

## **Turning World Views Upside Down: from the Africa Week to Gameboy**

### **How anti-bias educational work in political development sharpens one's view of one's own reality in life**

*2002, Annette Kübler*

**"The countries of the South need our help." Development organisations, in particular, reinforce this view of the world. It is overlooked, that this attitude is based on extremely paternalistic images of the South and the North. A helping attitude is often subconsciously stylised and this reproduces a clear power gap in economic matters and in relations between people. Anti-bias training courses go towards providing particular projects at home and in other countries with a stronger orientation towards the relevant problems and challenges and leads to an implementation of these locally, instead of transferring them onto a global level. In addition to global learning, the anti-bias approach offers opportunities for reducing dominance relations and prejudice in day to day life.**

At a time when I was searching for serious steps towards a way of working together which was based on equality, I found, in the anti-bias training of the South African tutors in the INKOTA project "Learning from the South", a guiding approach and a (learning) context. In this approach, many things which made me unhappy as a tutor in my educational work in political development, are treated seriously. At the same time, new methods and themes in a lively South-North partnership are implemented and developed further: South African models of anti-bias training courses are carried over into the German context. I found the following particularly convincing

- working on themes which are also widespread in Germany instead of the attitude "we Europeans help the others",
- critical analysis of own, firmly established opinions,
- making one aware of one's individual involvement in dominance structures and the development of alternatives.

### **From the educational work in political development to global learning**

Educational work in political development has a 50-year history in both theory and practice (Scheunenpflug/Seitz 1995; Führung, 1996). In most cases, it has gone hand in hand with projects of "development aid". Usually without own financial means and experts, the work has often been part of the public relations work of aid organisations. In line with the aim of pulling in donations, information about problems in the South and about aid projects for improving living standards there have dominated. Educational work in political development only plays a marginal role, to such an extent, that it does not even exist in works of reference about development politics (Nohlen, 1993; Nuscheler, 1995).

A transformation in our way of thinking has been taking place since the 70ies. A learning process is underway, not only in society but also in political development organisations: the "limitations of growth" (Club of Rome, 1969) have questioned the development model of the North. Environmental awareness reached its zenith at the "Environment and Development" conference in Rio in 1992. The term "sustainable

development" has worked its way into our consciousness, thus highlighting the need for change in the North as well as in the South.<sup>1</sup>

Experts from the field of educational work in political development have therefore favoured the idea of "global learning" since the 90ies. "Global learning aims to develop individual and collective capacities to act which are characterised by worldwide solidarity. It promotes respect for other cultures, ways of life and world views, and sheds light upon the prerequisites of own positions, making it possible to find solutions to joint problems for the future." (VENRO, 2000, p 8)

However, putting these ideas into practice remains difficult, for various reasons.

Firstly, out-of-date ideas still dominate pedagogical practices in educational work in political development. The most important activity is still the collection of donations for projects in the South. It seems that others are responsible for the necessary changes which have to take place in the North. A great deal of differentiated pedagogical materials (Führung, 1998; Fountain, 1996; Gujer/Andres, 1998; Misereor, 1988 and 1995; Ratz, 1990) are, however, too seldom applied in practice.

Secondly, one weak point is that almost only teachers and workers from the churches have been addressed as disseminators. This means limiting the issue to a quite homogenous group from the middle classes, many of them German civil servants, who have learned rather to teach people than to accompany processes.

Thirdly, educational work, in the respective home countries of the organisations has remained, to date, an issue on the sidelines and of secondary interest. Financially, it plays hardly any role at all - the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation only makes available 0.1% of its financial means for this work. And even there, where it enjoys the status of an independent area with qualified employees, it is still sometimes counteracted by the posters calling for donations: with images of poverty, misery and large dark eyes.<sup>2</sup> This is a sign that feeding critical reflection back into one's own organisation only seldom takes place. Several aid organisations, such as the World Peace Service (WFD) with its project "Partnership instead of Dominance"<sup>3</sup> (WFD 1999) do open themselves to self-critical questions.

### **Stumbling stones on the way to equality in cooperation and possible answers from the point of view of the anti-bias approach**

Overcoming thoughts of superiority and internalised dominance represents a great challenge within the educational work in political development. This should be made more apparent on differing levels in the following three examples:

- talking about the South
- our attitude towards people in the South
- subjects, which can be worked on

#### **Talking about the "South"**

"Sun and palm trees, droughts, people who are poor but happy; hungry children with big eyes; the thought that we must help; the fear of refugees fleeing from poverty."

