

# **North-South Educational Partnerships**

Summer Term 2012

## **Assignment 2**

### **From Charity to Emancipation**

**The question of power in international educational partnerships**

**By Tobias Troll**

Word count

3.703

Quote as:

Troll, T (2012) *From Charity to Emancipation. The question of power in international educational partnerships*. (Unpublished student assignment. MA Development Education, Institute of Education, London. Retrieved from: [www.globalwh.at](http://www.globalwh.at))

MA Development Education

Institute of Education, University of London

September 2012

## **0. Introduction**

“North-South educational partnerships”, which means, in a narrow sense, formal school links between institutions in industrialised countries with schools in so-called developing countries, can contribute to the aims of development education, or global learning (Bourn and Cara 2012). But how can we define “success” in relation to such partnerships? Is increased “knowledge and understanding about development and [...] about the lives of pupils from their partner schools” (Bourn et Cara. 2012:7) enough? What about the deeper, transformative purpose of development education in regards to power and social justice, considering that school links actually can reinforce stereotypes and reproduce colonial power patterns (Leonard 2008)? This essay will have a closer look at the question of power in international school links, and under which conditions such partnerships can unfold a liberating, emancipatory potential of all partners involved, in order to bring upon social change and to challenge the current system of exploitation of planet and people – which is, to my opinion, the very essence of global learning and development education.

In order to do so, I will first outline the limits and scope of this essay.

Further on, we will have a look on the notion of development education, which is used in this text, based on the concept of development as freedom (Sen 1999) and joint human responsibility (Giri and van Ufford 2004), the thoughts of Paulo Freire (1995) on education as a liberatory, utopist practice, Kumar’s (2008) definition of development education as dialogical and democratic exercise and Andreotti’s (2006, 2012) post-colonial critique of global education.

In order to address the issue of power, it seems furthermore useful to question a number of terminological and conceptual elements, in particular the “North-South” concept, which is also used in the formulation of the assignment and module title this essay contributes to.

Finally, I will attempt to draw up a typology of the relation to power in international school links, based on three ideal-type categories: Charity, participation and emancipation.

### **1. Limits and scope of this text**

The assigned task in the present exercise is an “*assessment of value and impact of North-South educational partnerships*”. This, however, is hardly doable: There is globally a potentially infinite number of approaches and experiences in international educational partnerships in various countries and contexts, and no aggregated data and evaluation of these is available. Although there is a growing body of studies in geographically limited contexts (e.g. UK), comparative evidence of these experiences beyond particular case studies remains weak (Fricke 2006). This lack of secondary sources would require

comprehensive primary research, which is not possible in the frame of this exercise.

Also, there is the question what a “North-South educational partnership” is, after all. Does this term include formal school links only? Are international volunteering programmes with a strong learning component, and/or reciprocity elements, which allow non-Europeans to do internships in Europe also “North-South educational partnerships”<sup>1</sup>? And what about non-formal or informal and organisational learning in international NGO partnerships, which increasingly occur as part of a movement towards the establishment of a “global civil society”?

Considering the complexity and amplitude of these questions, no systematic and complete “assessment of North-South educational partnerships” seems feasible within the limits of this paper. However, through addressing the question of power in school links, I will try to endeavour a reflection on the transformative potential of educational partnerships, which might also be applicable in other international partnerships with an explicit or implicit learning element, beyond formal schools links, which are the scope of this essay.

## **2. Development education as pedagogy of liberation**

When we look at development education, we cannot omit a critical reflection on the concept of development – especially when it comes to school links, which are typically “either about learning (about, from or together) or about development (helping or being helped)” (Najda in Leonard 2008:65): While development is still broadly used as a benedictory promise of continuous progress, taming nature and material wealth for all, this western, modernist view has been constantly criticised (e.g. by Gudynas 2011, following the post-development thinking of Arturo Escobar). Sen (1999) proposes a concept of “development as freedom”, which puts the liberation of the individual at the very centre of development. The aspect of liberation is particularly relevant when it comes to education: What, if not the development of awareness of existing power structures, of one’s own role within these and the enhancement of individual freedom to challenge these structures towards positive change should be the purpose of development education as transformative pedagogy? Paulo Freire’s (2005) “Pedagogy of the oppressed” gives education exactly this emancipatory scope through actively addressing power dichotomies such as between student and teacher or between coloniser and colonised. However, while learning manifests in individuals, it can unfold its social power as a transformative, emancipatory tool only in interaction and dialogue, which is

