

# CRISIS TRANSFORMATIONISM AND THE DE-RADICALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN A NEW GLOBAL GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

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**Abstract:** This article critically considers the implications of ‘crisis transformationism’ for development education’s radical agenda of cultivating politically engaged, self-reflexive global citizens who have a deep understanding of power and politics and who are firmly committed to working collectively toward fundamental change.<sup>1</sup> Crisis transformationism is a mobilising ideological framework which deploys crisis rhetoric in order to consolidate the corporate takeover of education from a democratically controlled system to one designed and run by private actors in service of the global economy. In this article, we demonstrate how this takeover has accelerated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We draw on the 2022 *United Nations’ Transforming Education Summit* (TES) as exemplary of a growing trend in global educational governance whereby the values and interests of global corporations – through the ascendancy of Big Tech philanthropic foundations – increasingly shape educational policy and programming. Our primary purpose is to consider the implications of crisis transformationism for the future of development education’s genuinely transformative goal of achieving global and ecological justice. Applying critical discourse analytic techniques, we explore the ways in which the discourse of crisis transformationism is being deployed by influential policy actors to legitimise the expansion of the private sector in the delivery of education and to accelerate depoliticised notions of the ‘global’ via a

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<sup>1</sup>We use the term ‘development education’ when referring to the emancipatory, Freirean-inspired movement which seeks to address the root causes of global injustice. We use the term ‘global citizenship education’ (GCE) to refer to neoliberal and neurologically-imbued iterations of these adjectival educations.

skillification agenda premised on the acquisition of neurologically-inflected social-emotional skills or competencies which seeks to yield a productive (i.e., mentally healthy, resilient and skilled) workforce and a pliable, politically docile citizenry.

**Key words:** Crisis, Development Education; Neoliberalism; Philanthropy; Private Sector; Skillification; Social-Emotional Learning.

### **Introduction: the hijacking of transformative education**

This article critically considers the implications of what we characterise as ‘crisis transformationism’ for development education’s radical agenda of cultivating politically engaged, self-reflexive global citizen subjects who have a deep understanding of power and politics and who are firmly committed to working collectively towards fundamental change (Westheimer, 2020). Crisis transformationism is a mobilising ideological framework that advances crisis narratives in order to consolidate the takeover of education from a democratically controlled system to one designed and run by corporations in service of the global economy that has accelerated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It speaks to the hijacking of emancipatory educational initiatives designed to work towards ecological and global justice – such as those based on radical theories of equality and de-growth – in order to ensure continued capital accumulation and the interests of a minuscule minority of economic elites (Hickel, 2020). Drawing on the 2022 *UN Transforming Education Summit* (hereafter TES) as exemplary of crisis transformationism, we critically explore how overlapping global policy actors are mobilising around a perceived crisis in education via global summits, platforms, transnational networks and partnerships to advance a skillification agenda premised on the acquisition of neurologically-inflected competences which seeks to yield a productive (i.e., mentally healthy, resilient and skilled) workforce and a pliable, politically docile citizenry.

We characterise the learner envisioned in this new ‘transformative’ education agenda as an (economic) *global citizen with benefits* – in other words, an individual imbued with a set of social-emotional skills (SES) who

engages in politically detached forms of service and action rather than politically engaged, self-reflexive global citizenship. We demonstrate the ways in which the intertwined logics of skillification and *neuroliberalism* – with their prioritisation of specific SES necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – shift attention away from the substantive causes of global poverty and injustice and the need for widespread political engagement, collective action and a major overhaul of existing political-economic arrangements, norms, practices and ideologies.

The article is organised as follows. After outlining the methods informing the study, we provide a brief overview of a number of interlocking policy trends that are contributing to the (re)imagining of global citizenship in individualised, reductive, depoliticised terms. We then turn our attention to a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the ways in which the discourse of crisis transformationism is being mobilised by influential policy actors to legitimise the expansion of the private sector and digital technology in the delivery of education. The concluding section considers the implications for development education, re-imagined as a set of neurologically-inflected SES or competencies rather than a radical form of pedagogy that addresses the structural causes of poverty and injustice in the global North and South (McCloskey, 2014). In so doing, we contemplate the pedagogical and political implications of this neurologically-inflected *global citizen with benefits*, with a particular emphasis on what is being foreclosed by the framing of global citizenship in politically detached terms.

