
Editorial

When, in 1964, a conference in this field was held in Manchester,¹ not many courses on development were being taught. The conference was in fact not so much about problems of teaching as about the subject itself—especially whether growth models, derived from the dominant neo-classical school, were appropriate. Since Thomas Balogh, Nicholas Kaldor and Joan Robinson were among those present, the discussion was lively and iconoclastic. The conference was, perhaps—in retrospect—something of a landmark, the first major occasion on which the then current orthodoxy in ‘development economics’ was on the defensive.

By the end of the 1970s, teaching about development had proliferated in Britain. Most universities had established at least optional units on subjects such as ‘economics of underdeveloped countries’ for undergraduates studying economics or social science, and East Anglia had pioneered a complete undergraduate degree in the subject. Several universities had also established graduate courses. Meanwhile, the subject itself had been changing. Experience was revealing the limited significance (even dangers) of economic growth in the sense of an increase in some income aggregate. This was becoming sharply distinguished from ‘development’, which was increasingly seen as a largely political and social process. Consequently, those teaching development economics began to pay more attention to ‘social factors’; courses on the ‘sociology’ of development, etc appeared, and some expressly interdisciplinary ones were established.

Organisational problems in this area had been discussed at the annual conference of directors of ‘special’ courses (ie those financed by ODA), but there had been no opportunity, since Manchester, for those actually teaching to compare experience and assess what was being done. The idea of a conference on this topic was suggested by some IDS Associates and welcomed at a meeting of the Development Studies Association in Glasgow in September 1978. The following formed a steering group under my Chairmanship:

Raymond Apthorpe (ISS, The Hague)
Willie Henderson (Birmingham)

¹ The proceedings were published in Martin and Knapp [1967]. I tried to assess its significance in [Seers 1979].

Philip Leeson (Manchester)
John Oxenham (IDS)
Emil Rado (Glasgow)
John Toye (Cambridge)
Geoff Wood (Bath)

The group, which met three times, decided that, to keep discussion manageable, attention should be focused on *graduate* courses in the *social sciences*, in *Britain*, that were *interdisciplinary*. They expected, however, that the issues raised would be of rather wider significance.

The conference was held at IDS from 4–7 January 1980. Despite limitations on numbers, no fewer than 70 people registered for it, including participants from The Hague, Madrid and Warsaw.² As a basis for the first part of the conference, contributions had been invited from universities with considerable experience of courses of this kind—Bath, Cambridge, Manchester and Sussex. In addition, Reading and Swansea had volunteered papers, and shorter notes were contributed by Bradford (Postgraduate School of Studies in Planning), University College London (Development Planning Unit) and the LSE. These papers, together with an historical note on the development of teaching in this field, an evaluation of courses by Basil Cracknell of ODA, and a report by Deryke Belshaw on a questionnaire to course directors, are being published separately.³ So is another background paper surveying the graduate courses in this field.⁴

This *Bulletin* consists of papers produced for the second part of the conference,⁵ dealing with more substantive issues, such as the meaning (even the possibility) of ‘interdisciplinary’ teaching, whether there is (or could be) a general theory of development, and what business we in Britain have teaching in this field.

It would be misleading to claim that there was much agreement on these central issues. However, one

² One of the participants was Kurt Martin who had been a co-director of the 1964 conference, which Emil Rado as well as myself had also attended.

³ *Courses on Development at Graduate Level in Britain* [IDS forthcoming].

⁴ See *Guide to Postgraduate Development Courses in the UK* by Darrell Jackson [IDS forthcoming].

⁵ There was also a lively panel which gave students a chance to air their views.

common element was noticeable in the papers and the discussion: an emphasis on plurality. No longer was neo-classical economics the main source, nor did many think it should be: on the other hand, those who attacked its relevance to the problem of 'development' usually conceded that it should be taught, if only because it was still the basis of much policy, which could not be examined critically by those ignorant of its roots.

The article by John Cameron et al outlines briefly the three major traditions: neo-classical (in the conventional sense), Marxist, and an intervening group (Myrdal, Emmanuel, etc) sometimes called 'structuralist' or 'neo-Ricardian'. It points out that the debate between these three schools has historically been useful for all of them, and that one cannot really understand any in isolation from the others. An interesting corollary is that, if only one of these is taught—because of limits set by governments on academic freedom, for example—it will not be fully understood by the students.

