

Título da Tese: Learning experiences within child sponsoring – A reconstructive study of orientations of young sponsors in Germany

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Abstract

This PhD project deals with the learning experiences of young people in Germany who engage in child sponsorship programs for children in the Global South. Child sponsorships are a common option for people in so-called industrialised countries who wish to permanently support a non-governmental developmental organization in their work for a child and its environment in a country in the Global South. In response to paying monthly contributions the donors – in this study young people in Germany who sponsor a child as part of their school activities – receive information about the child, the superordinate development project and also the child's country. In addition, sponsors can communicate with the sponsored child via letters.

By connecting people from different parts of the world through a specific combination of encounter and action, child sponsorships are an essential way of engaging with developmental questions: They convey images of the Global South, shape the donor's understanding of development and, in a broader sense, influence worldviews as well as attitudes concerning global challenges. For many people in the Global North sponsoring programmes are an influential resource for dealing with aspects of globalisation and more specifically the development of a world society (see Luhmann 1997 for information on world society theory). For that reason child sponsorships can be considered informal learning opportunities in the global context (Scheunpflug 2005).

Child sponsoring is a highly controversial matter in this respect since sponsorship programs are often accused of conveying simplified concepts of "development as charity" (Smith & Yanacopulus 2004, p.661) and disguising global causes of poverty (e.g. Jefferess 2002, Scheunpflug 2005). Research on sponsoring is still very limited but findings point in a similar direction (e.g. Ove 2014, Scheunpflug 2005). Findings from research on global learning in different action formats furthermore suggest that charity-based activities encourage dichotomous and paternalistic world views (e.g. Asbrand 2009, Andreotti 2011, Tallon 2011). There are

therefore concerns that sponsoring fosters simplistic understandings of and oversimplified approaches to global challenges, thusly counteracting important learning processes regarding the complexity of the world society. Learning in sponsoring, however, has not yet been the subject of empirical research. And despite its popularity, school engagement in sponsoring programmes and in particular accompanying learning experiences have not been paid much scholarly attention either.

By drawing on a well-established methodology, this qualitative research project developed a comprehensive picture of the sponsorship-related learning processes with regard to global orientations in the context of the world society. The so-called documentary method of analysis (Bohnsack 2010) was used to analyse 29 group discussions with young people in Germany who sponsor a child in a country in the Global South. Data were gathered according to the principle of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

The comparative analysis of the group discussions allowed the reconstruction of dominant patterns of orientation and led to the development of a typology of orientations within child sponsoring: While all groups share the perception of being in an asymmetric relationship based on authenticity, three types of orientation patterns in dealing with asymmetry and authenticity were reconstructed. The first is characterized by processes of generalisation through which Global North and South appear as total contrasts with the former being superior to the latter. The second pattern is coined by processes of concretisation in which the construction of a personal connection towards the individual sponsored child is central. The third pattern is defined by dissociation processes through which the sponsorship itself and therefore also the asymmetric context in general is perceived as inauthentic and therefore rejected.

These empirical findings indicate limits of global learning in child sponsoring and on a more general level reveal challenges of abstract learning regarding complex issues in the world society. By drawing on perspectives of system and evolutionary theory (e.g. Asbrand & Scheunpflug 2006) the research results can be contextualised in order to further theory development in the field of global learning. The findings show that in the course of a strong reduction of complexity central learning processes regarding the complexity of the world society and its developmental challenges might be inhibited.

Keywords: *Global Learning; Development Education; Child sponsoring; Informal Learning.*

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