

The Globetree - some comments and reflections at the Globe days October 24th and 25th 2008

Birgitta Qvarsell

Background

The Globetree is a Swedish NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) which has received UN-status through a special assignment to be an advocate for children. One could say that the Globetree has been in children's service since its start over twenty five years ago. The roots for many activities have been questions and comments by children, about the meaning of life and about the future. This way of being in service for the children makes the Globetree and its cultural work an interesting and positive challenge for an educational view, which counts on children and their culture as a possibility for personal and global development. It also contributed to the Silver Rose Award 2008, and an earlier assignment to represent children within the UN, manifested in a Children's meeting place in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Globetree has through the years arranged many international encounters in different parts of the world, e.g. travels to Kenya. In Nairobi there is a Children's meeting place in the United Nation's area. A World Championship in Cooperation was run for the first time in Stockholm during a week at the end of May and the beginning of June 2006, and this championship continued to Kampala in Uganda in June 2008. Children's creative activities as well as their influence on their own and the world's development were in focus. Inner and external conditions for life and socialization interact in the Globetree's work, which is connected to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Agenda 21 with its emphasis on important environmental conditions, on water and air. Water has become the joint task for international child collaborations and encounters within the Globetree. (See www.globetree.org)

An educational and childhood cultural interest

My own interest within the educational science (educology) is childhood culture, focusing *the educational in childhood culture*. Following this interest the Globetree has some challenging dimensions and qualities: It has to do with children's joint encounters and their relations to adults (not least politicians and other decision makers) on places where they may meet, talk, discuss and learn from each other. The places, the contexts, the arenas for communication are, in this sense, of educational as well as cultural interest.

The educational in childhood culture concerns the powers and conditions that are put in movement when children and young people meet across borders, thus getting the possibility to do important things together, and to learn from each others' experiences and knowledge. Important questions are how children themselves consider what is important and interesting, and where children from different cultural contexts and nations find their meeting places, for their exchange of experiences.

Three Globetree encounters, 2005 – 2008

I have taken part in three encounters arranged by the Globetree: one travel to Kenya in December 2005, the first World Championship in Stockholm, in early summer 2006, and the second World Championship in Kampala, Uganda, in June 2008.

The travel to Kenya. In December 2005 I traveled with the Globetree to Kenya, together with Swedish children aged 13 to 18, and their teachers and leaders. We spent the first days on a safari near the border to Tanzania. In Nairobi we visited, among other places, UN:s area, where children have a meeting place under an acacia tree, and we visited Children's Garden, where slum children and street children through the Globetree have access to schooling as well as, for some of the children, a home. After the travel to Kenya I had email contact with the partaking children via a questionnaire with open answers. It was evident that the young Swedes appreciated the experiences as positive possibilities to get insights into other cultural values, not just pitying the African children for their poverty. "I will never again talk of those poor children which we have to afford with food", was a comment in this conversation.

World Championship in Cooperation, Stockholm. In early summer 2006 the Globetree had invited children from the whole world to a championship in creative cooperation. This world championship started with parades from four parts of the city. I went in the parade from Medborgarplatsen to Strömparterren where the opening ceremony took place. After this the children built their installations outside the parliament, and the week ended with a gala feast in the Globe. What can be mentioned and noticed as especially interesting, from an educological point of view, and with a knowledge interest in childhood culture and its meaning for children around the world, is what the partaking children really put on the agenda as important during these events in Stockholm 2006. They stressed the importance of seeing differences, in life conditions and in experiences, as affordances, as invitations to joint actions, and to see the big global problems as developmental challenges for all to work with, children as well as adults. This was perhaps more pronounced by the children than by the adults, that the differences are interesting and provoking for thought as well as affording when it comes to joint tasks to work with.

World Championship in Cooperation, Kampala. In June 2008 the world championship took place in Kampala, Uganda. The place was the City Hall and its surrounding park and garden, and it contained installations and performances by the children, African as well as Swedish, often in joint projects. The parade went through the centre of the city, and the events ended with a barbeque at the city hall garden. It is not that evident in Kampala as it was in Stockholm two years earlier that children appreciate the differences in experiences and background. Rather they point to the importance of coming to grips with all threats and maltreatments that children may be subjected to. What was also interesting to see is that the Swedish young people (rather than children according to their age) noticed the bad conditions that many children in Uganda live under, rather than seeing the interesting contributions they had, due to life experiences and specific cultural competencies. When I interviewed some African children in Kampala, boys and girls around the age of 11, about their motives to attend the World Championship, they could answer that they had something interesting to convey, to contribute with, relative the Swedish children, e.g. dances and songs. They could also say that they thought that they are so good at cooperation – even best! And of course they also wanted to have fun – this was an important reason to come, but learning from each other was mentioned as a prime reason. The Swedish youngsters could be a bit more confused about the exchange possibilities, but this was still during the championship. Perhaps they

considered the exchange points more in depth after the visit to Kampala and Uganda. They were older than the African partaking children, and they saw more of problems for the younger children in Uganda than possible experiential exchange, at that occasion.

Some conclusions

I have presentations with digital pictures from these events, one from the travel to Kenya and the WCiC in Stockholm, and one from the WCiC in Kampala, where I point to situational and contextual cultural affordances that I could see during these events.

What is especially interesting to point to is the clear relevance and place that the UN convention on the rights of the child has in these international encounters, expressed also in the children's own comments on what is valuable in experiential exchange. I could also see the importance and value of the choices of meeting places, which are offered and used during these encounters, and – above all - the respectful attitudes and inviting activities that are coupled to the arrangements. I think of Janusz Korczak, the Polish pedagogue, doctor and author, who once worked eagerly and forcefully for a global convention on the rights of the child (see Korczak 2002/1929) . He pronounced especially the importance of listening to and respecting children for what they are, not just thinking that they will become something (more important).

I often use a quotation from Roger Hart (1992), who wrote: “Children are undoubtedly the most photographed and the least listened to members of society”. In the Globetree the children have their voices and people do indeed listen and take actions.

Some references:

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