

Bridging gaps and building wisdom

You can't change what you can't see... or feel

Harriet Marshall

A few weeks ago, I tried to explain development education to a teacher friend. My definition went along the lines of

"helping people see, understand and feel connections and interconnections, disconnections and gaps in order to make the world a more just and sustainable place... it's a pedagogical approach that helps us recognise power, purpose, perception and misperception".

I then went on to draw lots of circles to illustrate – alas judging by my friend's face by the end, I was only partially successful!

Recent reading has caused me to draw lots of circles to represent fields, ideas and world-views in order to understand the disconnect and interrelationships between them.

Elephant Times [ET 2] posed some vital questions to me about moving forward in the field of development education – for example ...

Mick Waters:

Are we stuck in a model of curriculum-design that will always be antagonistic to pluralist or alternative world-views?

Elena Lengthorn:

Do we need to be better at working with 'facts' to counter the negativity instinct?

Robin Richardson:

Are our motivations for making this world a more sustainable place anything other than self-interest, or the avoidance of premature death?

What are our key contextual constants and shifts?

A long-standing dilemma and raison d'être for global learning* links to what might be called a '**connection gap**' between seeing the need for change to happen in order to make this planet a more just and sustainable place for all (species) and actually wanting to make that change happen so much that we actually transform behaviour, policy or even systems.

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Harriet reflects on
issues in
[Elephant Times \[ET 2\]](#)

* **Global learning.**
Which I see as a loose umbrella term used to include global citizenship education, development education, education for/about sustainable development, futures education and other adjectival educational concepts.



The Elephant Times [51]



Contextual dilemmas ...

1 - that **socially 'perceived' subject hierarchies within schools** are immensely powerful, value-laden social constructs within society and look set to continue to haunt any interdisciplinary curricula for the foreseeable future [see any sociologist of education that has ever written];

2 - that those in the field of global or development education need to also **reflect upon the instrumentalism** within our own agendas ^[1] when they critique others; and

3 - that **many teachers ARE actively engaged** in different 'forms' of global learning but perhaps prefer to use different labels ... [from UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools, to diversity education through BLM or LGBTQ projects, to #TeachSDGs or #TeachtheFuture].



But for this article, let's stick to the '**connection gap**' issue.

Most people agree in principle that we need to act now to address our global 'wicked' problems like climate change and biodiversity loss** ... with the exception of a minority who are highly unlikely to be reading the Elephant Times.

Millions of people have watched David Attenborough's 'Our Planet' which significantly topped the Netflix chart in 2019 and the number of those aware of the UN's SDGs is slowly increasing (although we in UK have a long way to go as illustrated [here](#)). But how to shift our mindset to such an extent that we 'act' is a whole different matter.

** A wicked problem is an issue that is difficult to explain and inherently challenging to solve, e.g. poverty, many of the SDGs.

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Tide on line magazine

... and ongoing concerns ... stimulated by ET 2

4. Some of us in the environmental action or awareness-raising world occasionally **forget that we are operating in a bubble** – that not everyone prioritises nature, that not everyone loves animals and trees, and not everyone ‘feels’ these issues [no matter how much evidence or emotion you throw at them].

As the elections here and in the US have illustrated, people hate being told off or told ‘how they think’ is ‘wrong’.

If we enter into that approach we lose the very people whose mindsets we are trying to engage.

5. Often ‘mindset change’ strategies relating to global learning and climate change target formal schooling and school curricula in isolation from an intergenerational or life-long learning approach. There has been an increase in projects in this vein often linked with ed tech or youth leadership and some of these have utilised PR messaging that implies sustainable development or global citizenship is new or revolutionary.

They may not have been as technologically sophisticated, but projects in this field have been around in the UK for 50 years, as Tide~ knows well. So, how can we better connect projects and generations in the increasingly broad field of development education without dismissing the new or disregarding the more established?

6. The contrast between ‘**6th extinction**’ predictions juxtaposed with the ‘**2nd renaissance in human capabilities**’ has the danger of appearing so complex and overwhelming that it will lead to inertia, brain freeze and avoidance.

Do we have tools to navigate this tension in the dev. ed. world?

What tools are out there to help us achieve ‘wisdom’?