## **Methods**

### *The UN 2022 Transforming Education Summit*

For illustrative purposes, our analysis focuses on *TES* – a major international event convened by UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, which took place in September 2022 at UN headquarters in New York. *TES* was variously heralded as a ‘turning point for education’, a ‘milestone for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education)’ and ‘a conceptual and political platform for transforming education’ (UN, 2023: 22). It evolved out

of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to accelerate progress on SDG 4 on foot of the realisation that most of its targets would not be met (IEFG, 2022). Over 2,000 education stakeholders participated in the Summit, whose stated purpose was to ‘elevate education to the top of the global political agenda...to mobilize action, ambition, solidarity, and solutions...and sow the seeds to transform education for the breakthrough that our world so urgently needs’ (UN, 2023: 6).<sup>2</sup> The main TES event comprised a youth-led *Mobilisation Day*, showcasing youth recommendations on transforming education; a *Solutions Day* featuring representatives of UN-based agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO, the World Bank, and corporate entities; and a *Leaders Day*, dedicated to the presentation of National Statements of Commitment by Heads of State and Government in the form of Leaders Roundtables.<sup>3</sup> This main event was preceded by an extensive preparatory process with inputs across three work streams: 1) national and regional consultations, 2) thematic action tracks and 3) public engagement, communications and advocacy.<sup>4</sup> A Pre-Summit event attended by Heads of State, over 150 Ministers and a wide range of education stakeholders was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in June 2022.

### *Why the Transforming Education Summit?*

The COVID-19 pandemic provided the impetus for education to be reimagined according to pre-pandemic priorities, interests and agendas, most notably in relation to the role of private organisations in the design and implementation of digital technologies and online learning (Morris, Park and Auld, 2022; Schweisfurth, 2023; Zancajo, Verger, and Bolea, 2022). TES is exemplary of a number of interlocking policy trends in education which have major

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<sup>2</sup>TES stakeholders included those representing nation-states, donors, policy-makers, civil society groups, young people, teachers, education advocates, academia, the private sector and philanthropies.

<sup>3</sup>Private sector companies included, inter alia, Google, IBM, KPMG, Deloitte, Ericsson, and Microsoft. Philanthropies included the Aga Khan Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lego Foundation, and The Qatar Foundation.

<sup>4</sup>The five thematic action tracks included 1) inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools; 2) learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development; 3) teachers, teaching and the teaching profession; 4) digital learning and transformation; and 5) financing of education.

implications for the practice and enactment of global citizenship. As outlined in more detail below, these include: 1) the ongoing influence of neoliberal rationality, bolstered by the ascendancy of *neuro*liberalism – an ideology combining neoliberal principles with insights derived from the behavioural and neurological sciences (Whitehead et al., 2018); 2) the increasing influence of private philanthropic actors in educational governance, and a corresponding emphasis on techno-solutionism and personalised learning; and 3) the promotion of specific skills, values and mind-sets that cultivate ‘entrepreneurial’ citizen subjects modelled on billionaire, for-profit philanthropists (Williamson, 2017).

We chose TES as the focus of our analysis because we regard it as exemplary of a new global educational governance landscape increasingly shaped by private actors and corporate interests, most notably Big Tech. TES crystallises a discursive shift away from a Freirean conception of transformative education as an *enabler* of social and ecological justice towards an understanding of transformation as a *lynchpin* for (green) economic growth in a digitised economy. It marked a consolidation of multiple forces and discourses that have been ascending in the global educational policyscape pertinent to the future of education enshrined in SDG 4.7 (concerned with education for sustainable development and global citizenship).

Given that one of the major outcomes of TES was the establishment of a ‘global movement for transforming education’ to ensure that education remains on top of the political agenda (UN, 2023: 4), we anticipate that the TES agenda and the associated ideology of ‘crisis transformationism’ will intensify over the coming decade.

#### *Critical discourse analysis of the Transforming Education Summit*

Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 8) suggest that policies always manufacture problems (or crises) in certain ways, and ‘from a particular point of view’ in order to give legitimacy to specific policy proposals and proffer solutions constructed by the policy itself. With this in mind, we used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interrogate the discursive construction of a global

educational crisis, as well as the kinds of solutions that are envisioned and enlivened by it (Fairclough, 2010). In the interests of manageability, our analysis was limited to several major documents associated with TES, namely the *2023 Report on the 2022 Transforming Education Summit Convened by the UN Secretary-General* (UN, 2023), and the *Secretary-General's Vision Statement for TES* (UN, 2022a), *Transforming Education: An Urgent Political Imperative for our Collective Future* – which was the primary formal outcome of TES. We also subjected a number of statements, discussion papers and declarations of particular relevance to our analysis, including the *Youth Declaration on Transforming Education* (UN, 2022b), the *Statement by Philanthropic Actors Supporting Education* (IEFG, 2022) and the discussion papers informing each of the TES Action Tracks. We also reviewed the TES website and the Summit programme – as well as a select number of video-recorded side events – to build a comprehensive picture of TES content, participants, representation, interests and emphasis. Applying CDA techniques, we examined various degrees of presence or absence in these texts, such as foreground information (those ideas that are present and emphasised), background information (those ideas that are explicitly mentioned but deemphasised), presupposed information (that information which is present at the level of implied or suggested meaning) and absent information (Fairclough, 2010). The next section sets the stage for the analysis of TES with reference to a number of interlocking policy trends and their implications for the acceleration of depoliticised notions of ‘the global’ in the post 2015 context.

