



## QUALITY EDUCATION? FOR ALL?

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### Abstract

This article illustrates the author's understanding of Development Education/Global Education in the light of Sustainable Development Goal 4 with a critical focus on SDG 4.7. The article also looks at the interconnection between the development and education agenda in general, and Development Education and development cooperation in particular.

**Keywords:** Education; Global Education; SDG 4; Competencies, Solidarity

### 1. Education, SDG 4 and Development Cooperation

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 17 Goals to Transform Our World - were adopted by the 193 member states of the United Nations in September 2015. They are a further development of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had ended in 2015. They are a comprising catalogue of targets and measures. They claim universal validity and want to enforce a holistic development with equal ranking of the economic, social and ecological dimensions.

Next to this equality of approaches in the content dimensions it has to be emphasized that through the SDGs for the first time the countries of the global North are demanded to implement these goals. The conviction behind this is that it should make it possible to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a large, holistic and long-term set of goals. They are a universal agenda, requiring progress at home and elsewhere. They require both a whole government and a whole society

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endeavour. In most countries there is still little knowledge of them and so far only little serious concern can be observed.

Among the 17 goals, Goal 4 deals especially with Education.

Education for all – a noble target in the new Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. But which paths to stride to reach the goal? How firm is the ground on which it is based, how safe are the assumptions behind the new development goal?

#### SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Lobbying by multilateral organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the run-up to the SDGs agreement was an important factor. In May 2015, UNESCO had invited a plurality of actors to a World Education Forum in Korea. A comprehensive catalogue of measures was formulated there. It became known as the Incheon Declaration. Goal 4 refers to it, but also stays behind it. The understanding of quality has been watered down and there are no financial agreements concerning the extended catalogue of tasks. The well-known maxim behind this agenda seems to be: do more with the same amount of money or even with a lower amount. The issue of financing is one of the targets greatest weaknesses.

The agreement is positive, but little is new. The bias behind it is a drive for measuring educational outcomes and further standardisation. However, it offers a momentum.

Generally speaking, some lessons have been learned from former international education agendas. There is a stronger emphasis on educational justice and educational quality. The concept has turned more inclusive. The role of teachers is more central.

The extension to the secondary and tertiary sector is the most decisive change compared with the education target in the MDGs “primary education for all”. Success in education is no longer measured only by how many children enrol in primary school. Furthermore, the question of quality moves into the centre. It shall be risen by, e.g., an improved initial teacher training (Langthaler, 2015).

However, the global context and the impact of globalisation on national education systems is ignored.

For the field of Development Education the most relevant is target SDG 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.*

## 2. A critical look

### 2.1 Future knowledge or knowing the future?

There is the underlying assumption that there exists a fixed set of knowledge and skills we must acquire to reach a sustainable future. Yet, do we know what the world will be like in 2030? The target ignores the contingency we are faced with.

The future is unwritten: Where are the world economic system and the world finance system moving to? What will be the concrete effects of climate change in the coming decades?

Where will the gap between rich and poor lead to, locally, regionally and globally?

Today, the issue of migration dominates the political debate in many places. How will it change our societies, our values? Among the EU member states there are political parties, which in their countries push for leaving the European Union. Some countries struggle with the survival of their finance and banking system. Youth unemployment rates climb up to threatening heights.

*Education is more than a programme for improving the world*

Rather than aiming at ultimate ends, education always represents an interim solution of pedagogical efforts. In a historic situation in which the human being's ability to modify behaviour does not seem to be able to keep pace with social change, it seems to be essentially important to point to this continuous provisional character of education. More than ever before, we are required to reflect over and over again on what we perceive and do, to reconsider our actions and their underlying decisions. The environment can change so frequently and radically during a human being's life, that what we learned yesterday hardly suits the requirements of tomorrow. We are witnesses of, as well as participants in, a trend towards an increasingly globalised world. This is fascinating and alienating at the same time. Depending on one's educational background and personal interests, it is experienced as either an opportunity or a threat. The single individual has to put in great efforts of orientation. Neither can, for instance, power always be located - and least of all personalized - nor can wars be exclusively explained by rational logic (Scheunpflug, 1996 in Hartmeyer, 2008).

