

Chapter 12

Teaching Post Development as a Tool for Transformation

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I realized that every aspect in our day-to-day life and activities is a form of development or means to development (Student 2015 Q2.4 S2).¹

The chapter is a contribution to the collective learning process of decolonizing the academe. I share my reflections on teaching, and experiments in critical pedagogy. The aim was not to teach the orthodox canon but to start from the experiences, knowledges and ‘development encounters’ of the students themselves. In this approach, I am inspired by feminist writers such as Donna Haraway (1988) and Giovanna Di Chiro (2017). I share with them the importance of situated knowledges – produced by particular actors in a specific geographic and historical setting – along with a commitment to Freire’s notion of education as ‘critical consciousness’ where students are producers of knowledge along with teachers.

This chapter reflects on the first years (2015–2018) of using post development (PD) as a tool to engage international students in critical reflections on development in the MA General Course of the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands.² The essay considers both the possibilities and the difficulties of using PD in a global North institute where most of the students are from the global South. The course uses PD along with decolonial and feminist pedagogies to engage students in the ‘making, unmaking and remaking’ of development. The aim of the course is to create a space for reflection and dialogue among peers and teachers that extends the students’ understanding of development in and beyond the classroom.

1 Throughout the essay, I refer to students’ comments coming from the evaluation of the first version of the course in 2015. As all the comments were anonymous, I have referred to them by a Question (Q) and a number (S) that refers to the order of the student answers.

2 The essay is a reworking of an earlier version of the article published in the *Third World Quarterly* (Harcourt 2017).

The chapter explores ‘the doing of’ PD through teaching practices as a story of learning (and unlearning) for both teachers as well as students. It is inspired by the pedagogical philosophy of Paulo Freire (2000) where teachers are seen as cultural workers and students are intellectuals and practitioners and our goal is to make classrooms spaces that encourage investigation, cooperation and critical dialogue.

The chapter also tells a personal story about creating transgressive spaces (hooks 2014) in teaching institutions. The chapter connects my self-reflections on teaching to wider political and social understandings of education. I am interested in the politics of teaching critically about mainstream development processes as a contribution to help dismantle the deep colonial and Eurocentric biases of the global ‘development project’ (McMichael 2012). The chapter is a story of how challenging it is to unsettle truths of mainstream development in places like ISS which has a long history at the interface of activism and academe as well as a colonial legacy.³ It is also a contribution to this historical moment in academe where the domination of curriculum by ‘dead white men’ (DWM) is being questioned, and there are lively academic debates about decolonizing the university the Eurocentrism of university courses (Icaza 2015).⁴

My approach to the course is inspired by and aspires to Freire’s view of education as ‘the practice of freedom – the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world’ (Freire 2000, 34). I see students as deeply learning from each other’s stories and the course as a way to gain skills of self-reflection and compassion when they hear about other’s experiences, accomplishments and the challenges they have faced. I see the teacher’s role as mentoring and guiding students in co-productive collaborations, reflecting a commitment to education that is interdisciplinary, experientially grounded and culturally diverse.

In spelling out this approach to the course I am ‘situating’ the teaching as a form of knowledge inspired by the edited collection on PD by Ziai (2007). Following this debate, I reflect on the highly political process of teaching institutions asking what counts as knowledge, who has the authority to teach, in which language, from which history (Icaza and Vazquez 2016). I consider this ‘reflexive turn’ (Kobayashi 2003) on pedagogy welcome if also problematic as it demands courage to scrutinize your own complicity in the power relations that go on in the class room (Icaza 2015).

³ It was one of the five Dutch institutions set up post World War II in 1952, announced to the UN by the then Queen Juliana in the UN to train students from former colonies in social sciences.

⁴ As I write this chapter, there is a steady stream of articles, blogs and letters about the University of Cambridge seeking to decolonize its curriculum. See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/oct/30/perspectives-on-decolonising-and-diversifying-english-teaching> (accessed 1 November 2017).

As well as based on my own reflections, the material used in the chapter comes mostly from the students' experiences recorded in the formal evaluations of the first year of the course.⁵ In addition, I quote from the students' essays and the videos they produced in the other years of the course.⁶ I also refer to internal group discussions of students and staff and particularly to internal teaching review surveys.⁷ In addition to course evaluations, a survey was sent out early in 2017, two years after the first course, to the first set of facilitators and students. This yielded reflections about their pedagogical experience in ISS and their thoughts on the impact of PD in their current working lives.

