ENTREVISTA A LIAM WEGIMONT[1]

POR TÂNIA NEVES[2] E SARA PERES DIAS[3]

Tânia (T.) and Sara (S.) – On the behalf of Sinergias' team, we want to thank you for all your support on the last two years. And to start: can you tell us a bit about your life path until here, regarding Development Education (DE)? How did you get here? Why did you choose this field?

Liam (L.) – I studied Religious Education in college and I was teacher of religious education in a Roman Catholic school in Ireland in the late 80s. I was inspired by some brilliant, liberating educators

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[1] Liam Wegimont has been involved in global education practice, theory and policy learning for almost three decades. Currently on leave from his role as Principal of Mount Temple Comprehensive School, in Ireland; he is the Interim Director of GENE (Global Education Network Europe).

[2] Investigadora no Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto e técnica do projeto *Sinergias ED: Conhecer para melhor Agir – promoção da investigação sobre a ação em ED em Portugal.*

[3] Licenciada em Ciência Política e Relações Internacionais, atualmente colabora como free-lancer em projetos de várias Organizações e é Mestranda no ISEG na área da Cooperação Internacional.

and also by some theologians in traditions of the liberation theology. In my first few years of teaching, I pursued post graduates studies in Boston College, and was influenced by a number of educators, feminist theorists and sociologists. So while my praxis as a teacher in a secondary school was very much focused on education for justice, my theoretical views were also being shaped by a variety of local and global analyses of justice. I moved from religious education to development education, and increasingly saw the importance of non-formal education. I left teaching to work with the National Youth Council and to work in Development Education. That's how I got into Development Education, inspired by great Development Educators in Ireland and in Europe. I've gone back and forth from policy, practice and research roles; and from national and international arenas, and more recently I've been Principal of a school in Dublin that is devoted to Global Learning, and continue to work with GENE. I suppose the red thread has always been Development Education or Global Learning – I'm interested in how people learn how to change their world.

T. – That leads us to the next question. What does Development Education mean to you?

L. – For me, at the core, it's both simple and complex. The simple answer first. The core of

Global Education (GE) – the term I prefer - in essence, has three dimensions: it's about recognizing the need to engage people with the realities of injustice in the world; it's about an analysis that links local and global dimensions, the local and global causes and effects of any issue; and it's about an educational process that engages with people in all their freedom. And so the process has also to be fundamentally just and participative. Underlying each of these three dimensions, for me, is an understanding of human imagination. That's the simple answer. But there is a more complex perspective, which I'll return to if time allows.

T. – Actually you said something curious. We wanted to ask you about the diversity of concepts. In Portugal, we use mainly Development Education but we know that a lot of organizations are using different names, such as Global Citizenship Education or Global Education.

S. – It's true, in the last years we had so many debates and thinking about these different nomenclatures. What do you think about that? Do you think this kind of discussion is important?

L. – I believe it is. I want to talk about the general process of defining, and also about my own position. When I started professionally in Development Education in Ireland, and I think it was in May 1992, I was a teacher for already seven years, I had been involved in Development Education, Environmental Education and Human Rights education already. The first workshop that I participated in was on "defining the concept of Development Education for youth sector".

T. – So, we are still discussing the same now.

L. – Yes, we are; but hopefully we are discussing it in a slightly different way. Or I'd like to propose

that we should think about this defining slightly differently. There has been a lot of defining. These defining processes in the 90's and in the last decade tended to be developed by consensus – mostly by practitioners, also by policy makers, and with academic input. Definitions were developed by consensus – at sectoral, national and international level. What this meant is that the group who was developing the consensus, they understand the process and they developed together a common understanding - which brings them together in a community of practice, which is marvelous, it is great; it has led to common understanding, to identity, to belonging, and to commitment. It has also led to political support, which, in my view, was crucial for integration and embedding.

I was involved in these processes myself for a long time, both at national and international level. I might mentioned some historical dimensions of these "defining moments" from my perspective. In the mid- to late- 90's, the Global Education Advisory Committee of the North-South Center developed a Global Education charter. We began to see, around and in the follow-up to the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, that there was a need to broaden the perspective beyond Development Education, to include Environmental Education, Intercultural and Anti-racist Education, Human Rights Education, etc. Of course we were not alone in this – if you read writings from the time in Human Rights Education, or Environmental Education, or Peace Education, you see both a similar convergence, and a similar focus on the global dimensions of issues and causes. This was coupled with a systemic critique of development discourse, development models and the development paradigm – one which has been deeply embedded in the practice of development education for decades.

