

World Society and the Human Being

The possibilities and limitations of global learning in dealing with change

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Abstract

This article¹ deals with understandings of change. It attempts to provide a framework for comprehending the hopes and assumptions concerning change that are implicit within global learning. The proposed framework of understanding draws on the theoretical perspectives of 'world society' (Luhmann) and '*homo absconditus*' (Plessner), and therefore places the proposed framework regarding an understanding of change within the context of an understanding of cultural functionality.

Keywords: social change, theory of global learning, system theory, philosophical anthropology

Introduction

We live in a world of fairly unmanageable social change, a world characterized by risk and insecurity. We have come to expect worldwide developments that create fundamental changes within the constitution of society. These changes do not lend themselves to easy assessment, judgement, or understanding. Information about the condition of the planet and the chance of joint survival – global South and North – are well known and widely reported, and are also dealt with within education.

The field of global learning, as I understand it (from a European, and specifically German perspective), has tried to offer opportunities for learning to deal with the challenges related to this change. I recognize that my own practical and theoretical foundations – and therefore those of this article – are deeply embedded in practices of global learning in Germany and Europe, and in understandings associated with the European 'enlightenment'. I must also acknowledge that my own practice and theory of global learning have been formed following in-depth conversations with

colleagues from India. Having done field research in selected villages of Bangladesh and India (Lang-Wojtasik, 2001), I trust that my practice and theoretical perspectives have been equally, and humbly, informed by their wisdom. At the same time, my own philosophical traditions, based on the European enlightenment, and informed by critical theory, also hold within them possibilities for liberation (see, for example, Dussel, 1996).

To understand global learning in Europe I begin with the Maastricht declaration (O'Loughlin and Wegimont, 2002) – confirmed in The Hague 2012 (GENE, 2012) – which describes the field from a political and content perspective:

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.

(O'Loughlin and Wegimont, 2002: 66)

This, like many other definitions of global education, contains within it assumptions about change. With most conceptualizations of global learning it is assumed, in a somewhat normative fashion, that education will lead to anticipated change. But the relationship between (fairly unmanageable) social change and the hoped-for change assumed in global learning may not be that simple.

The article deals with two main questions: if much is known and if we are possibly heading towards disaster concerning the survival of humankind, what are we to do, what action are we to take? And how do we understand the possibilities education might provide in dealing with the anticipated and assumed change, especially in the horizon of global learning?

Moving from the macro to the micro level, we know about the difficulties in causal planning within teaching–learning processes, due to human rationality having a 'technology-deficit' (Luhmann and Schorr, 1982) or due to our 'non-disposability' (Plessner, 1928/2003). Both terms describe the challenge due to missing causal links between human beings and the world (detailed below in the section on 'Learning options, in a meta-theoretical framework'). If causal links between the intended planning and the ultimate learning are so difficult within the limited microcosm of the somewhat controlled teaching and learning environment, why should we assume such an easy causality in the even more complex forum of unmanageable social change?

In this article I offer a descriptive meta-theoretical view on some of the main societal challenges. I refer to the theory of world society (Luhmann, 1971; 1997a; 1997b) and to a perspective from philosophical anthropology (Plessner, 1928/2003; 1969/2003), within the horizon of cultural functionality, in order to provide a theoretical frame. This, I propose, might provide a basis for viewing the assumptions and possibilities inherent in global learning for education and change.

World society and human beings in relation to culture

Perhaps world society has already surpassed its 'limits of growth' (Meadows *et al.*, 1972) and is supposed to face challenges, which need a sustainable revolution (Randers, 2012). If one examines some of the main challenges facing the planet (Datta and Lang-Wojtasik, 2013; Datta, 2013), it seems to be clear that something has to change if we are to pursue sustainability and international justice. But what is that something? If one looks at the need for radical change regarding climate policies, coupled with the seeming inability to deliver global political change in favour of climate justice, or the complex relationship between poverty and inequality, or the relationship between climate justice and food security, or the relationship between energy, security, and sustainability – in all of these areas and in many more, one sees both the challenge of change, and the uncertainty of possible outcomes.

At the core of each challenge lies a relationship between the human being and world society. This relationship is complex, and is difficult to understand in all its complexity. In order to better understand that relationship, I suggest turning to the perspectives of social theory, anthropology, and educational theory.