---

<sup>1</sup> The “multipliers training cycle” of the Global Education Network of Young Europeans (GLEN, [www.glen-europe.org](http://www.glen-europe.org)) is an example of such a volunteering programme with a strong global learning focus. The German GLEN partner ASA Programm also offers in addition to internships for Germans abroad project stays in Germany for a limited number of non-Europeans as part of a “South-North-Programme” ([www.asa-programm.de](http://www.asa-programm.de)). These initiatives are examples for “North-South educational partnerships” outside the formal education sector.

at the very heart of Freire's pedagogy. Correspondingly, Giri and Van Ufford (2004) propose to enlarge Sen's thinking towards a concept of development as a shared human responsibility. This would introduce a reflective and self-critical element to the concept of freedom, underlining the need for self-development and constant questioning of the actors in development. Kumar (2008) emphasises "freedom, autonomy and responsibility" as cornerstones of development education, considering participatory democracy and genuine dialogue as central elements: "dialogue [...] is the primary thinking skill, reconceptualised as 'learning to learn', with all other thinking skills following from this induction." (Kumar 2008:45). This dialogue has to address questions of power, language and interest, including a critical self-reflection and deconstructing of assumption on the side of the learner (Andreotti 2006), which is particularly important in the context of international partnerships (Andreotti 2012).

To conclude, I would propose to replace the term "development education" by "global learning", in order to go beyond the notions of progress and instruction and to emphasise the role of the learner in a world society (Bourn 2008). The purpose of such learning would be to enhance human freedom and responsibility (i.e. the freedom to act consciously and politically in a responsible way) – a pedagogy of liberation and emancipation.

### **3. Challenges and characteristics of educational partnerships**

There is a growing body of empirical evidence, especially from UK context, that international educational partnerships can contribute to global learning (e.g. Bourn et.al 2012, Fricke 2006, Garden 2003). However, these studies regularly underline also the potential dangers of school links in terms of reinforcing stereotypes and contributing to a missionary or neo-colonial attitude from the partners in the richer countries: "First you came to us as missionaries, then you came to us as colonisers, now you come to us as linkers" as put it a non-European participant in a school linking programme according to Leonard (2008). Recent research by Bourn and Cara (2012), while underlining documented positive effects on awareness of global issues, skills development and spill-off effects to re-vitalising school life, acknowledges that changes in attitude regarding social justice, power and equity are less evident. The Oxfam GB (2007) school-linking guide underlines the importance to address questions of power and equal partnership openly and proactively from the very beginning, as one of four key areas for successful school linking.

According to Leonard (2008), the potentially neo-colonial character of current school linking practice is inherent in the dominant funding and programme model, which gives the power of initiative and resources to the institution in the "donor" country, while the schools in the "partner countries" are first of all objects of this approach, selected according to criteria set up by the "Northern" school. An alternative to this bilateral approach could be a multi-level,

multi-actors network of “global school relations”, which would relativize the power imbalance of a one-to-one link.

Key questions for school links remain evaluation and continuous organisational learning. Beyond self-congratulating success stories, which possibly satisfy funders and help to promote the school towards (potentially sceptical) partners, colleagues and community (e.g. Hillier 2003), an educational partnership should consider continuous organisational learning through on-going review and evaluation mechanisms, in particular related to questions of power and equality in the partnership, in order to avoid dead ends in the partnership process. In this respect, an empowering evaluation approach, as described by Wandersman (2007), provides interesting elements in particular for international educational partnerships with an implicit power gap. The principles of inclusion, ownership, community and democratic participation as well as a strong and explicit value base (social justice) and the focus on personal (capacity building) and structural (organisational) learning can contribute to meet the main challenges of educational partnerships. Such a proactive approach to continuously critical addressing questions of power and joint learning can also be highly beneficial for international partnerships outside the formal education sector, such as international volunteering programmes or institutionalised partnerships of civil society organisations.

#### **4. The language of power**

If we consider that we have to address questions of power and inequalities in order to unfold the full transformatory potential of global learning in international partnerships, we have to critically assess the concepts and terminology we use, as the public discourse forms the way we think and conceive the world (e.g. Blum 2000 referring to Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis).

