

# ***Global Learning as Constitution of Meaning in Global – Local Contexts: Pedagogical Design and Support Towards Sustainability***

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## **Proposal information /Research /Questions and Theoretical Approach**

*“Through international and intercultural friendship, young people should benefit from cultural diversity, through their actions today, help to preserve it for generations to come. Thus, while youth are the key to the future, it is essential that they shape the present too.” (UNESCO, 2004, p.4)*

The purpose of this research is to analyze and describe the ways in which young people from many different countries and cultures experience their learning during the online course Young Masters Programme (YMP), which focuses on the phenomenon *Preventive Environmental Strategies (PES)*. The course is characterized as an extended global learning space in which the common content takes on a local meaning.

A starting point is that through the distance course a global network is developed within which the students work across national and cultural boundaries, boundaries that have to be met and crossed across cultural differences. Different conceptions and different meanings of what are apparently similar concepts have to become the object of reflection, and this gives rise to knowledge formation (Pierce, 1934; Bateson, 1972). The different meetings encourage the young people to reflect more on attitudes, to realize how their own actions and the actions of other people affect the environment.

The high school students work in interactions across the globe to learn about sustainable development through exploring a learning environment with new ICT-mediated ways of communication including global interaction with ideas and descriptions, and a transdisciplinary approach focusing on social, economic and ecological dimensions of the students' daily lives (Gough, 1987). Young people from different countries and cultures were working with a common content in the extended classroom. These global meetings seem to catalyze the high school students' commitment and learning process in a sustainable direction.

## **Method**

The aim of the analysis for this paper was to find qualitative differences in the experiences of learning. The study has been influenced by a phenomenographic approach (Marton 1981, Marton & Booth, 1997), where the goal was to capture the ways in which learning was experienced by the students, taking a second-order perspective on the object of study. While the overall study attempts to capture, analyse and describe qualitative variation in significant features of the experience of learning about sustainability, this paper presents an analysis of how the students understand the phenomenon preventive environmental strategies (PES). The data for the study reported came from the students' assignments and follow-up discussions where they reflect on the assignments in the online course's interactive global forums in Part1 of the YMP course that ran in 2005. The part chosen for this research was the first module *“Hanna and Sustainability”*. In the assignment the students reflect over their daily life situations and the environmental and social consequences. This was the students' first assignments. The students were asked to reflect on general features of their learning on PES as an aspect of sustainability. Answers were analyzed to find themes in the broad concept of sustainability that the students related to their learning. A learning perspective on the communication was in focus (Booth & Hultén, 2003). Study groups representing different countries and different continents were hosted in an online globally extended classroom. This research intends to focus on the relation between certain features of the special phenomenon and the learning that is afforded, making use of comparison and contrast. In particular, learning as constitution of meaning by the individual in relation to the context of learning, experienced by the individual from her own background and experiences, the meeting with the given structure and content of the course, the meeting with other participants at a distance, is central to the study.

## Conclusion & Findings, Scientific Significance

The group discussions are not dramatically dynamic in the start, but the students were testing the global learning and may be capable to create their own potential for learning. They showed that they want to know more and to deepen their knowledge through learning dialogues.

Reflective contributions with problematizing demand from the students in the group discussion to cease taking something for granted. A detail in the assignment could be isolated and some aspect from a more general field is focused. When asked, what are the problems you may face while discussing the use of bicycles instead of cars for short distances, the forum discussion contribution could even be recognized as a *learning contribution* in the meaning of appearing as the culmination of some threads of arguments. Such contributions have a characteristic element of critic of one's own thinking or someone else's, and it is followed by a search for a better way of analysing and expressing a situation associated with the task (Booth and Hultén, 2003).

Still, the students are young people meeting one another as young people do, living in a single world of youth and the problems of the environment; besides that they are meeting in the course, around the common issues of the environment; and finally, they were meeting as representatives of different cultures with different assumptions and values.

Global learning as constitution of meaning is vital, three features of learning recognized are in particular central: the character of the constituted context for learning, temporal and spatial flexibility of opportunity for learning, and the meetings that take place in a diverse population of learners in global contexts. For the students of this online course is the diversity very important and the context for learning. The result will turn to considerations of pedagogical design and support.

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