I propose describing the specific relationship between human beings and the world systematically, in terms of its relevance for learning, and from four perspectives: spatial, factual, temporal, social – as meaning-dimensions in the tradition of Hegel, Husserl, and Luhmann. I apply this analysis, using these four perspectives, based on a theory of world society (Luhmann, 1997a; 1997b) as well as a philosophical anthropology (Plessner, 1928/2003). Both of these meta-theories can be seen as functional, although they come from different perspectives – Luhmann starting from society looking also to persons mainly as social and psychic systems and Plessner starting from the anthropological fact of human beings as a part of community and society. In my understanding, these theoretical perspectives offer opportunities to comprehend the links between world society and the person (Luhmann, 1971) and between the human being and the world (Plessner, 1928/2003).

World society and learning challenges

Ideas of world society, of globality, of globalization are of course not uncontested and carry within them assumptions regarding global power relations. In a contemporary,

post-colonial framework it is well-nigh impossible to start with any claim to truth that pretends to be universalist or universally applicable. Nevertheless, I start within the horizon of German philosophical traditions, and wish to refer here to the system-theoretical concept of world society (Luhmann, 1971; 1997a; 1997b). From this point of view (Luhmann, 1995; 1997a), 'society' today means world society as both a problem and a communication connection on a global level. Accompanied phenomena and connections can be seen as relevant for all persons, although the perception of these phenomena and the consequences associated with them vary according to different life-contexts (Scheunpflug, 2003a; 2003b; Tremml, 2000; Lang-Wojtasik, 2011). Applying the aforementioned fourfold analytical framework (and identifying spatial, factual, temporal, and social perspectives or dimensions), the following analysis emerges.

From a *spatial perspective*, according to Luhmann, we see the emergence of a delimitation of the nation-state as a reference-horizon. We also see the emergence of the phenomena of 'glocalization' (Robertson, 1998), which describes parallel and interlinked processes of global and local developments, beyond national limitations. This process is characterized by new network-structures (Castells, 1996; 1997). The unit of the nation-state as a frame of reference characterized by certainty is eroded. The exponential growth in the use of internet-based technologies, etc. suggests that an erosion of the distinction between concrete reality and virtual reality may also challenge the solidity of the reference horizon, i.e. that to which we might be expected to refer in determining if decisions are valid, legitimate, rational, and so on (Kammerl, 2012).

From a *factual perspective*, we see that the volume of information, the growth of information, and the interrelations between differing types of information seem to be overwhelming; the pattern of this growth seems to move from complexity to somewhere beyond complexity (Russell, 1992).

Some examples will illustrate this point. We have a growing economic gap within and between nations. A globalized and rapidly changing world of work calls for alternative and flexible qualifications. We see environmental problems and know about the overconsumption of resources. Within world society many political and economic developments have causes and effects that lie beyond the nation-state, and provide challenging cases. It is clear that the global nature of such challenges is very much connected with questions of power relations. We witness conflict and war, where the role of multilateral institutions and processes are challenged by the unilateral positions of some countries.

Meanwhile, it seems to be more difficult to decide about the feasibility or success of particular individual, social, or political actions. This leads to the perception of contingency. Events can take a very different turn from that which was anticipated.

Knowing this and being aware of the many alternatives in the moment of decision-making makes it difficult to legitimate one's decision. This has significant consequences in terms of justice and sustainability as there are new and as yet untested criteria, horizons of understanding, and options for action. So what does this mean for solidarity in a globalized world?

From a *temporal perspective*, we perceive a 'shrinking of time' (UNDP, 1999: 1) concerning solutions for global challenges. Meanwhile, regular communication beyond time zones also tends to dissolve distinctions between nation-states and collapse the distances between people. News is presented virtually, and, while constant, seems to change at breathtaking speed. In consequence it becomes more and more difficult to be assured of its significance. Though time as such stays constant, it is normal to communicate beyond its limitations – for instance, when conversing with friends from Japan or India by phone or internet.

At the same time we realize that in many parts of the world we can see an acceleration of social change – that is, changes of social structure within a specific time frame (Fuchs-Heinritz *et al.*, 1995: 734) – and with this, an accompanying debate regarding the legitimization of values, issues, and interests. It seems sometimes as if anything is possible beyond any links to traditions of the past (and without openness to the 'modern' future in the present). Changes of and within society have become faster than the change of a generation, according to this understanding (Scheunpflug, 2011: 209f). This means that adults face difficulties in referring to inherited knowledge in debates with adolescents (Turkle, 2012).