Section 1 describes how the course is designed and the pedagogical methods using PD as a tool to understand development encounters, in the different versions of the course, in particular peer learning. Section 2 analyses the responses of the students to the course along with my own. I reflect on the teaching as a process of 'unlearning' and on what kinds of transformation and transgression were possible. Section 3 analyses the strategy to use PD as tool for teaching. I examine the continuing challenge for development studies to be progressive given the backdrop of dwindling resources as well as broader pessimism about increasing global inequalities, economic and ecological failures.

THE ISS GENERAL COURSE 'THE MAKING OF DEVELOPMENT' OR 'MOD'

The course is taught at the ISS in The Hague, the Netherlands, one of the most well-known European postgraduate development studies institutes. Founded

5 There is some quantitative information about the students in the first year of the course. In terms of nationality and gender of the students, 19.5 per cent of the students were from Latin American, 29 per cent from Africa, 40 per cent from Asia, 7.6 per cent from Europe, 2.6 per cent from the Middle East and 1.3 per cent from North America; 39 per cent were men and 61 per cent were women (no other gender identity was registered). The majority of the students were in their thirties (53 per cent) with 20 per cent in their twenties and the rest over forty. There was one student with disabilities. In the additional survey, twenty students were contacted and twelve responded – 25 per cent European, 25 per cent Asian, 25 per cent Latin American, 25 per cent African.

6 Most of the quotes from students come from a detailed Final Course Evaluation held on 1 February 2016 before the grades were released organized by one of the ISS staff using a computer-generated EvaSys package. A total of 126 students answered the survey. The selection of the quotes is from a study of all thirty-one pages as well as online written reports. As the entry is a personal anonymous reflection, it was not possible to differentiate which students said what. I selected the most articulate comments.

7 Drafts of the TWQ piece were shared with a selection of 152 students and 16 teaching staff and facilitators involved. A short version of the piece was also presented at the Development Studies Association Conference in Oxford in September 2016. The original results of the second survey were summarized in the ISS magazine *Dev Issues* (October 2017). I take full responsibility for the views expressed here.

in 1952, ISS has been for most of its history an independent institute funded by the Dutch government to do capacity building and postgraduate education, as well as research, pioneering a number of critical development courses over the years.⁸ In 2009, ISS joined Erasmus University, Rotterdam. As a result, there is now less emphasis on capacity training courses in the global South, and more research-led teaching and a growing emphasis on winning large research grants. The focus of ISS is now more firmly anchored within mainstream academe, competing on various levels with other universities in Europe for students and funding, though a strong emphasis on societally relevant research and scholar activism remains.

The ISS master in development studies currently takes fifteen months and there is a period, where ‘batches’ of students overlap as one group begins the course and the other completes their master’s thesis. The General Course, known by students as ‘MoD’ is taught in this overlapping period, is the only obligatory course that all the students take as a form of ‘orientation’ to the ISS approach to development studies. The large majority of students are from the global South. During the three years, the intake ranged from 152 to 170 students from 52 to 57 different countries. The majority of students have scholarships, and many take a year off from jobs in government, NGOs and universities to do the master’s degree.

The course is not the first time PD was taught at ISS but it was the first time it was the main pedagogical tool for the only compulsory course at ISS. The course takes place over twelve weeks with lectures, workshops, using an online platform as well as social media to communicate. The course is co-taught. The teaching team is made up of a group of academic staff (six to eight members) and a group of ‘old batch’ MA students (nine to twelve) who are hired to facilitate the workshops. There are two weekly lectures (co-taught by the teaching team) and a weekly workshop facilitated by the ‘old batch’ MA students and continuous online discussion groups. The course uses participatory methodology, and where possible flips the classroom in order to encourage dialogue and to create space for students to speak about their own knowledge and experience of how they understood economic development processes as societal improvement.

During the lectures, there is space for questions, as well as dialogue and interactive debate often using films and online quizzes. More in-depth discussions happen in peer-learning processes, both on- and offline, in the working groups facilitated by the old batch MA students. There is a general online discussion group for all teachers and students as well as group discussions. The course material and general communication is hosted on an e-learning-platform which migrated from Moodle to Canvas between the second and

8 For more on ISS, visit http://www.iss.nl/about_iss/.

third year. The focus on online dialogue and interaction has left a digital trail of discussions and debates as well as films used and produced during the course. In addition, there are regular internal reviews after each module by the teaching team with the facilitators (held in a social environment over three evenings in my home) and there have been two external reviews.