How is it possible to achieve pluralism without total confusion? The answer, according to the East Anglian paper, lies in teaching the history of doctrine. John Toye's article, too, stresses the need for unity in diversity. He argues that a 'core' is necessary; those designing a syllabus should not leave everything to student whim—the 'cafeteria' principle. In the set menu (which would still allow some freedom of choice for the soup and the dessert), an historical framework would integrate the various themes.

Colin Leys is not primarily concerned with this question but with the related issues of the meaning of 'interdisciplinarity' and of 'development'. However, while the implication of the first two articles is essentially relativist, his position is that 'the ideas produced in the 1950s and 1960s were incorrect at any time. To the extent that they are still with us, they are misleading, not because they are out of date, but because they embody fundamental mistakes'. He would agree, however, that conventional development theory, especially in economics, has suited the needs of dominant social groups at least and he concedes that 'typical concepts of the co-optation process' such as basic needs, should be taught alongside those of neo-Marxist or Marxist origin.

Leys also denies that one 'theory of development' is suitable everywhere. Raymond Apthorpe, drawing on his own background in social anthropology, a subject which is naturally rooted in specific reality, is scathing about all pretensions to construct, from a

safe distance, artificial models of reality purporting to cover all the 'Third World'.

The paper by Willie Henderson and Emil Rado, on the use of case studies, is only marginally concerned with the ideologies of development, but the comparative method they advocate is basically empirical and would be hard to reconcile with allegiance to a single theoretical school. Teachers who believe that there is some unique wisdom, whether its Mecca is Moscow or Chicago (or Mecca itself), devote most of their time to its *a priori* metaphysics, and use empirical material merely for illustration. Indeed, looking too closely at actual social reality might be dangerous.

These articles, as well as the whole debate at the conference, show that pluralism is alive and kicking in Britain. This strengthens the conclusion of John Oxenham's article, that it is worthwhile running development courses in this country. The reason is not that we have any magic formula for development (or even, apparently, for avoiding 'de-development' ourselves!), but that here students are exposed to different, indeed conflicting, ways of looking at reality.

But is it useful—even kind—to provide such a rich spread of ideas? Even if there is a core syllabus, as recommended by Toye, the feast as a whole is often difficult to digest, especially for students coming from countries with different educational traditions. Moreover, they will mostly have to put up with a much more spartan diet when they return to their government office or university faculty.

This doubt formed in my mind after visiting several alumni of the IDS MPhil course in their national environment. But it should, I suppose, be rejected immediately as incompatible with the conventions of liberal education, especially at the graduate level. Whatever students and ex-students suffer in the meantime, they may one day be in a position to exercise their full professional capacities. Besides, how could a syllabus in development studies be constructed if one decided deliberately to restrict the discussion of basic theory? One could put greater emphasis on techniques that are likely to be generally useful (research methodology, for example). But one service we can provide is precisely to safeguard the student from the common error of applying a technique naïvely due to insufficient understanding of the theory from which it is derived, or of the context in which it is to be deployed.

In most countries, such fundamental appraisal is impossible. Some doctrine, which serves the purpose

of the régime in power, is more or less fully articulated in academic teaching, *especially* in the social sciences, narrowing the range of what the student can discuss or read. Even where there is a degree of academic freedom, social science departments are often in the hands of a group which sees its role as propagating some particular brand of truth. In some other countries again, especially small ones, the universities are too poor, affecting library facilities in particular, to enable a student the priceless freedom to browse in different intellectual fields.

Moreover, while elsewhere in the world academia has become more monolithic, the neo-classical school is no longer so dominant here, at least in 'development' departments. Indeed, the very troubles of Britain have sharpened intellectual debate, which has not, as yet at least, generated the typical sequence of consciousness-raising, militancy and repression.

(Examples from the 'Southern Cone' of Latin America leap immediately to mind.) There is also an increasing quantity of material for case study close at hand. From this point of view, the comparative advantage of Britain as a teaching centre has increased. D.S.

Reference

Martin, Kurt and John Knapp (eds), 1967, *The Teaching of Development Economics*, Frank Cass

Seers, Dudley, 1979, 'The birth, life and death of development economics: revisiting a Manchester conference', in a special issue in honour of Kurt Martin, *Development and Change*, vol 10, pp 707-19. Also available as an *IDS Reprint*, IDS, Sussex.