From a *social perspective*, we are confronted with a massive demand towards individualization, which started with the semantics of European enlightenment, with its focus on the individual as unique, with equality and liberty as a normative horizon for everyone (Luhmann, 2005: 233). This, of course, gives rise to the perception that everyone is responsible for their own success. But referring to this leads to plurality, which can be experienced in the growing heterogeneity of life concepts. At the same time, we can see universalized orientations within the world concerning, for example, fast food or supermarkets, which seem to move towards the promotion of standardized life contexts. In the end, the social perspective is very much confronted with the difference between haves and have-nots in terms of privileges and their role in society.

This sketch of selected phenomena suggests some of the realities that surround people and with which they have to cope – whether they wish to or not. It should be made clear that against this background societal orientation and the ability to act have become difficult.

It is, therefore, no longer simple or straightforward to engage with the question: which norms and values should count and how do we know and agree? Or to engage with the related question that is at the heart of global learning: how can we educate and act to change the world towards greater justice and sustainability?

So, in conclusion, informed by Luhmann's perspective, we might say this: people today live in a risky and insecure world, characterized by an abundance of variety. That leads to the perception of unmanageability, acceleration, and ambiguity. At the same time, most people wish to have security as a basis of reflective action – and that is not surprising from an anthropological viewpoint. So at the crux of our questions lie a series of paradoxes. These are connected with *learning challenges* in the lifelong horizon, appearing as paradoxes, and can also be considered along the lines of the aforementioned, fourfold analyses. These paradoxes are outlined below:

1. **A spatial learning paradox:** In view of delimitation and glocalization, it is necessary to offer options of reference in linking spatial relations (limitation) within local contexts and to connect these to spacelessness (openness) within global connections beyond the nation-state but within the context of a world society.
2. **A learning paradox related to fact:** In view of the complexity of information and the difficulty of legitimating decisions (that is, the experience of contingency), it is necessary to deal with the fact of a growing lack of knowledge and to develop knowledge against this background, considering possible effects and side-effects, to deal with the existing insecurity of decision.
3. **A temporal learning paradox:** In view of de-temporalization and the accelerated pace of social change, it is necessary to deal with the uncertainty of planning against a non-scheduled future. At the same time, while searching for certainty it is necessary to look critically at feasible strategies learned from the past to be used constructively in the present.
4. **A social learning paradox:** In view of growing individualization and the related pluralization of life concepts, including agreed multiple variations of values, it is necessary to appreciate equally both familiarity and strangeness and to develop a preparedness to deal with the underlying tension in a multi-perspective fashion (Scheunpflug, 2003a; 2003b). I outline these analyses in tabular form below (Table 1).

Knowing about these learning challenges concerning world society, it is now necessary to turn to the people that we wish to teach, to those we wish to learn. A deeper understanding of human beings and learning is necessary before we can achieve clarity about the related possibilities and limitations.

Human beings and learning

Again I refer to a meta-theory embedded in the horizon of European enlightenment to think about the human being and his or her functional role concerning the world. This is the starting point of philosophical anthropology (Plessner, 1928/2003), referring to the Kantian question 'What is the human being?'. Plessner – coming from a zoological, biological background – suggests that we should consider the human being as part of the whole given world. He differentiates between the three main creatures – plant, animal, and human – and asks about their specific position in relation to the world. In consequence, we learn that plants are characterized by an open position (open to inputs of world phenomena such as energy from the sun). Animals, on the other hand, are characterized by a centric position (open to interaction with world phenomena like other animals but mainly centred in and on themselves). Human beings, distinct from both plant and animal life, are, in this systematization, characterized by 'eccentric position' (*exzentrische Positionalität*) concerning their being in the world.

What does Plessner mean by this 'eccentric position'? For him, the human being is distinct in that it is able to know about possible interactions with others and to go out of itself, both cognitively and affectively, in order to reflect on its position within the world and with others. This is described as a difference between the inner-world (*Innenwelt*) of the physical body (*Körper*), as given biological phenomena, and the outer-world (*Außenwelt*) of the social body (*Leib*), as social phenomena with others (*Mitwelt*) (Plessner, 1928/2003: 366–75, 383–425), being a unity in itself – a unity of difference of body as a physical and social being. A human being knows about and possesses its being. At the same time, it is able to move out of itself, reflecting and distancing itself from itself.

