

Theorizing learning process: An experiential, constructivist approach to young people's learning about global poverty and development

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Abstract

Learning processes in global education have not been significantly theorized, with the notable exception of the application of transformative learning theory. No theory of learning is complete, and to understand the complexity of learning, multiple theoretical lenses must be applied. This article looks at Jarvis's (2006) model of lifelong learning and argues that it can help global educators understand young people's learning about global poverty and development. Considering young people's learning through the lens of this theory highlights the way in which learning occurs in multiple contexts, its individual nature, and the significance of emotion, action, and identity as well as knowing in the process. These themes are already evident within existing research into the way in which young people in England learn about global poverty and development, as well as global education theory and commentary. As a result, and despite some limitations, Jarvis's learning theory has potential utility in extending global educators' understanding of young people's global learning.

Keywords: action, development, emotion, global poverty, identity, Jarvis, learning process, learning theory, reflection.

Introduction

Learning is increasingly recognized as a highly complex process, covering social, psychological, and neurological dimensions. Learning process is used here to mean the way in which individuals respond to opportunities to learn, for example in terms of emotion, cognition, and action, and the way these responses interrelate in the elaboration, integration, or change of an individual's understandings.

Learning processes in global education have been largely overlooked (Bourn and Morgan, 2010). There are a range of theoretical approaches to global education pedagogy, from loose descriptions of learning through global education activities (see e.g. Andreotti and Warwick, 2007; King, 2012; Bowden, 2013), to fully worked theories and frameworks (most significantly Freire, 1972; but see also Hicks, 2007; Bourn, 2014a). Research also exists into the conceptions of pedagogical approaches held by global educators (Marshall, 2007; Brown, 2013). However, whilst assuming a close relationship between the two, this research and theory focuses on teaching, not on learning.

This limited theorization of learning process is likely the result of a number of factors, including the interest of funders in the outcomes of learning, and a strong pedagogical tradition through which the theorization of teaching, and the way it directs learning, has perhaps obscured a more open exploration of learning.

There are exceptions, most notably the application of transformative learning theory both theoretically (see Morgan, 2007; Bourn and Issler, 2010) and empirically (Bentall and McGough, 2013; Brown, 2013; Martin and Griffiths, 2014). Other authors have applied learning theory to argue for specific pedagogical approaches, including experiential learning cycles (Trewby, 2007) and the developmental milestones of Demetriou *et al.* (2011) (Coakley, 2013).

Influential authors in the field of global education have begun to point towards the complexity of the learning process in relation to global poverty and development, and the need to understand it further (see, for example, Scheunpflug and Asbrand, 2006; Bourn, 2014b).

Learning process is crucial in global education *because* 'it is in the minds of learners that these things [concepts of global learning] need to come together as the basis for lifelong learning' (Sinclair, 2011: 8). Therefore, understanding learning processes better not only has academic merit, it is also highly relevant to global education practitioners in helping them understand how learners respond to opportunities to learn about global poverty and development in the classroom and beyond.

All theories of learning are incomplete in that they examine only limited elements of the process of learning, approach the whole person from different perspectives, and are the product of particular historical, political, and cultural contexts. As a result, no single learning theory is sufficient to explain all learning, and applying multiple theories will build a richer picture, casting light on different elements of the process. This article proposes that the experiential, constructivist model of learning theory developed by Jarvis (2006) has utility as a lens through which to explore learning about global poverty and development.

The next section describes Jarvis's (2006) theory and the way it resonates with existing themes within empirical research into the learning of young people in England about global poverty and development, as well as with global education theory and commentary. The article then turns to explore why Jarvis's (2006) theory is highlighted here over other learning theories, and the article finishes by considering what global educators can learn from his model.