### **Interlocking policy trends in education**

*‘Heightened ambitions’: The growing influence of private sector and private foundation involvement in education*

Private sector involvement in education has expanded rapidly in recent years, perhaps most notably in relation to the growing influence of ‘new’ or ‘big philanthropy’ in education (e.g., Ball, 2020). Writing over forty years ago about ‘old’ philanthropy, Arnove (1980: 1) warned that philanthropic foundations could undermine democratic societies because ‘they represent

relatively unregulated and unaccountable concentrations of power and wealth which buy talent, promote causes, and, in effect, establish an agenda of what merits society's attention'. Three decades later, Arnove and Pinede (2007: 422) reaffirmed this observation in relation to the 'Big Three' United States (US)-based philanthropies – namely the Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford Foundations – when they suggested that philanthropic institutions are corrosive of democratic processes and pre-emptive of more radical, structural approaches to social change:

“It is still the foundations, with the profits that they have derived from the given social system, that determine what issues merit society's attention, who will study these issues, which results will be disseminated, and which recommendations will be made to shape public policy. Decisions that should be made by publicly elected officials are relegated to a group of institutions and individuals who cannot conceive of changing in any profound way a system from which they derive their profits and power”.

Philanthropic involvement in the delivery of education has expanded considerably in recent years (UN, 2023). Between 2016 and 2019, for example, total global philanthropic funding for education was USD 4.5 billion and cross-border philanthropic giving represented the eighth largest source of financing for education towards developing countries, which is comparable to more traditional sources of aid (IEFG, 2022). In addition to providing financing, philanthropic actors play a significant role in educational governance by providing expertise, supporting, managing, producing, and disseminating data and using knowledge to forge new political relations and to legitimise their intervention in the public sphere (Viseu, 2022). In the context of TES, education philanthropies articulate their role in terms of policy advocacy, 'partnership building', 'knowledge brokering', and 'enabling a culture of evidence in policymaking' (IEFG, 2022: 1).

In practical terms, the deepening involvement of philanthropy in education has led to a series of educational reforms and interventions premised

on market logic, business strategy, and ‘social return on investment’. Other implications of growing philanthropic involvement include: the prioritisation of outcomes-based educational interventions, based on a ‘what works’ logic which privileges measurable aspects of education (such as skill acquisition) over more valuable elements of education which defy measurement (Unterhalter, 2020); pre-distributive (rather than re-distributive) approaches which prioritise early childhood education and foundational skills that seek to enhance productivity and reduce social spending (Gillies, Edwards and Horsley, 2016); and an increasing emphasis on ‘personalised’ learning platforms which capture ‘data’ and mine users’ personal information (Mertanen, Vainio, and Brunila, 2021; Williamson, 2021).<sup>5</sup> Building on our earlier work examining how global citizenship is being reimaged in de-politicised ways (Bryan, 2022; Mochizuki, 2023; Mochizuki, Vickers and Bryan, 2022), we contend that the amplification and intensification of private (and in particular ‘new philanthropic’ involvement in education) (Ball, 2020) is a major driver of the de-politicisation of global citizenship. As outlined in more detail below, this intensification of private, philanthrocapitalist involvement in education is intimately bound up with the increasing emphasis on techno-solutionism in education, i.e., a reliance on educational technologies (EdTech) to deliver educational programming and as a ‘solution’ to perceived deficiencies in teaching and learning.