So, through the late 90's to 2002, to the Maastricht Congress and Declaration, we began to use the terminology Global Education strategically, to bring together existing practices, and communities of practice, and emerging policymaking, in Development Education, Environment Education, Education for Citizenship, Antiracist Education, Intercultural Education, and all those types of education for social change that have local and global dimension and a justice perspective. And we had a very clear strategic and political intent. I myself drew on the perspectives of UNESCO in the field of the Right to Human Rights Education, and on the Aarhus Convention on the rights of all citizens to access information on environmental issues, to forge consensus around a language regarding the "right to access of all people in (…a particular sector, country or continent) to Global Education". This approach, which I describe elsewhere as a "universalist, rights-based approach", has become something of a common policy language, a forward-looking horizon, for the growth and improvement of Global Education or Development Education. And all of this – the Maastricht Declaration, the Consensus Document, etc. – have all been developed with consensus defining processes.

So, I use Global Education for a very strategic reason, it was about bringing together these other groupings that developed definitions by consensus. However, while I think that we have used that terminology quite effectively over the last decade and a half; over the last few years I also begin to question the consensus nature of a lot of this defining. We have created agreement on defining, and agree or disagree on particular definitions. And that was good for an emerging field. But such consensus also works to dampen discourse, to mask difference, to stultify debate. I believe that in this field of Global Education or

Global Learning we are now moving forward from the need for consensus to the need for dissensus, to support emerging and differing and divergent schools of thought. I believe this is already beginning. And we are getting there.

S. – Dissensus in which sense? Regarding the concept?

L. – My understanding is based on that of Lyotard, who articulated the need for dissensus [4]. Development Education and other types of Global Education are very hybrid constructs, with very strange interdisciplinary balance – a balance which is influenced, for good and for ill, by the activist base from which they have emerged. And I believe that this interdisciplinary imbalance is masked by too much consensus, I think the time for consensus may be leaving us. What we need now, I believe, is a development of different schools of thought. This is happening already in the German language and discourse, where there are different schools of thought in Global Learning, coming from different sociological and educational perspectives. It is happening in other linguistic sites of the intersection of practice and theory. And now, with *Sinergias*, it's happening in Portuguese language traditions of Development Education.

T. – I just want to add that in Zagreb, in the 3rd European Congress on Global Education, organised by North-South Centre, in November 2015, the participants and some organisations were moving from Global Education, the concept used by GENE and the North-South Centre, to Global Citizenship Education, also because of the UNESCO statement. So, maybe that will change…

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[4] On this point see Fazzaro, C.J. and Walter, JE "Schools for Democracy: Lyotard, Dissensus and Education Policy. International Journal of Leadership in Education, vol.5 no.1 January 2002.

L. – From an academic and intellectual point of view, I have to say: beware international organizations carrying the banner of umbrella terms. I am being self-critical here. I work with GENE very closely, GENE works on Global Education, and we have been using that umbrella term for over a decade. Other international organizations have used the same, or different umbrella terms. These terms are not neutral. I've outlined some of the reasons why, strategically, in both the North-South Centre and in GENE, we have used the Global Education construct strategically. But the construct is also being critically deconstructed. Meanwhile, I think there is a move towards the embrace of the terminology of Global Citizenship Education. I can see advantages in this, both in the political context, and in the conceptual development of the field. But I remain a little wary – particularly when the language of global education is gaining parlance in education policy *per se*. My suggestion is that choosing one umbrella term instead other umbrella term is still remaining within the paradigm of consensus. I think we have to be looking at it in a more critical way. We also need to be aware that while the emerging terminology of Global Citizenship Education may be right for this moment, a wider debate about the way in which Education theory, practice and policy more broadly, are moving towards centralizing Global Education – with attendant possibilities, and dangers – needs to take place.

