

# What do young people learn when sponsoring a child in the Global South? Empirical findings from Germany

Marina Wagener\* – *Otto-Friedrich-University of Bamberg, Germany*

## Abstract

This paper describes and analyses the results of research into the learning experiences of young people in Germany who sponsor a child living in the Global South as part of their school activities. First, the research context and methodological approach is presented. A qualitative-reconstructive design was applied using the documentary method of analysis to identify implicit knowledge structures. Second, the central findings, particularly three reconstructed types of learning experiences – concretization, generalization, dissociation – are presented and illustrated by extracts from the empirical data. Third, the discussion of the results reveals the limits of global learning from child sponsoring.

**Keywords:** child sponsoring; global learning; development education; qualitative research

## Introduction

The following paper is based on the author's dissertation on learning in child sponsoring (Wagener, 2018a) and is an adapted version of a summary of the findings of this research in German language (Wagener, 2018b). It focuses on central findings from a research project on the learning experiences of young people in Germany who are engaged in child sponsorship programmes for children in countries of the Global South as part of their school activities. Child sponsorships are a common option for people in so-called industrialized countries to support a child (the 'sponsored child') in a country of the Global South. In the German context, there is a variety of small and sometimes even private initiatives and organizations offering different forms of child sponsoring. However, the central sponsorship agencies are the five large international development organizations: Plan International Deutschland, World Vision Deutschland, Kindernothilfe, SOS-Kinderdörfer weltweit and ChildFund Deutschland. Plan International Deutschland is the most successful provider with more than 300,000 existing sponsorships in Germany in 2015. In most sponsorship programmes the money is therefore donated to a non-governmental development organization that runs programmes in the respective country from which the sponsored child benefits. Through child sponsorships, sponsors thus support a non-governmental development organization in their work for a child and its environment in a country in the Global South. In response to paying monthly contributions, the donors – in this study young people in Germany who sponsor a child as part of their school activities – receive information about the child, the overarching development project and also the child's country. In addition, sponsors can communicate with the sponsored child via letters.

According to Watson and Clarke (2014), child sponsorships are therefore characterized by three aspects: they are based on regular donations, grounded on the idea of supporting individual children, and involve a form of regular personal reporting to the sponsors. Sponsorship is also undertaken by schools or individual school classes, as well as non-school youth groups. In the following, the learning experiences of these young people who sponsor a child as a group will be presented. The findings are the outcome of a qualitative reconstructive research project in which learning experiences were reconstructed through analysing group discussions by means of the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2010).

## **Research context: Learning experiences of young sponsors**

The participation of young people in child sponsorships can be understood as a process that takes place in the combination of encounter, action and learning in a North–South context. First, young sponsors encounter a previously unknown person, the sponsored child, and second, they make a financial contribution and hope that the child will benefit from this. Third, these two first facets and their specific links are often associated with the expectation of learning. The personal assistance made possible through sponsoring is frequently considered a learning opportunity regarding global developmental issues, especially by non-governmental development organizations that are offering child sponsorships. This is especially the case when it comes to schools engaging their students in sponsoring activities. When pupils take on sponsorships as part of their lessons or as an extracurricular activity, the sponsorship is expected to raise awareness of global societal challenges. This perspective is particularly important, since the mere collection of donations in schools seems problematic with regard to the educational tasks of this institution, especially in terms of political education. For the German context, the Beutelsbach Consensus, and in particular its prohibition on overwhelming students in order to impart desirable opinions, is of relevance here (see Reinhardt, 2016). School-based learning must contribute to a more differentiated understanding of global issues, and the commitment of non-governmental development organizations in schools must be justified in terms of the initiated learning processes (Scheunpflug, 2007). For this reason, having sponsorships in a school context must be accompanied by the expectation that learning processes regarding global issues take place.

As a tool for international aid, child sponsorships point to the problem of serious social disparities and pronounced economic differences in the world. At the same time, complex social questions, such as unequal living conditions, are reified as individual support relationships between people in countries of the Global North (here, young sponsors at German schools) and people in countries of the Global South (here, sponsored children). The learning experiences taking place in such a context have not been extensively researched to date. Concerning sponsoring advertisements, researchers have identified a problematic tendency towards simplified and little differentiated representations of developmental issues (see Horlemann, 1989; Jefferess, 2002; Scheunpflug, 2005a; Manzo, 2008). Empirical studies on perspectives of adult sponsors in the United Kingdom (Rabbitts, 2013) and Canada (Ove, 2013) have shown that these sponsors see themselves as charitable persons easing the situation of a poor child in the Global South and thereby ‘chang[ing] a life’ (Ove, 2013: 200). Furthermore, it has been shown empirically that asymmetric types of action towards

global challenges such as charity-based activities (e.g. donations) are associated with asymmetrical and paternalistic world views (see, for example, Asbrand, 2007, 2009).

