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How Do You Solve a Problem Like Development? From Wallerstein's World-Systems to Post-Development Progress

by

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Abstract

Teacher union work is a vital piece in improving student learning conditions in the developing world. However, this work continues to be done in the framework of world-systems analysis, which positions the developed north in the core position and the developing south in the periphery position. This paper will suggest that development work will be more effective when framed in the post-development theory model, which allows for contextualisation of the developing countries and acknowledges their unique history. It gives the developing country the agency to decide what they want and need, and positions the northern development worker as a resource rather than a leader.

Keywords: World-systems analysis, post-development theory, modernism, neoliberalism, teacher unions.

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Introduction

In July 2023, I led a team of Canadian teachers to Togo, as part of a Project Overseas (PO) experience with the Canadian Teachers' Federation- Fédération Canadienne des Enseignantes et Enseignants (CTF-FCE), where I worked with local teachers on the power of unionism, collective bargaining, and working conditions, over the course of ten days of teacher professional development sessions. While I enjoyed the work and I was fortunate to have an incredible team, something nagged at me the entire time.

Before all 15 of the PO teams left Ottawa, we were given orientation and training in a variety of areas, including the purpose of the work we were doing and the importance of avoiding "white-saviourism". We were there to support, not lead. The key word was "co", in the sense we were there to co-plan, collaborate, co-teach, and co-facilitate. The work was not so much implementing programs as building capacity: we needed to be mindful of the work that would continue when we left our partner countries. During my graduate degree work, I had read West's 2016 chapter "We Are Here to Build Your Capacity" and so the term made me very uncomfortable, because the way West critiques the term made me completely rethink the work I was doing for PO. Perhaps I had misunderstood the article. Or perhaps I had misunderstood our purpose in country. But I was extremely mindful of the optics of four teachers racialised as White going into a developing country. As another participant mentioned, "Many Africans are conditioned to defer to White people… their education is as good or better than ours but they will put that aside and be humble" (Smith, 2023, personal communication).

In Togo we were fortunate to work with the partner union, the Fédération des syndicats de l'éducation nationale (FESEN), which already had a strong program in place. In fact, my team soon got the impression that one reason we were there was because FESEN depended on financial support from CTF-FCE to implement summer professional development programs; we were part of a package. This added to my feeling of unease: how was what we were doing any different from previous development work, where money moves from the developed world to the developing world, with strings attached? I had spent a portion of my Master's work (and a portion of my Social Studies teaching career) pontificating against northern hegemony, the World Bank, and the IMF. Was I now a part of this financial system? All I wanted to do was share my passion for teaching, unions, and the power of solidarity. This was why I signed up for PO in the first place: I am passionate about teacher working conditions, and PO was a way for me to collaborate with teachers all over the world and improve my own practice.

Over the rest of the summer, and into the beginning of the school year, I thought about what had bothered me about the whole experience. I began my capstone exercise by looking at the challenges of teacher unionism in the developing world, but I realised unionism and its attendant challenges was not the issue. This was solidified for me when I attended the Project Overseas team leader debrief in November. I listened to other team leaders describe their challenges in-country, with the partner organisations and with their team members, and I realised that despite our orientation and despite CTF-FCE's best efforts, a lot of teachers still did not seem to understand what exactly we were doing there. So many teachers spoke of their desire for adventure, or of their wish to do "humanitarian work". How could we "Challenge the Development Work(er) Narrative", as Heron discusses in her 2007 chapter? Or do we even need to? I contend that we do indeed need to challenge this narrative and replace it with a model which McEwan (2009) describes as "new ways of thinking about development – of what it is, what it does and what it might do. It also allows us to reconsider the practice of doing development" (p. 251).

Over the course of this paper, I will develop a working definition of development and outline both world-systems analysis and post-development theory. I will discuss how the idea of development work remains stuck in Wallerstein's ideas of core and periphery worlds and why it needs to move more towards a critical, post-development theory. Although this distinction may seem purely academic, it has real-world implications by changing the framework and the mindset of the role of the northern development worker, which will change to become a resource for the developing world, rather than the model and leader of development work.