### *Techno-solutionism in education*

As outlined by Marelli, Kieslich and Geiger (2022: 1), techno-solutionism is a mode of intervention that emphasises ‘technological fixes’ and ‘silver-bullet solutions’, ‘which tend to erase contextual factors and marginalise other rationales, values, and social functions that do not explicitly support

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<sup>5</sup>Outcomes-based investment approaches are premised on the idea that governments, philanthropists etc. should pay *only* for what works and to the extent that it works – hence the need for measurable indicators and standardised data.



technology-based innovation efforts'. This trend in education is being driven by a complex transnational network of powerful, for-profit actors (including Big Tech philanthropists such as the Chan-Zuckerberg, Bill and Melinda Gates and Bezos Foundations) for whom education comprises a largely untapped market (Mertanen, Vainio and Brunila, 2021). These education policy entrepreneurs seek to disrupt public schooling in order to privatise educational data infrastructures, provide services and profit from data accumulation, thereby corporatising and privatising education as a public good (Hogan and Sellar, 2021). Elsewhere, we have argued that the increasing emphasis on digital technology as a pedagogical tool to foster global citizenship espoused by organisations such as UNESCO's Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) has profound implications for the realisation of social, global and ecological justice. Specifically, we argued that MGIEP's preoccupation with neuroscience, digital technology and social-emotional learning (SEL) (including so-called SES such as empathy, compassion, critical thinking and mindfulness) reinforces a reductive, depoliticised vision of education which threatens to exacerbate educational inequality while enhancing the profits and power of Big Tech (Bryan, 2022; Mochizuki, 2023; Mochizuki, Vickers and Bryan, 2022).

#### *'Personalised learning'*

'Personalised learning' is one of the main techno-solutionist responses championed by private companies, big-tech philanthropies and multilateral agencies alike (e.g., MGIEP) (Mochizuki, Vickers and Bryan, 2022). The increasing emphasis on personalised learning is reflective of 'larger global trends where young people's education is becoming more individualised, privatised, behaviourised and datafied than ever' (Mertanen, Vainio and Brunila, 2021: 737). Besides posing a major threat to personal privacy and ceding control to algorithms in setting curricula and assessing learning, personalised learning undermines relationality between teachers and students and the broader social and civic purposes of schooling (Hogan and Sellar, 2021). For example, tailoring learning in response to student needs, preferences, interests and so on could easily become the basis for non-engagement with more civic or political aspects of the curriculum, which can

be all too easily dismissed as overly-contentious, distressing, sensitive, risky, or uninteresting. Moreover, personalised online learning platforms, by their very nature, filter and select what content *individual* learners are exposed to, based on algorithms that ascertain what engages them most. This has profound implications for how students learn about political and democratic life, potentially closing them off from new or alternative perspectives, for example (Williamson, 2017). Furthermore, personalised learning jars with active, group-based, participatory learning modalities that are integral to development education.

Having provided a brief overview of some of the most relevant intersecting policy trends affecting education and contributing to the depoliticisation of global citizenship, the remainder of the article draws on TES as illustrative of the ways in which major policy actors and global initiatives are re-orienting educational policy and reshaping the goals, purposes, and values of education. Inevitably, this re-configuration of education has major implications for the teaching and enactment of global citizenship education (GCE). Specifically, we examine the ways in which the discourse of crisis transformationism is being deployed by multilateral agencies, academic ‘gurus’, economic think tanks, philanthrocapitalists and commercial EdTech providers, thereby paving the way for education to be reimaged in service of the global economy and private interests. We demonstrate how the characterisation of global citizenship as a set of (social-emotional) skills, elsewhere defined as ‘the global currency of twenty-first-century economies’ (OECD, 2012: 10), is central to this educational reimaging.

### **‘Transforming Education’: The crystallisation of a new global educational governance landscape**

#### *The undeniability of ‘crisis in education’*

As Morris, Park and Auld (2022: 692) point out in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, crises - real or perceived - have long provided an opportunity to usher in radical processes of educational and political-economic reform, often with ‘questionable motives and variable consequences’. Schweisfurth (2023)

argues that discourses of crisis and disaster in education (particularly in relation to teaching and learning) are now widely taken-for-granted in mainstream development discourse. Crisis rhetoric was ubiquitous in all of the TES texts we analysed, featuring ten times in the UNSG Vision Statement and over thirty times in the TES Report. Within these texts, education is variously characterised as confronting ‘a dramatic triple crisis’ (UN, 2023: 1); a ‘deep crisis: a crisis of equity, quality, and relevance’ (UN, 2023: 3), and a ‘learning crisis’ (UN, 2023: 3).

The undeniability of this crisis is reinforced with reference to statements such as ‘study after study, poll after poll, draw the same conclusion: education systems are no longer fit for purpose’ and ‘young people and adults alike report that education does not equip them with the knowledge, experience, skills, or values needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world’ (UN, 2022a: 1). Meanwhile, we are informed that ‘employers complain of a major skills mismatch while many adults are left with little or no access to affordable training and re-skilling opportunities’ and that ‘parents and families decry the value or lack of return on the investments they make in education and their children’ (UN, 2022a: 1). Collectively, this gives the impression that there is a consensus amongst all sectors of society, including children, young people, parents, policy-makers, employers, academics/researchers etc. that education is experiencing a deep crisis and in need of radical reform.