This empirical finding is in line with many scholars emphasizing that benevolent activities might support paternalistic understandings of development according to which the need for development is located in the South and thereby solidify the image of a needy South and a giving North (see, for example, Smith, 2004; Jefferess, 2008; Bryan and Bracken, 2011; Tallon, 2011). With regard to encounter settings in a North–South context various scholars have argued that encounter does not automatically lead to a reduction and reflection of stereotypes (among others, Thomas, 1991; Scheunpflug, 1997; Lang-Wojtasik and Scheunpflug, 2002; Krogull and Landes-Brenner, 2009). Findings from empirical research on North–South encounters of young people (see Davies and Lam, 2009; Jorgenson, 2014; Krogull, 2016) and on North–South school partnerships (e.g. Disney, 2005; Pickering, 2008; Andreotti, 2011; Martin, 2011; Leonard, 2014) point in the same direction. With regard to child sponsoring, there are therefore concerns that it might convey simplistic understandings of ‘development as charity’ (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004: 661), as well as oversimplified approaches to global challenges, and not lead to a questioning of stereotypes. In many respects, however, there is a lack of reliable knowledge about learning in the specific setting of child sponsoring. In particular, the learning experiences of young sponsors have not been addressed empirically so far. Against this backdrop, the research project outlined here focused on the question of learning experiences of young people in Germany, who engage in sponsoring a child in the Global South.

## Methodological approach

Since, to date, only very little research concerning sponsorship has been carried out (see Ove, 2013; Rabbitts, 2013; Scheunpflug, 2005a) and only little is known about the learning experiences of sponsors – especially about those of young sponsors – this research project focused on generating hypotheses. The research question was therefore addressed by using a qualitative-reconstructive design. The so-called documentary method of analysis (Bohnsack, 2010) was used to analyse data gathered in group discussions with young people in Germany who, as a group, sponsor a child in a country in the Global South. The focus was on young sponsors that engage with child sponsoring in the context of their school, meaning that their school class or sometimes even the whole school is sponsoring a child. In a theoretical sampling process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), 29 group discussions with young sponsors were conducted. At the beginning, groups were chosen according to theoretical sampling criteria, such as differences in age and school type, which were identified based on existing knowledge from other studies in the field of global learning (see Asbrand, 2009). Sponsors from different development organizations were included. In the process of analysis, groups were then chosen according to aspects that were identified as relevant in the progressing analysis of the discussions. For example, there are groups in the sample engaged in letter exchange with their sponsored child and groups who are not in personal contact with the child. However, although all categories that emerged as relevant in the analysis were included in the sampling process, the sample is not fully saturated, for example with regard to the educational background of young sponsors. The idea of collecting data through group discussions is to give participants (here, young sponsors) the chance to express what is important to them and not to restrict their expressions by pre-formulated questions (for information on group discussions, see Loos and Schäffer, 2001).

The approach of the documentary method (see Scheunpflug *et al.*, 2016) follows Mannheim's (1980) sociology of knowledge that distinguishes between communicative-generalizing and conjunctive knowledge. While the notion of communicative-generalizing knowledge points to explicitly available and thus communicable knowledge, the term conjunctive knowledge refers to implicit, action-guiding knowledge, which individuals cannot express themselves. It refers to 'knowledge stocks that are not located on the surface of conscious and clear explicable attitudes and values, but which are beneath the surface and affect behaviour indirectly' (Scheunpflug *et al.*, 2016: 10). This conjunctive knowledge is based and acquired in fundamental experiences (e.g. child sponsoring) that groups of individuals share with each other.

Following this distinction, the analysis of the group discussions focused on tacit knowledge structures that were identified by the means of two different steps of analysis. First of all, the analysis focused on 'what' the young sponsors talk about and on what they say in terms of content, thereby extracting explicit knowledge demonstrated by participants (formulating interpretation). In a second step, this focus shifted towards 'how' they talk about and discuss certain issues (reflecting interpretation). The methodological assumption here is that this focus makes visible the implicit knowledge structures, also referred to as orientations (Scheunpflug *et al.*, 2016: 9). By drawing on this well-established methodology of the documentary method, this qualitative research project developed a comprehensive picture of the sponsorship-related learning processes with regard to global orientations in the context of the world society. The comparative analysis of all the group discussions allowed the reconstruction of dominant patterns of orientation and led to the development of a typology of orientations within child sponsoring (for information on different processes of typification within the documentary method, see Bohnsack, 2007; Nentwig-Gesemann, 2013; Nohl, 2013).

