbeiter and Bucar, 2021). The work of this network has shown how Target 4.7 could be a mechanism for bringing together a range of key stakeholders for a common purpose. As both this network and the work of Our Shared World have also shown, there is more commonality in purpose than may have been first envisaged between a wide range of organisations that might individually come under the banner of peace, human rights, environment, culture and global citizenship. There have been numerous attempts in the history of development education and global learning to bring together what has been called these *adjectival educations*. In the 1980s, Pike and Selby (1988) in their characterisation of this field of global education envisaged it as bringing together these different elements. Led initially by the North–South Centre, and more recently by Global Education Network Europe (GENE), this broad interpretation of global education gained considerable political support among policymakers across Europe, as could be seen in the 2001 Maastricht Declaration. In 2022, this declaration was updated at a major conference in Dublin, with a vision of global education to 2050:

> Global education empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring about a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity and equality, planetary sustainability and international understanding. (GENE, 2022: 12)

What perhaps is needed now, however, is more than just a closer alignment of these themes and movements, but a reconceptualisation that links them together around the theme of global social and environmental justice with a focus on intersectionality. This means also including a dimension that is looking to the future, and that promotes a sense of positivity and that change is possible.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

Douglas Bourn is a member of the International Editorial Board for this journal. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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