The human being in this understanding is characterized as *homo absconditus* (Plessner, 1969/2003) – a latent, hidden, profound fact and phenomenon – being non-disposable and non-determined concerning its own anthropological being. This understanding of what it means to be human provides possibilities of motivation to learn, change, and act, but it means also that the results, effects, or the success are unforeseeable. The *homo absconditus* is an inscrutable and unavailable creature being always confronted with various options of possibilities and imaginable futures that need continuous decisions. Drawing on Kantian philosophy, Plessner suggests defining this as the *categorical conjunctive*, describing the human being as placed and irreplaceable to deal self-reflexively with possible replaceability, compatibility, and equivalence (Plessner, 1968/2003: 339f). So a human being reflects on him or herself as a specific being but realizes that he or she is only one option of being among others.

In a *spatial perspective*, a human being is characterized by eccentric position and a categorical conjunctive. The human being has a given physical body (possessing a physical body – *Körperhaben*) and is a developed social body (creating a social body – *Leibsein*), being always confronted with a range of given possibilities needing reflective decisions. These basic assumptions offer the framework to understand the human being against the suggested anthropological ‘basic rules’ as a priori observations and reflect on these by the selected meta-perspective of meaning-dimensions.

In my Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch [‘The levels of the organic and the human being’; GLW], which introduced the concept of eccentric position and substantiated it by a theory of organic categories, I summarized these necessary possibilities from a threefold point of view: from the standpoint of the natural artificial, the immediate-mediated, and the rooted-groundless. The basic anthropological laws of natural artificiality, mediated immediacy, and utopian standpoint thus mediate between the fundamental constitution of the eccentric position and the typical modes of human activity.

(Plessner, 1970: 39)

In a *factual perspective*, the human being is characterized by natural artificiality, which describes the necessity of creation and creativity (*natürliche Künstlichkeit*). The human being knows that its physical body is only one aspect of its existence and that the social body is something that has to be worked on with others in a long reflective process. The human being realizes that its existence needs continuous completion created as culture (creation/creativity of the social body) distinct from nature (given physical body).

In a *temporal perspective*, the human being is characterized by a utopian standpoint as the location of reflection and action. As a person against its reflected difference of body as social being and body as physical being, he or she is able to create ideas and visions. These offer opportunities to move oneself to other time contexts and associated perspectives, though non-reachable and non-realizable. At the same time, this informs the human being about one’s perishableness at present concerning past and future. In consequence, the self-description of the human being in the world is associated within the horizon of the possibility of not being and also that of transcendence.

In a *social perspective*, the human being is characterized by a mediated immediateness. He or she is limited to the difference of body as social being and body as physical being, describing what is given physically and developed socially (immanence). At the same time, he or she is able to use the ability of expression to cross the given limitations in an eccentric mode of self-reflection (expressivity). This is the possibility

we have of dealing with the social world of others. The human being is related to the world only indirectly through various 'media', being created issues (what) and being performed in a specific form (how). The most important and nearly uncontrollable forms of expression are laughing and crying, being in the first instance limitation-reactions (*Grenzreaktionen*) of the physical body, but also having an impact on the social body in relation to others. Human beings in this understanding take masks as social roles; smiling is an example here of a controllable form of expression (Plessner 1968/2003; 1928/2003: 383–425).

Linking these anthropological 'basic rules' to the description of learning challenges concerning change, we get the following picture:

1. Dealing with the open closeness of the human being within the world means a limitation. As the given difference of physical and social body related to others, which can be observed by self-reflection (eccentric position), it also means appreciating the possibilities as given options (the 'categorical conjunctive' – which is not an imperative!).
2. The possible ability to transform information to knowledge by education requires dealing with the necessity of the human being to appreciate creativity in reciprocity with nature. This knowledge is, however, always less than the attendant lack of knowledge.
3. The awareness of the utopian position concerning time allows a human being to reside in the realm between invalidity and transcendence. This offers possibilities for orientations creating security in the present, while offering options to deal with the insecurity as normality.
4. Appreciating the immediateness as a mediated fact of the human being within the tension of immanence (I-relation) and expressivity (to step out of oneself and to rely on others to reflect on oneself) allows one to position oneself within the paradox of 'Familiarity and Strangeness' and within the tension of 'Self- and External-description.'

In conclusion, I state that this theoretical perspective – embedded in the viewpoint of European enlightenment – offers a chance to deal reflectively with the certainty of given uncertainty, because of the nature and culturality of being in the world, creating manmade risk beyond the danger that is a natural given. This is just one possible approach among others, grounded in German and European traditions of thought, which helps in understanding the chances and limitations of the human being living in a world, perceived as unmanageable, accelerated, and ambiguous.