## Empirical findings

A first central result of the study is that the sponsorship is experienced as a care situation, in which the young sponsors themselves participate as givers and the child in the Global South acts as the recipient of the welfare relationship. The empirical evidence shows that primarily economic differences between the two sides are decisive for the construction of this asymmetry. While the young sponsors consider themselves as materially and economically superior and thus in the position to help, they perceive the sponsored child as characterized by neediness. Young sponsors in Germany therefore construct themselves in an asymmetrical relationship with the person they support, the child in a country of the Global South.

The second important result of the study is that the young people are guided by the expectation that the sponsorship is an authentic form of action and enables the experience of an authentic relationship. It is central for the young sponsors that the sponsorship establishes an authentic situation in the sense that they *actually* are caregivers of a *real* child. They expect a true and credible insight into the life of a distant person. Experiencing their own *real* participation in a welfare or caregiving relationship is the basis of every engagement with the sponsorship.

The third crucial finding refers to three different types of orientations within child sponsoring. While all groups share the perception of being in an asymmetric relationship based on authenticity, three types of orientation patterns in dealing with asymmetry and authenticity were reconstructed. The first is characterized by processes of *concretization*, in which the construction of a personal connection towards the

individual sponsored child is central. The second pattern is coined by processes of *generalization*, through which the Global North and the Global South appear as total contrasts with the former being superior to the latter. The third pattern is defined by *dissociation* processes, through which the sponsorship itself, and therefore also the asymmetric context in general, is perceived as inauthentic and therefore rejected. In the following, these three types of orientation are presented, each on the basis of an exemplary extract from one of the discussions. This form of presentation was chosen despite the fact that the reconstructed types are ideal types (Weber, 1968) that can be identified in different group discussions (for a detailed reconstruction of the types from the entire sample of the study, as well as more detailed transcripts of the discussions, see Wagener, 2018a).

### Concretization

The first type of orientation was named concretization, since the central feature of this type is a focus on the concrete and individual sponsored child. The young sponsors feel a personal care relationship to this specific child. The type was developed as an ideal type by means of various group discussions in the sample, but will be illustrated below in an excerpt from the discussion of group Phoenix, which consists of six young sponsors from grade seven (approximately 11–12 years old). For reasons of anonymization, the groups were named after different types of birds. Moreover, all names of countries, sponsored children and other names mentioned in the discussions have been changed. Participants of the discussions were identified with a letter (in alphabetical sequence) followed by ‘f’ for female and ‘m’ for male. If the audio did not allow the identification of a particular participant this was indicated by a question mark (e.g. ‘?m’).

The students of group Phoenix talk about a crisis in the sponsored child’s family – more precisely about conflicts between the parents who separated shortly before – based on which they think about donating more money to their sponsored child:

- Cm: The mother sued the father—  
 ?m: Yes ... so  
 Cm: and I think at the moment there is a lawsuit or so—  
 ?m: Yes  
 Fm: Yes and for this he now wrote to us ... whether that ... somehow more money ... somehow that his mother can finance the lawsuit—  
 Dm: Yes, he is on his mother’s side  
 Fm: yes, he is on his mother’s side ... because the father hit him all the time ... —  
 Dm: Yes  
 Fm: yes and he now has problems in the family and thus he asked us for some more money ...

(Group Phoenix, passage ‘family crisis’, 0:39:02–0:42:32, l. 16–29)

As becomes apparent here, and also in the progress of the discussion, a very specific, current and precarious situation in the life of the sponsored child becomes the reason for wider financial support of the child. The sponsorship is understood by these young sponsors as a welfare structure for a concrete person whose need for help is a result of specific circumstances. The young people take on a position of responsibility towards their sponsored child and describe themselves as the ones who are asked for support and help in the event of an emergency. This brief excerpt therefore presents a

perspective on the sponsorship as a support structure for a concrete person to whom the young people maintain a personal relationship. Donating in the context of the sponsorship is understood as being directed at the specific child.

Focusing on the individual child, as shown in the excerpt from Phoenix, is typical of a mode of concretization visible in the entire empirical data of the study, in which the sponsorship is perceived as a concrete care relationship. The focus is on the sponsored child, who is considered an individual with a personal identity and therefore his or her own interests, hobbies and ambitions. In a different extract from the same group discussion, for example, the students talk about the plans of the sponsored child to study natural sciences at university and that they are going to support him in following these plans. The child is seen as an authentic counterpart, and the caring situation is integrated into an authentic and personal relationship, which is associated with a certain responsibility. The young people are guided by their responsibility for the well-being of their sponsored child.