By describing the current state of teacher unionisation, and using it as an exemplar, I will demonstrate how it is possible to leave the still-existing development worker narrative behind and adopt a model that is more contextual and inclusive. While unionising teachers is not a panacea towards leaving world-systems analysis behind, it can be considered a viable first step, since it can serve as inspiration not only to other labour groups and aid organisations. The main audience for this paper will be people who are considering engaging in work in the global south, to encourage them to shift their thinking from how Stephen Lewis describes developing countries as "in a state of unmanageable disarray" (Heron, 2007, p. 5; see also Huish, 2013). People doing this work are in fact going to places which have their own proper history without being "dominated [or] shaped according to an essentially Western way of conceiving and perceiving the world" (Tucker, 1999, p.1; see also McEwan, 2009); therefore, development workers need to be more cognizant of this fact. As Escobar (1992) points out, "To think about 'alternatives to development' thus requires a theoretico-practical transformation of the notions of development, modernity and the economy" (p. 22), and this is what I propose to do in this paper.

A brief discussion of development

Among authors who take up the topic of development, one constant seems to be that there is very little consistency in the definition. McEwan (2009) calls it “one of the most complex words in the English language” (p. 11) and Nederveen Pieterse (2000) caution us to not confuse development with westernisation, because “it denies the agency of the Third World. It denies the extent to which the South also owns development [...] at any rate, 'Westernisation' is a catch-all concept that ignores diverse historical currents” (p. 178). Ziai (2013) advises giving the word up altogether, and critiques it strongly, calling the concept “Eurocentric, depoliticising, and authoritarian” (p. 127). The term itself is difficult to quit; as McEwan (2009) points out, “it has the power to fascinate, seduce and create dreams and expectations” (p. 12). Just as fascinations and dreams can be subjective, so too is the word itself. This is supported by Ziai (2013) who points out that when it comes to the concept of development, “Are there not vast differences between approaches inspired by modernisation theory or by dependency writers, proponents of balanced or unbalanced growth, export orientation or import substitution, capitalist or socialist development?” (p. 126).

Indeed, Rist (2014) reminds us that the definition is “based upon the way in which one person (or set of persons) pictures the ideal conditions of social existence” (p. 10). However, coming up with a new word for the work currently labelled “development” is beyond the scope of this paper, though this work should be undertaken (and, as West pointed out in 2016, the term “capacity-building” is not the correct alternative, because it is nothing more than a new buzzword). For the purposes of this paper, “development” will be defined as “actions which are contextual and responsive to specific needs”. Therefore, it must be understood that development is entirely contextual on the local people and the places doing the work, and not on the northern development workers themselves (see, for example, Diaz, 2011; Heron, 2007). If development work is to become more responsive to local needs, the idea of the northern blueprint (Rist, 2014) needs to be abandoned.

Although, historically, development-type work began far before the age of imperialism in Europe (McEwan, 2009), the term "development" as it is used here is considerably more recent, emerging post-World War II (Escobar, 1992; Rist, 2014). This work has also been responsible for creating more crises than it has solved (see, for example, Compton & Weiner, 2008; McEwan, 2009) and is generally seen as a short-term solution without long-term effects (Riddell & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016, p. 24). However, unless there is a fundamental challenge to north-western hegemony, as well as the way economic globalisation plays out (both ideas beyond the scope of this paper), development work as it is now will continue to exist. The major change must be in mindset, moving from world-systems analysis and traditional Marxist thoughts to more of a post-development paradigm.

World-systems analysis

World-systems analysis was first developed in the 1970s by Immanuel Wallerstein, who was building on the theories of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. It is "a revised form of dependency theory" (Buchanan, 2018, p. 485), which attempts to explain that the developing world remains developing (and never gets fully developed). However, it was generated more as a rebuke to Durkheim's ideas on structural-functionalism, partly because Wallerstein felt that structural functionalism did not take colonialism into account (Wallerstein, 1998, pp. 108-109; see also McEwan, 2009). Wallerstein expressed this by describing ideas of the core (or the centre of power; in other words, the developed north) and the periphery (further away from the centre of power) to explain how and why former colonies would not develop to the standard of the global north. Clayton (1998) explains that

> Essentially, Wallerstein's conceptualization is orthodox Marxism projected onto the global level. In both world-system theory and orthodox Marxism, one group (core zones or the capitalist class) is seen as controlling the means and extracting the surplus of production, while another group (periphery zones or the proletarian classes) is seen as participating in economic processes it does not control and is exploited (p. 480).

