

TOWARDS THE SECOND DUALITY OF GLOBAL YOUTH WORK: THE ENVIRONMENT AND DISRUPTIVE ACTION

MOMODOU SALLAH

Abstract: There are five faces of globalisation that global youth work (GYW), as an offshoot of global education, should respond to (economic, political, environmental, cultural and technological), in order to be transformative, both in thought and deed. The vexed issue of climate change (environmental face) and its correlation to sustainable development, as an ameliorative mechanism, speaks to the imagination and contours of GYW, centred on the duality of provoking consciousness and taking action (Sallah, 2008a; 2014).

In positioning the pedagogic approach of GYW, the author establishes his situatedness as a de-colonial scholar-activist, in presenting an analysis of the impact of climate change and its attendant negative consequences, on a Southern country like The Gambia. Using the conceptual framework of GYW, the author presents his work, spanning the last four years, with Global Hands and at De Montfort University, of disruptive attempts to challenge orthodoxy and configured ways of knowing and being, from a Southern perspective. Drawing on GYW projects he has implemented in a ‘live lab’ in The Gambia which has developed Africa’s first solar powered taxi service, the development of a Compressed Earth Brick machine to combat low-cost housing and climate change, and solar dryers to preserve food and encourage food self-sufficiency, all of which have huge carbon footprint savings as well as significant economic advantages.

This article presents a reflective analysis of a scholar-activist’s practice of how GYW can be used to combat climate change and enhance sustainable development in a symbiotic approach. It will illustrate the powerful pedagogic prowess of this development approach as well as highlight the challenges and tensions inherent.

Key words: Global Youth Work; Sustainable Development; Global Education; Global Learning; Development Education; Environment; Informal Education; International Development; Global Hands; Gambia.

Introduction

Globalisation, as a site of contestation, especially its environmental dimension, its impact and consequently how it is dislodged through the specific praxis of work with young people, conceptualised as global youth work (GYW), as an offshoot of global education, forms the centrality of this article. As an ongoing open sore, globalisation divides opinion equally between the globophobes and the globaphiles, whilst still anchored within a neoliberalist orthodoxy (Scholte, 2005; Oxfam, 2002; Jenkins, 2004; Skosireva and Holaday, 2010) that sees profit as its main driver, regardless of the human cost. Environmental degradation and destruction, on the largest scale possible to date, is the ensuing fiasco, which threatens planet earth and thrusts environmental sustainability, as an urgent prerequisite for continued human survival and existence. Reflecting on this human conundrum and urgent need for environmental action, anchored on the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly, 2015), the article posits GYW as both a conceptual and pedagogic approach to engage young people, to not only gain new consciousness, but also to take action, to redress the environment crisis.

The environmental impact of globalisation

Scholte writes that:

“Analyses of globalisation tend to remain conceptually inexact, empirically thin, historically and culturally illiterate, normatively shallow and politically naïve [and] although globalisation is widely assumed to be crucially important, we generally have scant idea what, more precisely, it entails” (2000: 1).

Scholte highlights the tensions inherent in the search for common understanding in relation to the concept, process and impact of globalisation. These debates have been covered exhaustively in the available literature in this

field; whilst acknowledging this, the intention here is to highlight the complexities that surround the establishment of context and consensus, whilst at the same time maintaining the focus on the environmental impact of globalisation as the central theme of this article.

Beck (2000) identifies the five dimensions to globalisation as: informational, ecological, economic, labour cooperation/production and cultural. In a similar vein, Sallah (2008a; 2014) identifies the five faces of globalisation as political, economic, cultural, technological, and environmental. These faces/dimensions either in isolation or in interaction, illustrate the manifestation of globalisation and its location in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Whilst there is a huge conversation and debate to be had with these individual dimensions, the focus of this article is on the environmental dimension, its destruction and the need to generate sustainable development solutions.

The concept and process of globalisation remains a huge site of contestation, especially its positioning and repositioning as a consequence of capitalist greed, anchored in the exploitation of profit, at all cost (Oxfam, 2002; Sallah, 2014). Its contribution to environmental degradation and threat to the survival of Mother Earth, as we know it, has been well documented (Yan, 2019; Borghesi and Vercelli, 2003; Asongu, Nting and Nnanna, 2019), with devastating consequences. This impact is often magnified in sub-Saharan African countries and has been manifested in soil erosion, deforestation, reliance on dirty energy linked also to disproportionate use of foreign reserves, which maintains the cycle of poverty in low income countries. The article focuses on interventions designed to support sustainable development and ameliorate the effects of climate change in The Gambia. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa continue to be consistently placed in all available deprivation and underdevelopment indexes (UNDP, 2016), manifested in high child mortality rates, unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, underdevelopment and hopelessness (Sallah, 2014). These indicators, it can be argued, are linked to the environmental face of globalisation.