Jarvis and the transformation of the person through learning

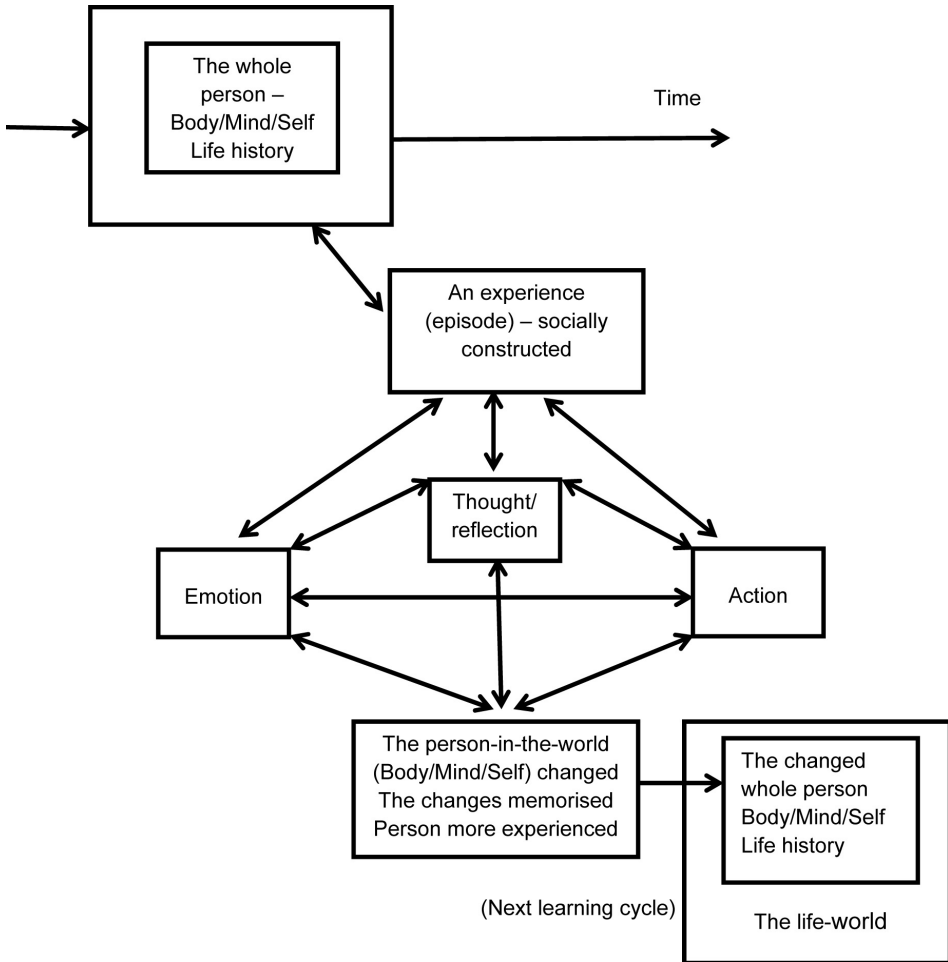
Jarvis takes a multi-disciplinary approach and attempts to develop what he describes in his 2006 book title as being 'Towards a comprehensive theory of human learning'. Jarvis first published his model of learning process in 1987, but it has undergone many revisions since (1995, 2001, 2004, and the version in Jarvis, 2006 and 2009, largely referred to here). He draws on the work of a range of experiential theorists in his serious attempt to 'schematise and systematise the specific components of the learning process' (Le Cornu, 2005: 166).

Figure 1 depicts Jarvis's understanding of the learning process, the way in which a person is transformed through learning. Jarvis uses the term 'transformation' to cover iterative changes in an individual's understandings as opposed to the 'shift' of transformative learning. Jarvis sees the model in Figure 1 as being at the heart of his theorization of learning (Jarvis, 2006: 22). He understands learning as a process through which we, as whole people (both body and mind) in our life-worlds (our reality), are changed through cognitive, affective, and practical processes. According to Jarvis, these three dimensions of emotion, thought/reflection, and action interact, often simultaneously, feeding into each other in multiple ways in the process of learning. Learning is prompted by an individual's experience of a situation or event. The result is the changed person and life history, through memories that are integrated into our biography.

Jarvis's work emanates from the field of adult learning. However, he sees his theory as one of lifelong learning, not specifically adult learning, holding the view that 'we should not seek to regard children's learning ... as necessarily different from adult learning' (Jarvis, 2006: 4).