On the surface, world-systems analysis should be embraced in development work because it responds to the modernist contention that the Western methods of modernisation and development were the desired goals of all nations and should be followed and encouraged. It builds on the ideas that neither modernism nor structural-functionalism took into account the colonial histories, competition with Western industrialisation, and unique cultures which prevented developing nations from transforming into true (read: Eurocentric) democracies (Shannon, 1989, pp. 7-8). In this case, "modernisation" is defined as an assumption that "all societies are on an evolutionary trajectory taking them from 'primitive' to 'modern' and that if they are not there yet, it is because they are reactionary and/or underdeveloped" (Buchanan, 2018, p. 325; see also Wallerstein, 1992, p. 104). According to McEwan (2009) and Tucker (2001), the desire of the developed world was to reproduce itself in the developing world; dependency theory (and Wallerstein's world-systems distinction) was meant to explain why the act of "development" could not move past this idea of using modernisation to build the developing world in the developed world's image. Although world-systems analysis has successfully critiqued modernism (as per Wallerstein, 1992), it has "failed to address the cultural dimension of domination" (Tucker, 2001, p. 12). I believe it is time to move to a new framework for development work. At this point, critiquing is no longer enough. A better choice for action, I contend, is post-development theory.

Post-development theory

Post-development theory came into being in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily through the work of Dasgupta (1985), Escobar (1995, 1996), and Rist (1990, 1997, 2014), among many others (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, p. 176), mainly to critique the idea of what development actually is. Tucker (2001) calls development “a specifically Western myth” (p. 2) and also says that “the model of development now widely pursued is part of the problem rather than the solution (p. 1). As Rist (2014) points out, “if ‘development’ is only a useful word for the sum of virtuous human aspirations, *we can conclude at once that it exists nowhere and probably never will!*” (p. 10, emphasis in original). Rist (1990) calls development “the new religion of the West” (p. 5). Munck and O’Hearn (2001) refer to it as an entirely Eurocentric concept. In other words, post-development exists to challenge the hegemonic idea of development as the act of bringing some countries (mostly in the global south) up to the standards of others (mainly the global north).

It is important to discuss this framework as post-development theory rather than just development theory, which was, as Munck and O’Hearn (2001) posit, “a revival of the old 1950s modernization perspective, dressed in the 1990s garb of globalization *[sic]* and neoliberalism, with a token nod towards issues of gender, ecology, and ethnicity (dressed up as culture)” (p. xiv). As Tucker (2001) points out, “The sooner we demythologize this ideology, the better” (p. 1).

Post-development theory is a better choice of paradigm when thinking about development work because it changes the framing of the people doing the work and puts it solidly in the context of the local do-er, as opposed to the north-western development worker. It acknowledges the unique history, both pre- and post-colonial, of nations in the global south, and the role this history plays in the development of ideas. It puts the choices made in the development process squarely on the local context; rather than being developed, the local worker is doing the developing according to their needs. That is to say, the post-development northern worker says "What do you need?" instead of "You will do what we do."

Discussion

In many development projects, implementation is code for "the way it looks like in the developed north". In their 2016 chapter, West writes at length about what "building capacity" looked like in Papua New Guinea, where American banks tried to work with the locals to help them secure loans so they could open their own businesses. The problem was that the Western systems of securing loans, such as putting up personal property as collateral, would not work in Papua New Guinea because property ownership does not exist there as it does in the global north, so the people had no collateral. West argues that this idea of "capacity building" is merely "part of the broader neoliberal development agenda that has come to dominate development practice" (p. 72). Essentially, instead of just giving money (which, as West points out, is associated with risks that it will be misused), the global north sends workers to train locals in ways of doing. However, these ways of doing are embedded in neoliberalism, which means they are heavily capitalist and do not consider the local context.