Against this background, the claim that we can achieve a better world through educational programmes needs to be critically revised. I myself wonder whether it is a matter of the recurring attempt to remove the uncertainty of the future, in order to finally get to grips with it. Still, one should not imagine that the educational activities which accompany it provide a complete programme for coping. They should not be saddled with the task of change in outlook to help the human being and the planet. This may too quickly lead to normative prescriptive teaching. Even more, it abuses education and turns it into a means of political and economic purposes. Attempts to quench the hunger for improving the world are bound to fail. They run the risk of turning educational programmes into technical programming. Designing the future will not be better achieved through

more planning and efficiency. In doing so, feelings and reflections, considering and sympathizing, delight and dolefulness, being a friend and being a stranger are at threat of being lost. Are these sacrificed to the obsession with aims and targets? Yet not everyone who wants to circumnavigate the earth - truly or notionally - is thereby approaching it.

## 2.2 Preaching or Learning?

It would be much more important to follow a less prescriptive approach, but a more educational one: to learn how to learn; to question the unbroken belief in the almightiness of the “banking concept” (Paulo Freire, 2007) and the linear transfer of information. Learning to be understood as self-organised. The notion of learning cannot be reduced to learning outcomes and their measurement. It should be broadly conceived and comprehensive. It should focus on learning goals, contents and processes (IBE, 2013).

More than skills, the acquisition of competencies is needed. In our societies, it is most important: to be able to critically reflect on our own behaviour, individually and as a society, and thus be able to change it.

### *Living in a World Society Requires Competencies of Orientation and Action*

To have knowledge about the world is not enough. The reason for this is that we have to ask ourselves: do we have sufficient knowledge? What do we really know? Is it enough to google a word or term and to trust the first hits, to look up *wikipedia*, to follow the news on TV or commentaries in the newspapers? There are so many more things we do not know than we know. Everybody who owns an encyclopaedia may guess the size of the unknown, of the unheard of.

The pure accumulation of knowledge is not sufficient.

*Global Education* is derived from the transformation from societies which are constituted as national to a world society which is an international network. This transformation happens very fast, it is a complex one and it creates uncertainties and a lack of orientation. For learning this is a great challenge.

Through *Global Education* two objectives are aimed at. It should contribute to a better orientation in our own lives. And it should enable us to develop a vision of a successful life in a humanely designed world society. This is an extremely ambitious undertaking. The aim of such an education is not to close ways, but to open chances - you want to discover and not to conceal, you want to search and find something. The interests, experiences, and competencies of everyone involved in this learning process should constitute an integral part.

In such learning, solutions should not be provided, but taken into consideration. Radical questions should be asked. Thinking and acting in alternatives ought to be tried out. Through practicing collaboration and living

together, solidarity and social virtues are required. The capability of a collaborative approach in everyday life, of good co-operation can be strengthened. We should therefore count on an understanding of learning that does not discriminate against a person due to possible behaviour of defence, that keeps the whole person with his/her limits in mind. The aim would be educational processes which give people confidence, stability, self-efficacy and *joie de vivre*.

### 2.3 Creating performers or performing creativity?

SDG 4 has a bias towards the view of education as being a means to productivity as it focuses on creating skilled workers more than autonomous and self-conscious persons (Burchi & Rippen, 2015).

SDGs 4.3 and 4.4 address the access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education and of the relevant skills including technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. How this could work in the light of 25 million young Africans entering the job market every (!) year, remains unanswered.

Learning is too often defined as in order to: the instrumentalisation of education is in the forefront. People should be adapted to changes and developments resulting from rapidly changing conditions on the market. Technological innovations shall serve further rationalisation. The job market has therefore already created the expression *lifelong learning*. The neoliberal trends in education want people who are ready to be used. Still, this is often about taking advantage of people, not about empowerment, self-determination or one's own way of acting.