Not global education but GYW – a disruptive methodology

Development education (DE), global education (GE) and GYW are just a few of a myriad of terms that are often conflated or confused, in delineating global learning. It is pivotal that conceptual and pedagogic clarity is established from the onset as this determines the motive of engagement. It is apt at this junction to inject McCollum and Bourn's observation (2001) that:

“A development education programme does not, and in most cases will not, have as its main objective changing attitudes and understanding of global poverty and international development. This is likely to be much more specific, such as improving the capacity of teachers to deliver effective programmes, or giving educators the tools and resources to engage with development issues” (McCollum and Bourn, 2001: 27).

GYW or similar approaches to work with young people (Sallah, 2009; 2014) has been variously labelled by a number of writers who have attributed multiple terminologies to the practice (Cotton, 2009; Dare to Stretch, 2009; North-South-Centre, 2010; Bourn, 2015; 2016). However, as a process, there is broad agreement that it is concerned with how the concept and process of globalisation impacts on young people's realities; is based on the principles of informal education; promotes consciousness and action; challenges oppression and promotes social justice; and is located in young people's realities (DEA, 2004; Bourn and McCollum, 1995; Sallah and Cooper, 2008; Sallah, 2014). This process when configured into a whole arguably emerges as the distinct practice of GYW. The Development Education Association (DEA) further posited that:

“Global youth work is a form of development education. However, what makes global youth work distinct is that it *starts from young people's own perspectives and experiences and develops a negotiated agenda for learning*. Global youth work also focuses primarily on the impact of globalisation in the UK and overseas rather than education about the *development and underdevelopment* of countries.

Although it shares many of the values and principles that underpin good youth work, development education often has its own agenda from the outset, linked to specific campaigns or concerns and has historically taken place in more formal educational settings” (2004: 28).

Terms such as international youth work and development education have been used to label this practice, however the term GYW was coined in 1995 (Bourn and McCollum, 1995) and its prominence has grown in recent times as a distinct way of working with young people, incorporating both the principles of development education and youth work. The DEA (2004: 21) positioned GYW as:

“Informal education with young people that encourages a critical understanding of the links between the personal, local and the global and seeks their active participation in actions that bring about change towards greater equality and justice”.

It is a methodological approach that explores the personal, local, national and global interconnections between the young people and the five faces of globalisation (economic, political, cultural, environmental and technological), interactively to generate a critical understanding (Freire, 1993) which hopefully leads to the second prerogative of promoting action as a result of that consciousness which attempts to change the world (Sallah, 2008a: 7).

Sallah (2008b) has investigated how, and to what extent GYW is conceptualised and operationalised within 43 of the 50 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) delivering youth and community work qualifications. Whilst the research provided insightful evidence on the state of GYW in British HEIs, it more significantly provided an understanding of how the practice of GYW was conceptualised and labelled in British HEIs, in addition to offering differing pedagogic approaches:

“Development education was identified by research participants as being about global education and awareness, although the INGOs also made reference at the focus group to it being based on similar principles to global youth work. Despite this, four of the HEIs interviewed suggested that development education is about knowledge and awareness, but did not mention action and process as might be expected when talking about global youth work” (Sallah, 2009: 47).

The North-South Centre (2010: 16) argues that global education enables the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for everyone to fulfil their potential and live in a just and sustainable world. This concept proposes the reimagining of the content, form and context of education, with a focus on developing the necessary skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. In presenting his theoretical framework, Woolley (2011) highlights the three interlinked dimensions of global issues, global experiences and global perspectives that must be configured as a whole for the distinct practice of GYW to emerge. The DEA has suggested that GYW supports young people to connect with local-global issues, and then encourages them to challenge their own construction of reality, normalisation of inequality and injustice, starting from their own realities and experiences; and then to bring about change. Following on from this, Sallah (2008a; 2014) has argued that GYW must first attempt to engage with young people’s constructed realities and then support young people to make the links between the personal, local, national and global, and the five faces of globalisation (economic, political, cultural, technological and environmental) to provoke critical consciousness and then support them to take action, whatever the concerned young people deem appropriate in creating a more just world for themselves and the rest of humanity.

GYW is, therefore, a distinct practice of working with young people, not only to promote campaign agendas premised on ‘development pornography’ peddled by the ‘merchants of misery’ (Hilary, 2014), but a disruptive practice deeply rooted in the Freirean tradition of provoking critical

consciousness and then supporting those most affected to take action. The first mandate of provoking consciousness is essential in order to connect with and start from where those most affected are at; the second of the duality must be about how action is taken to effect change; towards the construction of a more socially just world. GYW, unlike other terminologies in circulation, has this as a fundamental aspect of its practice.