In addition, critical race theory plays a small role here. In her comments about race and education, Ladson-Billings (1998) describes curriculum as "a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain White supremacist master script" (p. 18). This idea could be extrapolated to the role of Western countries in development work; while we may tell ourselves the goal here is to develop capacity, the question remains as to whether we (meaning the global north specifically) are doing this in a way that is relevant and appropriate, or whether this is just a neo-colonialism to maintain White hegemony (see, for example, West, 2016). In other words, once again the global north is imposing its values and measures of success on the developing south. McEwan (2009) makes this point: “what ‘experiences’ and whose ‘learning’ has been brought to bear in understanding the world? What are the material consequences of this?” (p. 122). As my colleague points out, “How can we proactively address and avoid the possibility of this new colonialism?” (Zhang, personal communication, 2023). It is shocking how Africa, Asia and South America continue to be homogenised as one large landmass with common struggles (McEwan, 2009, p. 141). In order to move away from the neo-colonial model, this global south monolith needs to be dismantled, and whatever work is being done in the developing world needs to stand on its own once the northern workers (and money) are gone.

McEwan (2009) also discusses the idea of the binary central not only to Western philosophy but also to development work: the “us” vs “them”, or the developed vs the undeveloped. This is echoed in world-systems analysis with the idea of the core vs the periphery. The purpose for moving to a post-development framework is to move away from the binary as a whole, so any sort of development work can be more responsive to the local context. It is time to move away from the idea of “have” vs “have-not” and stop seeing the local context as an example of “lacking”. The “CNN effect” (McEwan, 2009, p. 132), in which northern media amplifies and presents a specific message (such as the ubiquitous starving African orphan), needs to be left behind.

As McEwan (2009) mentions, this local context may not look like what “we” in the developed north think it should in the developing “other”: “Child labour is a much-cited example of an issue driven by Northern concerns rather than by Southern realities. Ethical and fair trade codes that prevent children from formal employment can increase the financial insecurity experienced by some households" (p. 133). Some of the goals brought by the developed north may be aspirational at best, and completely tone-deaf and ignorant of realities at worst.

However, it is important to not go too far in the other direction, as Matthews (2017) points out in their critique of post-development. While post-development theory critiques the idea of northern, Eurocentric development as the standard to which everyone should (and can) aspire, a people's desire for those standards should not be dismissed. Matthews relates multiple stories of post-development theorists and writers who try to defend "traditional" ways of doing and living, only to be confronted with questions as to why people should not want indoor plumbing, or malls with lots of choice in clothing and other goods, or modern hospitals and sewage systems. Therefore, when moving towards a paradigm of post-development, it is important to not ignore the aspects of northern development that people may want, instead of just defending "long-standing traditions and [...] live an avowedly non-Western way of life" (Matthews, 2017, p. 2659). If the purpose of moving to post-development is to be more culturally mindful, then the work being done by northern development workers has to actually *be* culturally mindful.

To demonstrate how and why moving from world-systems analysis to post-development theory results in more mindful and effective development work, I have chosen teacher unionism as my exemplar. Teacher unionism is an ideal exemplar because it can be heavily-context dependent and responsive to local requirements. As well, union work is becoming more common in the developing world (ILO, 2021, para. 7) and, through organisations such as CTF-FCE, the developed north is helping to establish and improve unions. This is a topic near and dear to my heart, and I have done work in this area both in the Alberta context and in the developing world as part of Project Overseas.

Background of teacher unions in the north

In this paper, teacher unionism will be situated in the two theoretical frameworks in order to compare and contrast the current model of development work in this area (world-systems analysis) with what is possible (in post-development theory). I believe it will be useful to give some background on the northern model, since this is the model often being emulated by development workers, and contrast it with the current state of teacher unionism in the developing world and some of its challenges.

In Canada, union activity was spurred in 1872 by a general strike in Toronto of print workers who were demanding nine-hour work days. The strike was supported by Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, not because he was supportive of unions but rather as a political move against a rival and publisher, George Brown. Although there have been other strikes and labour actions since then, workers' rights have continued to make gains in most of the developed North, including "minimum wages, overtime pay, workplace safety standards, maternity and parental leave, vacation pay, and protection from discrimination and harassment" (Canadian Labour Congress, n.d., para. 1), as well as access to pension plans.