Two texts play a particularly important role in the teaching: *Encountering Development* (Escobar 1995/2012) and *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs 1992/2010). These have guided the lectures and assignments. Escobar is used as the text to introduce the PD ‘turn’ and to introduce the third module on ‘alternatives to development’. Sachs is used as a model for the group assignment and final essay. Students work in groups of ten or less in order to prepare, write and present five entries for an ISS General Course Development Dictionary. Each group is asked to give a five- to seven-minute pitch to the audience in plenary in the form of a video. The videos are intended to show an understanding of development as a cultural, political, economic and historical process using the concepts from the course. The resulting films are referred to and viewed by the next generation of General Course participants. For the final essay, the student selects one of the concepts and writes up an individual Development Dictionary entry.

Students’ responses to the course – Turning the world upside down?

I don’t know, I feel like I have not learned anything in this class, besides questioning everything and everyone, which is useful . . . but now what?
(Student 2015 Q 7.3 S 74)

In the first year, such were the pressures of setting up a new course that the teaching team met every week, continually adjusting the course, the readings and the approach. We began by flipping the classroom which meant asking students to read the texts, watch (music) videos related to the themes before the lecture and began each session with a video of a song and ‘buzz’ groups where students divided into groups of two and three to discuss issues raised. We co-taught, taking time to tell students who we were, where the authors they were reading came from, what institutions and backgrounds produced these texts (academia World Bank, NGOs, social movements), where the places and people were situated in the development debates. We began the course by presenting development as a highly contested term. We spoke about the different and conflicting explanations of development – why travelling along roads, migrants, funerals and mobile technologies were an important part of the material development process to be criticized and understood culturally. We asked them to see the course as discussing partial truths of development in order to challenge the homogenizing nature of the

dominant development project. We taught that there were many understandings of development. We pointed to the conflicts, contradictions and potential cracks in these understandings, including our and their own. We wanted them to learn from each other's views of development by sharing their own experiences. We saw ourselves together with the students as co-producers of knowledge in the classroom. It was exciting for some, but the response was decidedly mixed. Some met the whole process of the course (its approach and content) with disbelief and confusion followed by demands for the facts and figures and the 'real development' story. These students did not want to be part of an experiment. They wanted the teachers to tell them what development was about; they had not come to the ISS to 'just' discuss with other students'. Some of the negative responses about the course revealed this:

Go back to the old way of teaching, it may help us learn much more (Student 2015 Q 7.4 S 22) or

I still do not get most of the materials in the course. Workshops must help us to understand, instead of doing nonsense things. (Student 2015 Q 7.4 S 25)

Some of the responses were due to the fact that students coming from fifty-seven countries have experienced very different pedagogical processes. The ones that were bemused by our approach came from backgrounds where teachers taught and students listened, and knowledge was from books not songs or videos or stories. For them flipping the classroom in the lectures and the use of interactive pedagogy was bewildering. As the course progressed, we decided to integrate a more standard teaching format in the lectures while keeping a participatory and transgressive peer-led pedagogy in the workshops. We were responding to comments such as this one:

I think students should be better prepared for what to expect from this course – the structure of the course came as a surprise to them and was frustrating and bewildering for many as this is not a style of learning with which they are familiar. (Student 2015 Q7.3 S 36)

Two moments from the course

Reflecting on how the course has changed I would like to share two moments. I was about to leave the classroom after an early lecture in the first year of the course 2015. A female student in her mid-thirties (who I later found out was a business consultant from Colombia) came up to me and said, 'You have turned my world upside down'. I felt troubled but somehow pleased to hear it. It has become a refrain I heard throughout the course ranging from thanks to accusation.

A second moment is in October 2017 during a review session when teachers and facilitators meet in an informal environment to review the course. As we sat around my living room eating spicy pumpkin soup and reflecting on the module ‘economic narratives of development’, I began to realize that the course had settled. No longer were there questions about why question development, why not more facts and figures – but rather how to improve dialogues and communication, to be sure issues such as race were spoken about, whether students were ready for the Development Dictionary exercise and which concepts people will use. Facilitators were anticipating how to be sure students could ‘really get into dialogue among themselves’. As I sat scribbling notes on how lecturers could improve delivery, how best to flip the next session using the new platform of Canvas, I took the courage to ask: ‘this is all great – but are they enjoying the course do you think?’ The answer came back: for some it was the best course they had ever taken. Maybe not for all, but something was working; indeed in 2018–2019, the course has been expanded with four more afternoon sessions on Encounters in Development Studies.