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<sup>1</sup> Bread for the World's project "e" already used the slogan "live more simply" in 1977 to question the extravagant and ecologically unfriendly way of life in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the poster "Peace is a Fact" from Misereor for a fasting campaign or the poster "Bread to Live" from the organisation Bread for the World, both 2002.

<sup>3</sup> WFD raised questions about racism and structural superiority in North-South relations for six years and sought to find modes of operating which would enable a "more equal" partnership.

These points are repeatedly named in seminars about "the South". In this way, countries which are socio-culturally, politically and historically very different to each other appear more uniform and easier to understand when viewed as "developing countries".

We are confronted, in educational work, with these false and clichéd images. They have a great deal of influence on our perceptions, especially when they are subconscious. Therefore, it is important to prevent a situation whereby the events organised by us reinforce such clichés. We reinforce myths about the "South" when white Germans are responsible, at events, for the theoretical work and lecturers "from the South" for the practical work: the latter are allowed to play drums, cook, do handicrafts and thereby add to the aura of exoticism.

On the other hand, it is necessary to become aware of our own internalised images and to question these. What do we take for granted when we talk about the "South"? It is worth taking a look at history here. "Foreign" places have been a favourite surface for projections since the Enlightenment: good-natured natives and evil cannibals serve as a counter-image of middle-class identity (Kappeler, 1987).<sup>4</sup>

An analysis of our stories and our fantasies about the "stranger" says more about us than about others. Certain types which resemble one another pop up regularly in seminars, films or newspaper articles (Homuth, 1992): there are, for example, the "wild peoples" who we should "civilise" or "the victim" of exploitation, whom we should help or who we use to assuage our guilt; "the revolutionary subject" who should turn into reality our dreams of social emancipation, "the entertainer" whose music and dance should help us to mature, and last but not least, the "intercultural conflict partner" who should initiate the process of self-reflection by being different. All these allocations act to functionalise and prevent real encounters between people. Instead of describing the "strangers", we should recognise our own needs and projections behind these allocations and reduce these in order to prepare ourselves for an encounter with individuals.

In this process, in which things which we normally take for granted are put into question, learning means, above all, unlearning - unlearning internalised images and fantasies. What is important is to use irritations to learn anew and to try out new ideas.

### **Our attitude towards people in the South**

Many people from the North still assume that the people from the South are dependent on donations. And so, donations flow from the North, either because of a guilty conscience or because of the paternalistic attitude of the North. It is exactly these ideas that the aid organisations have helped to create, by narrowing their view of the issue down to this factor. The attitude: "We help, they need. We give, they take" prevails far too much in the North and it strongly influences contacts between people, for example on journeys to meet people in faraway countries or in our day to day lives at home. One typical opinion is this: "It may be true, that they can help us and that we can learn something which goes beyond just cooking or dancing. However, when it comes to money, one thing is clear: the South takes and the North gives." The donor attitude is based upon "we give what **we** think is needed". In this way, the significance of development aid is fully overestimated.

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<sup>4</sup> His analysis of the connection between enlightened, progressive thinking and Eurocentrism and racism is interesting.

There is a great necessity to learn anew here. To be able to approach one another and communicate with each other without preconceived ideas, it is necessary to unlearn the fixed idea that people in the South need our help.

We educators in political development can promote the necessary new learning through a historical analysis of the history of exploitation between the North and the South. The subject of colonialism which is fully ignored in school education lends itself to this: the rule of force which also took place in German colonies and the resulting devaluation of others as "uncivilised" people.

The donor attitude described should also be looked at critically. By informing the public about the marginal significance of the overestimated development aid, a new basis can come into being.<sup>5</sup> Instead, it can become clear that the industrialised countries, right up until today, have taken and still take a lot in the way of debt services and cheap raw materials, and that this causes an obligation to compensate for betrayal and theft. In this way, we could regard people in the South as partners in overcoming injustice rather than seeing them as beggars.