##### **North-South**

The development discourse is still largely framed through the idea that supposedly “rich” countries – the “North” – should help the poor – the so-called “South” – to “develop” in order to get closer to the “northern” example. Rooted in the idea of colonial and post-colonial charity, this approach might contain noble intentions, but it is unhelpful in order to address the malfunctioning of the existing system and its disastrous results – poverty and exploitation of people and nature – as questions of power and underlying causes are not systematically addressed (DEEEP 2011). The agenda setting power, including the allocation of resources, remains with the donor, which is contradictory to Giri and Van Ufford’s (2004) idea of development as shared human responsibility and Kumar’s (2008) insistence on a genuine dialogue as key element of development education. Furthermore, through focusing on a

dichotomy between rich and poor countries, diversity within countries and similarities between people and situations from a range of countries are neglected (Young 2010). The very concept of global learning as an answer to globalisation and contribution to the creation of a world society (Bourn 2008, referring to Scheunpflug) strives to overcome the notions of a two-world concept and to contribute to a one world vision (Young 2010). The perpetuation of the North-South dichotomy, also in the concept of educational partnerships (for example through “North-South-linking” funding mechanisms, or through the title of this study module and assignment) is potentially reinforcing related power structures, both on a discourse level and in terms of structural implementation mechanisms (e.g. eligibility criteria for funding). It is suggested to replace this terminology by more precise concepts, and problematize the use of these terms if they are unavoidable.

### **Empowerment<sup>2</sup>**

Empowerment is one of the buzzwords in the development discourse. From World Bank to NGOs, one would hardly find someone who is against the promise to empower the poor to develop themselves (Rai 2007). However, with its strong rooting in local realities, empowerment does not imply the *acquaintance* or even collective conquest of power (which necessarily challenges the power of someone else), but the permission to *exercise* power to a certain degree. It does not question the power relations beyond the local level, as the position of the donor, which allows or encourages empowerment, is not questioned: Empowerment implies that someone receives power from someone else - it is not the result of an autonomous struggle against oppression or exploitation, or the negotiation of resources and power between equal parties. It is no coincidence that Paulo Freire (2005) didn't use this term and rather used the word *emancipation* for the role of education in relation to power:

*“Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process [...]. The world [...] becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization. Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. [...] [O]nly a revolutionary society can carry out this education in systematic terms”*  
(Freire 2005:86)

For the practice of educational partnerships, we have to ask to which extent they have the capacity to go beyond empowerment, which leaves the learners in the position of an object

---

<sup>2</sup> I own some inspiration for this paragraph to the blog post „Time to move beyond Participation and Ownership?“ and personal exchange with its author. <http://log.quanders.com/post/22383233912/time-to-move-beyond-participation-and-ownership>

of an institutional setting, towards a truly emancipatory practice, which is, according to Freire, necessarily a revolutionary practice, putting the social transformation of society at the very heart of its agenda.

### **Culture**

The element of culture is an important aspect of educational partnerships: The exotic appeal of the unknown and the learning potential of a confrontation with other ways of living and thinking can be a central driving force for setting up a school link (Fricke 2006). However, often a strong emphasis is put on the differences between cultures, e.g. through Hofstede's empirical classification of whole nations according to a set of five cultural dimensions (Fennes et.al. 1997). Martin (2007) underlines that a critical reflection on similarities and differences - may they be cultural, social, political or economic - can lead to understanding the social and political structures that support inequalities. There is a double fold danger when partnership encounters are seen through an intercultural lens only:

- While culture can be considered as the general "operating system" of a society, its visible manifestation are behaviours, for example related to eating habits, or – even more reductive – folklore. The differences between groups can easily be reduced to folkloristic, observable behaviours ("they eat with hands, we eat with forks", "they play drums, we play piano"). This might result in over-emphasising the group character of the partners and the differences between the groups, leaving aside the similarities between the partners and the differences within each group.
- Questions of power, language, history and interests tend to be omitted by the intercultural lens. These are, however, crucial elements – maybe more important than culture - to set up a successful and trustful partnership.

Culture is an easy excuse when something goes wrong. However, the borderline between cultural, personal, economic or political aspects in a given situation is thin, and only an open and explicit learning dialogue can untangle cultural and non-cultural motivations.

### **Resources**

International school links require important financial support, especially if consequent travels are involved. These moneys are often referred to as "resources". They come to an overwhelming part from the "rich" partner school, or an affiliated funding mechanism or organisation. This imbalance marks the character of the partnership deeply: While some non-European partners explicitly expect "resource gain" (i.e. financial or material support) from the school link, others problematize the charity element in partnerships (Fricke 2007). Questions of power are directly linked to the use of the moneys: The funder decides how to use the funds, or when to allow consultation or co-decision and when not. However,

resources are more than funds: They can also be time, ideas and knowledge, enthusiasm or strategic thinking. A truly educational partnership, aiming at joint learning, should result in immaterial “resource gains” for all partners involved, and have an open, problem-posing dialogue on the sources and use of moneys involved.