S. – *Regarding the project* Sinergias ED*, as you know, the project has been devoted, for the last 2 years, mainly to linking Higher School Education (HEIs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in a collaborative learning process, trying to create conditions for institutional dialogue and cooperation dynamics with these two sectors. How do you see this link between HEIs and CSOs? Do you see that connection as important? Do you think this evolved from the last years?*

L. – I have a particular perspective about this. I grew up in Development Education within youth sector activism, both at national and global level, so I would tend to see civil society sectors as being at the forefront of change, as the harbingers of change. And in countries that are successful in Global Education, civil society organizations – NGOs, youth sectors, trade unions, community organizations – have a strong and critical role. Governments, ministries and agencies also should, I believe, have an equally important, if different role.

But, in the regard of the relationship between CSOs and Academia, I've always been interested with Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual" – philosophers have interpreted the world, but the point is to change it; the flip side of this adage is that without the philosophers, without strong theoretical foundations underpinning, or critiquing, our practice, we are in danger of working counter to the change we would wish. Sometimes, in my experience, because of the activist-base of CSO – which, of course, is the strength of the Global Education movement - there can also be an anti-intellectual bias which is, in my view, deeply mistaken. Unless we understand the paradigm within which we work, and the models of the relationship between theory and practice through which we see our practice, we can be engaging in mindless activism, and this can undermine, counteract or impede the sort of change we want. So, I see that it is a fascinating model because for me it bridges a divide that is unnecessary and counterproductive. I believe it is crucial for CSOs (as for policymakers) that they deeply engage with academia. Similarly, academia has a lot to gain from the engagement with civil society sectors.

Coming back to *Sinergias ED*, I think it's even more important than that, because of the language of Global Education or Global Learning – there is quite an interesting body of work in the English language and literature in the field. There has been real progress in articulating differing schools of thought and divergent perspectives[5]. There is also a growing literature and research base in the field in the German language in a growing number of Universities in Austria, Germany, and a body of work around *ZEP Journal*[6]. Of course there are also strong or emerging traditions of Global Education and Global Learning research in French, in Finnish, in Norwegian, and in other languages. What I believe from years of conversation with Portuguese colleagues, is that there is in the Portuguese practice and theory in the field a different style, a different sensibility, a different approach to process and methodology, and differing sources of thought – educational, sociological, philosophical – as well as a different, and complex, relationship with understandings of justice and of the world. I think the field of Global Education can be enriched by the expanded conversation that is available by making Portuguese thought and praxis in this field available to those from other linguistic traditions. So, for me, what *Sinergias ED* is doing is opening another linguistic way for work with the dissensus and with critical thinking.

S. – Related with you just said, and regarding the relation between HEI's and CSO's and about the language, we found some constraints, due to different languages and themes about DE, also because of different interventions and perspectives in this field. What do you identify as the main challenges in this work between Academia and CSOs? How could DE empower researchers, educators and practitioners in this field?

L. – One of the main challenges is that we work with a large number of questions and assumptions in GE/DE. I think if you look to the way in which you could discover this through a brief analysis in these specific fields of Development Education or Human Rights Education, or Education for Sustainable Development. If you look at the practice, if you look at the small amounts of theory that comes from the practice, what you see is that there are some imbalances or internal contradictions or what the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur describes as "aporias", internal contradictions or fissures in the practice and the theory. For example, in the relation within DE or Human Rights Education between education and the other field, if you pick up the DE manual, from many countries, they would give you a small and short history about DE. When does it usually start?

T. – In Portugal, maybe post our dictatorial period.

L. – So, usually you would say around the 70's. This is the case in most manuals, in most countries in Europe. Portugal maybe has a better reason than many other countries to state that Development Education started in the in the 70's, during or after the revolution, but in many other countries the short history would talk about the UNESCO declarations of the 1970s. In Human Rights Education, when you pick up the Human Rights Education manual, you see the introduction, you see that the history is either from the 60's or from the Universal Declaration. In Norway they got it a bit earlier, but essentially it's the same for everyone. A 50-60 year old history. We need to

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[5] On this point see Bourn, D. "Developing a Research Culture in Global Learning" in Forghani-Arani, N., Hartmeyer, H. et al, eds, Global Education in Europe: Policy, Practice and Theoretical Challenges, Munster, Waxmann.

