Quality learning for all and sustainable development: A transformative agenda

Leon Tikly
University of Bristol
Outline

• The critique of dominant approaches
• Towards a critical understanding of SD
• Theorising quality education for all in the context of SD
• Towards a transformative agenda, i.e. education that is
  • Relevant
  • Inclusive
  • Democratic
  • Sustainable
• Focus on Africa
Key argument

• The meaning of quality learning for all needs to be considered in relation to a critical understanding of sustainable development.

• Education can contribute to both unsustainable and sustainable development

• Quality Education for Sustainable Development needs to be transformative, i.e. it needs to be:
  • Relevant, i.e. develop understandings of ‘what works’ to improve learning outcomes that are situated in the realities of African classrooms and lead to the development of capabilities that support sustainable livelihoods both for existing and future generations.
  • Inclusive i.e. close the learning gap between the privileged and the most marginalised and to promote indigenous as well as global cultures and languages.
  • Democratic in terms of how a good quality education is defined, implemented and evaluated and in promoting principles of local and global citizenship.
  • Sustainable i.e. embedded in sustainable education systems that are driven by locally determined priorities and that are themselves capable of learning and innovation.
The critique of dominant approaches to ESD
Critical realism

**Empiricism/ positivism**
Emphasis on ‘gold standard’ methods that can lead to ‘generalisable’ conclusions. Reality is objectified and reduced to what can be empirically measured/ observed.

**Interpretivism**
Emphasis on perceptions/ context that can include consideration of power relationships. Reality reduced to necessarily limited perceptions of reality. Relativistic.

**Critical realism**
(Un)sustainable development in Africa: some causal mechanisms

**Economic**
Extractive production processes; over-consumption; unsustainable agricultural practices; weak industrial base; poor infrastructure; skills crisis; debt peonage.

**Socio-cultural**
‘Hollowed out’/ neo-patrimonial state; growing social inequality based on class, gender, ethnicity; conflict; demise of indigenous knowledge systems and languages; dependency.

**Environmental**
Drought, flooding, land degradation, deforestation, pollution.
Exosystem: e.g. The structure of the educational system; global and national policy and legal frameworks governing education; education finance; aid modalities; management and information systems; teacher training; the curriculum; international and national assessment regimes etc.

Microsystem: e.g. structure of formal and informal learning environments and pedagogical practices; structure of regulatory institutions and discourses e.g. family, school, religious, community organisations, kinship networks, peer groups etc.

Mesosystem: e.g. linkages and processes between home, school and community, e.g. parental involvement, school governance, feeding schemes, community health etc.

Macrosystem: e.g. Political economy including class, gender and ethnic relations; cultural norms and values; global and indigenous knowledge systems; national and global educational ideologies/ discourses etc.

Individual level: e.g. genetic predispositions, structure of the brain, mind and personality, health and wellbeing

Diagram 1. A laminated learning system.
Amartya Sen and Capability Approach
Nancy Fraser
Education and Human Capabilities

• Freedom as the goal of development
• Purpose of education is to develop range of capabilities that contribute to overall wellbeing that individuals, communities and nations have reason to value
• Education quality can be defined in terms of the opportunities available to develop capabilities
Relevant....

Develop understandings of ‘what works’ to improve learning outcomes that are situated in the realities of African classrooms and lead to the development of capabilities that support sustainable livelihoods both for existing and future generations.
Inclusive i.e. close the learning gap between the privileged and the most marginalised and to promote indigenous as well as global cultures and languages.

Democratic.....

Democratic in terms of how a good quality education is defined, implemented and evaluated and in promoting principles of local and global citizenship.
Sustainable

Sustainable i.e. embedded in sustainable education systems that are driven by locally determined priorities and that are themselves capable of learning and innovation.

Indigenous leadership able to exert leverage on global stage

Strong and vibrant civil society

Education policy linked to indigenously determined growth paths

Indigenous capability for research, innovation, monitoring and evaluation
Some Implications for research.....
Implications for research