#### *What does ‘transforming education’ involve?*

Education’s perceived failure to ‘equip the new generations with the values, knowledge, and skills they need to thrive in today’s complex world’ is identified as the source of the crisis of *relevance* in education (UN, 2023: 1). Predictably, the proposed solution to this particular crisis lies in the cultivation of various forms of ‘knowledge, skills, values and attitudes’, including ‘foundational learning’ skills (which are defined as literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills) (UN, 2023: 18); various 21<sup>st</sup> century skills including ‘resilience’, ‘curiosity’, ‘creativity’, ‘empathy’, ‘kindness’, ‘problem solving’ and ‘critical thinking’ as well as education for sustainable development, employability and entrepreneurship skills (UN, 2023; UN, 2022a). According

to thematic Action Track 2, *Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development*, one of the five thematic action tracks underpinning TES:

“Transforming education means empowering learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to be resilient, adaptable, and prepared for an uncertain and complex future while actively and creatively contributing to human and planetary well-being and sustainable societies” (UN, 2022c: 4).

Action track 2 addresses three key issues: (a) foundational learning; (b) education for sustainable development, including environmental and climate change education; and (c) skills for employment and entrepreneurship. Key recommendation four arising out of this Action Track calls upon every country to:

“Ensure all learners gain foundational skills, including the ability to read with understanding, do basic maths, and master appropriate socio-emotional skills by age 10. Digital skills, transferable competencies for sustainability and entrepreneurship mindsets and skills should also be embedded in learning goals, curricula and programmes” (UN, 2022c: 14).

The co-articulation of ‘transferable competencies for sustainability’ with basic literacy and numeracy as well as socio-emotional, digital and entrepreneurship skills or ‘mindsets’ conflates the goals and aspirations of education for sustainable development (ESD) with job-ready skills. The discussion paper makes numerous references to ‘mainstreaming ESD’ in education (e.g., UN, 2022c: 6) and ‘empowering individuals for human and planetary sustainability’ (Ibid). It also identifies the need for ‘reflection and unlearning of unsustainable ways of living and ideas about how we measure success’, and to empower individuals ‘to make structural changes by holding government and industries to account’ (Ibid: 7). However, there is a major incongruity between these more critically-oriented aspects of ESD/GCE and the mobilising framework underpinning TES as a whole, namely the SDGs.

TES seeks to ‘advanc[e] the SDGs in every corner of society’ and espouses a (green) growth-focused agenda that seeks to ‘empower individuals as agents of change to lead the twin transitions towards digital and green economies’ (Ibid: 1).

Calls to ‘mainstream ESD’ notwithstanding, TES’s primary emphasis is on promoting skills to ensure the smooth running of the neoliberal machinery that pursues sustainable economic growth on a finite planet. The ‘learning to do’ section of the UNSG Vision Statement, for example, focuses almost exclusively on the need for an entrepreneurial and flexible workforce, legitimising the role of elites in global capitalism (notably billionaire philanthropists who push for a digitisation and privatisation agenda) in guiding education transformation.

“Learning to do calls for a focus on a whole new set of skills, including digital literacy, financial skills, and emerging technical and STEM skills. Transformed education systems should develop flexible career management skills, and promote innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship. This also calls for qualifications that recognize skills, work experiences and knowledge throughout life, and beyond formal education” (UN, 2022a: 3).

Similarly, rather than playing the role of revolutionary subjects or rebels against the machinery that makes their life precarious, young people themselves urge decision-makers to ‘foster an education that advances critical thinking, imagination, communication, innovation, socio-emotional, and interpersonal skills’ (UN, 2022b: para 9) and invest in ‘future-proof skills development, technical and vocational training, apprenticeships, and other relevant opportunities to ensure access to decent jobs for youth’ (para 16), ‘green and digital skills’ (para 17) and ‘the digital infrastructure of education’ (para 20). It can be argued that UN forums such as TES provide a perfect platform to showcase the self-empowerment of (elite) youth and youth agency, enabling political elites to present education (narrowly conceived as skilling and competence building) as a panacea and to celebrate youth as a symbol for

positive change. Reflecting the UN's status as an intergovernmental organisation, the representations of education and youth in these outcome documents reflect the constructs of education and youth shaped by the predominant global, capitalist and neoliberal world models. As we elaborate in more detail below, this discourse on transforming education functions in service of the global economy, undermining the future of humanity for the capital accumulation of a minuscule minority of economic elites (Hickel, 2020).