Listening to critical student responses

Name two things you learnt from the course

The source, origin and birth of the word and concept of ‘development’ and the way it has been contextualized. Development differs from place to place due to or based on the background of a particular place as well as social, economic and political factors. (Student 2015 Q2.4 S 55)

The course provided other perspectives on seeing development narratives. That there is no single story about development. People live in different spaces, cultures and times, so that we have to be more critical when doing development agendas. (Student 2015 Q2.4 S 78)

As these two student responses suggest, the course aims to provide students with the tools to examine critically the making, unmaking and alternatives to the development project. In this approach, we present PD as allowing us to examine the many stories or narratives of development. We follow Escobar in understanding development as an ‘extremely efficient apparatus for production about and exercise power over the Third World’ (Escobar 2012, 9). We take different examples of the practices of development and modernity by using PD as a tool to look at how power operates in development processes. The process of becoming like ‘developed countries’ is critiqued as profoundly Eurocentric, universalizing and hegemonic but also in this process we propose ways to create spaces for transformation and change. We ask students to look at ‘alternatives to development’ inspired by alternatives

to development at the local level, which we ask students to construct from their own experiences.

In the first year of the course, the concept of glocality was introduced as a major concept. Glocality defines processes of change as glocal phenomena, involving transactions and flows at very large scales but also necessarily defined by context and the particularities of place. By the second and third course, we shifted away from glocality to talk about people and places. We explore how place constitutes people's experience of development and encourage students to look at their own experience of place and people in order to understand how modes of domination both at global and local levels operate. We look at how diversities and difference inform and build resistances to development interventions that are then dynamic and fluid over time and space rather than place bound. We use Katherine McKinnon's definition of PD not as a 'cohesive movement' but rather as a 'set of debates . . . grounded in a particular way of thinking about the nature of truth and knowledge' (McKinnon 2011). We teach PD as a critical conceptual stance in order for students to rethink the way they have experienced and observed development in their lives, and in sharing those experiences to think together about new narratives.

In the first year, we understood that the questions and silences indicated that the dominant development concept for some of the students was difficult to question, and to see as a set of narratives. For them development was about 'underdeveloped' countries learning how to follow the development path to progress, modernity, success and wealth. The tools they asked for were not critical theory but practical information about how to do development better back home in their governments, NGOs and business, so they and their country could benefit. They were inscribed within development discourse in ways that made it difficult to look at it critically. They did not see the value of discussing experiences, ideas and diverse narratives; they wanted to know how development worked, not to change it, but so that they could, once home, make it work better, in particular for the poor.

The first set of essays, inspired by Escobar, were telling. We asked students to reflect on their own experience of development, assuming that students coming to study at ISS would welcome the chance to share their own history and colonial experience and then, as a course, we would learn from their 'encounters'. We watched YouTube videos such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2009 speech 'The Danger of a Single Story'⁹ and invited them to tell their own.

⁹ https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en (accessed 5 November 2016).

Some students wrote brilliant essays, voyages of discovery and curiosity about how to use PD as a tool to unpack assumptions. Extracts from four essays give examples of how they understood encounters in development.

One deeply felt essay spoke about the metaphor ‘don’t cross the river before you get to the bridge’ and at how ‘culture’ is essential in the making of development. She argued how culture is critical to understanding how to unmake and remake *the meaning of development and then through our practices and in the context we live* (Student Essay B, November 2015).

Another student wrote an evocative essay about his/her travels across histories and landscapes on his/her way to the ISS, reflecting on the contradictions of development encounters in his/her life, concluding,

I arrived at The Hague looking to imbue those experiences with theoretical rigour. Travelling across the development spectrum has given me a more nuanced view of poverty. Here, I’ve been encountering academics who translate this multi-layered reality into a general, if diverse, theory. (Student Essay C, November 2015)

Another encounter reflected on the student’s experience as a teacher in Palestine where

making development is understood as the mainstream NGOs business in Palestine. Unmaking development is, more or less, donors/NGOs free. Unmaking development happens when people decide to act. When they realize that development is more than money poured in different sectors, unmaking development in this way, is key to real development. (Student Essay A, November 2015)

Another student considered how to consider the daily expression from Morocco ‘Fouk Figuigu’ which means I am doing fine but also literally means ‘beyond Figuigu’, the place where she actually grew up. She questions the

implicit categorisation of this place as being just far and poor which can be true in certain way, however in this same place others things are happening, as people are not passive in facing inequalities between the ‘useful’ and the ‘useless’ Morocco. I think that my effort in discussing with people about Figuigu was a way of telling another story of this place and its people to avoid the danger of a single story as said by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009). (Student Essay D, November 2015)

Several students, however, found it impossible to write in the first person. They were unsettled by the idea of writing narratives, firm in their belief that development was economics and progress, prescribed by academics and practiced by development experts. Their interest was in the conceptual tools about

how to measure and analyse development; they did not see the relevance of sociocultural understandings of self and community. For them writing about how they experienced development, rather than being told what it was from lecturers and textbooks, was not a valuable learning experience. Some did not understand what a development encounter could be and thinking about how they have experienced development rather than being taught it made some anxious, and others simply angry.

