

Changing the World (or Not): Reflecting on Interactions with the Global South during the Frontrunners Program

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This chapter is based upon a conversation with Outi Toura-Jensen, Filip Verhelst, and Ole Vestergaard, deaf teachers in the well-known and influential Denmark-based Frontrunners program (<http://frontrunners.dk>), an international deaf youth leadership training program (though its focus has recently changed and it is now a deaf international education program). The idea for Frontrunners came from a think tank in which Danish Deaf youth participated and the initial goal of the program was to educate deaf participants to be leaders, lobbyists and activists in order to create a better world for deaf people (hence the name “Frontrunners”). The slogan during its early iterations was “Wanna change the world?!”

Each Frontrunners program lasts nine months, from September to May each year, accepts deaf youth between the ages of eighteen and thirty from all over the world, and is taught in International Sign (IS). The first program was conducted in 2005–2006, and annual groups are named Frontrunners 1, Frontrunners 2, and so on. At the time of the interview (September 2013), the program was in its ninth iteration (Frontrunners 9). Frontrunners takes place in Castberggård (<http://www.cbg.dk>), an institution for deaf students located in a remote rural area in Denmark. The program includes two classroom components (module 1, from September to December, and module 3, from the middle of February to the middle of May) and an applied component

(module 2, from the middle of December to the middle of February). In the classroom (modules 1 and 3), participants learn about Deaf-related themes and concepts (such as Deafhood, audism, deaf history, deaf art), (sign) language and communication, bilingualism, media, leadership, teamwork, project management, and social entrepreneurship (see <http://frontrunners.dk/curriculum/>). In the applied component (module 2), participants are expected to devise a short (one- or two-month-long) project to put theory into practice in either their home country or a foreign country.

The Frontrunners program is international in five different aspects, which makes it interesting to consider in the framework of this book. First, the participants come to Denmark from all over the world. Most come from European countries, but deaf youth from the USA, Canada, Australia, and countries in the global South such as Ghana, Mongolia, India, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Chile have participated. Second, during modules 1 and 3, one or more educational trips are organized, often to another European country such as Germany or Belgium. Third, during module 2, participants often visit other countries to do an internship in which they apply the theories they have learned. Fourth, about once a week, a deaf guest lecturer visits the Frontrunners classroom and teaches for one or two days. Over the past nine years, ninety-five different deaf guest lecturers from a range of (mainly European) countries have visited the course. Fifth, the three permanent deaf staff are from different international backgrounds: Ole, a Danish man in his fifties, initiated the program and has experience as an administrator and teacher in Castberggård; Filip, a Belgian former teacher in his thirties, participated in Frontrunners 1; and Outi, a Finnish woman in her thirties, is an education specialist.

The number of participants in the Frontrunners course differs every year and has ranged between nine and nineteen participants. Only the classroom/residential components (modules 1

and 3) are included in the fee of around 8600 euros; thus participants themselves decide how much to spend in module 2. A number of participants obtain sponsorship. In their application, potential participants must include a video in which they explain who they are and why they would like to attend Frontrunners, and an online interview is conducted. When evaluating the applications, the teachers look for motivation, signs of ability to learn and reflect, and signs of capability to operate in a team. A maximum of two people from the same country are accepted in each group. Each Frontrunners group has its own website (<http://frontrunners.dk/archives.aspx>) on which participants post(ed) pictures and movies in International Sign about what they have learned and experienced.

The Frontrunners course has grown into a place where deaf people can learn what it means to be deaf and to look at themselves in a group context, while leaving everything else aside. This is a particularly powerful space of opportunity for deaf youth in the current (European) climate, with the closing of deaf schools and diminishing popularity of deaf clubs: it is increasingly difficult to find places where deaf people gather frequently in a structured environment. Metaphors the teachers used to describe the Frontrunners program included “a mirror,” “an energy center,” and an “an injection.” Hence, throughout the years, particularly during and after Frontrunners 5, the program aim has shifted and the curriculum has broadened. The emphasis on leadership did not disappear but has lightened, and there is a growing focus on sign language work in the curriculum. The slogan “wanna change the world?!” has been discarded, because (particularly in the first years of the program) it put a lot of pressure on former Frontrunners. As Ole commented: “the name was an aim, and now it's just a name to us.”

Parallel to this shift was a shift in the backgrounds of international deaf guest speakers: in the beginning, people with high status were invited, such as Markku Jokinen, the then president

of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Now, guest lecturers have more practical experience working directly with people on the ground and they are closer in age to Frontrunners. Former Frontrunners are invited as guest teachers also, to reflect on whether the theories they were taught earlier have worked for them. From Frontrunners 11 onwards (2015–2016), a new shift is planned: the program is now called a Deaf international education program rather than a leadership program; Frontrunners can get ECTS credits when they attend, and can opt for choosing only the first module (focused on culture) or third module (focused on language) (see <http://frontrunners.dk/curriculum/>). The new slogan is “We exist, we believe, we do.”