Within the Canadian context, and with a view towards improving working conditions, teachers' unions first began in Newfoundland in 1890. While teachers' labour groups had existed prior to this, their main focus was teacher professional development, not bargaining for working conditions. The majority of teachers' unions in Canada were founded between 1914 (Saskatchewan) and 1919 (Manitoba), with a few later formations, including in the territories. In 1920, the CTF-FCE was created as an umbrella organisation for provincial and territorial unions.

Current challenges to teacher unions

Regardless of where they are located, unions can create polarising feelings. Teachers' unions are not an exception to this polarisation; anecdotally, at the last Collective Bargaining Conference (CBC) in Edmonton in November 2023, a lengthy discussion was held as to how to increase engagement not only from members, but from the public, and whether it was better to be brutally honest or more diplomatic. This idea of engagement is key not only because member apathy weakens the strength of the union as an organisation (Bascia, 2008, p. 103), but because public opposition adds another dimension to the work the union is doing to represent its members. In other words, if the public sees a union as pointless or a waste of money, it is not a stretch to infer that eventually the members will, too. An editorial from 2011 calls out Canadian teacher unions as "trembl[ing] at the prospect of performance-based evaluation and tenure" (Bennett, 2011, para. 10). This is in line with many of the public's ideas about unions, which is mainly that they exist to protect the lazy. However, another editorial rebutted this idea. While it acknowledged that "not all of the things that teacher unions do are necessarily good for education" (Maharaj, 2015, para. 3), the editorial continues that overall teacher unions are good for education, mainly by fighting for improved working conditions which in turn helps to attract and retain good teachers (Maharaj, 2015, para. 4). However, it is worth mentioning that this improvement engendered by teacher unions is most effective in the public school model, since private schools often have the money to hire and develop strong teachers.

Neoliberalism, which has become part of the cost of doing business in the global south, brings with it the idea that schools are more effective when they are more competitive. In other words, where the state fails, it is up to the private sector to salvage the situation. In both the global north and south, teachers' unions refute this (Klees, 2008) by pointing out that if public schools were as well-funded as private schools, test results and graduation rates would be competitive because it is easy to improve these rates when all students have access to special-needs supports, mental health support, technology, and up-to-date resources. As Klees (2008) points out, teacher unions and neoliberalism continue to fight against each other, with neoliberals calling for an end to public-sector unions and unions pushing back against neoliberalism by driving for social change (p. 333-334). However, unionism faces an uphill battle in developing countries. For teachers' unions, privatisation is the enemy. One goal of teachers' unions in both the developed north and developing south is to promote public education. Private schools are seen as pulling students and money out of the public system, which results in a tiered education system in which the wealthy elite attend private schools and use their dollars (or "cost recovery" according to Klees) and connections to acquire resources. Everyone else attends the public or "state" school system which then becomes chronically underfunded and underperforming. This private model is a direct threat to teacher unions (indeed, unions in general) who focus more on working and living conditions for workers (and, by extension, students, since teacher working conditions are student learning conditions) over profit.

Another issue chipping away at teacher union membership is accountability, both of teacher and union. In numerous studies, absent teachers are not disciplined or even called to account for their actions (Glewwe et al., 2008; Mbiti, 2016). Therefore, there may be a perception among teachers who are covering for their absent colleagues that the union is toothless. Neoliberalism plays a role in teacher accountability as well, with its focus on privatising education or giving power over education to foreign interests. Since it is difficult to fire unionised teachers, there is added incentive to use Glewwe et al.'s (2006) suggestion of a policy of hiring teachers first on a contract basis and then rewarding them with tenure after a probationary period. This would not threaten unions as much as hiring strictly contract workers (Glewwe et al., 2006, p. 33), partly because effective contract teachers eventually become civil-service teachers (rather than continuing to undermine them), and teachers who do not make the grade, so to speak, do not gain membership into the union, do not continue in their employment and therefore pose no threat to the union membership.