In response to the question about how they saw the first assignment, there were some interesting answers ranging from somewhat tongue in cheek to deeply anxious:

I learnt 'development issues, evaluation of my own life and experiences, putting thoughts together, concepts of "mental furniture", "unmaking", etc., referencing, discipline, hard work, reading etc., etc., etc.' (Student 2015 Q2.4 S 102).

To

For me, it was confusing. I am not sure if I actually learnt something out of it. (Student 2015 Q2.4 S 87)

Though there were some who enjoyed it:

It was very enriching to write the first narrative essay, since it made me reflect on my work and study experiences and understand the connection with historical processes that I can know recognize and explain with consciousness and critical view. It also helped me to identify the authors that I align my thoughts with and to go deeper in the course readings. (Student 2015 Q 2.4 S 67)

Students continue the dialogue in the four afternoons where students set the topics and take the lead in designing how to debate and on which issue, many of which in the first year of the course were resisted. They are co-producing inclusive spaces to talk about race and ethnicity, for example, with a view to improving their own experience at ISS and to help improve the course for the next batch of students.

Peer-to-peer pedagogy

The core of the success of the course is the working groups. Here there is highly creative work produced and shared, ranging from writing poetry, writing songs, role plays and online discussion with photographs and blogs. In the first year, each facilitator designed a specific workshop bringing into the course their own skills (many had been teachers or NGO facilitators). This led to an

unevenness among workshops, so in the second year the facilitators do same exercise in each of workshops. The second-year facilitators opted to review the texts or lectures and gather questions and concerns to bring back to the second lecture in the week. In the third year, the facilitators decided to design jointly weekly exercises which every group follows, and questions are brought to a plenary consolidation session with the teachers at the end of each module. As this evolving process of the working group method shows, the emphasis has been on learning from others, though it continues to be hard to break down the idea that the one giving the lecture is ‘really’ the one who ‘knows’.

Writing and performing the ISS Development Dictionary

The group assignment was wonderful and awesome, based on the multi-cultural fora and backgrounds here at ISS. (Student 2015 Q 2.6 S 42)

This was fascinating assignment, I learnt how to work with excellent people from different backgrounds and cultures, it taught us how diversity matters in making development. (Student 2015 Q 2.6 S 82)

It was during the presentations that I understood what development study was all about. (Student 2015 Q2.6 S33)

PD as a tool of analysis comes into its own when students moved into making their group ‘ISS Development Dictionary’. The students are divided into small groups of ranging over the years between seven and twelve people and take about a month to produce their dictionaries. Modelled on the original dictionary, they select five concepts from the course and produce a film based on these five concepts as a ‘pitch’ to a particular audience.

The group assignment is the most appreciated aspect of the course; students are excited that they could ‘create our own concept, taking into account what is the direction that we wanted to go’ (Student 2015 Q2.6 S 45).

The students worked hard, as one stated:

It challenged me to integrate other points of view, different to mine, with respect and inclusiveness. I learnt to work with a very diverse group in terms not only of culture but also professional perspectives and expectations regarding our studies at ISS. (Student 2015 Q2.6 S 32)

When each of the groups’ seven-minute videos are shown in a plenary sessions, attended by all, there is an electric atmosphere. Each year the videos are different; there were some extremely funny skits as well as emotionally moving films and statements. The creativity and imagination is impressive along with the scripts, the acting, use of the music and quality of the filming. Several recreate pivotal moments of development intervention, some do animations

with drawings done by hand, others do a humorous day in the life of an ISS student, others do transnational (translocal) intersectional reporting on how PD concepts travel.¹⁰

REFLECTIONS: TEACHING REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS IN REACTIONARY INSTITUTIONS?