I call this a "technology of performativity" instead of a culture of critical analysis and a culture of experiments and even failures.

#### *Education means reflection*

The contemporary interdependencies in which people live today are only partly clear to most people. The perception of the complex network of cause and effect has become more difficult. The already imminent problems of excessive demands on the human brain in coping with diversity, timely information processing and interconnectedness will continue to increase. It is hardly possible to create comprehension of facts in which no linear causality exists and in which the social, cultural and ecological environment is no longer stable. Through rapid progress in science and technology, the spatial circle of action which still existed not long ago has changed. We are forced to enter increasingly diverse (physical and virtual) rooms. We run the risk of getting lost in the labyrinth of complicated paths and the complex interdependencies and secondary effects; we risk losing our footing in increasingly complex societies and deregulated structures.

"We are drowning in information, but starving for knowledge" (Naisbitt, 2006:12 in Hartmeyer, 2008). The less the human being reigns over data in the technical reality, the more concrete rooms and places should gain importance: places against "placelessness". Places that encourage reflection and mediation should be acknowledged as objects of cultural value. It has become more essential than ever before to locate oneself not only in real terms, i.e. economically and socially, but also notionally, emotionally and culturally, ever and anon. Gaining simple information does not suffice. It is a matter of connecting our horizon of experience and enlargement of one's own learning aptitude and decision-making ability. This requires sufficient individual and social space and time for all who are involved in such learning processes.

Learning processes, which concentrate on reflections on one's own identity and possibilities as well as on social circumstances and developments, should and can provide people with the capability of connecting their own lives with worldwide developments.

Learning should enable us to critically question our own self-perception and action. It should not bet on concrete targets and fixed results, but should be an open and holistic process coming from the needs and experiences of both teachers and learners. One should act on the assumption that not everything has already been discovered, comprehended and conquered. What is required is the willingness to doubt over and over again, what one believes to know.

This is a plea for an understanding of learning as an education that demands the capabilities of human beings, such as their creativity, their empathy and their courage, their openness and their preparedness for the new. This demands learning processes that are pedagogically accompanied and that strengthen self-confidence and self-efficacy. Such a learning process requires full participation and lively curiosity. We should be occupied with people, matters and events without feeling occupied. It requires investigation and reflection; it includes pondering one's own origin, not merely thinking ahead into the future. One can sense how an overabundance of information leads to a lack of wisdom. Therefore, we need curiosity and reflection. We should encourage an examination which is differentiated and makes sense; visions and new forms of life should be given befitting space. This would mean to take a path, whose margins and ends are unmarked. In any case, such learning processes would be neither about balances nor format

#### 2.4 Creating performers or performing creativity?

The content of the SDGs is a vague vision of 2030, which can be reached if we acquire the right knowledge and skills. It ignores that only through a radical shift of parameters this vision can be reached in fourteen years from now. Only a transformative education, which truly empowers learners, could contribute to it.

The dominating theory of change seems to be: we want others to learn what will lead to immediate results. This ignores that awareness only grows slowly and that there is one constant - that is constant change.

*Politics give priority to development; education should give priority to envelopment (reaching out).*

In the post-war period, development was the overall concept of growth and progress, to which nations were geared as if it was a light house that shows ships the way to the saving coasts. For six decades the poorest countries and their inhabitants have not approached the light house. On the contrary: the boats and their crews are in an even worse condition than ever at a lot of places. The world is a very unequal one (see UN World Development Reports). The dependency theories of the 1970s, as well as the modernisation theories of the 1980s, closely linked development to deficits in conditions that have been (and still are) confronted with concepts of regulating policies and structures. There are only cautious indications to accept an interpretation of development as reaching out of one's own abilities.

The expression "reaching out" presupposes a different basic understanding. It is based on a faith in people's abilities. Teachers would have the mission to contribute to their development in freedom. One should deny oneself to the credo of absolute planning and strategy. Education should not be determined by concrete targets and fixed results, but on an open process resulting from the needs of pupils as well as teachers. Therefore, we need spheres for thinking and fantasy that are disburdened by the concrete pressure of the enforcement of political interests. It takes room for "concrete utopias", which are eluded from political instrumentalisation.