Like all learning theories, Jarvis's (2006) work is subject to critique (e.g. Le Cornu, 2005; Jarvis, 2006). These include: Jarvis's broad and imprecise use of terms such as reflection; the limited attention his model gives to the social dimension of learning and to socially constructed bodies of knowledge; the way in which the model suggests learning is essentially reactive and sequential; and Jarvis's holist approach, meaning he fails to attend to different elements of learning process fully.

Figure 1: The transformation of the person through experience (Jarvis, 2006: 23)



Relevance of Jarvis’s (2006) model of learning process to global education

Table 1 sets out the relevance of Jarvis’s (2006) model of learning theory to global education. It highlights themes evident both within the model and global education literature, including empirical research into the way in which young people in England learn about global poverty and development, and about global education theory and commentary from the English context. These include an approach to learning as actively constructed by the individual in a range of contexts, including behavioural and emotional, as well as cognitive responses, and as strongly related to

identity. An additional merit of Jarvis's theorization is his clear visual modelling of his theory (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Shared themes between Jarvis's (2006) model of learning process, global education, and empirical research into English young people's learning about global poverty and development

	Jarvis (2006)	Global education theory and commentary	Existing research into young people's learning about global poverty and development
1. Active construction of understandings by the individual learner	Jarvis sees learning as an active, individual process taking place through lived experiences. Jarvis understands learning to lead to a broad range of changes in the body and mind.	Freire's work, significant within global education, frames learning as a process of reflection and practice (praxis) through which the learner constructs understandings. A range of intended and actual outcomes are evident in global education discourses.	A range of learning outcomes, including knowledge, attitudes and emotion, are evident within research into young people's learning about global poverty and development.
2. Learning context: learning as continuous process	Jarvis situates the learner in his or her life-world: learning results from experiences within that broad context (not solely from intended learning contexts).	Interdependence and the global connections throughout our lives are themes within global education. These connections are understood as providing multiple opportunities for learning about global poverty and development.	Research highlights the range of contexts in which young people learn about global poverty and development.
3. The role of emotion, action, and reflection in learning	Jarvis understands learning as involving a complex combination of reflecting on, emotionally responding to, and acting on the new impulse that results from an external interaction.	Social action is a dominant theme within global education discourses. The influential work of Andreotti has emphasized the critically reflective dimension of learning, and there is also evidence of emotion within global education theory from the English context.	There is strong evidence of emotional responses and personal action within existing research into young people's learning about global poverty and development.
4. Centrality of identity in learning	Identity is central to Jarvis's understanding of learning, as he sees learning as the construction of an individual's biography.	Identity is central to notions of global citizenship and to post-development critiques exploring the construction of the 'Other', both of which are influential in global education discourses.	There is empirical evidence that young people learning about global poverty construct an identity as lucky and superior in relation to a poor unfortunate 'Other'.

Of course, Jarvis's (2006) model is not the only theory of learning that echoes one or more of the themes identified in Table 1. For example, Jarvis is far from unique in focusing on emotion, action, reflection/cognition, or a combination thereof (see e.g. Piaget, 1929; Skinner, 1953; Rogers, 1969; Bandura, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978; Mezirow, 1998; Wenger, 2009). However, what is different about his approach is his interest in all three of these responses.

The following section details each of the four themes in Table 1 in more depth. Before turning to this, however, it sets out why the empirical data and global education literature used to exemplify the relevance of Jarvis's (2006) model is drawn from the English context, with a focus on young people's learning about global poverty and development.

The learning processes of young people in England in relation to global poverty and development

In arguing for the relevance of Jarvis's (2006) model of learning process to global education, this article draws on empirical data from 12–18 year olds in England and on global education literature from the English context. The focus on this national context and age group stems from my academic background in Development Studies and practice as a secondary school teacher in England. However, in the English context a focus on young people and on learning about global poverty and development is relevant well beyond my own interests.

