

Foundation Education and Development: a national forum for development education in Switzerland

Richard Helbling describes how a national forum, which includes local and national governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the field of development education, is helping to develop a coherent and effective national programme of Global Education in Switzerland.

A short history of development education in Switzerland

The first steps towards development education were made by NGOs and religious organizations by the end of the sixties when they started addressing schools in their raising of funds. In the early seventies, the newly established information service of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) started publishing educational material about development cooperation. In 1975 the 'Schulstelle 3.Welt' was established by the Swiss Coalition of Development Organizations (Swissaid, Catholic Lenten Fund, Bread for All, Caritas, Helvetas). This educational service aimed at collecting teaching material about the Third World and offered training courses to teachers in that domain. At about the same time, UNICEF Switzerland started producing teaching material under the label 'One World' and in the early eighties, it was again UNICEF who established the 'Forum Schule für Eine Welt'. This Forum slowly developed into an umbrella organization for all those agencies (in the field of human rights, environment and development) which were offering services to schools. Questions like 'What should be the learning objectives for development education?' (Lernziele für eine Welt) and 'How should these objectives be implemented in every day teaching?' were topics of the Forum. Teaching material was evaluated and a list was published.

In response to the comprehensive transformation of our societies at the beginning of the nineties, the members of the Forum increasingly questioned the educational work that was accomplished by NGOs in the field of development. A broad study conducted in 1993 found that the aid agencies were no longer reaching their target group – teachers in Swiss schools – with the way they presented development education, despite flooding them with publications, projects and appeals. Hence the Forum members worked out a series of medium and long-term aims for introducing the ideas and concepts of Global Education. This new concept was geared to integrate more issues, to come closer to the target group, to concentrate forces by improving cooperation among interested organizations and to develop better contacts with the regional (cantonal) institutions of education.

Leading role of the Foundation Education and Development (FED)

This process of educational and institutional transformation led to the establishment of the Foundation Education and Development as an independent national agency with competence in matters of Global Education. The "Schulstelle 3.Welt" became part of the new structure while the Forum ceased some months after the FED had been established.

Bringing together all the partners who are working on the concept of Global Education is part of the structure of the FED. These partners are the Swiss Confederation (represented by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology, OPET), the 26 cantons (represented by the Swiss Conference of the Cantonal Ministers of Education SCME), teacher organizations and private NGOs involved in development and cooperation. This concentration of forces on national level is unique in the field of education in Switzerland. So the FED fulfils all the institutional conditions needed to act as a pivot for Global Education. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has decided to delegate the field of development education almost completely to the FED – with just one exception: the role of providing information on development and cooperation remains in the hands of SDC. Many of the aid agencies and development organizations still have direct contacts with schools in areas where they are active and well known, but they are more and more looking to the FED for professional advice when working out their programmes and projects.

Goal, mandate and mission of the Foundation Education and Development

The FED's goal is to promote education focusing on:

- teaching know-how and sensitivity to global connections in our lives today
- enabling learners to develop awareness of global interconnections and understanding how to apply that awareness in their own lives
- empowering people by developing an exchange in the form of a partnership beyond language, cultural and geographical boundaries

The values that determine our lives are no longer passed on by the community, but by global means of communication which create completely new guidelines.

The educational mandate of the Foundation Education and Development starts from the idea of sustainable development and includes those interrelated subjects and questions that are vital for the future of mankind.

The Foundation functions as a service provider in the field of education. The main target groups are educators and teachers at all school levels and officials from the Swiss Federal Government, the cantons and communities, responsible for education. The Foundation's services include information and advice, training, loan and sale of teaching material, conceptual work, and networking.

For the FED providing a full range of educational materials and concepts (including both content and methodology) is of major importance. It therefore developed a package of ways and means, such as publishing a catalogue of teaching materials, elaborating and publishing quality criteria for materials and concepts, coordinating the production of teaching materials and granting a prize for excellent teaching materials.

The head office of the FED is in Bern and the regional offices offer services to teachers in their respective regions:

- at Zürich to German and Rhaeto-Romanic speakers
- at Lausanne to French speakers
- at Lugano to Italian speakers

Key issues for Global Learning from the point of view of the FED

Global Learning today is a necessity simply because our everyday lives are marked by global aspects. The values that determine our lives are no longer passed on by the community, but by global means of communication which create completely new guidelines. The schools, too, are subjected to these transformations as they follow the needs of a particular society that is embedded in a global environment.

Global Learning has a knowledge base but how to access this wealth of knowledge is not the main problem. Rather, it is about finding one's way through all the knowledge offered and selecting appropriately. Global Learning helps learners to acquire the competencies that are needed to cope with such a wealth of knowledge.

Another point is that our everyday life has become intricate and complex. This is not only shown by all the issues around us, but also in the social relationships that today are so much more complicated than 30, 40 or 50 years ago. Today's reality is so complex that one can only understand its dimensions if one looks at it from different perspectives. An urban Swiss citizen sees things in a different light compared to an asylum seeker; the Third World farmer does not share the worldview of a woman manager. To learn how to deal with these various realities is one of the essential objectives of Global Learning.

Switching perspectives requires competencies with issues and methods but also depends on personal and social competencies like empathy, sensitiveness and similar things.

This ability to see matters from other perspectives and to be able to imagine oneself in somebody else's situation is extremely important in understanding what happens in our world.

Ethical principles are part of Global Learning. This should enable those that are in the process of learning to develop their own ideas and attitudes. There are central values that are taught by Global Learning, including human rights, democracy and tolerance.

Global Learning focuses on triggering three learning processes:

- The students should acquire knowledge
- They should learn to define more precisely their own opinions and attitudes.
- Finally, Global Learning aims at empowering those that are learning and helping them to recognize their own capacity to act.

The term "Global" signals that Global Learning is a pedagogical answer to the entire process of globalization – doing justice to the fact that we live in a global society. The term "Learning" points out that it focuses on an educational process and not on a fixed state. The term should actually signal openness. Global Learning is not a concise concept but includes different approaches. The opportunities provided by such openness are, in the view of the Foundation Education and Development, greater than the disadvantages. No longer is it necessary to deal with individual issues; we should rather work out a pedagogical program and tackle global interdisciplinary questions.

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