A better and sustainable world cannot be prescribed through plans, but requires social dialogue and consensus on values. This already sets the pedagogical bar very high. It requires time and room, leisure and calmness, ease and composure. The breathlessly articulated slogan "There is so much to do" neither speeds up learning processes nor leads to one's objective any faster.

## 2.5 Power to the rich or empowering the poor?

More and more learners (also in the global north) are excluded from the gains of what we call development, the gains of globalisation; are marginalised, are NOT global citizens. For them the question is less how their lifestyles can become more sustainable, but how to afford any lifestyle at all.

SDG 4.5 defines the marginalised as being disabled, being indigenous, being a child in a vulnerable situation. It's the traditional approach saying for whom we have to be especially caring. It excludes the growing mass of people deprived of their economic and social rights (and therefore tend to follow nationalistic, racist, authoritarian directions and elites).

SDG 4.7 does not mention the issues of social and economic justice. It does not mention the need for a change in the power relations as a core content issue in education, if we really want to make education an agent of change for a sustainable world.

*Global Education is a narrative in solidarity.*

In many education programmes there is the tendency to especially move the learning of the individual into the centre. The individual shall be prepared for a future, which he or she can master. In this concept modern society falls apart into individual efforts. The overall conviction is that it is up to the individual to be successful at school and in his/her job; to acquire the share of happiness everybody seems to be entitled to. Everybody is seen as his or her own master of happiness. It creates a frantic search for it. Every means seems allowed in the competition for the best chances in life, even the shameless exploitation of communal welfare. Those who fail blame themselves and in the end really believe that it is all their own fault.

Solidarity falls astray. It is becoming a meaningless formula.

This is a great challenge for education in general and for Development and Global Education in particular, because the individual faces a world society marked by competition, which hampers the formation of common action. Universal empathy is a fiction. We are not inclined to collective feelings without any borders. Yet, solidarity and social virtues can be promoted through cooperation and collaboration, and even more, the ability to a cooperative behaviour can be strengthened in our everyday lives.

It is a difficult but exciting journey. Even if we do only small steps in this direction our societies could well become more open, inclusive and socially responsible.

### *The global context is a challenge*

Many people are fleeing from war and civil war to Europe, but they are also escaping permanent poverty and a lack of perspectives. A future worth living for seems out of reach for them. It could cause a change in our own thinking. In fact, we know that our way of life, production and consumption is based on the exploitation of resources, on willpower and migration in other countries. It is not based on solidarity. It enlarges the climate problem and creates environmental refugees.

We do not know how many refugees will stay in Europe and of course it also depends on the development in their respective countries. On the one hand we are asked to be tolerant, but we are also challenged to stabilise their everyday life, to give them chances for work and a decent life. The issue is how to create a socially solidary and ecologically sustainable future here and in other parts of the world.

The traditional development paradigm of growth and progress does not lead us any further. The resources of the planet are limited. The courage to walk new paths is needed. Pedagogically, the acquisition of new expertise is not sufficient. It must be integrated into a critical reflection of new insights and existing experiences, in order to acquire the competencies of orientation and action.



### 3. Conclusions and strategic suggestions

In SDG 4 there is no critical approach to the term “development”; it is disguised by the word “sustainable”. The concept seems to remain the same: development is about economic growth. Yes, some need growth, others need de-growth.

There is a need to move strategies from a development agenda to an educational agenda. It also means to put Development Cooperation into a perspective and go far beyond it.

The global development brings about an adaptation of all political, economic, social and cultural systems. It is also true for education, which sees clearer and clearer processes of adaptation and norms. Pedagogy should resist such tendencies. In educational processes a learning environment should be created, which relates to the concrete experiences of people, promotes differentiation. There is a need to support it by independent research and courage to innovation in the field.