GYW as a distinct practice - heretic attempts at disruption

We have seen many attempts (Ipsos Mori, 2008; Lashley, 1998; Joseph, 2005; Dare to Stretch, 2009; Cotton, 2009; Adams, 2010; Bourn and Brown, 2011; Sallah, 2013a; 2013b) to analyse and capture the purpose and impact of GYW; however, the exploration of GYW and the environmental impact has been elusive. Based on an analysis of current literature, we can begin to draw the inference that, whilst there is growing literature in the GYW field, the actual impact of GYW on supporting young people's learning and taking action is limited. Additionally, literature on how GYW specifically supports action in relation to the environmental dimension is even more limited.

The next section will present the work done in a 'live lab' established by the author through his work as a Senior Lecturer/Reader at De Montfort University (DMU) (scholar), and also founding director of Global Hands, which is a charity in The Gambia and a Social Enterprise in the UK (activist). It is also important to note that this author's practice is imbued with colonial and neo-colonial experiences, therefore and accordingly, a response of decolonisation imbues his practice. A practice that negates neoliberal and charity-based notions of development towards Africa is the premise of his work. It is pivotal that, in response to transparency and intellectual objectivity, this author exposes his positionality and situatedness of a decolonial advocate in addition to be a scholar-activist. In line with the philosophical ethos of GYW, this author is interested beyond just the generation of knowledge, but also in the production and enaction of sustainable solutions. This is significant in understanding, situating and positioning the interventions that follow.

Our methodological approach has been to establish a ‘live lab’ at the Manduar Development Hub in collaboration with students from different UK universities, the local communities in and around Manduar village (west coast region, The Gambia), and independent civil and automotive engineers from The Gambia, and social scientists and sustainable energy engineers from De Montfort University (DMU) (UK). The process for the identification of all three interventions (compressed Earth Brick Machine, Solar Dryer, and Solar Taxi) all started mainly with the consultation of communities in and around Manduar, especially young people; mainly in constant dialogue with the author, Dr Rupert Gammon of De Montfort University, and leaders of Global Hands (in The Gambia and UK). From 2011 to 2015, the author has worked with or consulted over a 1,000 young people both in the UK and The Gambia, using participatory methodological and pedagogical approaches. Through these processes and a GYW pedagogical approach, in addition to building the Manduar Development Hub as a social good incubation hub and ‘live lab’, this distilled to three different projects described in the next section.

Compressed earth brick machine

Following critical questions raised through the consultative conversations about the availability of low-cost housing in The Gambia and the significant erosion of some beaches and other associated negative environmental impacts, a project was initiated, based on distinct identified needs, to address the unavailability of low-cost and sustainable housing. The project not only aimed to address the increasing scarcity of sand, but additionally linked to the cutting of trees, and importation of corrugated iron sheets, with a heavy carbon footprint as the majority of these were imported into The Gambia. The first component of the project was to provoke consciousness and then explore practical solutions from their perspectives.

The aim of this project was the development of SMART, locally made, Compressed Earth Brick Fabrication Machines, using a collaborative approach to combat soil erosion and promote cheaper sustainable housing using locally available mud/clay. One of these machines’ costs about \$4,000 to import, which takes it out of the reach of most Gambians, but the project

delivered the aim of producing one for under \$400. The project developed SMART, low-cost Compressed Earth Brick Fabricator that is affordable to local builders which will significantly improve their ability to afford and build houses as well as mitigate soil erosion as there is significant sand mining leading to soil erosion and environmental degradation. The introduction of this low-cost machine will have a significant impact on the availability of housing.

The initial project ended in June 2018 (with the successful testing of a manual Compressed Earth Brick machine). In April 2019, the second version (automated Compressed Earth Brick Machine) was completed. The objective was to build a prototype Hydraulic Compressed Earth Brick Making Machine. One of the other objectives for the project was also to be able to produce this machine locally, using environmentally friendly materials. The work started with the 3D modeling of the machine in solid works which was completed and simulated. As mentioned earlier, in attempting to ‘produce the machine locally’, the materials for this project are not readily available in the hardware shops in The Gambia, so the team had to go around to the scrapyards and second-hand shops for almost all the materials for the project. As this was the first time to venture into this type of project, there were a lot of unanticipated challenges in this regard.