### Generalization

A second typical orientation, which was also reconstructed and developed by means of various group discussions in the sample, is characterized by the generalization of the welfare structure of the sponsorship to a welfare relationship between the Global North and the Global South. In the following, this orientation will be illustrated by the example of the group Owl, which consists of seven pupils from grade 12 (approximately 17–18 years old). In the course of talking about the letter exchange with the boy called Niam whom they sponsor, the young sponsors consider sending him photos from their life context:

- Af: We can take more pictures generally ... so that he can imagine it better ...—  
?f: Yes  
?f: Hmh  
Df: Of one [unintelligible]  
Cf: Yes  
Af: I don't know because for examp- yes, for example ... or maybe just from home from everyday things, right? I think Niam cannot imagine how we live for example ...  
?f: I don't think so too  
Gf: I could also ...  
Af: So I don't know because ... for example ... people in Africa ... they ... I don't know there is maybe electricity in some houses but for example no running water or something similar and I think ... he cannot imagine this suddenly a water faucet—  
?f: Hmh  
Af: or a shower a bath tub and ... a proper kitchen  
?f: (laughing) yes (laughing)  
?f: Yes a [unintelligible]  
Af: I think ... it would somehow be cool I think or he would be happy simply if we sent him more pictures.

(Group Owl, passage 'experience', 0:26:07–0:33:17, l. 162–84)

In this sequence, the students think about why photos from their lives could be interesting for Niam and ask themselves what photos would be suitable for sending.

They consider photos of 'everyday things' to be relevant, because from their perspective Niam cannot imagine these. It is clear, in this short excerpt, that assumptions about the life context of the sponsored child form the basis on which the young sponsors act in their sponsorship: they assume that a sponsored child in an African country is unfamiliar with the objects of everyday life in Germany and that he would thus be happy to see pictures of these things. This assumption is accompanied by the notion that their own everyday life differs significantly from that of people in an African country. The sequence also reveals the ways in which way differences are perceived between the life of 'people in Africa', who are collectively seen as one homogeneous unit, and their own lives: they assume that there might be electricity in some African households, but, in their understanding, there is neither running water, nor water faucets, showers or 'proper kitchen[s]'. The young people describe living conditions in Africa as deficient and do not make any distinctions; a stereotypical understanding of a poor and needy Africa is documented. When thinking of sending their sponsored child photos of objects that they assume are not available in Africa, the young sponsors implicitly oppose this image of a needy Africa with their own living conditions. They construct life in Africa as a contrast to their own life and thereby adopt a clear hierarchy: the life of the sponsored child is largely lacking what is normal for them.

This sequence stands as an example for several discussions in the empirical data, in which not only a perception of the Global South determined by lack and extreme poverty becomes visible, but also a hierarchical contrasting of North and South is dominant. In this type the central feature of the Global South is a general neediness, which can be alleviated by the support of the wealthy Global North. Global North and Global South are constructed as contrasts, with the former being superior to the latter. In the type of generalization, the sponsored child is therefore interpreted as exemplary for the people in the Global South. And while the neediness of the child is regarded as an authentic expression of a general neediness of people in the Global South, in the same way the sponsorship is considered an authentic reflection of global relations. The sponsored child is not the focus here, as a real individual with real needs resulting from specific life circumstances (as is the case in the type of concretization). It rather represents a generally deficient and needy Global South. This type is therefore determined by the fact that the Global South is perceived as a generalized counterpart, and that welfare in the sponsorship is aligned to a non-specific collective. The type is defined by the generalization of the sponsorship experiences: The asymmetric welfare structure of the sponsorship is generalized into a care relationship and consequently an asymmetric hierarchy between North and South. The sponsorship, in this respect, is regarded as an authentic opportunity for unspecific charitable behaviour towards the South and, at the same time, a chance to pursue the North's obligation to help the South.

### **Dissociation**

The third typical orientation is characterized by dissociation processes. This type was developed in the same way as the other two types by means of several group discussions and is illustrated below in an excerpt from group Parrot. The group consists of three female students from grade 13 (approximately 18–19 years old). In the following passage, the young people talk about the letter exchange with their sponsored child Kate:

- Af: No me neither we have then written the one letter about what there is to eat in our country so bratwurst with coleslaw and so on and that—
- Cf: (laughing) yes ... (laughing)
- Af: this is popular food in our country (laughing) sort of, then we also asked them—
- Cf: Tasty
- Af: what they typically eat but I don't even know whether they have written this in their second letter ... —
- Bf: I don't think so
- Af: I think it wasn't in there they only reported that ... Kate goes to school ... and learns how to read

(Group Parrot, passage 'Malawi', 00:40:39–0:44:13, l. 30–40)