### **Subjects, which can be worked on**

In the wide field of themes with which global learning concerns itself, it is necessary to make choices and to reduce the number of complex circumstances. When this choice is examined for thematic one-sidedness, it becomes apparent, that it is mostly the development problems of "the other" which can be dealt with on project days. Sometimes "our" problems with the "others" are also addressed, however future development in Germany is seldom dealt with (Third World House, 1997). Violations of human rights in the South are highlighted and people are encouraged to become active. However, educational work in political development doesn't seem to carry responsibility for violations of human rights in the North, such as racism.

The points focussed on can be explained to some extent by the need to advertise: extremes upset people, the exotic attracts. "So far away and totally different" thus becomes a trend which counteracts the global learning approach. The "One World" remains pretty far away. Distortions occur, even in the case of a harmless subject like "children's games elsewhere": home-made tin cars are in, rather than Gameboys and other modern toys. And children usually learn only the simplest variation of the "bean game" - not because the rules are so simple, but because it would take too much time to learn some of the complex rules.

I will outline later, with the help of examples, what the anti-bias approach can contribute here. First of all, I would like to show the new path which has been carved out by the anti-bias approach in the "Learning from the South" project.

### **"Learning from the South" carves out new paths**

In international work, the opportunity has been grasped to question other people and groups about how they deal with problems which we know ourselves. Partners with similar goals and visions are sought and the group works towards an exchange

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<sup>5</sup> The significance of development aid (nowadays, the term development cooperation is used more often) is fully overestimated. In a questionnaire from the Federal Ministry for Cooperation (BMZ) in 1981 and 1985, when asked which level of cooperation is financially the most significant, 39% put development aid in first place, and 26% the import of raw materials. The effectively largest cooperation level, the export of German manufactured goods, was only named by 11%. However, the latter exceeded development aid by 12-fold! (Willmsen, 2000, p 401).

based on equality. The differing needs are clarified and the power relations in which the exchange takes place are reflected upon (see Anita Reddy in this booklet). Learning, working together, developing a dialogue based on equality and cooperating on a future that makes sense are goals which are quickly formulated. However, against the background of violence in the past and at present, we gain an idea of how difficult it is to realise these goals. These power relations affect not only the relationships between states, but have also affected us as individuals. Therefore, an individual process which goes hand in hand with political objectives is necessary in order to consciously unlearn the mechanisms of oppression.

This was also recognised by pedagogues in South Africa following the legal abolition of racism and they developed anti-bias training courses (Shifting Paradigms, 1997). They also carried these out in Germany as part of the "Learning from the South" project. It is the aim of the training courses to actively reduce preconceived ideas and discrimination. To achieve this, they make us aware on an emotional level, how discrimination works and they encourage us to consciously unlearn these mechanisms. The recognition of and work with injuries and survival strategies enables a group process in which alternative ways of acting are created and the ability to create supportable alliances is reinforced (see Prasad Reddy in this booklet). In the training courses, the images and ideas which exist about the North and the South are questioned in a common dialogue. Biographical experiences of discrimination are placed at the forefront at the beginning of each course so that each individual can listen and then compare his/her pre-images with the stories which other people have really experienced.

Jace Pillay, an anti-bias trainer from South Africa, provided the people in one training course who were politically involved in development politics with the following picture: we are now like the five wise people who touch an elephant in the dark. When we find the tail or a foot, we are happy and argue with the others about who has found out the truth. The elephant in this story stands for the future development we are seeking. The darkness is our isolation and the competitiveness against each other which obstructs us. What is important, therefore, is that we find ways to cooperate and to share responsibility. Only then can we see the elephant in its entirety.

## **Putting educational work in political development into practice in everyday life**

It is possible to put into practice elements of this work even outside of anti-bias training courses and without a fixed group of people who have willingly engaged themselves in an emotionally intensive learning process. Three real examples are presented here which verify the basic attitude of anti-bias work, as sketched above, in practice.