In various keynotes and media appearances in 2019-20 both Jane Goodall and David Attenborough have been calling for greater ‘wisdom’ to combat the world’s great environmental and biodiversity threats... but what does this actually mean? To bridge the connection gap we can craft beautiful ‘global citizenship’ curricula and teacher training courses, we can push for the prioritisation of SDG 4.7 within government policy and practice, and we can work hard to support teachers who share



By 2030 ensure all learners acquire 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.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.7

our vision... but if the ‘wisdom’ is not co-owned by the target audience, if the connection between ‘seeing/understanding’ the change and ‘feeling’ it in order to ‘act’ differently is not achieved, then is this always the best use of our time?

With these dilemmas in mind, I recall Scott Sinclair’s invitation for us to return to some of the why, what and how questions of development education. Here are my thoughts.

Simply put, **I think we would benefit from a bit more neuroscience (the why), economics (the what) and systems-thinking (the how) and a reminder of the wealth of expertise we already have as a global education field.**

a] **Neuroscience** helps us better understand how we actually learn [rather than how we ‘suppose’ we might learn based on social norms and generations of formal schooling]. The reason I think it can really enhance our field is that there are some interesting findings ^[2 & 3] emerging on the relationship between human connection, empathy, learning and the significance of the emotional dimension of learning.

When we create resources that are aimed at challenging stereotypes or embracing diversity or recognising alternative world-views, are we really taking on board the empathy-building aspect of this process?

Development education pedagogy has been talking about the connection between head, heart and hand models of transformative learning [for sustainability values for example] for decades, but are we simultaneously providing rigorous evidence to back up this approach beyond the anecdotal?



b] Economics and quantitative data are not always within a humanities expert's or social scientist's comfort zone, but we ignore them at our peril.

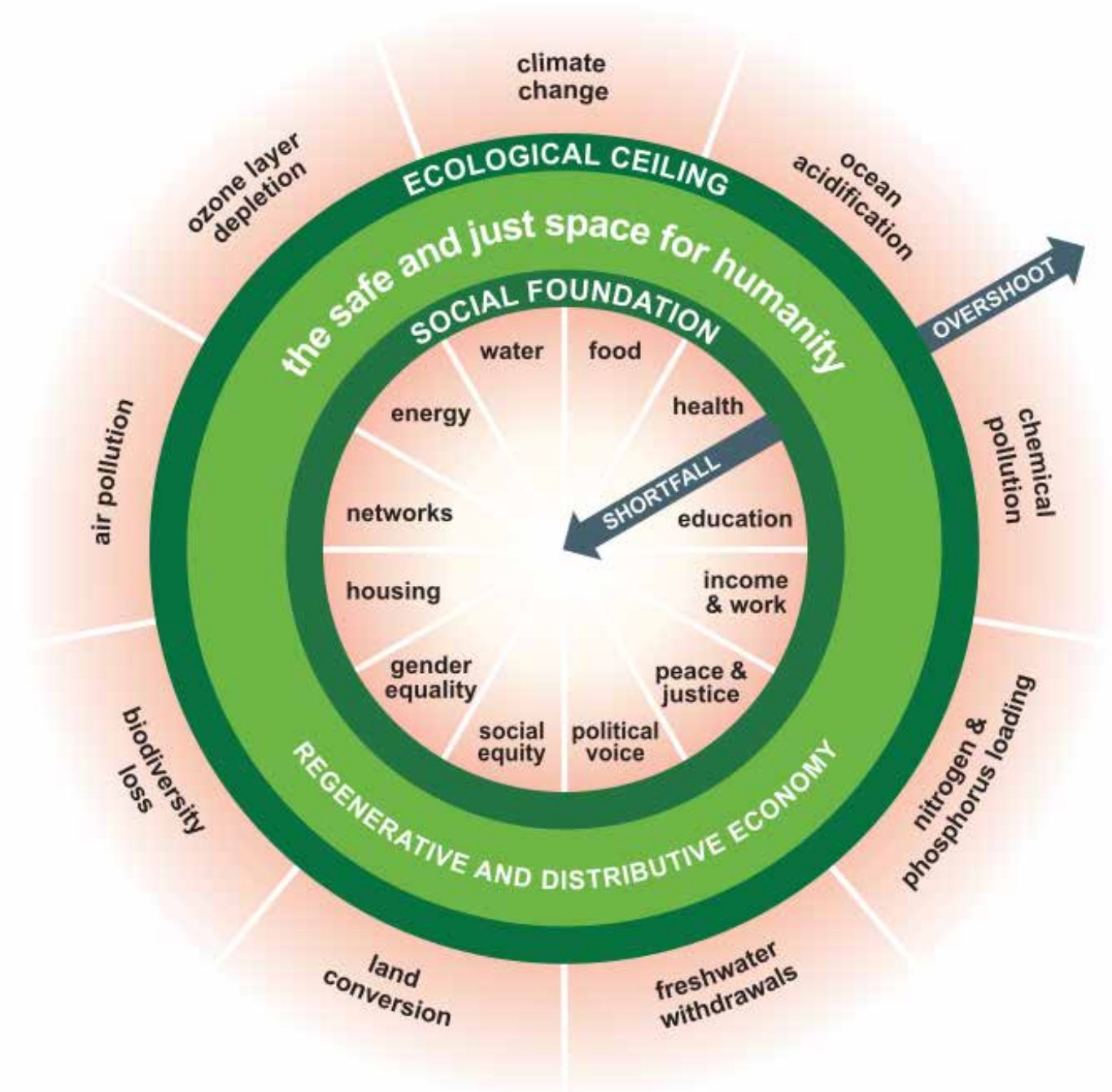
The brilliant Kate Raworth makes regenerative economics more accessible than ever before via her work on '**doughnut economics**' and this knowledge is vitally important in the field of development education. What it helps us to do is to better explore 'purpose' and 'resilience', relating planetary and societal resilience through an accessible, economic lens.