‘Unmaking’ development can only serve any purpose if we subsequently remake it somehow. (Student Essay, November 2015)

Working with diversity

It is stimulating to design a course that enables people coming from such diverse geographies, histories, religions, cultures and educational processes to debate different experiences of development. Their understanding of development is constituted by very different people and places. There are hierarchies, simmering dislikes and there is shyness due to language barriers. There is always a hovering question about the facts and there are requests to tell the ‘real’ development story. One particularly thoughtful feedback from a student from the first year was:

I really enjoyed the methodology implemented and the experimental approach within a very diverse group of students. I believe that even those who did not enjoy or understand completely the course, will in the long term, conscious or unconsciously, enrich their understanding and approach to development in an innovative and wider view. (Student 2015 Q7.1 S82)

The quote indicates the need to be patient and allow the silences. Some of the students do not want to enter into debates in the course. Asking people to let go of the dominant story can create uncomfortable moments, and at times volatile discussions.

There is also friction around the differences of authority among the students and the teachers based on gender, class and race. There continue to be students who refute the ‘unsettling’ and ‘unmaking’ of development. A critique of subjectivities in development processes – who are the recognized development actors, institutions and power players – also extends to a critique of myself as course leader. As one student commented, ‘Why did

¹⁰ Some example of the videos from the course in 2018–2019: ‘We Are All Human’: <https://youtu.be/kIKMZNP9Oto> ‘Portraits of Development’: <https://youtu.be/FEoZ2sWDtM4> ‘The Cakeing of Development’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35ssiBIMRfU> ‘A Daily Voyage into the Making of Development’: <https://youtu.be/FX2KnE1NFTw>

you want us to see development in the same way that you were looking at it? . . . There is a big power relation inside teaching: Who gets to teach and why? What are the interests behind teaching certain knowledges?’¹¹ As the course has evolved we have learnt to engage more easily even in plenary with students about the uncomfortable and silenced issues of difference and diversity and to be open to their stories and experiences consciously aiming not to take up a paternalist position. Particularly around issues of sexuality and race, we have found ways to deal with discussion by looking outside the development studies literature to popular culture, even forensic studies and above all listening to the messages of young activist groups around the world.

The knowledge I got is like a gloomy cloud. I cannot get the clear answer about ‘development’ solutions but at least I think we got the tools to find the answer later. (Student 2015 Q7.3 S 44)

Is it appropriate to turn students’ ‘world upside down’ or unmake development without giving them a clear set of tools to remake it? This was not fully solved in the course. We pointed them to other courses in the MA that will enable students to help them engage differently with mainstream development practices. In the later version of the course, we have tried to respond to how to build alternatives to development and at least students recognize the power of many stories:

That there is no single story about something. People live in different spaces, cultures and times, so that we have to be more critical when doing development agendas. (Student 2015 Q 2.4 S 45)

Challenges of power and knowledge

We have all encountered development at one point or another. The task for us as development workers is to critically assess and unpack development. (Student Essay C, November 2015)

One of the main lessons from teaching the course is that it is a challenge to create spaces of transgression. It can be confronting to people who arrive at The Hague to meet immediately with critiques of development. The responses of the students have made me question my own position as a Dutch-based academic. In the same way, the course is asking the students to position themselves as development workers; I have to consider where ISS is positioned in the modernization processes of change. The course is designed to challenge authoritarian and hegemonic ideas, and to make visible the impact of modernity and coloniality in development processes, but, awkwardly, both

¹¹ Personal correspondence with student of 2015–2016 course, 11 November 2016.

teachers and students are bound by the same hegemonic structures of development and education processes. We are part of the privileged mainstream of development discourses we are wanting to challenge. Even if there is a tension around the different forms of privilege in our course interactions trying to produce revolutionary ideas in a reactionary institution. In addition to the obvious hierarchy of teacher and student, we teach in English, in an institution with its specific colonial history. The scholarships are given by the Dutch government with the expectation that students come to our institution to be trained in how 'to do development'.¹² There is the underlying assumption in using PD as a pedagogical tool that students can question development. Yet we were also grading them, inviting them to reproduce what we said in exams and essays. It is highly contradictory to say that knowledge is partial and yet grade it. We deal with it by being as honest as we can about this contradiction and by giving maximum points for group work and creativity. For the first time, this year (18–19) the course features four ungraded sessions worth three credits (the graded course is worth eight credits) where the students need to complete assignments (quiz, group project producing posters and participate in an open debate with invited speakers).