### 5. Towards a typology of power in educational partnerships

Fricke (2007) distinguishes four types of school links: The *incidental link*, which won't address the question of power and potentially result in negative learning outcome; the *basic link*, typically framed in an isolated project approach, which won't allow mutual understanding of purpose and scope of the partnership and underlying questions of power; *developing partnerships*, which open dialogue and participation in the link, without putting questions of power and equity at its centre, and finally *sustained partnerships*, which put a critical “global literacy”, negotiated between equal partners both regarding concepts and implementation at the very core of their approach. Concerning global learning and in particular the question of power, this latter type of partnership could be situated close to Andreotti's (2006) concept of “critical global citizenship education”: Based on a political and ethical concept of development, a responsibility towards the other emerges from a continuous self-reflective dialogue between the partners. Based on a jointly negotiated positioning within global power relations, the partners aim to challenge continuously injustice within and beyond their partnership. Andreotti's “soft global citizenship education”, which is based on a moral and universalistic promise of progress towards a predefined vision of development and doesn't address questions of power and justice, can be attributed to the “less advanced” categories of Fricke's typology.

Considering these categories and reflections on development, power and related concepts above, I would propose three rough-cut ideal-types of educational partnerships relating to questions of power:

- Partnerships based on *charity*
- Partnerships based on *participation*
- Partnerships based on *emancipation*

The table below highlights characteristics of each type in relation to particular aspects of the partnership.

	<b>Charity</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Emancipation</b>
<b>Concept of development</b>	Aid, flow of resources from North to South, growth towards the “Northern model”	Enhancement of possibilities, “Development as freedom”	Development as shared responsibility, dialog, discourse analysis, post-colonial theory

<b>Change agenda</b>	Help the poor	Improve the system	Change the system (here and there and globally)
<b>Concept of DE</b>	Learning about “the South”	Learning about interdependencies	Social change, locally and globally
<b>Initiative</b>	Northern agenda setting	Northern agenda setting, with consultation or punctual co-decision making	Joint agenda setting
<b>Decision making</b>	North	Consultation and punctual co-decision making	Equal negotiation
<b>funding</b>	Comes from “Northern” donor, who allocates according to institutional mechanisms	Comes mainly from the “North”, Consultation and limited co-decision on the use of funds	Discussion on resources include non-monetary investment in the partnership, resources come from various sources, use of joint resources is negotiated among equal partners
<b>colonialism</b>	No topic	Might come up	Starting point of partnership
<b>Approach to culture</b>	Reinforcing stereotypes	Intercultural theory, understanding differences	Systematic questioning of identities, including culture, similarities as starting point
<b>Learning</b>	Weak or none, tourists’ view, tends to reinforce stereotypes and existing power imbalances	Global-local utilitarian approach: School link is used to apply learning (e.g. on interdependencies) in the local school setting and according to local educational objectives	Local-global transformation approach: joint and dialogical learning of “thinking schools” towards a “global literacy” as part of a common change movement. Permanent questioning, no given answers.

Of course, these categories are rough-cut ideal types, but they can contribute to critically analyse the aspect of power in school links. For example, the simple ban of charity in order to avoid a powerful giver/grateful receiver relationship, as it is the case in the Norwegian school partnership programme described by Garden (2003), does not prevent to have a “charity” approach: “charity and aid [...] flow within [...] the programme, although ‘unofficially’ and unreported” (Garden 2003:24). Furthermore, while “equity and reciprocity” is at the core of the programme concept, the Norwegian partners keep the agenda setting power and

sometimes even plan their own visit without meaningful consultation with the partners. The dialogical element, key to the global learning concept described above and essential to address questions of power and emancipation, is not inherent in the programme.

Developing partnerships, such as the one between Toot Hill School in UK and Little Flower Senior Secondary School in South Africa as described by Hillier (2003) can have elements of participation like joint curriculum planning. However, many elements in this example as the unreflected approach to fundraising and charity or to culture, which described manifestations are traditional dances and costumes, as well as the praised approach to “Citizenship through Mathematics”, using data from South Africa on “HIV/AIDS, illegal abortions, general health, clean water and other development indicators such as the GNP, literacy rates and infant mortality statistics” (Hillier 2003:3) in UK math classes, have a strong potential to re-enforce stereotypes and omit underlying causes and structures which lead to differences and suffering.

