

Franz Halbartschlager

Global Learning in the European „Marketplace for Exchange“ – Reflecting Experience

Men are wise in proportion, not to their experience, but to their capacity for experience.

George Bernard Shaw

Abstract:

The following reflection describes personal impressions and experiences which Südwind and the author have gathered in the course of more than ten years of work with international NGO projects on Global Learning. The preconditions for successful planning of projects are pointed out as well as the establishment of partnerships. The network of partners, with whom Südwind has cooperated so far, includes organisations in Greece, the UK, Bulgaria, and the Netherlands. Southern partners are also regularly involved in the consortia. The projects apply to both formal and informal learning sectors. A special emphasis is laid upon the development of common concepts and pedagogical tools.

Keywords: *Global Learning, NGO, European Dimension, Südwind*

Zusammenfassung:

Der Beitrag beschreibt die persönlichen Eindrücke und Erfahrungen, die die österreichische NGO Südwind und der Autor im Laufe von mehr als zehn Jahren Tätigkeit in internationalen NRO-Projekten des Globalen Lernens gesammelt haben. Auf die Vorbedingungen für die erfolgreiche Planung von Projekten wird ebenso verwiesen wie für die Etablierung von Projektpartnerschaften. Das Netzwerk an Partnern, mit denen Südwind bislang zusammengearbeitet hat, umfasst Organisationen in Griechenland, dem Vereinigten Königreich, Bulgarien und den Niederlanden. Südpartner werden in die Konsortien ebenso einbezogen. Die Projekte betreffen den formellen wie informellen Bildungsbereich. Eine spezielle Aufmerksamkeit im Beitrag gilt der Entwicklung gemeinsamer Konzepte und didaktischer Werkzeuge.

Schlüsselworte: *Globales Lernen, NRO, Europäische Dimension, Südwind*

Preface

Since the early 1990s, there have been attempts in a number of European countries to establish Global Learning as an integral part of the education landscape. In recent years, some countries

have adopted national strategies meant to integrate Global Learning into their national education systems. In addition, international conferences have been held and forums of exchange have been established aiming to achieve a common understanding of Global Learning and to exchange strategies and successful practice.

NGOs play an important role in these discussions, and their education experts carry out a lot of concrete and practical work to implement concepts of Global Learning. One emerging development is the realization of cross-border projects on Global Learning. Over the past decade, a veritable “marketplace for exchange” has evolved, producing interesting partnerships and innovative projects.

Starting a project

The cross-border projects are generally “mirror projects”, which are carried out in participating countries in a comparable manner: working with a target group in common, pursuing similar strategies and activities for project implementation, and working on the same theme. This approach we feel makes sense, however, it has nonetheless yielded difficulties, as will be shown below in more detail. A specific thematic approach is rarely the starting point for our cross-border Global Learning projects. These projects normally deal with all relevant issues in the canon of Global Learning, from sustainability to social justice.

Finally it should be highlighted that many cross-border projects are possible only because cooperation activities receive special funding from the European Commission and from national governments. The purpose is the promotion of cross-border projects and the strengthening of a shared European identity. The added value of such cooperation is, in the majority of cases, much higher than the effort for networking (because of language barriers, increased administration, etc.).

Developing successful partnerships

The first step to a successful international project is to create suitable partnerships and develop them in an appropriate way. In my opinion, this preliminary development cannot be overrated. A successful joint and cross-border project on Global Learning requires a similar understanding of education, comparable know-how (content, method, access to the target and dialogue groups), common interests, similar conditions, and a common vision and strategy of what can or should be achieved.

Unfortunately, these preconditions are often clarified under time pressure (within the frame of a project application) and only through emails. Preparatory meetings and a thorough framework analysis are often the exception rather than the rule. We have also seen that project strategies are formulated based on the experience of only one partner organisation, and that the other partners are initially subordinated to it. However, what is valid for one country or is good practice there, may not necessarily be successful in another country. Without doubt, jointly-coordinated project development and preparatory meetings are meaningful. Currently, there are, at European level, a number of possibilities that have been established during the past decade that are very helpful for developing successful project partnerships, which are also in the interest of the global learners.

For example, there is the annual Summer School for NGOs working on development policy. It is organized by DEEEP (Development Education Europe Exchange Project), an organisation based in Brussels that aims to strengthen exchange in the Development Education sector. Representatives of NGOs meet for a thematic training week that is supposed to lead to better networking and, in the best case scenario to jointly-planned projects. Generally, representatives from Southern organisations are invited to these Summer Schools as well. One of the benefits of these weeks is that encounters with representatives of Southern organisations are possible.

Exclusively for the development of joint projects under the EU budget line EuropeAid (for Development Education projects), 2- or 3-day network meetings are organized on a European level and rather irregularly. TRIALOG (an organisation for the support of civil society in development policy, with a focus on Central and Eastern European countries, based in Vienna) organizes these meetings, where concrete plans for projects are discussed and shaped into applicable forms.

The “Regional Partnership Program” initiative was launched a few years ago, funded by the Austrian Development Agency. At that time, organisations from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Austria were encouraged by the procurement of funding – under specific criteria – to develop cross-border joint projects. The projects were small, and the risk was manageable. The partner organisations hardly knew each other, but could get to know each other during the implementation of a joint project, and later implemented larger projects together. Also easily accessible, but more complicated in its administration, “learning partnerships” were created by the programme Lifelong Learning. Adult education institutions are invited to develop cross-border partnerships that could later lead to larger projects.

None of these programs, which represent a few examples of the many options, are specifically meant to develop global learning projects, but they can give birth to such projects. In retrospect, we have used all of these networking opportunities for the development of projects. One of the positive aspects of learning partnerships is their experimental nature.

