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Improving and Increasing Global Education through a peer review process

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Eddie O'Loughlin

Improving and Increasing Global Education through a peer review process

Abstract: The article describes the motivation for, background of and first experiences with Global Education Peer Reviews. The all-European process is co-ordinated by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

The report on the feasibility study concluded that the setting up of a Europe-wide GE Peer Review process would be an effective mechanism for the further improvement and increase of GE in Europe (see box).

Background

While people are generally very supportive of the concept of learning from international comparative experience in fields such as global and development education¹, how to facilitate such learning in practice is often not so easy. One practical mechanism for encouraging such learning can be through international peer review and reporting processes. Such an approach has now been taken in the field of Global Education (GE) with the recent setting up of a peer review and national reporting process of global education in Council of Europe (COE) member states.

This process arose out of the Europe-wide Maastricht Congress on Global Education held in the Netherlands in 2002, attended by delegates from over 50 states including representatives from over 40 member states of the COE. At this Congress a Declaration on Global Education was adopted calling for a number of initiatives aimed at bringing about improved and more global education in COE member states. This text, debated and agreed by over 200 representatives of governments, local and regional authorities, parliamentarians and civil society, included a recommendation calling on the North-South Centre (NSC) to "test the feasibility of developing a peer monitoring/peer support programme, through national Global Education Reports, and regular peer reviews, in a 12-year frame". (Point 5.8 of the Declaration).

Feasibility Study

In response and as part of the follow-up to the Maastricht Congress, a Global Education Peer Review feasibility study² was carried out by the North-South Centre in 2003. The study began with a reflection on relevant existing country review processes; key questions and issues were then tested, tried and reflected upon through a pilot review of Cyprus, leading to the first Global Education Peer Review country report; and through the initiation of a Global Education Peer Review process with Finland and the production of an issues paper.

Global Education Peer Review Process

The overall aim of the review process, is *to improve and increase Global Education (GE) in member states of the Council of Europe*, as agreed in the Maastricht Global Education Declaration. The purpose of the initiative is to provide a peer support and learning process, resulting in *National Global Education Reports* developed in partnership with national actors.

Apart from being a national comparative reporting process on Global Education, it became clear in the course of the Feasibility study, that the Peer Review process can play a useful role in helping key national stakeholders develop national strategies for better and more Global Education. The Process is guided by three Principles:

1. The process starts with the existing GE situation in each country, affirming good practice and supporting new learning for improving and increasing GE.
2. The process will also involve bringing international experts in the field of GE to act as "critical friends" to the national process. Bringing comparative experience from other contexts will enhance the learning possibilities.³
3. Each national peer review will reflect the overarching aim of the process.

Cyprus Process

As mentioned above, in the course of the Global Education Peer Review feasibility study, a Global Education Peer Review of Cyprus was carried out with the production of a national report on Cyprus. There were several reasons why Cyprus was considered a country suited for a pilot review. Global Education has been an increasingly important feature of education in Cyprus in recent times. In 1999 the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus identified two pilot schools to take part in the "Global Education Week" initiative, following a proposal from the NSC. In addition, as an island state with a population of under one million, scale was another reason

why Cyprus was considered suited for a pilot GE review.

The GE peer review international team visit to Cyprus took place in October 2003. During the visit, information and insights on the state of GE in Cyprus were gathered through a series of meetings with a broad range of actors and organisations - including representatives from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Pedagogical Institute, the Secondary Teachers Association, the Non-formal Youth Sector and with Civil Society organisations.

The NSC was also a partner in a national seminar, held at the Pedagogical Institute, Nicosia, on Global Education for Secondary Teachers in Cyprus, organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Pedagogical Institute, and the Secondary Teachers Association. It was attended by over 150 teachers. Members of the review team participated in the seminar and also organised a focus group and three workshops which fed into the Cyprus GE Peer Review process and national report.

One of the key findings emphasised in the report on GE in Cyprus was the clear evidence of an openness to Global Education in all sectors of formal education, in the non-formal youth sector and among civil society organisations generally in Cyprus. The strength of the partnership between the key stakeholders on this issue was also welcomed - namely the Ministry of Education, the Pedagogical Institute, and the Secondary Teachers Association - and the openness among secondary school teachers to Global Education.

Finland Process

During the course of 2003, a review process was also initiated with Finland. There are a number of reasons why Finland can be considered an interesting case for review concerning Global Education. Finland is recognised as having achieved very high standards in its general education system (see for example, the OECD PISA study 2003). It also has a strong and growing development co-operation programme along with significant GE initiatives, such as the Global Challenge project (MFA-Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Board of Education initiative); the KEPA (Service Centre for Development Co-operation) led 'Global Education Network' project, and other important Ministry and NGO initiatives.

The GE Peer Review Secretariat made an initial visit to Finland, at the invitation of the MFA, in November 2003 to present a paper and act as resource people at a meeting of key Finnish GE stakeholders (Global Challenge Vision Day). The secretariat also held meetings with a range of key individuals and organisations in the GE field. The main aim of such an initial visit by the GE Peer Review secretariat, is to gather

information and documentation, and develop contacts, in advance of the main peer review visit.

An Issues Paper on GE in Finland was prepared by the secretariat, following the visit, to be used as a document for further reflection by key GE stakeholders in Finland. The main International Peer Review team visit will take place in the last week of April 2004, with the final report scheduled to be published in autumn 2004.

