



Shaping global change with education: Thoughts on the effectiveness of Global Learning

Marion Rolle

Preliminary remarks

This article does not claim to talk about Global Learning in the sense of the totality of all available opportunities and providers in Germany, and certainly not about those existing in other countries. In my opinion, there is no standardised or singular way of defining "Global Learning". Educational approaches and concepts referring to this heading are as diverse and colorful as the stakeholders providing them.¹

As a consequence, I simply would like to take a very subjective look at a section of the German "Global Learning Community", and invite all educational providers to use my thoughts for self-reflection.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Agenda 2030², with the Sustainable Development Goals at their center, to combat global poverty, climate change and move the world along a sustainable development path. Agenda 2030 ascertains that this requires comprehensive political, economic and social transformations, and that education plays a key role (see SDG 4.7)³.

Accordingly, the UNESCO emphasizes within its 'Roadmap for implementing the Global Action Programme on Education on Sustainable Development'⁴:

To create a world, that is more just, peaceful and sustainable, all individuals and societies must be equipped and empowered by knowledge, skills and values as well as be instilled with a heightened awareness to drive such change. This is where education has a critical role to play. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is about shaping a better tomorrow for all – and it must start today (UNESCO 2014)⁵.

UNESCO confirms what providers of Global Learning / Education for Sustainable Development (within as well as outside schools) have stressed for many years: 'There will be no transformation without education.' (VENRO 2014)⁶.

All thanks to approaches such as Global Learning, knowledge about global interrelations has increased significantly. At the same time, such initiatives have contributed to foster awareness of existing imbalances, values and responsibilities. Worldwide, people and civil society initiatives have started to develop and practice new, sustainable life and production styles. They've become pioneers of the major transformations we urgently need, much on the lines of a post-fossil (and sometimes post-'development') economic strategy.

And yet the world has not become more sustainable in many areas: For example, biodiversity is still declining while carbon emissions increase. Moreover, the gap between the rich and poor is widening.

Thus, doubts have arisen in recent years about the transformative power of education. Reflection and reorientation might be as necessary as helpful.

What is Global Learning? Key objectives and content

In short: The educational concept of Global Learning offers approaches to deal with a world that is characterized by increasing globalization, more exchange of goods and human beings (virtual as well as real), by climate change, scarcity of resources, wars, nationalisms and partitions, by increasing injustices and the need for deep transformations. The topics of Global Learning opportunities thus are extremely diverse and range from fair trade to water, child labor, peace, human rights, colonialism, the world economy, transformation, climate change to anti-racism and anti-bias as well as diversity trainings and empowerment.

The variety of topics also has to do with the evolution of Global Learning.⁷ The foundation as well as core objectives of this educational approach lies in human rights as well as sustainable development—including all aspects: society, politics, environment and economy. However, Global Learning focuses on global interrelations and the question of global justice. The clear orientation on values emphasizes that Global Learning is not only a pedagogical but also a political concept: It understands people as part of a global society and wants to support them in shaping the world as active global citizens. This finds expression in the United Nation's



Silence Climate Parade from JANUN e.V. On the placard: "Sorry for the inconvenience. We just want to save the climate".

Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) Global Citizenship Education (GCED) that aims at empowering learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world.⁸

Against this background, Global Learning provides knowledge on interrelationships, sharpens awareness on imbalances and contradictions, and encourages questioning the current situation. Global Learning in my understanding is 'transformative learning'. It wants to contribute to making life on earth more just and sustainable.

Accordingly, it promotes the development of alternative, positive visions and concepts of living and capacitates participants to develop their own position toward grievances and participate actively in change.

Key pedagogical principles

Global learning is above all learning about oneself; it aims at *self-reflection* and focuses on one's own role in the (world) society, one's own perspectives, values and attitudes. In global learning, teachers are always also learners. They initiate and facilitate *learning processes* and, accordingly to the principle of *learner's orientation*,

consider at all times the background, interests, competences and capabilities of the learner.

This is linked with the principle of orientation on *people's living (and working) environment*. Global learning builds on one's own life and creates links to the world. Therefore, Global Learning can (and should) take place everywhere and at any time: not only in schools or educational centres, but also in the city centre, at work, at public events, in parks and supermarkets.

Global Learning helps to understand oneself as part of the world and to express *solidarity* in the sense of human rights. It is based on a fundamental, empathic as well as appreciative attitude towards the diversity of persons who are equal. It strengthens the ability and willingness to put oneself in the position of other people and to understand one's own (e.g. national) perspective as only one possible perception.

Here, it is particularly important to encourage learners to deal with colonialism and global power imbalances, and to stir or expose stereotypical or racist ideas of other countries or people, but also central ideologies and concepts (e.g. development). Additionally, and in line with the principle of *multi-perceptiveness*, Global Learning fundamentally takes into account explicitly differing and often marginalized perspectives of people in countries of the Global South.