In this excerpt, the three young sponsors speak of being inadequately informed on the situation and progress of their sponsored child. They do not feel sufficiently included in Kate's development and her life circumstances and want to have more information as well as more detailed information. In particular, they disqualify the letters they receive from Kate and the caregivers from the organization as a source of information, since these do not provide them with the desired information. This shows an unsatisfied expectation for a more authentic insight into the life of the child they support with monthly donations. As is shown here and is also visible in the further course of this sequence, the young people complain about their impression that the letters they receive do not answer questions that were asked by them in their own letters before. The letters therefore do not really build on one another and do not constitute an actual discourse. The students thus question the authenticity of the letter exchange. There is a clear scepticism about the credibility of the sponsorship and their relationship to Kate. The young sponsors, as is evident in the excerpt, do not experience the sponsorship as a real care relationship or an authentic welfare situation.

The dissociation type fundamentally differs from the other two types in that the sponsorship is not regarded as an authentic relationship and real action situation. The credibility of the information given in the sponsorship is questioned and no real participation in a support or caring relationship is felt. In the course of this rejection of the authenticity of the sponsorship, their own possibilities for knowledge about and action towards global challenges are questioned. On the basis of this rejection of the sponsorship situation any reflection on the sponsorship experiences and in particular on the welfare situation and therefore asymmetry is being suspended. This type is thus characterized by processes of distancing. In contrast to the two other types, benevolence does not form a guiding principle – instead the young sponsors reject their own involvement in the sponsorship and withdraw from any further contemplation.

## **Discussion: Global learning in child sponsoring?**

The empirical results concerning the learning experiences of young sponsors in child sponsorships raise the question of whether and to what extent global learning takes place in this setting. There is the expectation, especially in a school context, that engaging students in child sponsorships facilitates their learning concerning global development challenges and, in particular, social disparities in the world. Within the discourse on global learning, and specifically from the perspective of system and evolutionary theory, the increasing complexity of world society (see Luhmann, 2015)



and the corresponding global challenges are considered a core learning challenge in times of advancing globalization. Global learning can therefore be understood as a pedagogical reaction towards the challenges of globalization and the development of a world society. It is oriented towards justice as well as sustainability and aims at the acquisition of competencies for life in a world society, primarily competencies to perceive, understand and deal with complexity (see Scheunpflug and Asbrand, 2006; Scheunpflug, 2010). With regard to the study on learning in child sponsorships the question therefore is: do the empirical findings and in particular the three types indicate learning processes regarding the complexity of the world society – do they point to processes of global learning?

The orientations of the young sponsors are characterized by asymmetrical welfare and charity perspectives. This central finding of the study points to the influence of the sponsorship's set-up as a donor relationship. The importance of implicit structures of social practices has already been empirically demonstrated several times (Asbrand, 2009; Kater-Wettstädt, 2015). For the context of sponsorships, it is therefore clear that there is no break-up and irritation of stereotypical and asymmetrical understandings of developmental questions. Likewise, the set-up of the sponsorship as a personal welfare relationship is reflected in the orientations of the sponsors. This becomes evident in the finding that learning in the sponsorship is defined by the idea of one's own authentic experience of care and welfare. The young people expect access to true and authentic information that is not accessible to them outside the sponsorship. What is not reflected upon is the fact that concrete impressions only enable a limited and very specific perspective on issues, and one that is bound to the concrete relationships, experiences and situations – and that the impressions could be completely different in a different situation and under different circumstances (see Scheunpflug, 2001). In their striving for authenticity, sponsors do not develop more abstract perspectives on the question of social disparities and inequalities in the world. Such a loosening from the individual experience would, however, be crucial for learning with regard to an understanding of a complex world with an increasing contingency.

In the reconstructed type of concretization, the neediness of the sponsored child is considered the individual need of a well-known person and is treated within the realm of a personal care relationship. The sponsorship experiences – for instance, the neediness of the child and the support through sponsoring – are not put in a more general context, with regard to the complex nature of the issues, for example, or the causes of development problems or approaches to overcome them. Experiences are dealt with within the context of the concrete individual case. What is visible here is that the experiences of donating and supporting a person in the Global South are detached from the global context. This finding points to the more general conclusion that it is difficult to relate concrete experiences (such as the support of a concrete child) to more abstract implications and complex issues behind this concrete case. Engaging learners in concrete activities (such as sponsoring a person in need) does apparently not necessarily open up opportunities to reflect global social issues.

