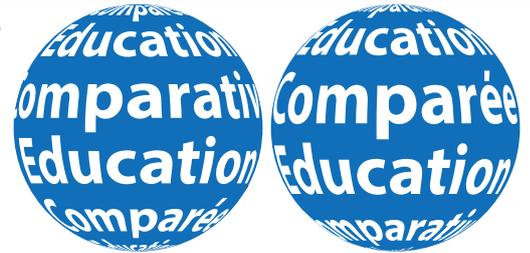


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التربية المقارنة العالمية

مجلة المجلس العالمي لمختلف مجتمعات التربية و التعليم المقارنين

Learning as development: Rethinking international education in a changing world by Daniel A. Wagner. New York & London: Routledge, 2017. 324 pp. \$44.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-84872-607-9.

Learning as development, by Daniel Wagner, is a new and welcomed entry into the collection of introductory texts that address education and international development. In this text Wagner posits that economic analyses and outcomes that privilege “national or individual income” over broader life goals are no longer adequate; rather, the field of international development must focus anew on more genuine forms of human development and, most specifically, on learning (p. 2). Indeed, understanding, measuring, and increasing learning lies at the crux of the book and, as Wagner contends, at the heart of development.

The book is organized into four key sections. The first section explores various lenses through which to understand the intersections of “International development,” “Human development,” and “Learning as development.” Each of these three areas receives its own chapter (Chapters 1-3). The second section draws inspiration from stage theorists and addresses across three chapters three pivotal moments of the human lifespan (Chapters 4-6). These chapters explore “Learning in early childhood,” “Children and basic skills,” and “Youth and adult learning.” The third macro section of the text concerns the ways in which the social institutions and activities of schooling and teaching, respectively, influence students’ development, as well as how international development agencies and theorists have approached both schools and the roles of teachers (Chapters 7-8). The fourth and final section explores several recent movements in the field (Chapters 9-12). These include “New technologies,” “Globalization and the environment,” “Measurement of learning,” and “Learning equity.” Concluding the text is a brief epilogue, wherein Wagner summarizes core concepts and leaves readers with a call for increased collaboration to address global issues.

This framework suits the text, which overall is quite accessible. Some other books in this sub-genre are either overly dense—and therefore too complex for introductory texts—or too general, and therefore lack the specificities to guide further exploration. To paraphrase Goldilocks and the Three Bears, the scope and tone of this text seems “just right.” Chapter One, for example, examines “International development” and includes a particularly useful overview of how various disciplines may perceive and approach development, broadly conceived. Here Wagner highlights how the lenses of economics, sociology, political science, psychology, anthropology, and interdisciplinarity frame development programs and problems as well as the possibilities for solutions. While some nuance regarding disciplines’ various epistemological assumptions is lost, this overview is quite accessible for readers who may have limited experience with traditional disciplines. Moreover, this chapter includes clear summaries of core theories that underpin various aspects of education and international development (e.g., Rostow’s stages of growth and Bourdieu’s cultural capital). It would be impossible to include all theorists and theories and, therefore, some are obviously overlooked; however, Wagner curated an important sample of key people and ideas and, perhaps more importantly, explained clearly how and why they are significant.

The book also emphasizes lived experiences and empirical evidence. Each chapter begins with a short vignette of a person and how they encountered education and international development, and then concludes with a retrospective of that individual's life, taking into account what has been learned about the given topic (e.g., early childhood) throughout the chapter. These snippets help to ground the theory and practice in the everyday lives of people across contexts as diverse as Peru, Nigeria, and Turkey. Wagner also opted to save endnotes for the end of each chapter rather than using in-text citations or endnotes at the bottom of the page. This was a smart decision—given the audience for the text—because it enhanced readability while still enabling ambitious and curious readers to locate both references and supplemental commentary. The detailed endnotes at the back of every chapter are very beneficial; some readers may even want to keep one finger in the endnotes to attain as much insight as possible. Moreover, the book includes many tables, charts, graphics, and even cartoons to keep the reader engaged. A few of the charts and graphs would benefit from additional explanation, but overall these visual representations help represent core concepts and generally add to the book's readability.

On a more conceptual level, *Learning as development* engages with key tensions in education and international development. It is evident throughout the text, for example, that there has been and continues to be a tension between universalist assumptions of knowledge, learning, and schooling, on one hand, and more culturally-specific and locally-informed perspectives, on the other. To address this tension Wagner employs a wide range of research evidence to illustrate key points, often acknowledging that readers and consumers of research ought to be careful of over-generalizing findings from across different contexts. For example, Wagner notes, “considerable research, *mainly from Western countries*, has shown the importance of parents reading storybooks to children in the early years of schooling” (p. 101, emphasis added). Given the potentially dangerous implications of applying research findings uncritically across contexts, it is refreshing to see in a text of this broad nature attention to the sites of data collection and knowledge production.

Texts of this scope are hard-pressed to address the wide range of issues related to education, learning, and development. This one does a particularly good job of exploring many important topics, though some are necessarily dealt with in greater detail than others. For example, educating students with disabilities receives scant attention throughout the text, whereas approaches to literacy and early childhood education remain primary foci. Likewise, the chapter on measurement and assessment, (Chapter 11), highlights the growth of this domain within international development, but falls short of exploring the nuanced differences between knowledge production (i.e., research) and assessments of knowledge (i.e., examinations and evaluations). In sum, in the privileging of certain topics and lenses of over others there are nuances lost. This is to be expected, however, and overall the text includes a rich description of many foundational ideas and approaches to education and international development.

In conclusion, I think this is an excellent text with wide appeal. As someone who teaches and works with students of both “teacher education” and “development studies,” I could envision using this text as a foundational volume across my undergraduate and post-graduate courses. Its concerted focus on education is likely to maintain the attention of my often more domestically-focused pre-service teachers, and its insights into the theory and practice of international development will challenge my non-education students. *Learning as development* therefore appropriately straddles the convergence of these readers and audiences. It provides a strong overview of the field and proposes several newer frameworks to help situate learning at the fore of educational policy, planning, and practice and, importantly, of human development. All things considered, I believe the scope and focus of this text is “just right,” a remarkable feat for an introductory text, and one that bears noting.

Matthew A. M. Thomas
University of Sydney

About the Author

Matthew A. M. Thomas is a lecturer in Comparative Education and Sociology of Education at the University of Sydney. He holds a PhD from the University of Minnesota and an MA from Columbia University, Teachers College. Matthew has worked as a public school teacher, teacher educator, researcher, and consultant across diverse contexts, including Australia, Mali, Nigeria, Indonesia, Tanzania, the United States, and Zambia. His research examines educational policies, pedagogical practices, teachers' lives, and the changing roles of teacher education institutions.