Whilst the first phase of the project (manual version) has been completed successfully, the second version (automated) is incomplete at the time of writing; the team could not access the electric motor to drive the hydraulic pump. Initially, the hydraulic pump that we purchased worked well but was not powerful enough to compress the brick so the team went in for a much more powerful hydraulic pump but again the electric motor purchased could not drive the pump. In fact, the team tried four different types of electric motors to no avail; this was challenging especially given that these had to be sourced individually in scrap yards. Almost all the powerful electric motors in town suitable for the project are 3 phase motors which are not feasible for the project because one of the objectives was for the machine to be portable and 3 phase supply is not available in most of the places. Through a GYW

approach, the focus was not to only understand the environmental issue of lack of housing and debunking unsustainable approaches to housing, but to get the most affected to take action, designing and building a solution by mobilising the best placed to do so.

Solar dryer

It has been estimated that up to 60 per cent of mangoes produced in the short three-month mango season goes to waste in The Gambia. This applies to a significant number of other fruits and vegetables as insufficient technology is available to preserve or store these for any appreciable length of time. These issues were raised by local young people through consultative conversations as issues to do with the environment and also linked to food sufficiency and healthy eating. This project was aimed at developing SMART technologies, starting with solar mango dryers. A team of engineers working with students from UK universities and local Gambian volunteers and carpenters identified the problem and through a GYW pedagogical approach, designed and tested the proof of principle for a solar dryer for mangos which could also be used to dry mangoes and other fruits. Again the key success in not only in mobilising young people to discuss and gain a new understanding of the problem, linked to globalisation, but to respond to the second of the duality of GYW, initiating action, beyond just talking, to act out solutions.

Solar taxi

The ‘Live Lab’ developed in Manduar is completely off grid and in its construction, between 2014-15, the issue of how and where to source its energy came up constantly. Consequently, and through a number of spaces generated within and between DMU experts, UK higher education students, and local Gambians, the issue of environmental sustainability in relation to energy came up with great frequency. Why are we not using solar energy given its abundance in The Gambia, especially given the increasing levels of pollution, as the average car in The Gambia is over ten years old with over 100,000 miles clocked, and not subjected to a compulsory annual vehicle test? Consequently, through a GYW pedagogical exploration, the idea for the use of a solar car was developed to test the principle of its viability, in terms of commerce as well as

the production of clean and non-polluting energy. Again, this was following a period of consultative conversations, to address the first of the duality of GYW.

Using solar panels donated by Sharp Electronics and an electric vehicle (EV), contributed by Nissan Europe, the project has been testing the proof of principle for running a ‘solar taxi’ service in The Gambia (first in Africa) by recharging the vehicle from a solar-powered mini-grid. Preliminary research (Sallah and Gammon, 2017) has shown that 50-60 per cent of daily revenue collected by taxi-drivers goes towards fuel, which can be greatly reduced by using solar energy instead, given the availability of sunlight in the region. Emerging results demonstrate a significant decrease in environmental and noise pollution, as well as financial viability for the use of electric cars.

Conclusion

There is a lot of aid (Kalu, 2018; Buba, 2019) going into developing countries and this is not sustainable as the focus has to a large extent, been on giving people fish instead of teaching them how to fish. Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goals and its predecessor Millennium Development Goals (UN Millennium Project, 2005), largely continue to be aspirational, rather than being entrenched in the daily actions and reactions of those most affected. A GYW approach of not only provoking critical consciousness, but also encouraging action at the personal, local, national or global levels is essential; herein lies the contribution of this article in demonstrating how the second of the duality of GYW is enacted. These three projects conceptualised and implemented from a GYW pedagogical approach focus on giving the most deprived communities the tools to lift themselves out of poverty and equalise inequality; to be architects of their own destiny by developing low-cost buildings, agricultural and food processing/preservation equipment, and optimising the usage of solar energy. All of these have demonstrated mitigation of environmental degradation and addressed the environmental face of globalisation. GYW has been presented as an act of resistance and an attempt to decolonise the economic orthodoxy and looming environmental sword of Damocles that keeps the Southern countries deprived. As a pedagogic approach, GYW goes beyond just the first of the duality, by

demonstrating efficacy and demonstrating action, in fulfilment of the second of the duality.

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Momodou Sallah (PhD, MPhil, MA) is the Director, Centre for Academic Innovation, and a Reader in Globalisation and Global Youth Work at De Montfort University, UK. He is also a founding Director of Global Hands, which is a Social Enterprise/Charity operating in The Gambia and UK, with a focus on capacity building and social good. In June 2013, he was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship by the UK Higher Education Academy. In November 2015, he was named the 'Most Innovative Teacher' in the UK by *Times Higher Education Supplement*. He has more than 20 years' experience working with young people at local, national and international levels; from being the Youth Director of Gambia Red Cross Society to a

Senior Youth Worker at the Leicester City Council, UK. Dr. Sallah has numerous publications in the fields of work with black young people, young Muslims and globalisation/global youth work. His research interests include diversity, participatory methodologies, globalisation particularly in relation to young people, and public engagement.