There is no explicit understanding of education as transformative education. Such an education would see learning as a process (aiming at a change of perspectives, at an emancipation and empowerment which cannot be prescribed). There is no reference to power relations and their reality. Education is becoming more and more commodified. The rich pay for their own (private) system; the poor fall out of the (public) system before they even enter it. A “new deal” for a policy of coherence is needed based on dialogue and cross-sectoral partnership. A rights-based perspective is what is needed most: everybody’s right to learn, to understand, to act.

Also the educational systems in the richer countries are far from being just and inclusive. The challenge altogether is not so much to have more education, but to find answers to the question “which kind of education?”. Target 4 in the SDGs gives reason to fear that the answer is again a very functional and human-capitalistic one, but does not give priority to methodological and theoretical plurality of experiences and approaches, to broader participation and to the very need of critical debate (Langthaler, 2013).

It leads me to Samir Amin’s question way back in 1975: “Which education for what development?”

*Education is about communication and reflection. Development cooperation requires communication.*

60 years of Development Cooperation have not brought about the expected success. It would not have been possible, because the financial resources have never been sufficient in the face of the problems. And endogenous factors in the developing countries were grossly underestimated. The breakthrough was not possible either, because the donor community changed its policy every ten years, now 15 years since 2000. Every time it was a complete political turnaround with the need to explain at the end why the new policy failed again. But again and again all kinds of papers are written for each field of activity. There is programming, adjusting, working at refined indicators. It is called “to accelerate progress” in the Accra Agenda (2008).

Everything should be made to rules and more efficiently. A legion of public and private experts draw down good salaries in countries where the majority have too little to live a decent life. It does not help them. Development Cooperation requires constant dialogue with those who it is for.

This includes dialogue with those whose tax money is meant to pay for it. One-way public relations are not sufficient. Photos and appeals reach the public only in situations of catastrophes. It would be very important to make the “why” and “who” and “what for” behind development problems an issue. This would be the noble task of information, so that people can become the backbone of an upright policy. The critical debate of possibilities and limits helps more for the good cause than wanting the blind support by people. Enlightenment deserves a chance, because development is an educational process. Communication and cooperation are two cultural techniques, which we cannot try and test often enough. It should become good practice to build bridges to all sectors in society..

Dambisa Moyo demands the complete end of Development Cooperation, because it causes more harm than good. Jeffrey Sachs answers with optimism. Is there a way in-between for differentiated criticism? Development Cooperation has its merits and its potential. Yet, the current trend to subordinate Development Cooperation to external trade and finance policy and to direct it according to parameters of growth leads astray. If Development Cooperation is not integrated in a coherent overall policy, it will never contribute to a fundamental change of the causes for growing poverty and global injustice. And if the European Commission only enlists activities in the global South when informing about its SDG 4 policy ([http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/sustainable-development-goals\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/sustainable-development-goals_en), 08.02.2017), it will fall only behind debates within civil society and academia. The priority should be to acknowledge the key issues of social justice, peace, protection of the environment and the indivisibility of the Human Rights as the key parameters of all policies.

Development Education can show the way. It changed from development information to Development Education in the 1970s and 1980s. Today concepts of *Global Education and Global Citizenship Education* are *in vogue*. All relevant global issues are included within them. A progressive concept of education is built on a concept of reflection, participation and dialogue and shifts the interests of the people it addresses for the centre. Who wants to deal with the future of mankind, is challenged to learn to read and understand the world, to acknowledge a changing society and to react appropriately to the changes in work, lifestyle and leisure time.

The challenges in the field of Development Education and communication are big: how can the connection to the realities of the life of people be found? How can the complexity in the world be made understandable? How can we cope well with the uncertainty of seemingly certain truths? How can curiosity and understanding be created? How can the ability to act be brought about? Which outlooks and which competencies do we need today, which ones tomorrow? Forgetting and throwing over board experiences and insights is a striking problem in development work. It is very important to know the history in search of the future.

The SDGs are a further step in the history of Development Cooperation and another attempt to reformulate the development agenda. To reflect on them critically and to draw lessons from SDG 4 for the Development and Global Education agenda is both a challenge and a chance.

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