c] Systems thinking focuses our attention on interconnections, synthesis, causality, and the fact that design is 'fundamentally world-view dependent, and the design decisions of previous generations, as well as the present generation have... shaped our world-view and value systems'^[4].

It helps us see systems as circular rather than linear and look at relationships rather than issues in silos – for example it helps us imagine the circular economy and sustainable living within ecosystems. It is a great framework for looking more deeply at the SDGs for example rather than looking at any single goal in isolation from the others.

d] The educational field of global learning – back in 2005 I called the movement for global education a 'field' because it both catered for its heterogeneity (i.e. different approaches each with a unique history) as well as its commonalities (such as broader social justice and environmental agendas). As Doug Bourn has since argued, 'GE can be seen to have developed over the past decade as a distinctive body of thinking, research, ways of working and practices' (2020:19). This field manifests itself in research hubs, academic journals, researchers and practitioners at an international level.

The rich work of practitioners and theorists (such as Vanessa Andreotti and Karen Pashby) and the influence of critical pedagogy in the field is important. Though an expert will point out a myriad of ways we can improve, the field has advocated post-colonial thinking and generally been good at taking an intersectional approach to identities and prejudice [e.g. taking into account people's overlapping identities - race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age - and their experiences].



Doughnut diagram source - <https://doughnuteconomics.org>

In fact, in relation to movements like Black Lives Matter and stop climate change, those within have championed these messages for many years.

To summarise, development methodologies and practices that encourage a different way of hearing perspectives or reframing an issue (e.g. Philosophy for Children) and academic work like '*The Bloomsbury Handbook of Global Education and Learning*' (Bourn 2020), collectively provide an excellent selection of tools to help us achieve wisdom!





How might this thinking further influence development education practice?

As to how these four points (a-d) manifest themselves in our plans, pedagogies and practice ... *I believe the opportunities are endless and the appetite amongst educators is strong.*

[Lyfta.com](https://lyfta.com) is a good example of a global learning approach taking on board some of this wisdom as it develops and grows. Lyfta is a digital learning platform that captures human stories around the world through powerful short films.