Learning about global poverty and development has been understood as an integral part of global education in England in both theory and practice. This has been true from the emergence of development education in the 1970s (an important contributing tradition to the broader discourse referred to here as global education), to the current Global Learning Programme in English schools, supported by the UK Department for International Development, and aiming to 'help pupils gain additional knowledge about the developing world, the causes of poverty and what can be done to reduce it' (Global Learning Programme, 2014).

This article's interest in young people is also extremely relevant to global education in England. Not only have global education practitioners in England produced a range of activities and literature aimed at supporting and interpreting learning about global poverty and development in schools (see, for example, Oxfam, 2006; Andreotti and Warwick, 2007; Hicks and Holden, 2007; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2007; Temple and Laycock, 2008; Bowden, 2013; Bourn, 2014a), but also governmental support for global education since 1997 has translated into a number of educational initiatives supporting learning about the wider world.

Whilst using the learning processes of 12–18 year olds in England as an example, this article argues for the broader utility of Jarvis's (2006) theory and its possible application to other age groups, issues, and national contexts. It also references significant empirical research into young people's learning about global poverty and development, which exists beyond the English context, most notably studies exploring differences in the way German young people learn about globalization and development through critical and intellectual discussion at school versus volunteering outside of school (Asbrand, 2008), and the responses of young people in New Zealand to NGO imagery (Tallon, 2013).

Active construction of understandings by the individual learner

Jarvis (2006) sees learning as an active, individual process through which the person is changed, taking place through lived experiences. His work could be described as both experiential and constructivist, along with theorists such as Kolb (1984) and Illeris (2009): experiential because of their focus on the learner's response to experience; constructivist because of their understanding of learning as actively constructed.¹

Application of experiential learning theory to global education is perhaps not surprising, given that some see Freire's (1972) work, influential in the development of global education, as experiential (Le Cornu, 2005), and global education is associated with dialogic and experiential learning (Brown, 2014). Freire (1972) understood learning to be a process of construction of understandings, through reflection and practice (praxis).

Jarvis (2006) takes a broad approach to learning outcomes, covering knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, and beliefs. Within global education, learning outcomes are also understood broadly, including action (e.g. Richardson, 2008), skills (e.g. Price, 2003; Andreotti and Warwick, 2007); emotion (e.g. Tormey, 2005), values (e.g. Bowden, 2013; Scheunpflug, 2008), and identity (e.g. Oxfam, 2006). For illustrative purposes, these examples simplify the way in which the authors understand the outcomes of global education activities; there is much overlap, with many authors describing multiple learning outcomes.

Empirical research directly focusing on young people's learning about global poverty and development also highlights a range of learning outcomes, including: knowledge, understanding, and awareness of global interdependence (Gayford, 2009; DEA, 2010; Sallah, 2013), specific topics such as global poverty and global health (Miller *et al.*, 2012; Bourn and Cara, 2013) and routes for personal action (Gayford, 2009; Miller *et al.*, 2012); attitudes and perceptions of people in developing countries (Lowe, 2008; Borowski and Plastow, 2009; Elton-Chalcraft, 2009); and

concern about poverty in poor countries (Cross *et al.*, 2010; Bourn and Sharma, 2008) as well as stronger emotions (Tallon, 2013).

Learning as continuous process

It is through experiences, in any context, that individuals are understood to learn and learning is therefore a continuous, recursive process (Jarvis, 2006). Experiences occur within our life-worlds, and Jarvis describes these as having been expanded by mass media to a world beyond our daily experience.

A recognition of multiple learning contexts is also apparent within global education discourses. It is a premise of global education that we are all intimately connected with, and dependent on, the world around us (see, e.g. Hicks, 2003). As a result of these interconnections, individuals have opportunities to learn about development and poverty not only through formal and informal educational opportunities, but informally through windows provided by globalization's flows of media, technology, ideologies, and ethnicities (Appadurai, 1996). These multiple contexts are highlighted in research exploring the multiple contexts in which young people learn about the wider world, including through TV, discussion with family, activities at school, going on holiday, religious institutions, and friends' experiences (Cross *et al.*, 2010).