A summarizing overview on world society, the human being, and learning challenges is given in Table 1.

Table 1: World society, learning challenges, and the human being

	World society (Luhmann)	Learning challenges (Scheunpflug)	Human being (Plessner)
Spatial	Delimitation of the nation-state/society and glocalization	Openness and limitation	Eccentric position of physical and social body as well as categorical conjunctive
Factual	Complexity and contingency	Knowledge and lack of knowledge	Natural creation/creativity
Temporal	Detemporalization and acceleration	Certitude and incertitude	Utopian location between invalidity and transcendence
Social	Individualization and pluralization	Familiarity and strangeness	Mediated immediateness between immanence and expressivity

Culture

The theoretical perspectives drawing on Luhmann and Plessner outlined raise questions concerning the underlying concept of culture, especially beyond the discourse of intercultural education, where culture is often reduced to national culture (Lang-Wojtasik, 2011: 241ff). It becomes clear that the concept of culture used is very much a functional one. I find the following expanded definition of culture to be useful in creating a basis for an innovative understanding of what is visible in the cultural discourse.

Culture is the entity of collective orientation pattern of a life-context (including material manifestations) used by human beings or groups of them to position oneself in the world.

(Nieke, 2008: 50–65)

This definition offers an opportunity to include national-cultural perspectives as well as perspectives that view culture from a societal or anthropological point of view.

Against the background of system theory, starting from the perspective of a world society, culture can be described as a semantic remembrance and functional system of world society, one that is not congruent with national society (Luhmann, 1995; 1997a; Lang-Wojtasik, 2013: 18ff). Culture in this understanding is functional in general (spatial) and allows for the possibility of observing and describing society from a multiplicity of perspectives (Lang-Wojtasik, 2013: 20). Culture is to be seen as a pool of themes (factual) to offer contingency breaks and legitimate decisions referring to culture as a mediating factor between interaction and language (Luhmann, 1995: 163). Culture is an optional societal memory and filter of temporal decision-making that allows human beings to deal inclusively with the perceivable openness concerning time. Culture, in this understanding, allows us to create options for certitude in spite of increasing incertitude. Finally, culture offers possibilities for

transcultural reference (Welsch, 2012) and multiple life concepts (social). It includes reference to the fact that we all have the equal right to be different. Starting from the human being, culture is a necessity for the individual concerning the collective (Plessner, 1928/2003; Lang-Wojtasik, 2013: 20ff). To further elaborate:

1. Culture is the frame of the possibility for an unfolding of community, and it is fundamental to the possibility of society.
2. The natural human being (that is, the biological fact of humanity) as person needs culture as created artefacts, to offer the probability of society. The human being has to deal with world-related subjects, created by him or herself or as the 'products' of others.
3. The human being as a person needs a standpoint between invalidity and transcendence, appearing in the *modus irrealis* that is non-determinant as unreality against the present. This location can be viewed in the present only as a utopian project to create options that might be cultivated. This also creates the foundation to look out for orientation within the flow of time and to assess or to judge whether or not these options or choices are reasonable.
4. Enculturation is possible in the encounter with oneself and between oneself and others. It occurs in the tension of immanence and expressivity (mediated immediateness) as well as in the process of immanence-expressivity with others.

Summarizing this in tabular form below (Table 2), and relating it to Scheunpflug's learning challenges, we see the following:

Table 2: Learning challenges and culture

	Learning challenges (Scheunpflug)	Functionality of culture (Luhmann)	Functionality of culture (Plessner)
Spatial	Openness and limitation	Generalized functionality and multi-perspectivity of culture	Culture and society/ community
Factual	Knowledge and lack of knowledge	Culture as a thematic pool	Culture and nature
Temporal	Certitude and incertitude	Culture as societal memory and filter of decision	Cultivation
Social	Familiarity and strangeness	Transcultural references and multiple life-concepts	Enculturation

Global learning, education, and change

Concepts and focus of global learning

Looking at existing concepts of global learning (Lang-Wojtasik and Klemm, 2012), we see educational offers dealing with the 'limits of growth' and necessary 'sustainable revolution' in a global context focusing on the hope for awareness-raising and change (Lang-Wojtasik, 2010). The main idea behind all this can be found already in the suggestions of Immanuel Kant and his vision of cosmopolitanism (Scheunpflug, 2008; Trembl, 1996). The focused questions underlying this are: 'what role should the human being play to create the world in a human way, what is the meaning of education, and what are the possibilities and necessities within education that may be used within the existing potential' (Lang-Wojtasik, 2010: 116).