In addition to unions holding their members accountable, the union itself also has a responsibility to be accountable to its members, primarily by advocating for them. Teachers in poorer countries make about four times the GDP per capita (Chaudhury et al., 2006, p. 93), which was not achieved through collective bargaining, as it was by unions in the developed north, but rather because teachers in developing countries tend to be more highly-educated than the average worker and are compensated accordingly. Therefore, the teacher union role of collective bargaining for improved salaries (considered only one of the main functions of unions) may not be as relevant to teachers in developing countries as it is to teachers in the north. Staff salaries are a large cost in school systems because one key purpose for unions is to bargain salaries for teachers that are guaranteed and rise incrementally, often in conjunction with years of experience. In both the global north and the global south, the private system, which is often not beholden to the state for money, can hire non-certificated or contract teachers for substantially less money. In their 2007 working paper, Fyfe explains that contract teachers “are not civil servants … Their salaries tend to be considerably lower than civil service teachers, from less than one-half to less than one-quarter on average, and they rarely have the same employment or labour rights” (p. 1-2). The ultra-capitalist stance of neoliberal economics which led to privatisation of school systems also led to decreased power for teachers’ unions.

In a 2015 paper, Fidan and Öztürk describe several studies which measured unions' reasons for existing, their functions, and their effectiveness. As I observed during Project Overseas, as well as in my union work in Alberta, some teachers who are heavily involved with union activities guard their access to union information almost zealously, distributing it piecemeal in order to retain their control over it, like gatekeepers. This can prevent teachers from accessing the information they require. As a result, the union looks incompetent and unwilling to communicate with its members. By adopting a more democratic structure, in which power is distributed across levels, unions can function more effectively, because more members feel as though they have a stake in them. If unions adopt a top-down structure, similar to school boards and education authorities, the result is that to many teachers there is little difference between the union and the authority: they are both structures in which the members have no say in the decision-making process and simply receive communications from on high.

In addition to communicating with members, unions must find a balance when communicating effectively with other stakeholders, such as the state. For instance, unions whose rhetoric is too combative may find that other parties are unwilling to deal with them. Conversely, unions which are too timid or too focused on “taking the high road” (especially in a climate where the state does not do the same) may find they make little headway in bargaining or advocating for their members because they are perceived as easily overwhelmed. This is especially true when (as in many developing countries) teachers' unions are up against totalitarian regimes, governments which are democratic in name only, or, as Ratteree (2004) points out, governments which adhere to International Labor Organisation (ILO) standards on paper but do not enforce these standards in reality, such as in Colombia or Costa Rica (p. 17).

Implications

I experienced this change in mindset from world-systems to post-development personally, through my work, because I experienced firsthand this fetishisation of development (West, 2016, p. 72) and I found the more world-systems mindset from my colleagues distressing. Anecdotally, I did my first Project Overseas experience in St. Lucia in 2019, where I also worked with teachers and with the St. Lucia Teachers' Union (SLTU) on unionisation, member engagement, and strength in numbers. This PO took place before I began my Master's degree; in retrospect, I cringe at my attitude and my mindset going into the work. I tried to avoid approaching it with the mindset that the work would benefit me personally (Lewis, 2000; as cited in Heron, 2007,p. 5); instead, I took the work on partly for the chance of going to the Caribbean, a place I had never been, and because I knew some of the people already involved and wanted to work with them. I worked with an excellent team lead, and I had done the solid orientation training from CTF-FCE, and I firmly thought of the work as "capacity-building", as it was presented this way during our orientation, unlike the way it is presented in West's (2016) chapter. In my work in St. Lucia, many teachers who chose to join the St. Lucia Teachers' Union (SLTU) did so because membership gave them access to discounts on cell phone plans, tires, and other tangible items. They did not see the benefit of union membership in terms of solidarity, legal protection (in terms of attacks from parents or other teachers), or improved working conditions.

However, the SLTU is one of the most powerful teachers' unions in the Caribbean region; when I think back on the (in my mind) insignificant work with them, I am mortified, and beyond grateful for how polite they received my ideas. There is nothing I could have shared with them that they did not already know, and my sheer northern way of doing things feels very arrogant now.

