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Special Symposium Issue

Aid, Development, and Education

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Editorial Introduction
Special Symposium Issue on Aid, Development, and Education

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The editors of *Current Issues in Comparative Education* are extraordinarily pleased to present this special symposium issue organized around a seminal contribution by **Steven J. Klees**, the Harold R.W. Benjamin Professor of International and Comparative Education at the University of Maryland, former president of the Comparative and International Education Society, and a contributor to previous issues of this journal. In the focal article for this issue, "Aid, Development, and Education," Klees conducts a close reading of recent entries into the burgeoning debate over international aid and development, and then proceeds to set out an articulate and passionate defense of a 'progressive perspective' that, he argues, stands in stark opposition to prevailing neoliberal and liberal views. Klees' essay is followed by four responses – by **William C. Brehm and Iveta Silova, Mark Ginsburg, Sangeeta Kamat,** and **Karen Mundy** – that are met in turn with a reply by Klees that aims at giving further elaboration to the progressive perspective.

Klees' essay comes at a time when the field of international aid and development has become a site of roiling contention. Of course, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have long debated among themselves whether international aid has done much to improve the living conditions and life chances of the world's billions of poor. Efforts to improve "aid effectiveness," while given fresh impetus over the last decade through the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action, are hardly new.[1] What makes the contemporary period remarkable, however, is the degree of attention and influence that critiques of the aid industry – such as those found in William Easterly's *The White Man's Burden* (2006) and especially Dambisa Moyo's *Dead Aid* (2008) – have managed to gain among audiences beyond the aid community itself. These critiques have emerged, moreover, just as the field itself has started to witness potentially significant transformation, with high-level initiatives such as the U.N. Millennium Development Goals unfolding alongside the emergence of a variety of new actors, ranging from celebrities and internet-fueled philanthropies to rising economic powers such as China and Brazil. What these developments suggest is that we are today confronted with a singular opportunity – and an increasingly urgent moral and political obligation – to re-examine the very premises of international aid and its implications for development.

As Klees' essay makes clear, re-examination requires us to go beyond the familiar debates over the machinery of aid delivery – or, to switch to a more frequented metaphor, with the specifics of 'aid architecture' – to question the fundamental *ideological orientations* that inform how we interpret past and current global realities, generate diagnoses and prescriptions, and connect these to our projections and hopes for the future. Klees begins his article by reminding us of the horrific scale of the human costs that poverty and inequality continue to exact on the world's poor and vulnerable. Addressing these problems requires not only that we do 'more' (although more certainly needs to be done), but that we also clarify and adopt a *progressive* standpoint that makes issues of global justice and equality central to its approach to contemporary development. However, as Klees acknowledges, a progressive voice remains relatively muted in contemporary debates. He argues in his review of five notable recent books on aid and development – the discussions by Easterly and Moyo, already mentioned above, as well as Thomas Dichter's *Despite Good Intentions* (2003),

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David Ellerman's *Helping People Help Themselves* (2005), and Roger Riddell's *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* (2007) – that 'mainstream' perspectives adhere to either neoliberal prescriptions or propose liberal meliorations that fail to do justice, in both a moral and intellectual sense, to the demands and requirements of genuine, progressive development. While Klees allows that neoliberal and liberal critiques of current aid practices occasionally hit real targets, they are based on a shared blindness to the fact that contemporary international development was founded and predicated, to a considerable extent, on both neoliberal and liberal premises. Indeed, Klees argues that development initiatives, including the Millennium Development Goals – which is easily the largest coordinated organizational effort there has been in international development – are most profitably understood as situated within a dialectic of "compensatory legitimation." In this reading, the 'real' purpose of aid is not to facilitate genuine improvement in the conditions of the world's poor, but to offer a fig leaf of remedial compensation for the deep and myriad injustices perpetuated by an enduring but fundamentally unjust global capitalist order. Only a progressive approach, he suggests, works toward using aid to transform that order rather than to smooth out its internal contradictions.

What Counts as Genuine Progressivism?

In the responses that follow Klees' essay, we find extensive areas of agreement and sympathy for the idea of a progressive perspective and approach to international aid, development, and education. However, the different authors challenge Klees on several points, and question whether or not he has offered us an adequately progressive understanding of progressivism, so to speak, or has a suitably specified conception of how institutional transformation is possible. For instance, both Mark Ginsburg and Sangeeta Kamat, in their respective responses, challenge Klees to pursue more deeply what a radical and not merely progressive transformation of global capitalism and other global institutions would entail, if the aims of justice and equality are to be realized in meaningful fashion. Arguments over labels such as 'progressive' and 'radical' may seem like semantic quibbles, but these responses raise important questions about the kinds of theoretical lens and conceptual frameworks that are needed to identify potential sources of (and obstacles to) deep social transformation. Does a progressivism that attempts to differentiate itself from its liberal and neoliberal opponents mark a genuine advance if it cannot identify plausible institutional alternatives? Both Ginsburg and Kamat argue that Klees, despite his fidelity to a progressive orientation, has not accomplished a genuine break from standard liberal efforts to 'improve' aid and meliorate the conditions of the world's poor. In reply, Klees suggests that both Ginsburg and Kamat overstate the differences between his position and theirs. The argument he articulates here is not a fully developed proposal but instead a promissory note for additional theoretical – and political – work that, once undertaken, should make the commonalities between his views and those of Ginsburg and Kamat much more apparent.