'Harnessing the digital revolution for the benefit of public education' is unsurprisingly another of the major elements of crisis transformationism advanced in TES (UN, 2022a). Reflective of the convergence of corporate interests, new (Tech-based) philanthropy, EdTech (Educational Technologies), neoliberal (or *neuroliberal*) policies and funding infrastructures (e.g., Ball 2020), the role of digital technology is championed as a means of enhancing educational quality and expanding access, transforming the way that teaching and learning happens and ensuring more creative ways of teaching and learning:

"If harnessed properly, the digital revolution could be one of the most powerful tools for ensuring quality education for all and transforming the way teachers teach and learners learn" (UN, 2023: 30).

"The digital revolution can be harnessed to expand access and to ensure more creative ways of teaching and learning" (Ibid: 2).

The next section, which documents TES's fulsome embrace of the private sector and private philanthropies in global educational governance, interrogates the vested interests involved in re-defining educational transformation in terms of the digital revolution.

*‘Louder Together’: The role of the private sector and private foundations in advancing crisis transformationism*

Morris, Park and Auld (2022: 704) demonstrate the ‘mutually reinforcing’ role played by multilateral organisations and corporations in ‘constrain[ing] the future [of education] as a privatised techno-utopia’ which reduces schools and teachers to consumers of digital, personalised learning platforms and deliverers of 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘skills’ and ‘competencies’ (Ibid: 691). Despite the rhetoric of ‘strengthening education as a public endeavour and a common good’ (UN, 2023: 13), TES outcome documents are replete with reference to the ‘active role’ of the private sector and foundations in delivering education (Ibid: 23) and to the ‘heightened ambition and engagement of the private sector’ in global educational governance (Ibid: 11). The TES report calls for private philanthropies to ‘step up their contribution to transforming education’ (Ibid: 31) and urges decision-makers ‘to support, fully fund, and establish multi-stakeholder and public-private partnerships to ensure dedicated funding to transform education’ (Ibid: 36).

TES represented a turning point in global education governance by enabling ‘education philanthropy to speak louder together as a committed and credible voice towards a common, broader but shared goal to transform education’ (Missika and Savage, 2022: n.p). Driven by philanthropic funders identifying as ‘the education philanthropy community’, sixty educational philanthropies – including, *inter alia*, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Jacobs Foundation, The Varkey Foundation, The Mastercard Foundation, The LEGO Foundation, and the Aga Khan Foundation – issued a joint statement to TES, representing ‘the first moment...of joined-up education philanthropy to a UN summit’ (Missika and Savage, 2022: n.p.).<sup>6</sup> According to the statement, educational philanthropies plan to ‘use [their] convening

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<sup>6</sup>This statement was facilitated by the OECD Development Centre, the International Education Funders Group (IEFG), and the OECD Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD). IFED and netFWD are networks that connect and enable collaboration between private philanthropy actors. The OECD Development Centre is an independent platform for knowledge sharing and policy dialogue between OECD member countries and developing economies.

power ...and [their] networks to strengthen collaboration with each other and with philanthropies in other sectors to align [their] strategic engagement'. Moreover, the statement urges 'education partners' to work closely with philanthropies and fund alongside them to ensure the advancement of SDG 4, and to 'capitalise on the contribution of philanthropy to sustainable development going forward'. One of the major outcomes of TES was the representation of private sector and private foundations on the SDG4 High Level Steering Committee (HLSC), co-chaired by UNESCO and Sierra Leone.

The *Statement by Philanthropic Actors Supporting Education* was welcomed by TES as a 'strong signal that private foundations are eager to leverage their influence, resources, and tools for transforming education' (UN, 2023: 11). The Summit 'encourages further mobilization of private foundations and the private sector in cooperation and coordination with Member States' (Ibid: 44) and identifies private sector actors more generally as having 'contributed to identifying solutions and creating a global movement' (Ibid: 11). Entirely absent from TES is any recognition of the risks associated with increased private sector involvement in education, such as those identified by Arnove (1980) over forty years ago in relation to undermining democracy, or more recent developments in relation to digital technology and personalised learning discussed above. Other associated risks include the prioritisation of educational initiatives which are funder or donor-led, rather than needs or values driven, and the re-appropriation of the SDGs to serve corporate and political-economic interests (Gorur, 2020: 25). Moreover, as Wulff (2020: 14) points out:

“When private actors and organisations enter public spaces and domains of the government, there is a more ideological dynamic at play, where power is being renegotiated simply through the new role taken by the private sector and its implicit or explicit side-lining of the government”.