The approach described by Hillier (2006) in a school link between UK and The Gambia gets close to several aspects of the “emancipatory” approach to partnerships: The partners insist on the dialog aspect through the organisation of joint conferences, where students and teachers of the two schools can discuss and confront their views on aims, benefits and challenges of linking. This link problematizes explicitly the question of funding and charity and underlines the need for a written, equally negotiated partnership agreement. There is a strong insistence on questioning assumptions and own perspectives, and on the political dimension of citizenship, with the ultimate obligation to contribute to transformation of power relations: “As one Gambian teacher commented, ‘Linking can be an agent for change.’” (Hillier 2006:9)

## **6. Conclusion**

Addressing power in school links is not an easy task: The complex and irritating questions challenge the comfort zone of well-meaning philanthropy, which often is the starting point of a linking initiative. The challenge is to channel the energy of an approach driven by exotism and charity carefully into a meaningful, equal dialog between the partners, not without omitting the ultimate aim of any critical global citizenship education: To question viewpoints in order to come to a more informed, responsible, ethical and political transformative action. This emancipation of students and teachers through joint and dialogical learning is highly subversive, and thus difficult to embed and justify in an institutional programme and a learning context, which mainly aims to enhance skills and competences of learners to survive in an even competitive economic environment. However, without challenging this

very environment we are living in, global learning is meaningless. The question of power is the central question, not only for school links and other educational partnerships, but for any relevant political reflection and action.

- Andreotti, Vanessa (2006) 'Soft versus critical global citizenship education', *Policy and Practice*, Global Citizenship, Issue 3 Autumn 2006.
- Andreotti, V. (2012) HEADS UP Checklist. Available online at: <http://globalwh.at/heads-up-checklist-by-vanessa-de-oliveira-andreotti/> [accessed 1 May 2012]
- Blum, N. (2000) *Doing Development Education at Home, Education as a Tool for Social Change*. MA dissertation, University of Sussex, pp.12-17
- Bourn, D. (2008) *Development Education: Towards a re-conceptualisation*. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* 1(1): 5-22
- Bourn, D. and Cara, O. (2012) *Evaluating partners in development: Contribution of international school partnerships to education and development*. London: Development Education Research Paper No. 5
- DEEEP (2011) *Development Needs Citizens: The place of Development Education & Awareness Raising in the development discourse*. Brussels: DEEEP
- Fennes, H. and Hapgood, K. (1997) 'Intercultural encounters', pp24-36 in *Intercultural Learning in the Classroom: Crossing borders*. London: Cassell.
- Freire, P. (2005) *Pedagogy of the oppressed – 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*. Continuum, New York
- Freire, P. (1995) Some Issues: Neutrality, Respect for the Students, Epistemological Curiosity, and International Financial Aid. In Figueiredo-Cowen, M. de & Gastaldo (ed) *Paulo Freire at the Institute*. London: IOE. pp. 68-75
- Fricke, H-J. (2006) *North-South School Linking: A Review of Approaches*. Unpublished report commissioned by Plan International.
- Garden, B. (2003) 'Getting it right: school exchanges between Norway and the South – evaluating experiences'. *The Development Education Journal*, 9(3) pp23-25.
- Gudynas, E. (2011) Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow. *Development* 54(4), (441–447)
- Giri, A. K. and van Ufford, P. Q. (2004) *A Moral Critique of Development: Ethics, Aesthetics and Responsibility*. Aalborg: DIR
- Hillier, F. (2003) *UK Programmes Case Study: Toot Hill School*
- Hillier, J. (2006) *School Linking Partnerships and Global Citizenship*. Commissioned Research Article, citiZED
- Kumar, A. (2008) *Development Education and Dialogical Learning in the 21st Century*. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* 1(1): 37-48
- Leonard, A. (2008) 'Global school relationships: school linking and modern challenges' in Bourn, D. (ed.) *Development Education: Debates and Dialogues*, pp. 64-98. London: Bedford Way Papers.
- Oxfam GB (2007) *Global Citizenship Guides. Building Successful School Partnerships*. Oxford
- Ray, S. M. (2007) *(Re)defining empowerment measuring survival*. Paper prepared for 'Workshop on Empowerment: Obstacles, Flaws, Achievements'. University of Warwick, UK.
- Sen, A. (1999) The Ends and the Means of Development, pp35-53 in *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press
- Wandersman, A., Snell-Johns., Lentz, J., Fetterman, D.M, Keener, D.C., Livet, M., Imm, P.S and Flaspohler, P (2005) 'The Principles of Empowerment Evaluation' pp27-41 chapter 2 in Fetterman, D.M. and Wandersman, A. (Eds) *Empowerment Evaluation Principles in Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Young, H. (2010) Naming the World: Coming to terms with complexity. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review*, Issue 10.