In Global Learning, learning takes place *holistically*, i.e. with all senses. It is participative and interactive and should be fun because one's own participation can best trigger sustainable learning processes. Global Learning encourages experimenting and discovering one's own abilities. *Orientation to action* begins with (self-) reflection as mentioned above, or in other words: with turning one's own world (school, community,...) upside down. It then includes the development of ideas (which might be considered utopian) and concrete activities. To sum it up: At the centre of any educational activity in the context of Global Learning is the emancipation of the learners to become global citizens.

Criticism and suggestions for further development

Unfortunately, the portrayed understanding of Global Learning is often only partly reflected in educational practice. Accordingly, it is not as transformative as it could be in my opinion. Some thoughts on potentially relevant changes in this context:

1. Creating learning and experimental spaces for political engagement

The act of being or becoming a global citizen must be learned. The focus of current education programs is often on knowledge transfer and super- (or anti-) ficial discussion. However, it is a *real* discourse that is needed to develop one's own position and to learn to defend it – even against resistance. As described above, *acting* is a central competence of Global Learning. Activities, however, far too often aim at responsible consumption. For sure, every purchase of a fair trade or sustainably produced product benefits the producer or the environment a little bit. However, the basic, unfair and unsustainable structures won't change in this way. (Riek, 2015)⁹

2. Alliance with active civil society

The majority of those involved in Global Learning in Germany are committed to a fair and sustainable world. But they often act occasionally, individually and in a fragmented way without any connection to associations, initiatives or movements. A stronger link between the national and international education community and solidarity/human rights/ sustainability community strengthens civil society and enables people to learn and exercise community action and commitment practically in real life.

3. Developing equal international partnerships

All too often, Global Learning, e.g. in school partnerships, is learning about the Global South, their challenges and needs in terms of support. In reality, partnerships are often sponsorships, aid or fundraising projects. In this way, equal learning from each other cannot take place. This only occurs when partners develop common topics—irrespective of the interests and specifications of the donors, when they use meetings to uncover mutual ideas as well as prejudices, when they reflect and discuss with each other and develop joint projects. The involvement of extra-curricular civil society partners, especially from the Global South, could also be helpful.

4. Reorienting the target groups of educational work—Strengthening adult education

Children and adolescents—who are currently the focus of attention in Germany—are usually not the ones who have the power to initiate the necessary changes (in the required time, i.e. NOW). In order to become politically more effective, we urgently need more

educational opportunities for adults who are decision-makers in society, politics and business. Correspondingly, new learning and activity areas besides school and education centres should be found and used.

Global learning has the potential to be the driving force of political change. But it needs to take its objectives and aspirations seriously.

'Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world.'
(Nelson Mandela)

Notes

1. These range from small—mainly voluntary, associations and initiatives, to big non-governmental or governmental organisations with full-time employees, to schools or teachers and self-employed trainers, to name but a few.
2. On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit officially came into force. <<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>>.
3. Target 4.7: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. <<https://en.unesco.org/gced/sdg47progress?language=en>>.
4. The World Action Programme shall also serve particularly to implement the SDGs.
5. German UNESCO Commission e. V. (Ed.), Bonn 2014: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002305/230514e.pdf>>.
6. <http://www.venro.org/uploads/tx_igpublikationen/2014Diskussionspapier_Globales_Lernen.pdf> (only in German).
7. Global learning has its origin in Germany in the 'Third World' pedagogy, whose focus was mainly on the Global South—and served in particular to generate support for (developmental) aid measures broadly speaking. With a slowly changing development cooperation, the so-called 'development policy education work' emerged. Emancipatory approaches from the Global South, such as Paulo Freire's Liberation Pedagogy, played an important role in politicizing the (international) solidarity and human rights work. The United Nations Rio Conference on Environment and Development (1992) was another milestone. The Rio Declaration emphasized, that environmental protection and development cannot be separated, and that countries like Germany also have to be understood as developing countries. Each and everyone's responsibility has come to the fore and continues to

shape Global Learning in the context of Education for Sustainable Development.

8. < <https://en.unesco.org/gced> >

9. Barbara Riek. 2015. "Between goals and achievement. Stumbling blocks on the road to political change". CONCORD/DEEEP 2015. <<https://info.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/blog/zwischen-zielen-zielerreichung-stolpersteine-auf>> (only in German).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marion Rolle works as One-World-Promotor for Global Learning at the VEN—Association for Development Policy in Lower Saxony. She supports and advises trainers, multipliers and teachers of Global Learning in the further development of their educational offers and conducts corresponding training courses. She also develops educational material and publications.