Since I have almost completed my degree, and especially since reading West's (2016) excellent chapter, I am troubled by the idea of "building capacity" because, as they remind us, it is just a new buzzword and "new development fetish" (Clarke, 2010, as cited in West, 2016, p. 72). I became troubled by the use of the term after I read West's chapter, for a class in 2021. In Togo in 2023, I was troubled by the use of the term again. From PO 2019 to PO 2023, I had shifted my mindset because of the graduate work I was doing. An expression that permeates social justice discourse is "When we know better, we do better"; now that I know better, how can I (and others doing similar work) do better? The main way is by shifting the mindset, and I maintain that the most accessible way of doing this is to embrace the post-development theory attitude, because it takes individual contexts and histories into account, and maintains that "development" means different things for different people. While a shift in mindset may seem small, it is nonetheless profound, because it can help to discourage future development workers from embarking on this work to gain "a life-changing experience for [themselves]" (Heron, 2007, p. 2).

When coming up with implications, it is important to keep in mind McEwan's (2009) excellent point that "Aid and development are not the same thing" (p. 135). For the purposes of this paper, aid is considered to be merely sending money to developing countries, to use as they see fit, whereas development is sending people with that money. In effect, to use the common idiom, the difference between aid and development is analogous to the difference between giving someone a fish and teaching them how to fish.

Unions and World-Systems Analysis

World-systems analysis is, I suggest, nothing more than modernism and development theory using words such as “core” and “periphery”. In this context, world-systems analysis will be considered as a branch of dependency theory, as defined by Buchanan (2018, p. 496).
As previously mentioned, one of Wallerstein’s critiques of modernism was that it did not take colonial histories into account; as Tucker (2001) points out, “Modernization *[sic]* theorists were concerned with understanding the culture of other societies so as to manipulate them” (p. 3). It does not seem (to me) that Wallerstein offers any actionable solutions to the problems of modernism.

In the context of unions, in the classical Marxist sense, the employer is the core and the worker is the periphery. On the surface this makes sense: the employer grants to the workers “high levels of social assistance [and] a greater stake in the existing system” (Maney, 2002, p. 33) in the forms of higher salaries, improved working conditions, and a voice in the process in the form of collective bargaining. As a result, on the part of the worker, “protest is relatively infrequent and generally less disruptive” (Maney, 2002, p. 33) because, in broad strokes, workers who feel heard, feel respected, and are content are less likely to complain or strike. However, the employer remains the core and the worker remains the periphery (see, for example, Sen & Lee, 2015). Just as the periphery countries remain dependent on the core countries for financial support, so too do the union members remain dependent on the employer for their livelihood. When I was working in Togo, we were told of a strike in 2022 in which more than 100 teachers were dismissed from their positions (Conover & Wallet, 2022, para. 7) because the government did not recognise the legality of their strike. The core cut off the source of funding to the periphery, and sent the message to the members that if they did not accept the aid they were given, it would be withdrawn. As Langan (2017) points out,“foreign external influence – and control – may be exerted via forms of aid-giving” (p. 61); this is true at a micro-level in this example from Togo.

This application of world-systems analysis also does not work at a larger level in terms of building capacity in the context of something such as Project Overseas (PO). The developed country, which is sending money and people, remains the core, and the developing country, dependent on this money and on the developed country to lead the way, remains the periphery.

One of the challenges to teacher unions mentioned previously is the effect of neoliberalism, especially with regard to the privatisation of education. In a world-systems model, privatisation will continue; the public system will continue to be dependent on the state for the bare minimum it needs to run, while the private system will raise money from wealthy parents and other benefactors. The core (the state) and the periphery (the union) are maintained; the periphery members will never receive the salary level or student population their colleagues in the private school sector enjoy.

Another challenge previously mentioned is one of accountability, especially union accountability to the members. World-systems analysis encourages the current model of information gate-keeping. In this sense, the people at the centre of the union (the president, the executive members, the local or school representatives) are the core and the other members are the periphery. These periphery members are dependent on the core for scraps of information, because the core guards it. While it is true that some information is confidential, such as the current state of collective bargaining (anecdotally, in my context we often say that bargaining is “a private process with a public result”), other information such as survey results or future bargaining priorities can and should be shared.