This 're-imagining' of educational transformation to include a digital revolution and greater involvement of the private sector and private



foundations is perfectly aligned with Big Tech’s efforts to reconfigure public education as a marketplace for its products, platforms and services (Mertanen, Vainio, and Brunila, 2021).

**Don’t worry, be happy: ‘Deepening the impact of education for sustainable development’**

As outlined above, TES echoes and amplifies existing efforts to align global citizenship with a SEL agenda traditionally associated with educational policies designed to promote academic success and economic productivity through the nurturing of ‘social and emotional skills, empathy, and kindness’ (UN, 2022a: 2). Similarly, the Youth Declaration calls on decision-makers to ‘foster an education that advances... socio-emotional, and interpersonal skills’ (UN, 2022b: para 9) and ‘centre the mental health and wellness of all learners within and beyond the classroom throughout our educational journeys...as well as create the optimal environments to promote recreational activities, such as arts and sports’ (para 12). Under the heading ‘learning to be’, the UNSG Vision Statement declares that ‘the deepest purpose of education’ is ‘to instil in learners the values and capacities to lead a meaningful life, to enjoy that life, and to live it fully and well’ (UN, 2022a: 4). Echoing the Youth Declaration, this is understood as:

“developing every student’s potential for creativity and innovation; their capacity to enjoy and to express themselves through the arts; their awareness of history and the diversity of cultures; and *their disposition for leading a healthy life*, to practice physical activities, games, and sports” (Ibid, emphasis added).

This formulation of ‘learning to be’ is individuating and reflective of the shifting of attention towards social-emotional wellbeing in schools (Bryan, 2022). The increasing alignment of SES with SDG 4.7 reduces global citizenship to the cultivation of pro-social/pro-environmental behaviour and positions mindfulness programmes as key to addressing problems as intractable as violent extremism and climate change (Bryan, 2022; Mochizuki, 2023). In this sense, it represents a significant departure from development

education characterised as a radical form of learning that addresses the structural causes of poverty and injustice in the global North and South (McCloskey, 2014). The next section considers a number of allied discourses which prioritise subjective happiness, well-being, and affect regulation as a means of ‘deepening the impact of ESD’, and their role in inculcating self-reliant, self-responsible, self-managing, and resilient citizen subjects.

*‘Build back happier’*

A TES side event convened by Mission 4.7 entitled *Deepening the Impact of Education for Sustainable Development through Social Emotional Learning and Happiness* is a particularly vivid example of the de-radicalisation of GCE in action.<sup>7</sup> Mission 4.7 is co-chaired by the academic ‘guru’ of sustainable development Jeffrey Sachs, who also serves as a Board Member of the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development at Columbia University. Sachs is also Director of the Global Happiness Council (GHC), ‘a global network of leading academic specialists in happiness...[that] identifies best practices at the national and local levels to encourage advancement of the causes of happiness and well-being’ (GHC, 2022: n.p.). Sachs and a number of other highly influential, densely networked actors who hold leadership and/or advisory positions across various policy/advocacy networks, have been instrumental in aligning ESD with SEL (Bryan, 2022). GHC’s *Global Happiness and Well-being Policy Report* (GHC, 2022) devotes an entire chapter to recent initiatives to ‘incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) into child learning environments’ and sees ‘the opportunity to build back happier’ as central to the ‘broader social justice agenda’ (GHC, 2022: 6). This report contains multiple references to ‘self-management’, ‘empathy’, ‘teamwork’ and

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<sup>7</sup>Mission 4.7 is an initiative to transform education by Global Schools and the SDG Academy (both flagship programmes of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network – SDSN) whose partners include UNESCO, the SDSN, the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens, and the Centre for Sustainable Development at Columbia University. Andreas Schleicher, Director, Education and Skills, OECD, sits on its High Level Advisory group.

‘resilience’, and conceptualises peace and human rights education in terms of SEL competencies such as ‘self-awareness and empathy’ (GHC, 2022: 32).