Netherlands Process

Another GE Peer Review and National Reporting process taking place in 2004 is that of the Netherlands. This will be an interesting review as the Netherlands has one of the best funded (per capita) GE/DE programmes among the DAC countries, resulting in some very innovative and interesting GE initiatives. Another interesting aspect of the review is that the coordinating structure for DE funding in the Netherlands, the Committee for Sustainable Development Education (NCDO), is also the oldest such structure among Global Education Network Europe (GENE) members.⁴ Undoubtedly there are many GE actors throughout Europe, at ministerial, NGO and other levels, who would be interested in learning more about the long Netherlands experience of running GE initiatives.

The GE Peer Review Secretariat made an initial visit to the Netherlands in March 2004 and held meetings with a range of key individuals/organisations in the GE field. The main International Peer Review team visit to the Netherlands will take place in late May 2004, with the final report scheduled to be published in autumn 2004.

Austria and Romania

Two further GE Peer Review processes which are scheduled to be initiated in 2004 include those for Romania (autumn 2004) and Austria (to be initiated in December 2004) with the review visits taking place in early 2005 along with the publication of a national report later in 2005.

Steps in the GE Peer Review Process

The following is a summary overview of the key steps in a GE Peer Review and national Reporting process:

1. Agree practicalities of how the process will be carried out/terms of reference, with the main partner(s) in the country to be reviewed, following formal engagement.

"The overall conclusion and recommendation of the Feasibility study is that the setting up of a Europe-wide GE Peer Review process will be an effective mechanism for the further improvement and increase of GE in Europe, and that this initiative should be pursued further. It is considered that it would be effective at the national level - where the process can contribute to and enhance national actors' efforts at increasing and improving Global Education. This is also true at the international level, where the production of national reports can give access to comparative learning, sharing innovation, best practice, and national strategies."

Overall Conclusion & Recommendation of the Global Education Peer Review Feasibility Study
(North-South Centre 2003)

2. The lead partner(s) in the country concerned, along with the GE Peer Review Secretariat, gathers background information on GE in the country to be reviewed.

3. This background information will take varied forms depending on the country structure and will provide the basis for a first draft National GE Report.

4. This first draft National GE Report could be drafted by the lead national partner (including both official and NGO input) and/or the GE Peer Review Secretariat.

5. The lead partner(s) in the country to be reviewed will assist the GE Peer Review Secretariat in identifying key individuals and organisations for the upcoming international team visit to the country, and with scheduling such meetings (in most cases an initial Peer Review Secretariat visit will be arranged to gather initial information and documentation from organisations, and to develop contacts, in advance of the main international team visit).

6. The material gathered above (first draft national report/background briefing material) is made available to the International Peer Review team who will be participating in the visit to the country under review (the team will usually comprise a Peer Review Secretariat and two international GE experts).

7. The international team visit to the country will involve briefings from the main GE partner(s) in the country concerned, along with other relevant actors and field visit(s) to see GE in practice.

8. The team visit to a given country could also involve the facilitation of a national process, or hearing, which can inform the country report. Conversely, national actors can use the presence of the International Peer Review Team to hold a national conference in keeping with national priorities. The International Peer Review Team will be available to input into such agreed processes.

9. Following the team visit the draft national report will be further developed based on the findings of the country visit. This draft will then be sent to the key stakeholders in the country concerned for feedback and comment, before a final draft is prepared for print by the Peer Review Secretariat.

10. Some partners may wish to have an official launch of the report.

Conclusion - added benefit of peer review

The added benefit of an external GE Peer Review and national report is clearly recognised by the key GE actors in Europe consulted during the course of the process to date. This recognition is also clearly shown through the support of key actors in Europe for the review process both through funding commitments, offers of expertise (Austria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK) and interest in being reviewed.

These national actors have emphasised that the external GE peer review process is both unique and is needed - producing national reports focused on the state of Global Education in both the formal and non-formal sectors. A number of national actors have indicated their particular interest in having an independent external review being carried out on GE in their country, and in seeing it as a mechanism in assisting

them in developing a GE national strategy.

The experience and impact of the peer review processes that have been initiated to date (in Cyprus, Finland and the Netherlands) have resulted in significant outputs.

In all cases the review process has acted as an external support mechanism, supporting national events and processes for the increase and improvement of GE, as well as reviewing the current GE situation in the country. The process has also provided opportunities for comparative learning, insight, motivation and encouragement for the ongoing and further development of Global Education.

Based on experience to date and feedback from a broad range of GE actors, the plan for 2004 is for two to three national reviews, increasing to three to five thereafter as the process builds experience and momentum. This will allow for quality to be maintained while ensuring that all COE member states can partake directly in this process of learning from international comparative experience on a rolling basis.

If you are interested in finding out more about the GE Peer Review Process, contact: eddieoloughlin@eircom.net or liam.wegimont@coe.int.

Annotations

1 The GE Peer Review process; The Maastricht Declaration on Global Education (see endnote 2 below); and the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe uses the following definition for Global Education as an umbrella term: *Global Education is education that opens people's eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. Global Education is understood to encompass Development Education, Human Rights Education, Education for Sustainability, Education for Peace and Conflict Prevention and Intercultural Education; being the Global dimensions of Education for Citizenship.*

2 The Global Education Peer Review Feasibility Study is available from the North-South Centre.

3 Our understanding of the notion of critical friends and critical learning is influenced by the literature on Action Research in Education.

4 GENE is a network aimed at sharing experience and best practice among organisations in Europe which coordinate national funding on GE/DE.

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