The role of emotion, action, and reflection in learning

Jarvis (2006) characterizes learning as involving a complex, progressive combination of reflecting on, emotionally responding to, and acting on the new impulse that results from an external interaction. According to Jarvis (2006), these three dimensions of emotion, thought/reflection, and action interact, often simultaneously, feeding into each other in multiple ways in the process of learning.

Within global education theory and commentary in the English context, two of these responses, action and reflection, have been particularly prominent, though emotion has also featured to some extent. Social change, or action for change, is a dominant underlying theme throughout global education (Bourn, 2008; Brown, 2013), and evident widely within commentary and practice (see, for example, Smith and Rainbow, 2000; Oxfam, 2006; Trewby, 2007; Temple and Laycock, 2008). It has deep conceptual roots stemming from the significant influence on global educators of the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (see, for example, Hicks, 2003; Bourn, 2014a; Trewby, 2014), who made the link between critical awareness and social action through the term 'critical consciousness' or *conscientização* (Freire, 1972: 17). He believed that through education people are able to actively address their social exclusion. The relationship of action and learning within global education continues to be central, but is much debated and viewed in multiple ways: as the choice of the individual learner (Andreotti and Warwick, 2007); as providing the pedagogical

context of learning (Temple and Laycock, 2008); and as prompted by critical understanding (Richardson, 2008), a sense of personal responsibility as a global citizen (Oxfam, 2006), and/or values of social justice (Haydon, 2005; Marshall, 2005; Scheunpflug, 2008). In particular, the place of NGO fundraising and campaigning actions is contentious, understood by some as providing the best context for learning (Temple and Laycock, 2008), and by others as representing quick fix responses to global poverty (Tallon, 2012), which prevent young people from fully understanding the problem or challenging their own assumptions (Bryan and Bracken, 2011).

In recent years, there has been an emphasis within global education on knowledge acquisition, and therefore on the cognitive and reflective dimension of global education (Lambert and Morgan, 2011). This may in part relate to the influence of the Brazilian educator Andreotti (2009) with her focus on the cognitive and epistemological dimension to learning. Andreotti's resources and support for teachers emphasize reflection on multiple perspectives and cognitive processes of developing critical literacy and independent thinking (see e.g. Andreotti and Warwick, 2007). This trend also corresponds to education discourses more broadly where cognition (thinking, knowing, and the acquisition of knowledge) is predominant, an approach taken by the slimmed-down and knowledge-based National Curriculum of the coalition government (Bourn, 2014a).

There is some evidence in the work of global education theorists and practitioners in England of the significance of emotion in learning, including arguments for emotion to have a place in the 'taxonomies of objectives' (Tormey, 2005: 10) of global educators; for an affective domain of global education (Marshall, 2005; Hicks, 2007); for awareness that discomfort is an issue for young people engaging with global education (Bentall and McGough, 2013); for consideration of empathy and passion in a pedagogy of development education (Bourn, 2014a); for not ignoring pupil's emotional attachment to fundraising for link schools (Leonard, 2012); and for drawing on a psychodynamic model of human development to help global educators understand young people's emotive responses to global issues (Sander and Conway, 2013).

The role of emotion has also emerged from recent empirical research (Tallon, 2012, 2013) as significant in young people's learning about global poverty and development. Tallon's research highlights the strong emotional responses of year 10 students in New Zealand to the use of images of development in the classroom. The students participating in her research used the word 'sadness' most frequently to describe their impressions on learning about developing countries. Research in the American context exploring teachers' emotional responses to social justice issues (Callahan, 2004; Zembylas and Chubbuck, 2009), points towards young people's emotive response to inequality. In this research and related commentary, emotional

responses are strongly linked to action, with emotion seen as the vehicle to enable action to reduce social inequality. The place of action is central to another significant piece of research into young people's learning about global poverty and development, Asbrand's (2008) work with young people in Germany. She found that young people who volunteered in organizations outside school felt certain about their knowledge and clear about their options for acting in a complex world society. She describes these young people as having 'a self-image of being active' (Asbrand, 2008: 37). There is also evidence of young people viewing charitable giving as an important response to global poverty (Brown, 2006; Bentall and McGough, 2013) and of young people perceiving World Development A Level as having an impact on the conversations they had, their choice of reading material and their future plans (Miller *et al.*, 2012).