The type of generalization refers to a dichotomous and hierarchical worldview and to stereotypical representations of the Global South. Such paternalistic perceptions have empirically been shown to be associated with asymmetrical actions in various studies (see, for example, Asbrand, 2009; Ove, 2013; Krogull, 2014; Tallon and Watson, 2014; Kater-Wettstädt, 2015; Fischer *et al.*, 2016). There is evidence that, instead of opening up opportunities to reflect one's own misconceptions, engaging learners in asymmetric settings such as donating money can support these simplified understandings of the world. With regard to global learning these generalization

processes indicate a simplified conceptualization of the world society. Perceived disparities are seen as differences between different and completely separable societies, and are not considered internal differences of one world society. This would, however, be central for a more differentiated understanding of world society (see Werron, 2011) and of the challenges the world as a whole is facing. In times of globalization and an increasingly interconnected world, perspectives of seeing global inequalities as an expression of internal social heterogeneity are crucial for understanding societal developments. Global challenges such as the enormous social disparities are located in a world societal context and cannot be adequately understood within national or regional limits.

Thus, the two types of concretization and generalization represent two empirically reconstructed forms of dealing with complexity, which are both dysfunctional for understanding the complexity of world society and its fundamental developmental challenges. In concretization, the global dimension of the asymmetrical welfare situation of the sponsorship is not relevant at all because the focus here is on the individual child and a concrete personal care relationship. In generalization, the understanding of the sponsorship as a representation of a hierarchical relationship between Global North and Global South is not related to the complexity of global developmental questions. In this study, the experiences of helping a child in the Global South are therefore dealt with either in a concrete or in a generalized way. With regard to the complexity of world society, however, both processes indicate forms of reduction, in which the complexity of the social issue of living together on a global scale does not come into view.

These two orientations, concretization and generalization, are based on the experience of the sponsorship as an authentic welfare relationship and acting situation. In contrast to this, the type of dissociation is characterized by a rejection of the sponsorship setting and a withdrawal from global questions due to a lack of authenticity. This type does not therefore point to processes of global learning, but rather shows that the sponsorship evokes certain forms of dealing with complexity based on authenticity, while other, more abstract approaches to societal issues are not furthered. Apart from the authentic experience, the sponsorship does not open up prospects for an engagement with global issues.

The overall empirical results show that the experience of helping a child in the Global South, and thus the experience of asymmetry, is not reflected upon with regard to the complex causes and interrelations causing and influencing global developmental challenges. The analysis shows that sponsoring does not encourage more abstract recognition processes with regard to societal problems in a globalized world with increasingly complex interrelations. This finding indicates that the structural set-up of a learning situation in terms of its connectivity to the complexity of world society is particularly important. Child sponsoring as a learning setting is apparently not sufficiently related to the complexity of the global dimension.

This result, however, must not lead to the conclusion that child sponsoring represents a poorer form of donation than other ones. There are currently no research results on learning processes evoked by other forms of donation such as, for example, different forms of project sponsoring or fundraising campaigns such as 'Oxfam unwrapped', which asks people to buy symbolic gifts for people in the Global South. Further investigations are necessary. However, it is often the case that organizations working with child sponsorships emphasize the alleged learning effect (see Scheunpflug, 2005b) and thereby promote the selling of child sponsorships in general and particularly in schools. Here, the results of the study give reason for a sceptical assessment. The organizations that provide sponsorships in Germany differ

significantly in their advertising appearance and also in their communication towards the sponsors, especially in the presentation of the sponsored children. Although all the large organizations offering sponsorships in Germany were part of the study's sample, the learning experiences were not systematically examined with regard to the different organization. The empirical data suggests that the setting of child sponsorship itself has a stronger impact than possible differences in the didactics of sponsorship (for example different forms of presenting child sponsoring and the sponsored child to learners or differences in the organization of the letter exchange); this must, however, be confirmed in further studies.

The methodological approach used in this study allows the reconstruction of implicit and non-communicable knowledge, which is acquired in fundamental experiences that groups of individuals share with each other and which unconsciously directs behaviour. This approach is particularly useful in identifying how people deal with global issues in different contexts and various forms of action and it 'has the potential to contribute substantially to understanding the complexity of world society' (Scheunpflug et al., 2016: 20). Focusing not on 'what' interviewees say, but on 'how' they talk about a certain topic is a valuable form of doing research in a highly normative field of study such as global learning, since the expressions of interviewees are not evaluated with regard to the attitude reflected but to the orientations of people in a complex world. The methodological approach used in this study therefore has great potential for future global learning research.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Hans Böckler Foundation for supporting this research project.

## Notes on the contributor

**Marina Wagener** received her PhD in Education from the Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg and is now a research assistant at the chair of foundations of Education at the Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg. Her main research interests concern global learning and development education as well as qualitative reconstructive social research.