Unions and post-development theory

When I was working in Togo, the teachers' union FESEN (la Fédération des syndicats de l'éducation nationale) presented a session in which they explained the origins of unionism in Togo; namely, that of a corporate approach in which workers "unite in federations which in turn consolidate in large centres" (FESEN, 2023, personal communication). FESEN is also linked with the STT, or Synergie des Travailleurs du Togo (one of the main and biggest unions in Togo), as well as with seven other educators' unions in Togo. In this way, the work FESEN does with its members is spread into other employment sectors, while still retaining the local culture and being responsive to their local needs. The role of Canadian teachers in this scenario was to collaborate and respond; we supported the local programming and the local teachers, and gave our perspectives and ideas when we were asked. Therefore, the post-development implication for this area is for support from the developed world to be just that: support. If we are working in developing countries to help, we must first understand what is required in the local context and respond, rather than dictate. For example, if the people in-country want gender parity in salary just like teachers in the north, they should have it! For this I return to Matthews (2017) who points out that just because it may be "traditional" for women to earn less than men in the local context, it is not wrong for women to want to be valued for their work and compensated accordingly.

Neoliberalism is difficult to challenge, because it is such a global reality economically. However, in a post-development model, I believe unions could change how they respond to it. Post-development gives developing countries more agency to choose to reject the capitalist, privatisation competition model of education, if they want to more fully support the state-funded model and make it more equitable for all. Currently, countries that do not wish (or are unable) to adapt to the neoliberal model find they may be left behind when it comes to aid and development. For example, the World Bank funds education in developing countries based on the country's willingness to adopt capitalist principles (Klees, 2008; Spring, 2015). A more post-development model on the macro level would not make such aid contingent on such conditions. At the micro level, neoliberalism can be challenged in-country by empowering unions to push back against their policies and calling for more government support (and money) for a public school system.

Returning to the example of union accountability, in a post-development model unions can be more accountable to the public by being more transparent about conditions of membership. The entire teacher licensing and discipline process can be more public, and conditions or punishments (as needed) can have more context. For example, in Togo there was a discussion about legal protection for whistleblowers, in the sense that inappropriate teacher behaviour towards students needed to be terminated. One issue cited was male teachers taking advantage of female students in return for higher grades. The local teachers attending the session were very uncomfortable, not because of potential legal ramifications but about spiritual ones: teachers were openly concerned that their denouncing of criminal behaviour would have karmic repercussions for them. My team was extremely confused by this; why would there be spiritual ramifications for denouncing criminal behaviour? This is just one example of where the local context matters; in Canada, which is a more secular country, this is not something we would consider. However, as development workers, using a post-development lens to consider the religious context of this country would have changed our reaction, as well as the type of support we could have provided. As it was, we could only speak to the northern context and legal system regarding how such offenders would be dealt with in such a case.

In the sense of unions being more accountable to their members, they will be more democratic and information shared more equitably, if this is the local model. The union will be more accountable to its members and be able to concretely prove the work they are doing. A consensus model may be implemented, and the local development worker will be actively in charge of the process from beginning to end, rather than just a passive observer who is getting developed by the north.

Conclusion

I grew up in a household (as well as an extended family) of ardent unionists. My parents both worked union jobs (e.g. school secretary and boilermaker) and were both active in collective bargaining. My father in particular relied on his union in the late 1980s when the oil sector was struggling in Alberta. This was my first introduction to the power of unions.

Over the course of my career, I have become more and more involved in my local union and a stronger advocate for it. Through my Master's degree, I have become more passionate and more convinced about their potential for employment conditions not just in teaching, but in employment in general. As a social media meme puts it, "Unions. …because the chance of 3 ghosts visiting your boss to make him do the right things is unreasonably slim" (MacKay, 2022).

Thanks to this early exposure and thanks to my work both in Alberta and on two Project Overseas experiences, I got a more nuanced understanding not only of the power of unions. I also learned how to effectively help their implementation in the developing world in a way that is more mindful of the actual local context by leaving Wallerstein and world-systems theory behind and moving more towards a more post-development theory model. Remembering the critique of Matthews, who reminds us not to blindly defend traditionalism, people are allowed to want what they want. It seems to me that world-systems analysis hearkens back to the idea of doing things the way they have always been done. If the people doing development work are truly serious about changing the paradigm of the northern worker doing this work for their own gratification, the ideas of post-development theory need to be more widely read and considered in this discipline.

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