Global learning is defined as an educational response to the realities of world society, starting with the description of given facts and connections as learning challenges (Scheunpflug and Schröck, 2000). It includes looking beyond assumed normative beliefs (Bühler, 1996). Global learning is, in this view, argued as having an educational meaning for everyone because of its being part of lifelong learning processes and being linked to various given concepts – that is, development education, sustainable development, and citizenship education (Bourn, 2001) – now also being discussed under the term *world citizenship education* (Bourn, 2008). Concepts of global perspective can be summed up as interdependence, citizenship/stewardship, diversity, sustainable development, social justice, values and perceptions, and human rights (Bourn, 2001: 332f).

From a slightly different perspective, global learning can be understood to relate to four interconnected fields – under the umbrella of sustainability and international justice. These are: development, interculturality, environment, and peace (Scheunpflug and Schröck, 2000). All of these fields have their own traditions and educational concepts. So it is definitely a challenge to clarify what is the umbrella and what are the pillars of the understanding. Though global learning arises from a variety of settings, some of which are situated outside the formal system of education, there is also growing debate regarding how to link the field more to the current education policy discourse (Wegimont, 2013). This has been mainly associated with a focus on competencies (Lang-Wojtasik and Scheunpflug, 2005). In the German context, a four-year policy-building process between the Ministries of Education of the Länder and the German Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation led to the creation of an agreed orientation framework. This framework links the debates of global learning to the discourse of competencies and offers a threefold set of competence areas – recognize, review, act (BMZ/InWEnt/ISB/KMK, 2007). This paper is helpful in outlining systematic connections between long-standing discourses and the necessary innovations in schools. Although the underlying understanding

of competence is often limited to cognitive aspects (Weinert, 2001), it is helpful in creating new opportunities to deploy an understanding of competencies in the field of global learning going back to the roots of education theory (Roth, 1971). That means focusing on the rationality of the human being beyond measurable cognitive achievements and linking this to self, factual, and social competences (ibid.: 180). Against this background, it could be helpful to find out how societal participation could be created and interlinked abilities of creation could be made possible.

While the aforementioned approaches to global learning have many different nuances, and differ widely in terms of, say, models of education and of social change, local and global, what they have in common is a clear link between educational processes and social change in the world, and an assumption that these educational processes will, *somehow*, lead to change in a particular direction.

In summary, we see that the understanding of global learning assumes an engagement with social change, based on hope for change through education against the horizon of sustainability and international justice, which are necessary from a political and educational point of view but which remain unreflected in regard to actual feasibility.

Learning options, in a meta-theoretical framework

Looking at the situation of the world, the known necessities of change and the limitations of action, we have to ask how we can motivate people to reflect on societal issues and on associated action. This means that we must also ask what kind of offers are needed educationally in order to provide the information and knowledge that people need, and in order to provide them with possibilities for them to create change – knowing that neither society, nor the human being, is determinable.

I myself propose that a human future of the planet is possible only with joint cooperation between the global North and South, that an understanding of development beyond economy is necessary, and that prosperity without consumption is an alternative. It can also be argued that sharing is more feasible than owning in terms of innovative norms and values, that just distribution is a requirement as the gap between and within countries in terms of poor and rich is widening. Furthermore, it can be argued that education creates chances for constant change concerning rationality, that education for all should be the basis when thinking about opportunities for all on the planet, and that a detachment of development and education from economic criteria is a necessity when talking about a world society with a human face (Datta and Lang-Wojtasik, 2013; see also www.globaleducationfirst.org/).

From a learning-theory point of view, the challenge can be focused on the limitations of incorporation of 'a global perspective into the subject because of lack of confidence

and skills to address the complexity of development and global themes, which is suggested as a research base for teachers to work on (Bourn, 2012: 6). So we have to be aware that working only on knowledge and its increase doesn't make sense at all. The important question then becomes: how to reach the minds of people and help them reflect on their possibilities for action in a global horizon and cognizant of their role within the world of today?

The underlying question of whether or not societal change is possible through education is not a new one within education theory (Trembl, 2006a). It leads to challenges in clarifying at least four terms – society, improvement, development, education (Trembl, 2006b: 22f). These are used often within related debates based on assumptions and underlying hopes on the basis of specific norms and values. Looking at the discourse of global learning, there are the two norms that appear to be accepted by most both in theory and in practice and which offer a feasible semantic horizon: global sustainability and justice.