Concepts and frameworks

It has already been pointed out that a common conceptual understanding of global education is also a concern at the European level. However, global learning theories are developed

from political and education theory traditions, which are significantly different from country to country. This is also reflected in NGOs projects. A good example of how different baseline conditions are can be found in the project “Global Education without Borders” (www.glob-edu.net), which was carried out between 2010 and 2012 in six European countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Austria, Romania, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and of which Südwind Agentur is a project partner. The project aims to improve the overall strength of Global Learning in various contexts. Global Learning initiatives gain momentum through regular training programmes for facilitators and through joint development of material. One such activity was a status quo analysis, which provided a broad overview of activities and strategies in the context of Global Learning. The results of the survey show that in all six countries Global Learning is not only named differently, but also plays a different role in educational research. In the Czech Republic in recent years, a strategy for “Global Development Education” was developed, which creates room for Global Learning. Romania and Bulgaria prefer to implement “Citizenship Education”, in which Global Learning would be integrated. Greece focuses on “Development Education”. Hungary has adopted Global Education in the field of NGOs, and for several years, Austria has over a span of some years worked out a strategy for Global Learning. Six countries, six fairly different approaches. A similar challenge arose in the training programmes for facilitators. For the project, we wanted to develop a seminar programme on Global Learning for key stakeholders from different sectors (such as teacher-training, adult education, textbook authors, extracurricular youth work, etc.) from the six partner countries and to invite them to participate. The conditions could not have been more different: in some countries there existed no youth centres but rather youth clubs in schools, while in other countries, adult education was completely unexplored, and so forth. However, the training, exchange, and discussion on common concerns (like explicitly Global Learning) were very successful. In the joint seminars, implementation opportunities at the national level were organized in sub-groups, and ideas from other countries were welcomed. When projects are implemented in a formal education setting, the structural differences between the countries are even larger. The Global Curriculum Project (www.globalcurriculum.net), which was also carried out from 2010 to 2012, dealt with the integration of Global Learning in the classroom referring to as many school subjects as possible. This project took place in 40 pilot schools in five partner countries: Benin, Brazil, Great Britain, Austria, and the Czech Republic. The conceptual framework for integrating Global Learning into school education in participating countries is, in this case, extremely wide-ranged. The UK partner organisation’s work is primarily based on the national requirement to integrate a “global dimension” into teaching. In Brazil, the focus of education policy in this respect lies in “planetary lessons and cosmic education” and the project is considered and evaluated in this context. Currently, in Benin, a new curriculum is being implemented which focuses on overcoming the colonial tradition in the country.

However, these educational policy objectives do not have a great impact on the actual teaching activity within the project. The exchange between schools was and still is fairly

intense, and there is great interest in other experiences, especially in the others practical approaches and lessons. Moreover, many of the baseline conditions seem to be international: the excessive demand on teachers, the call for external creative support, and the need to set up teaching with a stronger global perspective.

Joint development of educational materials

The joint development of pedagogical materials within international project teams is one of the most demanding challenges in cross-border educational projects. Many teams simply adopt and adapt publications of partner organisations. Our experiences have made us into more active participants. In 2010, we developed a poster exhibition entitled “Shaping Globalization: Improving our world through everyday decisions”, which was part of a learning partnership in four central European countries (Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary). We wanted to host a joint exhibition with a strong message that only needed linguistic adaptation. There were long and intense discussions among the partners about the concept and the practicality of the exhibition in each country. We had to redesign the concept several times, and the graphics did not initially meet with unanimous agreement either. However, after much hard work and coordination, we were all extremely satisfied with the outcome. In Hungary and Slovakia, the exhibitions were awarded innovation prizes independent of each other. In Austria, the poster exhibition met a high demand, and is often hired. Today, all project partners are very proud of the product and outcome.

We chose a different approach in the compilation of the handbook “Blickwechsel” (Changing Viewpoint), a practical guide with Global Learning tools for facilitators. This publication was also created as part of the aforementioned project, “Global Education without Borders”. The book has six thematic chapters: Globalization, Cooperation vs. Competition, Borders, Needs and Lifestyles, Media, and Education. Each chapter opens with a brief introduction and then presents tools for working on these topics in groups. For the creation of the hand-

book, the project team agreed on both a common structure and quality criteria; this allowed each partner organisation to write one chapter of the handbook. The results were then compiled, critically assessed by all participants, revised and summarized in a handbook. The process was very complicated, but the results satisfied everyone and made us strongly identify with the final product.

We do not know whether users are able to understand the complexity of the process, but we believe we have designed it in line with mainstream Global Learning concepts.

Summary

Over time, it has become clear that education projects – in Austria and across borders – will not change structures from one day to another (be they global or national, political or educational). These structures are too stable or too rigid to be changed quickly. This is not the purpose of education projects per se. All projects, however, have introduced people from different countries and contexts to, and fostered discussion of, Global Learning. In the most successful cases, the projects have helped these people to integrate Global Learning into their own educational landscape.

Many of these projects have gained a distinctive quality through their international nature. The fact that in other parts of Europe and the world there are people working with similar concerns and approaches to contemporary global development and to education is very encouraging for all of us.

References:

Südwind Agentur et al. (ed.) (2011): Blickwechsel. Handbuch Globales Lernen.

Südwind Agentur (2012): (Online im Internet: URL: <http://www.suedwind-agentur.at/start.asp?ID=14465&b=245> [19.10.2012]).

Dr. Franz Halbartschlager

was trained as secondary-school teacher (history/social studies and geography/economic studies). He is head of the education department of Südwind Agentur since 2000, manager of many cross-border projects on Global Learning and a member of the Austrian Strategy Group for Global Learning.