## References

- Andreotti, V. (2011) *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Asbrand, B. (2007) 'Partnerschaft – eine Lerngelegenheit?'. *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, 30 (3), 8–14.
- Asbrand, B. (2009) *Wissen und Handeln in der Weltgesellschaft: Eine qualitativ-rekonstruktive Studie zum Globalen Lernen in der Schule und in der außerschulischen Jugendarbeit* (Erziehungswissenschaft und Weltgesellschaft 1). Münster: Waxmann.
- Bohnsack, R. (2007) 'Typenbildung, Generalisierung und komparative Analyse: Grundprinzipien der dokumentarischen Methode'. In Bohnsack, R., Nentwig-Gesemann, I. and Nohl, A.-M. (eds) *Die dokumentarische Methode und ihre Forschungspraxis: Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung*. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 225–53.
- Bohnsack, R. (2010) 'Documentary method and group discussions'. In Bohnsack, R., Pfaff, N. and Weller, W. (eds) *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 99–124.
- Bryan, A. and Bracken, M. (2011) *Learning to Read the World? Teaching and learning about global citizenship and international development in post-primary schools*. Dublin: Irish Aid.
- Davies, D. and Lam, E. (2009) 'The role of first-hand experience in the development education of university students'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 2 (2), 35–52.

- Disney, A. (2005) 'Children's images of a distant locality'. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 14 (4), 330–5.
- Fischer, S., Fischer, F., Kleinschmidt, M. and Lange, D. (2016) *Globalisierung und Politische Bildung: Eine didaktische Untersuchung zur Wahrnehmung und Bewertung der Globalisierung*. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Horlemann, J. (1989) *Kindernot und Patenglück: Zur Öffentlichkeitsarbeit von Kinderpatenschaftsorganisationen*. Frankfurt am Main: Haag + Herchen.
- Jefferess, D. (2002) 'For sale – peace of mind: (Neo-)colonial discourse and the commodification of Third World poverty in World Vision's "telethons"'. *Critical Arts*, 16 (1), 1–21.
- Jefferess, D. (2008) 'Global citizenship and the cultural politics of benevolence'. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, 2 (1), 27–36.
- Jorgenson, S.R. (2014) '(De)colonizing Global Citizenship: A case study of North American study abroad programs in Ghana'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Alberta.
- Kater-Wettstädt, L. (2015) *Unterricht im Lernbereich Globale Entwicklung: Der Kompetenzerwerb und seine Bedingungen* (Erziehungswissenschaft und Weltgesellschaft 8). Münster: Waxmann.
- Krogull, S. (2014) 'Arm aber gemütlich – Afrikabilder deutscher Jugendlicher'. *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, 37 (4), 15–19.
- Krogull, S. (2016) 'Weltgesellschaft verstehen: Eine rekonstruktive Studie zu weltgesellschaftlichen Orientierungen im Kontext von Begegnungsreisen im weltgesellschaftlichen Norden und Süden'. PhD thesis, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg.
- Krogull, S. and Landes-Brenner, S. (2009) 'Qualitätsstandards für Begegnungsreisen im Nord-Süd-Kontext'. *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, 32 (2), 14–19.
- Lang-Wojtasik, G. and Scheunpflug, A. (2002) 'Bildung durch Begegnungsreisen? Interkulturelles Lernen in Zeiten des Massentourismus'. In Kreienbaum, M.A., Gramelt, K., Pfeiffer, S. and Schmitt, T. (eds) *Bildung als Herausforderung: Leben und Lernen in Zambia*. Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 17–35.
- Leonard, A.E. (2014) 'School Linking: Southern perspectives on the south/north educational linking process: From Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania'. Unpublished PhD thesis, UCL Institute of Education.
- Loos, P. and Schäffer, B. (2001) *Das Gruppendiskussionsverfahren: Theoretische Grundlagen und empirische Anwendung* (Qualitative Sozialforschung 5). Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Luhmann, N. (2015) *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Mannheim, K. (1980) *Strukturen des Denkens*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Manzo, K. (2008) 'Imaging humanitarianism: NGO identity and the iconography of childhood'. *Antipode*, 40 (4), 632–57.
- Martin, F. (2011) 'Global ethics, sustainability and partnership'. In Butt, G. (ed.) *Geography, Education and the Future*. London: Continuum, 206–24.
- Nentwig-Gesemann, I. (2013) 'Die Typenbildung der dokumentarischen Methode'. In Bohnsack, R., Nentwig-Gesemann, I. and Nohl, A.-M. (eds) *Die dokumentarische Methode und ihre Forschungspraxis: Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung*. 3rd ed. Wiesbaden: Springer, 295–323.
- Nohl, A.-M. (2013) *Relationale Typenbildung und Mehrebenenvergleich: Neue Wege der dokumentarischen Methode*. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Ove, P. (2013) '"Change a Life. Change Your Own": Child sponsorship, the discourse of development, and the production of ethical subjects'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of British Columbia.
- Pickering, S. (2008) 'What do children really learn? A discussion to investigate the effect that school partnerships have on children's understanding, sense of values and perceptions of a distant place'. *GeogEd*, 2 (1), Article 3, 1–10. Online. [www.geography.org.uk/download/ga%20geogedvol2i1a3.pdf](http://www.geography.org.uk/download/ga%20geogedvol2i1a3.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2018).
- Rabbitts, F. (2013) '"Nothing is Whiter than White in This World": Child sponsorship and the geographies of charity'. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter.
- Reinhardt, S. (2016) 'The Beutelsbach Consensus'. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 15 (2), 11–13.
- Scheunpflug, A. (1997) 'Cross-cultural encounters as a way of overcoming xenophobia'. *International Review of Education*, 43 (1), 109–16.