Taking account of the limitations outlined above, of the human being as *homo absconditus* and the associated non-disposability and non-determinability concerning the anthropological being (Plessner, 1969/2003), we can already assess possible challenges concerning education and learning. Looking at these from the perspective of system theory (Luhmann, 1995; 1997a), we can learn that education is basically confronted with a 'technological deficit' (Luhmann and Schorr, 1982): human beings can't be described as input-output machines.

The challenge of rationality means that learners are free people with their own rational minds, capable of deciding for themselves what they wish to learn. So it is extremely difficult to set legitimate goals to be reached. There is also the challenge of causality, which means that teaching aims to get people to learn. At the same time it is their free decision to learn things other than those set goals, which can be described as side-effects and open the mind to the interconnectivity and multi-levelled reality of teaching-learning processes.

There is also the challenge of double contingency, which means that learners know about their liberty and about the liberty in the thinking of others, which is already part of the expectations within the communication processes of both the partners. Let us summarize: if educators want people to learn specific things, they can be sure that people might also learn the opposite. In terms of communication, this knowledge is present in the interactions and expectations of both the communication partners and the anticipated actions.

The position of *homo absconditus* (Plessner, 1928/2003) underlines the limitation of learning opportunities, and the position of technological deficit offers a chance to deconstruct educational hope.

Consequences and reflective perspectives: proposing a model of reflexive difference learning

What might we learn from the ideas presented above? If it seems as though I am arguing against the possibility of education for change then this is certainly not the case. On the contrary! Rather, I contend that we need to think about the 'why' and 'how' of global learning for change concerning justice and sustainability. I seek to offer meta-theoretical perspectives based on German and European traditions in education, sociology, and anthropology, to reflect on the challenges being visible when thinking about the possibilities and limitations of global learning within the semantics of change through education. It should be clear that the assumed links between education and change deal with a non-explicit understanding of culture as the engine of possibilities.

In writing this I should also be clear that, in my view, in general, pedagogy without hope for change is useless. Hope for change is at the heart of all decent education. If this is so generally, it is especially so when it comes to education regarding sustainability and global justice. Most teachers know that good education is founded on hope and conviction, and that the possibility of action for change is at the heart of good education. In terms of global learning, we should be clear about differentiating societal descriptions concerning people from the anthropological possibilities of human beings in the world. This is necessary if we are to understand the opportunities made possible by the hoped-for learning processes as teaching results. Especially when we as teachers get the impression that we clearly know where the world should move, theoretical reflection might help in understanding why everything might be different in the end (Lang-Wojtasik, 2013).

I believe that it is helpful to differentiate systematically between two understandings of the term *reflexivity* in the understanding that one is able to turn one's back to the essence of its being in society (*Rückwendung*, as refers to oneself or society). The two meta-theories referred to in this article are based in the perspective of difference – being meaningful for educational reflections (Lang-Wojtasik, 2009; 2012). In the terminology of system theory (Luhmann 1995; 1997a), reflexivity can be understood as self-reference of society – within the unity of system-environment-difference – to describe the functionality of person and (world) society. In the terminology of philosophical-anthropological theory (Plessner, 1928/2003), reflexivity is understood as self-reflection to mark functional relations between the human being in its unity of the difference of physical and social body towards the world.

Linking this to educative reflexivity, we can state that within system theory a general inclusion of person is supposed to be possible through functional systems, which can be observed to be self-referential. Concerning learning processes, this is to be seen mainly in the education system and the school as its organizational differentiation,

proving its ability to deal with the manifold variations of world society (Lang-Wojtasik, 2008). Concerning self-reflexivity, it is the ability of the human being within the world that is important: being able to think about one's positioning as the difference of the physical and social body in an eccentric way and observe available connection opportunities to the specific educational environment, that is, offering options for social change.

From this perspective, then, we might focus on the relationship between educational goals and reflexive difference learning (Lang-Wojtasik, 2011: 248ff), again using the fourfold systematization above, building on previous insights.

In a *spatial perspective*, institutional places of learning would be characterized as offering space for a limited glocal abstraction, with a self-referential link between global and local as the basis of observation. At present they seem to operate within this framework. The given generalized functionality and multiple perspectives of culture create opportunities for self-reflexive processes, where the *homo absconditus* can position him or herself within multi-local life contexts concerning given possibilities. This is possible because of the eccentric position as a basis for self-reflection in the light of virtuality and concretion dealing with new media or global partnerships as part of exchange programmes in the here and now by means of selected themes and social contacts.