[6] For an overview, see Scheunpflug, A. And Uphues, R. "What do we know about global learning...: a summary of empirical evidence" in Forghani-Arani, ibid.

think about this critically. As if the history of education for social change, that goes from individual aspiration to communal responsibility and universal or global concern – concern for the other, for alterity - only started to happen half a century ago. On the contrary. The history of education for human liberation and freedom – the roots of a history for development education or global learning - goes back millennia. And I believe that the root cause of this forgetfulness, this citing of shallow history, occurs because of an interdisciplinary imbalance. In Development Education we have been taught to go for the historical resources to the recent field of "development" rather than to the ancient field of education; or to the recent field of international human rights law rather than the broad field education, or to important, but recent, environment sciences rather than important, and traditional, fields of education. This choice is very much open to question. You could go back literally thousands of years to find texts and wisdom about how we human beings learn how to change the world towards greater justice; but we choose to go back a few decades to less well-founded disciplines.

That sort of contradiction leads me to believe that while we have made great strides in GE over the last number of decades, we need to go back to questioning our foundational assumptions in Global Education. In this field assumptions abound on a number of fronts: about the nature of human knowledge, of what it means to be human, about the nature of the world, about how change happens in the world, you know, how people effect change, and of the relationship between education and social change. But also we need to deeply question assumptions about how we learn, how we teach, and what people need to know – these are questions about our pedagogy and our curriculum. So for me, I would suggest that we need to go

"back to the rough ground", as Wittgenstein put it – to the theoretical and philosophical foundations underpinning our work, our practice: to develop a more complex and more well-thought-out model.

I've written breifly elsewhere about this – about the need to develop a model which adresses eight key dimensions. Using a methodology drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, I suggest that we need to adress eight foundational assumptions; assumptions in regard to our understandings of:

- Truth
- Human Being, Becoming, Belonging
- The Common Good, Justice
- Action and Human Agency
- Individual, State, World
- Social Change (and Education)
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy.

Thankfully, we don't have to start from scratch in this, but can draw on perspectives from, respectively:

- Epistemology
- Ontology
- Ethics
- Philosophical Anthropology
- Geo-political perspectives
- The Sociology of Social Change
- Curriculum Studies
- Pedagogy …

…in order to develop a more fully articulated model of Global Education[7].

To be clear, I don't believe that there are particular perspectives in each of these eight foundational disciplines that will provide us with the best definiton of Development Education or Global

[7] For more on this see Wegimont, L. Global Education: Paradigm Shifts, Policy Contexts and Conceptual Challenges in Forghani-Arani, N., Hartmeyer, H. et al (eds) op.cit.

Learning. On the contrary. There are choices to be made in each of these foundational areas, choices that are more or less consistent with our visions of global justice, of human freedom, of learning. I believe that this sort of a model will lead not to consensus, but to divergent schools of thought in Global Education, drawn from differing schools of thought in regard to, for example, curriculum development or the sociology of social change. But I also believe that we are in danger of becoming irrelevant or counterproductive or mistaken if we do not develop further the conceptual foundations of the field in which we work.

S. – As a teacher in formal education context, what do you think about the relation between Academia and CSOs, particularly in the Irish context? What can we learn from that? Do you see it happening?

L. – I see it is happening, but I also see large gaps. So, let me frame it first of all. Sometimes, among the GE activists or DE activists what they want to do is to integrate the Global Education perspectives into the formal education sector or non-formal education sector, civil society organizations, youth organizations, etc. But sometimes the job of those leading formal education or indeed non-formal education is to keep extraneous agendas out – in favor of learning and the freedom of the learner. No pre-packed messages please, no predetermined political programmes or solutions please, we are educators! Meanwhile, schools, and formal education systems, are embracing global dimensions and perspectives - sometimes with, sometimes absolutely without, a justice and solidarity perspective. So CSOs are trying to get into the system and meanwhile the system is changing. So what do we need?

I've worked on a basis that I described earlier as a universal rights-based approach to access to quality Global Education. Each and every person, in every country, should have the right access to GE. And to have that for everyone then you need to get into the formal education system. But to have it deeply you need it in not only in formal but also in non-formal and informal learning systems and sites.

In Ireland, we have some brilliant processes and projects, a real ethos of partnership. And I want to mention one, DICE, which is Development and Intercultural Education. In Portugal I don't know how many universities and colleges provide teaching DE to primary school teachers. I don't know how many… 20/30?

S. – There are some teaching education for primary school, up to the 2nd cycle, the Higher Schools of Education and they are 14.

