

Verband Entwicklungspolitik und Humanitäre Hilfe deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen e. V. (VENRO) (Hrsg.) (2021): Quality Criteria for Development Education. Practical Handbook 2021. Berlin: o.V. Available for free.

Quality Criteria for Development Education was produced by the German Association of Development and Humanitarian NGOs and is a revised edition of a 2012 publication with now increased reference to postcolonialism and influence of power relations. Its purpose is to provide advice, guidance, and questions to consider for education practitioners on ensuring high quality programmes. This includes reference to clarity about target groups, format, nature and impact of activities and relationships between practising teachers and support organisations such as NGOs. Like the previous edition, this publication is the outcome of engagement of a range of organisations and educationalists across Germany. The publication also builds on the Quality and Impact Study in Global Education edited by Bergmüller, Höck, Causemann, Krier and Quiring published in 2021. This review is based on the English translation of the publication.

The publication on Quality Criteria has four main themes, planning and organisation, content, mediation process and criteria for school education. Each section is relatively short and includes some questions for discussion and consideration. The criteria are seen as guidelines for participants in the field of development education and related areas who are designing educational programmes. The publication states that the aim is not to provide a checklist of what to do, but as starting points for quality and effectiveness. Also within the publication is a useful glossary of terms.

A controversial feature of the publication is the continued use of the term development education. Most of the material referred to in the publication uses the broader terms global education and learning, and much of NGO practice in many European countries now use the term global citizenship education. Where development education is still used it is because of the influence of national policy and funding guidelines that wish to frame practices within a traditional development discourse. Here in this publication, there is a recognition of the development discourse, but it is stated this should be seen within the 'emancipation of critical citizens with a critical understanding of development'. There is also reference to the other terms currently being used across Europe and in using development education there is an assumption that it should

be seen in its transformational context related to encouraging and supporting social change. These questions are important in reviewing the publication because central to the revised edition is a greater emphasis on including power relations between the Global North and the Global South, dealing with cultural interpretations, languages being used and sensitivity to discrimination. Whilst it is good to see these themes included, I felt the material could have gone further and started to refer to how particularly NGOs begin to engage in decolonial practices. Also, these issues pose very challenging themes for all practitioners and a recognition that dealing with them will not be straightforward or easy.

Programmes and funding criteria related to development education have always had to take into account the policy context. This is noted in the publication and key questions are posed about the extent to which organisations provision in development education is directly related to the policy context. I felt the publication could have been stronger and clearer with regard to this area. A common criticism of development education practices in many countries has been the ways in which they have worked in an uncritical way within the dominant policy framework. Surely a role for NGOs is to provide the space for alternative voices but all too often these organisations often find themselves constrained by their own funding criteria. There is a need perhaps for more consideration given to encouraging innovation and creativity and that policy-makers should recognise that educational programmes do not and should not follow some pre-determined path.

The publication then goes through a list of key themes and questions that one would expect to see in any publication that touches on areas of evaluation and quality. These include being clear about objectives and ways to measure the programme, The needs of the target groups are mentioned alongside being clear about the learning environment, who the organisation will be working with, the nature and form of the pedagogy to be undertaken and its relevance to achieving broader educational objectives. Much of what is included within these sections seems appropriate and relevant although I would have liked to have seen more recognition of the need for programmes to be co-constructed between say NGOs and practising teachers. There is mention of the need for trainers to be pedagogically trained and that they operate in a participatory and culturally sensitive manner. I would perhaps have gone further than this and perhaps call for some form of accreditation of all trainers and that this includes some form of peer observation.

A major theme of the publication is the discussion on quality of content which aims to bring in some of the new themes in his revised edition. This includes multiple perspectives, recognising the historical context in ways in which terms and practices have evolved and also sensitivity to discrimination. Whilst all of the questions posed in this section are relevant and appropriate, I think there could have been more recognition of the challenges these questions pose on say trainers and practitioners. All too often questions of racism, discrimination, power relations and subaltern voices are often acknowledged as being important within development education but rarely are they put at the centre of educational practices. What postcolonial thinking is posing is the need for this to be addressed. I would suggest that if a social justice approach is more explicit

Rezensionen

then some of the points referred to above could lead to a more empowering educational experience. There is a need to turn potential negative conversations into positive ones by offering different pedagogical approaches that not only challenge assumptions but provide ways for moving forward.

Some of these points are touched upon but could have been more central to the section on Quality of the Mediation Process. This section includes points on participatory learning processes, practical experience, space for reflection, understanding different perspectives and critical and systematic thinking. What I found here were some excellent points about ensuring that the educational offer provides 'safe spaces' for discussion and debate, to ensure all participants have an opportunity to actively participate and that forms of practical experience are linked to developing skills for social and political participation. Where perhaps the section could have strengthened could have been in greater discussion on the term 'mediation', what this means in practice. There is recognition of positions of power and powerlessness but to me there is a wider point about ensuring the involvement of all stakeholders in agreeing the programme's objectives and the forms of practice.

The final section on Criteria for School Evaluation re-enforces some of the earlier themes by reviewing how to apply them more directly to the school contexts such as role of the NGO, ways of working and understanding specific educational context. Some valuable points are made about the need to recognise the NGO-school relationship, that it needs to be on an equal footing and the dangers of the organisation being seen as a service provider. What perhaps could have been raised more directly was the specific and distinctive contribution that NGOs can provide in terms of representing voices from civil society and perhaps alternative to those from the state.

What I found missing in the publication was any reference to research and the need for organisations to develop stronger bodies of evidence that could support the value and contribution of their work. Development education practices should be recognised as valuable in themselves, in contributing to a learners' understanding of the world in which they are living in. More and more policymakers and practitioners are seeing the value of working in partnership with academics and researchers to build a body of independent research. This could include having independent researchers contributing to the development of programmes by regularly gathering evidence from practice that could help to improve the quality of what is being delivered in the classroom.

Overall, I found the publication a useful one particular for NGOs working with teachers', but I felt it could have gone further in recognising the challenges many may have in terms of bringing in social justice themes. It is much more than minor changes to pedagogical approaches or different content. There is always a need for material that addresses issues related to quality of educational practices, that encourages organisations to continually reflect and question their own work and to identify ways programmes can be more effective and make a lasting contribution to understanding and engaging with global issues.

References:

Bergmüller, C., Höck, S., Causemann, B., Krier, J.-M. & Quiring, E. (2021). *Quality and Impact in Global Education. Empirical and Conceptual Perspectives for Planning and Evaluation*. Münster: Waxmann. <https://doi.org/10.31244/zep.2021.03.11>

Douglas Bourn

doi.org/10.31244/zep.2023.02.20