This SEL agenda promotes habits of mind and ways of being that individuals need to thrive in competitive neoliberal economies, such as capacities for learned optimism, personal agility, adaptability, resilience, positive thinking and other forms of ‘adversity capital’ (Pavlidis, 2009). The happiness industry reproduces and amplifies the emergence of an entrepreneurial self via processes of psychological essentialism and responsabilisation (Adams et al., 2019). Rather than promoting educational conditions conducive to emancipatory forms of GCE, forums such as TES therefore legitimise what Adams et al (2019: 191) call ‘neoliberal selfways’, the core features of which include: a sense of radical abstraction from social and material context, an entrepreneurial approach to self as an ongoing development project, an imperative for individual growth and personal fulfilment, and an emphasis on affect regulation. In other words, instead of cultivating global citizens committed to addressing political issues of resource allocation, recognition, and redistribution, ‘deepening the impact of ESD’ is preoccupied with subjective happiness, well-being, and affect regulation in order to inculcate self-reliant, self-responsible, self-managing, and resilient citizen subjects. As Evans and Reid (2013: 83) remark in relation to the cultivation of resilient citizens, ‘The resilient subject is a subject which must permanently struggle to accommodate itself to the world, and not a subject which can conceive of changing the world, its structure and conditions of possibility’. Furthermore, the alignment of SEL with ESD is incompatible with the pursuit of global justice because it implicitly frames certain people as deserving of care, rights, or justice while positioning others as undeserving of the same treatment, thereby pre-empting the very relations that lie at the heart of global justice (Bryan, 2020).

### **Concluding thoughts**

Concerns about the de-politicisation of development education (arguably a far more political term than global citizenship which has its origins in the scholarship and praxis of the radical educator Paulo Freire) were addressed in

this journal over a decade ago as part of a special issue concerned with the ‘de-clawing’ or de-radicalisation of the field in the context of its professionalisation (Bryan, 2011). In that issue, Selby and Kagawa (2011: 18) argued that the related fields of development education and ESD were in danger of ‘striking a Faustian bargain’, that is of compromising their ‘radical, status quo critical, value system commitment’ in exchange for a purchase on policy. The foregoing analysis suggests that this de-radicalisation agenda has accelerated in a post-2015 context driven by an SDG framework that espouses contradictory and fundamentally incompatible goals, such as economic growth, on the one hand (SDG 8) and ecological sustainability, on the other (Goals 6, 12, 13, 14, and 15) (Wulff, 2020).

Whereas global citizenship has long been recognised as a highly contested concept, or ‘floating signifier’, subject to diverse interpretations and encompassing competing objectives and agendas (e.g., Auld and Morris, 2019; Pashby et al., 2020), our analysis points to considerable ideological convergence amongst the most privileged voices in the contemporary education polycscape. The kind of global citizen being envisioned in UN-convened TES is indistinguishable from the OECD’s globally competent citizen, for example, which reflects a way of belonging and being in a globally-competitive market society and economy (Robertson, 2021). The learner at the heart of this new transformative education agenda is an (economic) *global citizen with benefits* – a citizen subject imbued with a set of social emotional ‘skills’ that prepare them for politically detached forms of service and action rather than an understanding of power, politics, and their role in local and global transformation.

The increasing emphasis on ‘human-centric’ skills or competencies – such as resilience, learned optimism, empathy, compassion, agility, etc. – offers limited scope for students to question implicit beliefs, to embrace different ways of knowing, or to transform existing political-economic arrangements and injustices. Rather, it forestalls political dialogue and diverts energy away from the pursuit of global justice and equality. For education to be truly transformative, it needs to equip students with the capacity and

commitment to critique the dominant norms, values, institutions and discourses of society; to contest power inequalities and vested economic interests; to make complex connections between intersecting local and global trends, crises and developments; to reflect critically on their role as *agents* in perpetuating and alleviating local and global injustices and to enhance their awareness of the complex intersection between individual actions and structural forces. As Westheimer (2020: 289) observes:

“Without an analysis of power, politics, and one’s role in local and global political structures – and without showing students how they can work with others toward fundamental change – students will be unlikely to become effective citizens who can transform their communities and the world by addressing issues identified by the 2030 Agenda such as poverty, hunger, and inequality. ...Programmes that privilege individual acts of compassion and kindness often neglect the importance of social action, political engagement, and the pursuit of just and equitable policies. The vision promoted is one of citizenship without politics or collective action – a commitment to individual service, but not to social justice”.

The rhetoric of crisis transformationism has profound implications for the future of democracy in a world increasingly dominated by, *inter alia*, political capture and political rigging<sup>8</sup>, media monopolies, disinformation, wealth inequality, ecological breakdown and a political system that allows ‘a few people to sabotage our collective future for their own private gain’ (Hickel, 2020: 246). As educators concerned for the future of humanity and democracy,

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<sup>8</sup>Political capture refers to ‘the exercise of abusive influence by one or more extractive elite(s) – to favour their interests and priorities to the detriment of the general good – over the public policy cycle and state agencies (or others of a regional or international scope), with potential effects on inequality (economic, political or social) and on democracy’s correct functioning’ (OXFAM Intermon, 2018: 14).

we must at once actively resist the corporate takeover of education which is currently underway and reclaim development education's radical roots.

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