### **1. One World begins at the front door of the Wuhlheide Leisure Centre (FEZ) in Berlin**

One practical example is the "One World in the FEZ"<sup>6</sup> project which I manage together with Virginia Alvear Galindo (Alvear Galindo/Kübler, 2002). Sometimes, the

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<sup>6</sup> The "One World in the FEZ" project is a project of the Further Training Institute for Pedagogical Practice FiPP e.V. (registered association) and has taken place since 1994 in cooperation with the FEZ Wuhlheide Leisure Centre in Berlin-Köpenick. The term "One World" became popular in the 80ies following the critical discussion of the term "Third World" which had been generally used up until then. This meant that, for example, many "Third World shops" which had come into being in the 70ies, changed their name in the 80ies to either "Worldshop" or "One World shop". While the term "Third World" draws attention, first and foremost, to the

demands of everyday life seem to be far away from the above-mentioned ideals. We are often enough confronted with one-sided images. Our task here to take up these images in the process of finding themes and working on them.

Consultation is one of our tasks; for example, when a teacher calls us up and wants to do something to combat prejudice by organising a project day on "the lives of children in Africa". Sometimes people want to see a programme which is more easy to digest, which is entertaining. Some even want a "foreigner hands-on". In our consultation work, we question clichés and make clear that Africa is a continent and not a village. That sounds trivial, but is based on experiences we have made: we experience, all too often, that Africa is identified with all that is unknown and far away and is thereby too strongly generalised about. Furthermore, in consultation sessions, we clarify what special situation exists for the class involved in order to find out the relevant theme. Together, we develop the aims and clarify how the project day's work is to be integrated in the teacher's work in class.

We are flexible when it comes to themes. Sometimes, something totally new comes up, like the project day "Journey to Germany" with a German prep class for pupils who had just come to Berlin. The children were given the opportunity to reflect on their own story and learned to see their immigration in a positive light. Different exercises and a visit to the family of one of the pupils in a residential centre for immigrants offered space for sharing experiences, including the injustice they had experienced and the emotions this caused. As an integral part of the teacher's work, we were able to reinforce the feeling of solidarity and cooperation in the class through the telling of and listening to stories about similar and different experiences of fleeing, migration and oppression. We very often create occasions which make it possible, together with the pupils and the teachers, to carry out an analysis of ingrained patterns of behaviour. Thus, we made the experience, that confusion comes about when a non-German tutor carries out a project day on the subject "constructive conflict solutions". People had expected her to talk about "drumming" or "child labour". This is our starting point for encouraging the pupils and the teachers to look for answers to the following questions: what expectations do we have? Who is allowed to talk about "our" problems? Who belongs to this "our"? How did I come to have the expectations I have? The classes gain the insight, through discussions and exercises, that their normality is relative and that it corresponds with the world views that have been conveyed to them and are a result of these.

## **2. Normal is not normal: turning world views upside down**

A second area of practice are the six-week qualification courses for educators which I run together with Barbara Habig (Kübler/Habig, 2000). The courses, titled "Diversity: A Chance" focus on global learning. One important element is to learn the ability to change one's perspective, that means being able to see the world through the eyes of another and to recognise that that which I consider to be normal does not necessarily have to be so for somebody else.

We developed a quiz for this in which the size ratios of countries were to be guessed using a Mercator projection<sup>7</sup> map as a basis (Kübler, 1996). These estimates were

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living conditions in faraway countries, and also suggests a certain 'third classness', the term "One World" emphasises the common elements which exist throughout the whole world.

<sup>7</sup> This traditional world map, which was developed by Mercator in 1569, distorts the size ratios in favour of the European colonial powers. The world map from Arno Peters which corresponds to the real surface areas was published by the Evangelical Missionary Organisation in Hamburg in 1974 in order to counter the colonial way of thinking which most world maps reflect, with a new world view.

collected from the whole group, were discussed and then the world map from Arno Peters, which corresponds to the real surface areas, was brought out. For example, Greenland and China were to be compared. Greenland appears twice as large on the Mercator map. The estimates of the participants usually lay between twice as large and almost the same size. When, at the end, the correct surface areas of the countries was given in square metres (Greenland 2.3 million, China 9.5 million), everybody was confused. "That can't be true!". They were especially shocked because, in their role as pedagogues, they had conveyed this distorted picture to many children without realising what ideology they were thereby reinforcing. Here, basic doubts arise. Heavy discussions then took place within the group: I thought the map was scientific - what can I believe in now? Where does this view of the world come from? Why are these old maps which reflect colonial thinking still in use? Why do we not have the maps with the correct representation of surface area in our school atlases? Is it chance that Europe takes a central place on the map, or does this represent historical and economic domination? Often the evaluation lasted right into the next day after the quiz had been repeated with the family at home and atlases had been investigated. When we transfer this to intercultural learning, it becomes clear how hurdles are set up with respect to intercultural contacts by unreflected, foregone conclusions and how important it is, therefore, to become conscious of one's own fixed images and to change them.