Lyfta makes it clear that these stories are partial, simply glimpses into the unique lives of others around the world, but valuable in so many ways as immersive learning experiences

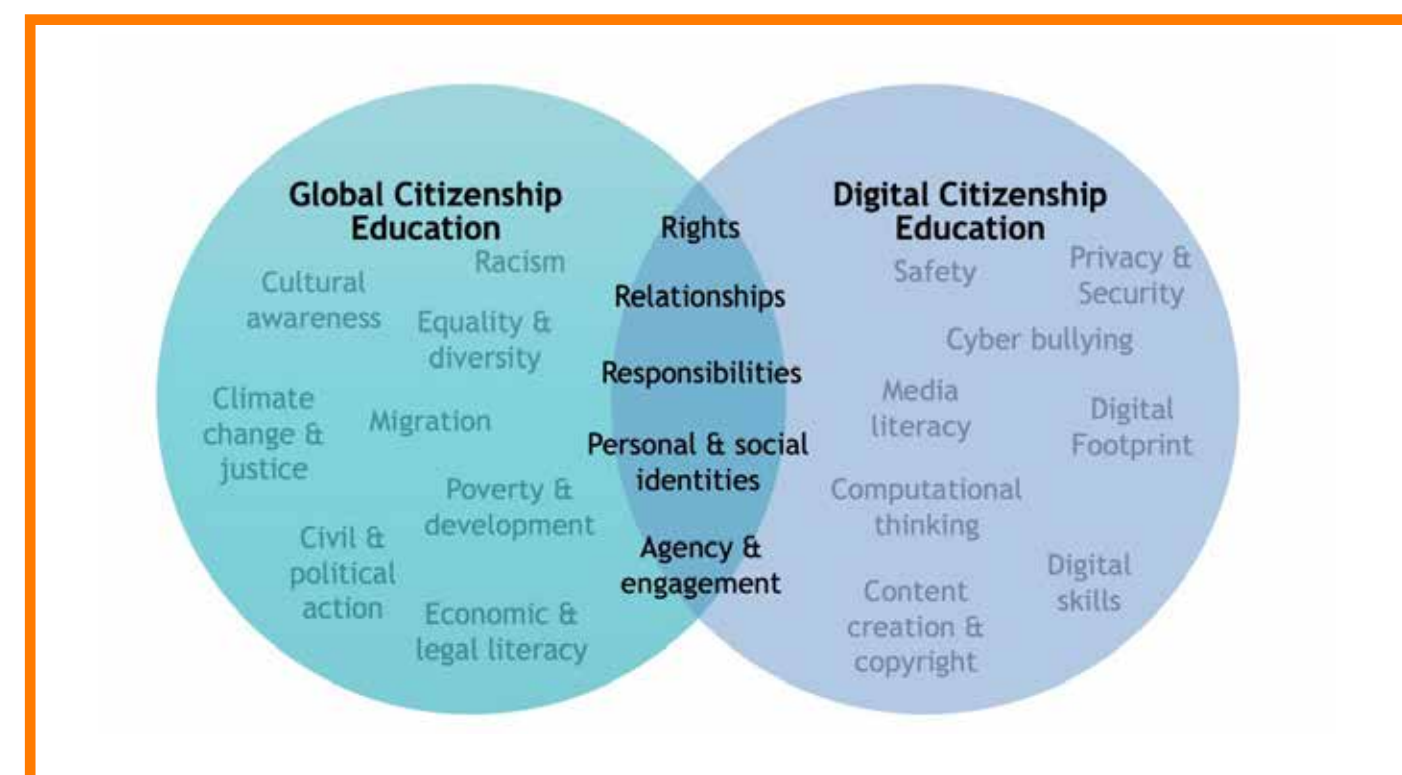
These films are then turned into 360 degree interactive spaces in which teachers and their students can learn about people, places, values and skills. The teacher resources, developed by practitioners, are mapped to the SDGs.

Lyfta has been well-received in primary and secondary schools across Finland and the UK, in part because of how engaged students and teachers have been with the authenticity and diversity of the stories encountered throughout the resource.

One of the strengths of this global learning resource is that it recognises the importance of building meaningful connection and empathy to key global issues in order to move towards action because just 'seeing' or 'understanding' the change or action required for a better world is not quite enough.

Lyfta chooses to achieve this through the ancient art of human storytelling enriched by the modern art of film making and the underpinned by the pedagogic expertise of teachers to achieve an immersive, educational experience.

This is an example of the critical dev. ed. work within the digital learning space ... an important space for us to 'get right' as highlighted by recent research by Dublin City University ...



From: Martinez-Sainz & Barry in 'Digital Technologies to Advance Global Citizenship Education in Schools' - ([Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, 2020](#)).

Links

1. [Marshall 2012](#)
2. [Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond and Krone 2019](#)
3. [Sylvan 2019](#)
4. [Wahl 2017](#)
5. [Bourne 2015](#)