AuQ65

The teaching team is conscious of the politics of teaching and of the disconnections between the spaces of teaching/learning and the realities of the world beyond. Though we speak about alternatives at the community level, social movements and radical networks, we do not address directly what to do with the 'big development' picture, even if we are evidently critical of it because we speak about partial truths, shades of development and so forth. We follow Freire in this regard seeing education as 'the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (Freire 2000, 34). Our aim is not to force them into solidarity with social movements, feminism or radical alternatives but to reflect on their privileges. In this we use, along with PD, decoloniality and feminist pedagogies in order to consider how best to engage with Western-dominated models of development. We try to create a safe space where epistemic violence could be countered through ethical engagements with other students, a connection that we hope extends beyond the classroom.

At first, teaching PD in ISS provoked a tense reaction among ISS teaching staff, though after several versions of the course this concern has abated. The original concern reflected several factors. We are living a time where there is uncertainty about development studies in general and a push towards

¹² Currently, one-third of the fellowships at ISS come from the Dutch government. ISS is now getting more and more students with fellowships (or study loans) from governments located in the south. Every year ISS has seven fellowships from the World Bank.

more conservative competitive academic practices. Within and outside ISS the increasing anti-migrant, anti-refugee public behaviour and a rise in right-wing politics accompanied by explicit racism inform our daily interactions. It is hard to undo years of colonial education that positions teachers as hierarchical providers of knowledge.

Education as the practice of freedom

As the course matures, students are engaging with PD because it gave them the chance to construct something different from the mainstream. Such students take up the question of how to create alternatives to the injustices inherent in modern Western development by looking for the possibilities to shift dominant Western power and knowledge structures.

When writing this chapter, I went back to graduates from ISS in order to ask them if, reflecting on what they learnt about development from the PD approach, they found it possible to link the classroom to spaces of activism beyond the academy, when I asked them to reflect on what they learnt about development from the PD approach. The question included if they thought the course helped them 'to do development' differently. Do revolutionary ideas born in a reactionary institution come to fruition when students take them outside the classroom to make the needed and crucial social economic and political transformations in today's shockingly 'post-truth' era?

From the responses, it seems that students both welcomed and felt unsettled by the course's pedagogical approach to development. J¹³ sees the General Course as enabling her 'to ask those very necessary but uncomfortable questions . . . which is not limited to the study of theory, but engages with analysing policy and practice at the global and local level'. While T comments that the course 'taught me ways to critique mainstream development practices' through a liberating if 'unsettling process of reading, discussions with peers and struggling to write something of relevance', B saw the course's pedagogical practices as promoting a 'horizontal class environment' which allowed for 'meaningful and extensive student participation where students could lead the learning process'. L writes that the course has 'taught us by raising questions. It has never been about being right or wrong . . . it has changed the way I see, feel, and experience the development itself.' P confirms that she was 'unexpectedly pushed to unlearn many ideas and assumptions'. Z reflects that it 'was not easy at the beginning' but it opened 'a door for a deep understanding of what development is and has been in the history of the world'.

N enjoyed the 'enriching and constructive places of reflection'. She felt challenged to unpack her own thinking: 'Learning to listen in order to respect

13 Students asked to be anonymous, so I have randomly assigned them initials.

diversity' helped her to see 'the path to transform everyday practices' as part of the 'the political process of the unmaking of development'. C saw the course as providing ways to think 'otherwise' and to embrace the 'imaginary of what is possible' which dominant ideas tell us 'isn't possible/realistic/practical/worthwhile'.

E found that the course allowed her to become more consciously aware of her 'deeply normative and Western-centric' position. She felt that the course dramatically shifted her way of thinking, helped by the 'informal and personable teaching practices' she was encouraged to think in new ways and 'ask ourselves why we thought how we did'.

The more informal student–teacher relationship was appreciated by many but also questioned. While S sees the PD pedagogical practices as part of an attempt by teachers to unmake 'the power-based distance teacher-student and the making of a trust-based and enriching relationship', M, on the other hand, felt that the diversity of thought among teachers and students needed to be pushed more. She missed deeper probings into questions of 'positionality, privilege and complicity'.

Some also shared how they currently try to put into practice what they learnt. L on her return to development projects says she now focuses on 'who are excluded in the policies'; she asks them 'personally how they want to be treated'. And when writing up her reports ensures that local peoples' experiences and strategies are included.

V, working at the Central Bank, states that she now sees 'clearly all the power relationships and inequalities that surround me'. At the same time, she is able 'to be tolerant with other people's ideas' and that 'little by little' she is opening the minds of the 'conservative elite' with whom she is working.