In his clear modelling of learning process, Jarvis therefore attends to responses relevant to global education and evident within empirical research with young people (emotion, action, and reflection). Jarvis's (2006) model of learning process also highlights the way in which behavioural, emotional, and reflective responses feed into each other in multiple ways in the process of learning. There is some empirical evidence of these interrelationships from research into young people's learning about global poverty and development. For example, Tallon (2013) found that an emotional response of sadness led to young people reflecting on themselves in relation to global poverty and feeling 'lucky':

Firstly, they expressed shock or disbelief at the chaos of life 'over there', followed by a feeling of sadness or pity. Secondly, they held a reflective sense of gratitude that they were not in the same situation.

Tallon, 2013: 87

The centrality of identity

For Jarvis, identity is a key dimension of learning, since the process of learning results in the 'transformation of the person' (Jarvis, 2009: 29) and the construction of the individual's biography (Jarvis, 2012). Jarvis's (2006) model places the learner at the beginning and end of the learning process. He explains that 'the crucial philosophical issue about learning is that it is the person who learns' and it is 'the changed person who is the outcome of the learning' (Jarvis, 2009: 24).

The relevance of the learner and his or her identity to learning about global poverty and development is also apparent in global education discourses. Notions of global citizenship, which have been prominent in global education in recent years, explore the extent to which people have or should see themselves as members of the human race, with associated responsibilities (see e.g. Noddings, 2005; Appiah, 2007; Sen, 2006). In addition, commentary on global education drawing on post-development critiques explore the way in which young people draw on learning about global

poverty and development to construct notions of themselves and their place in the world in relation to an unfortunate, poor, and distant 'Other' (Smith, 1999; Todd, 2003). Indeed, it has been argued that where the educational goal of an activity relating to global poverty and development is to imagine the suffering of the 'Other', this 'Other' is in fact not really part of the equation at all (Todd, 2003). Instead, the aim is to imagine how we would deal with a situation, and the empathy generated is for our own self-interest, our own learning about ourselves.

This role of the 'Other' in young people's identity construction is also evident in empirical research. Tallon (2013) saw year 10 Social Studies students in New Zealand as having begun to construct, in response to NGO imagery, their identities as superior and lucky in relation to the developing world, and as possible benefactors. This research echoes studies with young people in England. Young adults who have experienced poverty in developing countries through gap year programmes were found to have increased appreciation of the modern conveniences in their home settings, and a sense of their own privileged circumstances and luckiness (Simpson, 2004; Beames, 2005). Students in further education have also been shown to feel gratitude about their own situation in relation to fundraising activities (Bentall and McGough, 2013).

What can we learn from Jarvis's theory of learning?

The previous section has explored four themes common to Jarvis's (2006) model of learning process and to global education research and theory from the English context. Having established the utility of Jarvis's model in extending global educators' understanding of young people's learning process, this section offers some pointers towards what we may learn from this theory that is relevant to global education in England today.

Complexity of learning

Jarvis's (2006) model of learning process reminds us of the complex, individual nature of the learning process. Such a complex process, drawing on previous experiences and understandings of the individual learner, is likely to produce varied learning outcomes from any specific experience. This is a useful reminder to organizations carrying out project evaluations, which, driven by the requirements of funders, are often focused on specific pre-determined learning outcomes. Project evaluations that give greater space to explore the complexity of learning, not just project aims, are needed.

Emotion, behaviour and reflection all have a role

Jarvis's (2006) theory reminds us that a cognitive response to learning about global poverty and development, thinking, and knowing, is only one dimension to the learning process. This is useful because a focus on critical thinking and independent thought in the learning process has become dominant within global education in recent years (Brown, 2014). In particular, the work of Andreotti (2009) has been significant in bringing a post-colonial lens to global education in England and emphasizing critical literacy and dialogue as a potential way to prevent the reinforcement of stereotypes. However, Jarvis's model usefully reminds us that young people's cognitive processes are just one dimension of their learning, which also includes emotive and behavioural responses.