In a *factual perspective*, culture as an assumed pool of themes offers the chance for manifold connection possibilities to learn about rationale selection and breakable contingency. The anthropological construct of natural creation/creativity of the human being offers an analytical possibility to reduce options of the world society through exemplary intercultural issues and to offer options for the human being in the world to understand the possible multiplied perspectives in relation to the individual and/or the collective through (material) manifestations. In terms of teaching and learning, it is an opportunity to deal with perspective change and contradictions as the basis for reflective processes.

Regarding the *temporal* dimension, the described location can offer 'filtered' decisions relative to its connectivity to world society. Taking this perspective, it is possible to ask anthropological questions about the conditions for possibilities of the temporal location of the human being. Culturalization describes the utopian location of the *homo absconditus* between invalidity and transcendence. In both meta-theoretical perspectives, the sustainable orientation concerning change and acceleration offers parallel connectivities between past and future, thereby creating constancy. To realize this it seems important to use the possible chances of intergenerational snapshots in the here and now; that is, reflected interaction between people from different age groups to learn about various temporal links concerning values, norms, and aims. The utopian position of the human being offers

a prominent chance for reflection concerning the continuously innovating unclarity of a variation-manifold world society.

In a *social perspective*, the growing 'individual plurality' presents a challenge to any assumption that we can understand culture from a merely national viewpoint. Taking this beyond monocultural understandings, it means talking about transcultural links and multiplied life contexts. On this basis, one can take cooperative plurality as a given option regarding heterogeneity and diversity as normality. It includes the equal otherness of everyone as the basis of community and society. To do so, it is important to focus on the mediated immediateness of the human being – that is, in what way can immanence and expressivity be balanced in the context of the reflected unity of physical–social–body difference? It is meaningful to try for cordial appraisal and empathy for the individual in its entity being part of a variable collective. Possible options can be seen in constructive shapes of communication and dealing with conflicts as normality – to be tried especially in the field of non-violent communication.

Building, then, on the meta-theoretical perspectives outlined above, and also referring to the application of Scheunpflug, Table 3 summarizes these positions, and goes beyond them, to propose a fourfold model of reflexive difference learning: reflecting understandings of society and of the human being that provide reflective possibilities for social change and change through education.

In conclusion, I opt for innovative approaches in global learning and connected concepts starting from a reflexive difference learning – embedded in the difference theories of Luhmann (system and environment) and Plessner (physical and social body) – a model that might open windows for reflecting about the paradoxes of world society and *homo absconditus* in its relevance for education.

The described paradoxes of world society help us understand the global dimension as interlinked to local development. This theoretical perspective offers a deeply focused comprehension of connections within present society – as a societal framework for semantics in global learning. The anthropological figure of *homo absconditus* informs about the necessity of culture concerning the human being within the world with others – opening options for learning and creation/creativity. The two meta-theories confront the discourse on global learning in offering options to deal with the underlying complexity being addressed within semantics of hoped-for change. This might help us to understand the limitations and chances of societal change as the general hope of global learning and the possibilities of change through educative approaches. This invites us to clarify our understanding of underlying norms as important features for any education process, as limited starting points for new approaches.

Table 3: World society, the human being, culture, and global learning: towards a model of reflexive difference

	World society (Luhmann)	Learning challenges (Scheunpflug)	Functionality of culture (Luhmann)	Human being (Plessner)	Functionality of culture (Plessner)	Reflexive difference-learning of society and the human being	
						Self-referentiality	Self-reflection
Spatial	Delimitation of the nation-state/society and glocalization	Openness and limitation	Generalized functionality and multi-perspectivity of culture	Eccentric position of physical and social body and categorical conjunctive	Culture and society/ community	Limited glocal abstraction	Multi-local life-world orientation
Factual	Complexity and contingency	Knowledge and lack of knowledge	Culture as a thematic pool	Natural artificiality (creation/ creativity)	Culture and nature	Exemplary intercultural issues	(Material) manifestations within multi-perspectivity
Temporal	Detemporalization and acceleration	Certitude and incertitude	Culture as societal memory and filter of decision	Utopian standpoint between invalidity and transcendence	Cultivation	Sustainable orientation by snapshots at present	Intergenerational snapshots at present
Social	Individualization and pluralization	Familiarity and strangeness	Transcultural references and multiple life-concepts	Mediated immediateness between immanence and expressivity	Enculturation	Cooperative plurality	Appraisal and empathy of individual within collective

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Note

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