### **3. Learning from the South instead of reinforcing prejudices**

The educators carry out their own practical project as part of the same course. When it comes to global learning, many had the idea of organising an Africa week: they want to make contribution to more tolerance of foreigners by providing information about the unknown continent. However, it has been our experience, that many such well-intended projects on countries of the South only serve to reinforce existing stereotypes. Therefore, in our opinion, a view towards own prejudices must be at the forefront of preparations to avoid reducing the subject "Third World" to its exotic aspects. Here, exercises are useful which force one to confront one's own clichés (Fountain, 1996). In the "portraits" exercise, small groups are given the beginnings of stories, for example, "I am a man from a village in Chad. Today, me and several other men...". The participants then have to continue the story and paint a picture about it. When they compare the stories with photos that show the people in the stories in everyday real situations, they are very surprised. The participants are shocked at their narrow or romanticised view of things: African men are often illustrated in the pictures hunting lions or are described as mostly passive people waiting for help from outside to come. The analysis about where such pictures come from leads, among other things, to a critical examination of the children's and young people's books used in their own kindergartens (German World Hunger Aid - Deutsche Welthungerhilfe 1995).

With the help of these pre-exercises, we were able to integrate such experiences in practical projects. In the "I am me, you are you, we are us" project, the focus was deliberately not placed on a foreign child as a so-called "problem", as originally planned. It was our aim to contribute towards mutual recognition of the development of one's own identity. Children should learn to accept their own contradictions and dark sides instead of projecting them on to others. It was important here to strengthen the self-confidence of each child and to practice communication. Taking individual children in their groups and their family culture as a basis, the project made possible social learning in the whole group. Another group was came up with a new

idea because of a game of skill using small stones which a lecturer from Zambia had shown. The original idea to organise an Africa week was developed further. They reflected on what exactly should be part of the theme, and what it was about an Africa week that fascinated them so much. In doing this, they realised that their subject was actually "self-made children's games". They did not want to carry out exotic-seeming activities any more, but tidied the toys out of the schoolroom, made up some games of their own together with the children and motivated the children to ask their grandmothers and grandfathers what they used to play.

### **Whoever speaks of the South, should not remain silent in the North**

This small project from the World Peace Service (WFD) makes the following clear: something that, on first appearances, fascinates, frightens or seems far from our everyday life can be a good starting point for becoming active. "Learning from the South" is not limited to re-enacting what is attractive and fascinating about that which is strange. Rather, it creates a connection to one's own world and encourages one to apply newly-gained knowledge to one's own everyday life and to practice this there. The position which results from the anti-bias experiences outlined and supported by me here mean, within the context of educational work in political development, that support for a project in the South sometimes makes less sense than a training course to improve the communication and conflict skills in one's own working and living environment.<sup>8</sup> Trust in the process and in the ability to lead this process also becomes more important than the conveying of ideas.

Overcoming thoughts of superiority and internalised dominance is a great challenge, which makes it necessary to examine one's own structures and ideas. It is not enough to carry out educational work in political development towards the world outside. Internal processes must be initiated in order to observe blind spots within one's own organisation: is it more than a change in terminology when we nowadays no longer talk about "compensatory", but about "sustainable" development? Does it affect our subjects when our own right to exist depends on the suffering in the "Third World"? And what are we doing about building up cooperation, which is natural and based on equality, in our own cities with experts on the global world - people who have a background of migration - instead of ignoring and excluding these people. This necessary questioning of certainties is unpleasant, as it means giving up images of the world held up to now and it means putting up with the feeling of uncertainty. The seriousness of the work makes it necessary to support each other in this process and to overcome competition among us. In this process, the inner conviction that I can learn from everyone else and that everyone has something to offer helps. The anti-bias approach is a good companion on this road, as it integrates the structural-political and the personal-psychological approaches. By making people aware of their integration in and responsibility for dominance structures, this approach promotes the development of alternative modes of behaviour on an individual and societal level in a special way.

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<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, it is always a struggle, to find funding for such ideas within educational work in political development