- Scheunpflug, A. (2001) 'Die globale Perspektive einer Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung'. In Herz, O., Seybold, H. and Strobl, G. (eds) *Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung: Globale Perspektiven und neue Kommunikationsmedien*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 87–99.
- Scheunpflug, A. (2005a) *Die öffentliche Darstellung von Kinderpatenschaften: Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme aus entwicklungspädagogischer Sicht*. Nürnberg: Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. Online. [www.presse.uni-erlangen.de/infocenter/presse/pressemitteilungen/forschung\\_2005/06\\_05/Kinderpatenschaften.pdf](http://www.presse.uni-erlangen.de/infocenter/presse/pressemitteilungen/forschung_2005/06_05/Kinderpatenschaften.pdf) (accessed 30 January 2017).
- Scheunpflug, A. (2005b) 'Die Persönlichkeitsrechte der Kinder achten: Anforderungen an eine entwicklungspädagogisch sensible Darstellung von Kinderpatenschaften'. *Zeitschrift Entwicklungspolitik*, 16–17, 51–5.
- Scheunpflug, A. (2007) 'Die konzeptionelle Weiterentwicklung des Globalen Lernens: Die Debatten der letzten zehn Jahre'. In Verband Entwicklungspolitik Deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen *Jahrbuch Globales Lernen 2007/2008: Standortbestimmung, Praxisbeispiele, Perspektiven*. Bonn: VENRO, 11–21.
- Scheunpflug, A. (2010) 'Global education and cross-cultural learning: A challenge for a research-based approach to international teacher education'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 3 (3), 29–44.
- Scheunpflug, A. and Asbrand, B. (2006) 'Global education and education for sustainability'. *Environmental Education Research*, 12 (1), 33–46.
- Scheunpflug, A., Krogull, S. and Franz, J. (2016) 'Understanding learning in world society: Qualitative reconstructive research in global learning and learning for sustainability'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 7 (3), 6–23.
- Smith, M. (2004) 'Mediating the world: Development, education and global citizenship'. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2 (1), 67–81.
- Smith, M. and Yanacopoulos, H. (2004) 'The public faces of development: An introduction'. *Journal of International Development*, 16 (5), 657–64.
- Tallon, R. (2011) 'Creating "little sultans" in the social sciences: Learning about the other through benevolent eyes'. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 20 (4), 281–6.
- Tallon, R. and Watson, B. (2014) 'Child sponsorship as development education in the northern classroom'. In Watson, B. and Clarke, M. (eds) *Child Sponsorship: Exploring pathways to a brighter future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 297–316.
- Thomas, A. (1991) 'Abbau von Vorurteilen durch internationale Jugendbegegnungen – von der Kontakthypothese zur Theorie der Intergruppenbeziehung'. In *Jahrbuch für Jugendreisen und internationalen Jugendaustausch*. Bonn: Jugendforum-Verlag, 7–14.
- Wagener, M. (2018a) *Globale Sozialität als Lernherausforderung: Eine rekonstruktive Studie zu Orientierungen von Jugendlichen in Kinderpatenschaften*. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Wagener, M. (2018b) 'Weltgesellschaftliches Lernen in Kinderpatenschaften? Empirische Befunde zu Lernerfahrungen jugendlicher Patinnen und Paten'. *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, 40 (1), 4–9.
- Watson, B. and Clarke, M. (2014) 'Introduction to key issues in child sponsorship'. In Watson, B. and Clarke, M. (eds) *Child Sponsorship: Exploring pathways to a brighter future*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–17.
- Weber, M. (1968) *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Werron, T. (2011) 'Das Konzept der "Weltgesellschaft" – sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven und Positionen im Überblick'. In Sander, W. and Scheunpflug, A. (eds) *Politische Bildung in der Weltgesellschaft: Herausforderungen, Positionen, Kontroversen*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 19–33.