Action for change is a dominant underlying theme throughout global education (Bourn, 2008; Brown, 2013). However, debate has recently been focused on the role of fundraising and campaigning actions in the classroom, whether they provide a positive context for learning about global poverty and development (Temple and Laycock, 2008) or prevent young people from fully understanding the problem or challenging their own assumptions (Bryan and Bracken, 2011), offering only quick fixes aligned with consumer culture (Andreotti, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2010; Tallon, 2013). Whilst not negating the importance of this debate, Jarvis's (2006) model reminds us that action is part of the learning process, and that young people will be acting on their learning whatever our views on the specific actions of fundraising and campaigning. What is important is to view action in a much broader sense, for example including listening, sharing, learning more, talking to someone else about an issue, posting on social media, or, indeed, actively choosing to do nothing.

Emotion has been less widely emphasized as part of the learning process in global education, and Jarvis's (2006) model usefully highlights emotion as one of three central responses. Acknowledging this poses challenging questions for global educators. Engendering feelings of guilt, sadness, and anger can equip young people to effect social change (Chizhik and Chizhik, 2002; Callahan, 2004; Zembylas and Chubbuck, 2009), but stirring up these emotions and then not managing them can cause damage (Callahan, 2004), and 'discharging' them too quickly can limit young people's learning and any real societal transformation (Tallon, 2012). Regardless of how and whether we choose to channel young people's emotions into behaviour change, Jarvis's (2006) model highlights that young people will be responding emotionally as part of their learning. One response to this from educators could be offering young people greater opportunity to acknowledge and explore their emotional response. However, it is worth noting that supporting dialogue about emotions, though important, is likely an insufficient pedagogical response, since talk can serve to intensify emotional responses (Callahan, 2004). Collaboration between

psychologists and global educators has been productive in identifying overlap between pedagogical and therapeutic techniques (including drawing, play, and other structured activities) to support young people to work through their emotions (Sander and Conway, 2013).

Identity as key

Finally, Jarvis's (2006) model of learning process acts as a useful reminder of the centrality of identity to learning, the way in which learning is the construction of an individual's biography. How and what young people learn about global poverty and development will be significantly informed by their sense of self in relation to these issues, whether that be having 'a self-image of being active' (Asbrand, 2008) or a sense of being lucky and superior in relation to a poor unfortunate 'Other' (Tallon, 2013), or something else entirely. Acknowledging this, and supporting students to explore what this learning means for them, may open up different ways for students to relate to global poverty and development.

Application of learning theory

This article has proposed Jarvis's (2006) model as one lens for increasing global educators' understanding of learning process. In doing so, it also highlights the potential merits of drawing on the rich body of learning theory that exists to explore learning about global challenges. I would be hugely interested to see the application of a range of other learning theories to young people's learning about global poverty and development.

Conclusion

Learning processes in global education have not been significantly theorized, with the notable exception of the application of transformative learning theory. No theory of learning is complete, and to understand the complexity of learning, multiple theoretical lenses must be applied. This article has looked at the specific examples of Jarvis's (2006) model of learning theory and young people's learning about global poverty and development in the English context. It argues that the former has utility in extending global educators' understanding of the latter. This model is also likely to be relevant to learning about other global issues and in other national contexts. Its exploration here has highlighted the potential of the rich body of learning theory that exists to extend global educators' understanding of the learners they work with.

Note

1 The terms experiential, constructivist is used for ease of reference; it does not to assume that any groupings of learning theory are clearly delineated or homogenous groups, and acknowledges that learning theory can be grouped in many different ways (see e.g. Illeris, 2009; Wenger, 2009; Rogers and Horrocks, 2010).

Although Jarvis refers to his own work as experiential (Jarvis, 2006, p.184), and he strongly argues for the construction of personal knowledge, he may not see himself as constructivist, and certainly does not see reality as constructed as some constructivists do.

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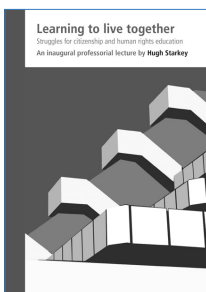
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