After graduating S has engaged in practices of 'unsettling mainstream development' in a popular education project. She carries the legacy of the course as she regularly questions her own role as an NGO, asking 'who are we in this social practice? Why and how to acknowledge our position and role?'

C, in reflecting on her current job in a public service employees' union, 'a militant organization that has had amazing successes and its own rigidities', sees herself as continuing to unmake development in 'close to home contexts'. Z, working back in the development sector, states that her education helped her 'to question the rationale behind my practice' and to 'be a more reflexive and responsible professional'.

Some students, on the other hand, are more critical. T feels that the 'value of the insights I learnt . . . were not easy to convey to family back home, nor to prospective employers at NGOs or development agencies'. In her job in a funding agency she felt that her 'critical thinking was not appreciated'. She writes that it is hard to 'come to terms with the contradiction of challenging

hegemonic development processes, yet needing to conform to the institutions and discourses of development and education . . . Being critical without proposing alternatives is not productive’.

Similarly, A warns that critical pedagogy is a very ‘risky business’. In her current job as a gender expert, she is ‘constantly doubting if when performing a consultancy, or a research project on gender-related topics I can stay what they call “professional”’. She is rueful when she states: ‘many of us can suffer from anxiety as we become politicised subjects’.

M feels that she definitely gained ‘a critical edge’ that she has taken into her work life. But, now she is ‘cynical about the mainstream field of international development [and] this is often a difficult position to be in’. She wonders whether what she learnt is too radical.

PIONEERING PD AS A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

At the heart of the ISS, General Course is an understanding that development, by its very nature, is an aspirational and forward-looking project. Development interventions change power relations not only in the economy but also in the home and workplace, challenging class, gender and generational order, reconfiguring intimate relations. The course recognizes that such issues are lived but not so easily spoken about in development studies. Therefore, one of the challenges has been to create the possibilities for students to speak about development studies from a critical PD perspective while still being committed to practical strategies. The course builds on a dialogue among the students’ own experiences and knowledges of development and perspectives from the course literature. The aim is for students to understand how development processes can be questioned strategically, and in this questioning to generate development alternatives. Teaching development studies from a bottom-up perspective entails countering the expectations of students of universally valid expert knowledge on development. The threefold emphasis on development as an aspiration, a discourse of power and set of practices presents PD as a tool for transformation.

The challenge of the General Course is to break down the notion of expertise, disciplinary divides and that all allusive assumption of objectivity. It goes beyond development studies and historical and contemporary discourses on the deserving and non-deserving poor, the economic, social, cultural and political outcomes of various anti-poverty development interventions such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. It looks at people and places – the experiences of people of different ages, class, race and ethnicity, confronting and challenging pre-existing and intersectional inequalities. By asking students to reflect on their own experiences, the course aims to combine

hands-on experience with on-the-ground realities of power differentials and exclusion. Key words are redistribution, recognition and representation. It introduces students to academic research by confronting them not only with policy documents but also with scholar activism. The course is designed to move the discussion beyond the reading and studying of texts and into the realm of critical deconstruction and imagination using different forms of social media that the students took up, intuitively, in relation to the questions and discussions being posed. The experience raises for me important questions about the role of critical pedagogy in a neoliberal climate and what kind of space PD can have in an increasingly cautious academic environment. Right now we are completing the third version of the course which is working through different narratives of unlearning or ‘unmaking’ of development by looking at three angles of the debate – economic narratives; people and places; and PD and alternatives to development – inspired by each other’s ability not to give into despair in these dark times.

What I have learnt, and continue to learn from this experiment in teaching PD, is the importance of listening, humbleness and flexibility. Humour is particularly important, as is the need to be honest about what goes wrong and what can be done about it. The most rewarding part has been creating spaces for engagement that took us beyond the confines of the classroom, working with online technologies across space and time – bringing in the places and voices of the students. Above all, we try to give students hope, through the capacity to peel away the gendered, racialized and exploitative global capitalist system that is driving ecological and climatic destruction. The course is in line with the aim to decolonize development studies and moves beyond the one narrative towards a plurality of knowledges by looking at various discourses and representations of development, beginning with the students’ knowledge, concerns, critiques also of the education institution itself. The course works with an entanglement of knowledges and interconnections – in our teaching, in our assessment of the modern development project and the wider society beyond – which the students bring into the classroom in their writings, debates, videos and essays. By stressing the plurality of knowledges, we encourage students to find possibilities and to resist the unilateral story of an all-encompassing oppressive capitalocentric narrative in what we hope is a shared life affirming curriculum.

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