Somewhat sharper differences become evident in respect of Karen Mundy's response to Klees. Mundy, like Ginsburg and Kamat, argues that much more needs to be done to specify institutional alternatives to the current international aid system. However, Mundy states, Klees' progressive perspective fails to give an adequate account of an apparent paradox: how can development assistance be a part of a system of global inequality and injustice and at the same time be a part of a progressive solution to that system? Moreover, there is much that is taking place in the development world today that has not been adequately captured by familiar ideological orientations and political economy arguments. New private and state actors (ranging from the Gates Foundation to celebrity donors and rapidly-developing countries like China) have entered the scene; none seem particularly beholden to 'old ways' of carrying out business or conducting aid debates. In view of these ongoing changes in the contemporary aid environment, Klees'

proposals for transforming the existing aid architecture – such as calling for the dismantling of the Bretton Woods institutions (i.e., the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) – may seem rhetorically satisfying, but upon inspection is less than convincing. Klees disagrees, stating that Mundy underestimates the potential of a progressive approach, and that the changing membership of the development field cannot count as an adequate argument against its basic claims or orientation.

Implications for Education?

As Klees acknowledges, much of the focus of his discussion is on the first two of the three terms in the title to his article – that is, on aid and development rather than education. But the implications for education should be clear. With the institutionalization of global compacts such as Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, education has come to occupy a central place in the contemporary international aid system. Billions of dollars now pour each year into funding an array of international, national, and non-governmental organizations working to design, implement, research, and evaluate programs directed at promoting education. But however rhetorically committed the international aid community has been to ideals of education's intrinsic worth, a notable consequence of these initiatives has been to sanction new forms of global governance – or to use the Foucauldian term, governmentality – implemented through time-bound targets, indicators, and benchmarks that place developing countries under onerous burdens and perhaps unsustainable standards and expectations. Under current assessment frameworks and development targets, as Michael Clemens (2004) pointed out in a trenchant analysis, the historically unprecedented rates of progress many countries have actually achieved in expanding educational access have, nevertheless, been criticized as insufficient or as signs of 'failure' by development experts applying global rather than nationally- or contextually-driven standards and criteria.[2]

In light of these observations, William C. Brehm and Iveta Silova's "radical reimagination" of aid relationships provides a stimulating point from which to view Klees' argument. In their essay, Brehm and Silova use Jacques Rancière's famous discussion of Joseph Jacotot, the 'ignorant schoolmaster' who sought to reorient educational and pedagogical practices around a principle of presumed equality, rather than hierarchy, of intelligence and capability between teacher and student. Following Jacotot's (and Rancière's) lead, Brehm and Silova suggest that all of the ideological orientations Klees identifies – the progressive perspective included – attempt to create new architectures on the basis of old foundations. They suggest that current practices in aid and development rest on an implicit sense that the developed world is authorized to dictate to developing countries the kinds of educational objectives and goals they should be pursuing. A more satisfactory approach, perhaps, would be to adopt the stance of an "ignorant donor," one less willing to instrumentalize education as a means toward economic or other ends, in favor of a system that recognizes genuine equality among all peoples to develop their intrinsic educational potential and values. In response, Klees questions whether or not Brehm and Silova are misinterpreting the progressive position, which would in fact find these novel ideas congenial.

Conclusion

Taken together, these essays offer but a single contribution to the multitude of intellectual, practical, and political debates that must be addressed if we – as students, educators, and citizens – wish to persist in our commitment to a more equitable and humane world. Certainly, the future of international aid, development, and education is difficult to predict with any great sense of assurance. However, the editors of CICE are thankful to Steven Klees and his respondents for helping to make the challenges, demands and possibilities in front of us much clearer.

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Endnotes

1. As development economist Owen Barder (2009) reminds us, the Pearson Commission's 1969 report, *Partners in Development*, came to many of the same recommendations – such as untying aid and improving coordination among aid donors and recipients – that can be found in current prescriptions and objectives incorporated into the 'aid effectiveness' agendas of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action (OECD, 2011).
2. Similarly, Easterly (2009) makes this point with respect to the MDGs and Africa, pointing out that indicators and metrics used to assess progress toward the MDGs place the most disadvantaged countries, mainly in Africa, under disproportionately burdensome expectations that cause even historically significant progress to be interpreted as indications of "failure."

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