T. – For instance, the Higher School of Education of Viana do Castelo, has a program to prepare teachers to this. They developed partnerships with local schools for the internships, so that pre-service teachers go and implement their courses at school.

L. – So there are few, like in Ireland. But they are in competition, and as independent academies, don't like to be coordinated, which is fair enough – academic freedom has to be safeguarded. So, if you want access for all to quality Global Education, the question becomes: how do you get to these teacher training institutions to cooperate? Because in order to have access to all to quality Global Education, you need each and every trainee primary school teacher, each new teacher emerging from Initial Teacher Education, into the school system, to have global education as a core of his/her own understanding of what is central to being a good educator? You also want them to have the tools to do it, and the intellectual

resources and competencies to continue to do it more, and do it better, throughout their professional lives. How do you do that when each and every one of the teacher training institutes is in competition with each other? It's a difficult challenge. I believe there is a great model and it's not only because it's Irish (laughs), but also because it works. This DICE – Development and Intercultural Education – model, is impressive. After over ten years a lot has been done, we now have a situation in Ireland where each and every primary school teacher coming new to the system has a real grounding in DE and it is in the core of their practice. Why? Because Irish Aid, like the Camões Institute in Portugal, provides funding for Development Education, and like Camões, used funding strategically, as part of the national strategy.

So rather than saying 'We will give funding to you in Dublin and you in Limerick, and you in Galway, the funder has instead said 'No, we will only give it to you all if you come together and cooperate'. That is what funding is for. So, if you want each and every child in primary school to learn, then you don't say 'let's give the money to that particular NGO, or to that particular school, or to that particular youth organisation…'. By asking 'what are the elements of the structure or the system that we need to put working together?'. So, that's what works well – using funding as leverage for system-wide effect. This is one example from Ireland where statutory development education funding, coupled with the experience of CSOs, and leveraging cooperation and coordination throughout the third-level system, in teacher education, has led to systemic effect. Of course there are other examples of good practice in this regard from other countries and other sectors. And of course it can work in isolation - you also need newly-trained initial teachers to be supported in the

integration of GE within induction processes, and textbooks and the continuous professional development process also needs to do it. In the formal education sector you also need whole school approaches, and approaches that involve school management and school inspectorates. And I could go on about this…

S. – Now, the last question. How is the world today and how do you see citizens' engagement for change? Along the years, we have more mobilization, more projects, more consensus among the international organizations regarding the need for a more sustainable future, and we now have the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), consensus on the political speech of almost all governments of the world regarding a more sustainable future, and still we are living times of extreme and growing inequality. It seems there is a contradiction. Do you see a pattern? How do you see this pattern and contradiction?

L. –Recently, I was in a conversation among academics in this field. And the conversation turned to the question of hope. For some, it seems, the very notion of hope, itself, was seen as some sort of neoliberal, post-colonialist construct and as a myth that masks the nature of injustice and inequality. I don't see it like that, because I do see progress in the face of obstacles, I see more rather than less justice. That's not to be naïve, but to choose hope – in the face of some evidence to the contrary. I do think that sort of political consensus that you mentioned can be useful in pursuit of a more hopeful future for more, for the majority, for those who are excluded. I also see that some points in political agreements, like the SDGs, do support the sort of education we believe in. And in a totally hopeful way, because it encourages people. My hope lies not in the SDGs themselves, but in the fact that they open up

possibilities for people, I see that as a good thing. Paulo Freire, in a tome that in English was entitled "A Pedagogy of Hope" if I'm not mistaken, said once that 'if someone is not full of hope, then they should get out of education'. So, I would think that if you're actually engaged in education, which is not about a particular project for changing the world, but is about enabling those who learn with me, and who hopefully will live beyond me, to imagine the world as different, then you need hope. If our co-learners are to develop what is needed to change the world – a world that I cannot imagine, but that they will live in – to change this world of injustices, then the process has got to be about learning, not about projects or programmes for change. It's not a linear path, it's not a straight road.

Every day in school I see young people who are deeply angry at injustice, who learn how to analyse the structures of injustice, who make links between local and global dimensions of issues dear to their hearts, whose imaginations are fired up with global responsibility and solidarity, and who believe they can muster the power to transform the world, not for their own benefit but for greater justice. While recognizing their part in a world of injustice, the road to greater justice is part of who they are. And more importantly: they are imagining these changes… so, I'm hopeful!