In module 2, the Frontrunners participants are responsible for developing a project and making contact with stakeholders in the country they want to visit. During the past few years, the majority of the participants have gone to a southern country, alone or with a few other Frontrunners. Some have traveled to countries such as Nepal, India, Chile, and Ghana, where they organized “awareness programs” in which the concepts taught in the Frontrunners course are taught, such as leadership, human rights, audism, Deafhood, and empowerment. Others have organized theater training, volunteered in deaf youth associations, or made documentaries. Just like the general curriculum, the aim of the projects in module 2 has shifted over time, for reasons discussed in this chapter. A turning point for Frontrunners took place in its sixth year, when a five-week stay in Ghana was part of the curriculum. This trip was not organized again, for reasons that are discussed here.

The conversation in this chapter focused on the teachers’ experience of the program over the years; their perspectives on what to teach, how to teach, how to mentor and guide deaf youth on their journey to “discover themselves” within international contexts, and the dilemmas the teachers face in their pedagogical practices in their international class groups with regard to

module 2 and the study visits abroad, particularly the one in Ghana. Annelies Kusters, who asked the questions and organized this text, is a Belgian deaf anthropologist.¹ She has a long-standing relationship with this program as a visiting lecturer (including preparing the Frontrunners 6 group for the group stay in Ghana), is married to an Indian participant of Frontrunners 3, and has observed parts and consequences of a number of Frontrunners' module 2 projects in Mumbai between 2009 and 2013. The conversation, which lasted two hours, was held in Castberggård in September 2013, conducted in International Sign, video-recorded, and translated into English.

DEAF-SAME within Frontrunners Groups

Outi: When a group comes to us, there are so many reasons within the group for why they come to us. The desire for change, the desire to look within, feeling oppressed, feeling a lack of confidence. A desire for experience. So many different experiences, but I see something come up in them that gives them some confidence and a breath of relief. They see and experience DEAF-SAME. . . . They are relieved to see that even though there are so many differences among us, there's something that's the same. . . . They feel how much they have in common. Then with time, they get a little fed up and see how different they are culturally, and then disputes come up. . . . And then in the third module, the message went forth, of acceptance. . . . They could see that there were some things DEAF-SAME, and some things that were very different. Culture, views of the world, experiences of the world. Values, philosophies—many things that are different.

Potential differences include having attended a deaf school versus having been mainstreamed, and differences in language use and communication.

1. Thanks to Kirk VanGilder for his suggestion to structure the text in this way.

Outi: An Indian man brought up the topic of interpreters. It was about how interpreters can engage and then disengage. The Scandinavians in the group were very convinced that when an interpreter is there, they could fit in with hearing people but if there was no interpreter, it was such a different experience, of being separated from hearing people. The Indian man disagreed, saying that the interpreter came in between and separated the deaf people into a different group. This became such a controversy. People wouldn't accept this point. This topic stayed around for a long time. At the end, the Indian person said, "Ok, this is my opinion and that's all. This is my culture that I grew up in and a different environment. Deaf and hearing people in India communicate with each other through gesture with ease, and Scandinavia is very different. But if you would come to my country, you must understand the experience and culture of that place." . . . And then, over time, I could see that if the topic of interpreters came up, people knew clearly where this person stood and that their experience was different. . . . That's one of the points where DEAF-SAME doesn't work.

Entering the Global South during Module 2

Outi: What's interesting is that we never say "you have to go and give lectures." We never say that. . . . Because it was in the curriculum, people thought they had to go in and change the world. They got the idea that they have to change the world in just one or two months. [smiles] But maybe it was the wrong wording in the curriculum, the wrong message we gave, it could have been misleading.

The teachers think the focus on the Global South was caused by a combination of guest lectures and current global trends.

Filip: There has been so much discussion about how to go into developing countries and how to do this or that. In Frontrunners 2, Colin Allen [now WFD president, previously active as development worker] came for a week or three days to teach.

Ole: That really blew up.

Filip: Yes, yes. . . . He came for teaching, and then he came to teach again in Frontrunners 3, and this was repeated for Frontrunners 4. This way of thinking was passed on and on. . . .

Ole: The people that come to give talks—they are inspirational. . . .

Filip: Since nine or ten years ago, many deaf organisations went over to different places, such as Nepal. . . . Swedish people and others went over there. People from Denmark were active in Uganda. Finland went over to Albania. To encourage development and change. There have been individuals who have come here to give talks and they say that . . . they have experienced clashes of culture. The group watches eagerly and they want the same thing. . . . There are different points that all come together that sort of become the prevailing philosophy that is given over to the Frontrunners. It's not only what we tell them. There's a prevailing mindset already out there. . . .

Ole: A trend—it's a trend that is followed.

Encountering and Responding to Cultural Differences in the Global South

Frontrunners teachers became gradually aware of problems related to the transfer of Western concepts to different contexts in the Global South.

Outi: Two years ago, a Frontrunner was from [Asian country] and for module 2 that person wanted to go back and work in [the same Asian country]. I thought that was really good, that this person would know the location, culture, and all of that and be able to adjust what was taught to suit this specific country. . . . After learning these strongly Western theories, that person went over there and started to teach and things were jarring. During a workshop in [this Asian country], people said, look here, what you are saying is very Western and very European and it doesn't suit us here. That really surprised the Frontrunner and took them aback. From this we can see that even when you know a certain place and culture, and when you hope that what you've taught takes in different views . . . [and] that we've given them the ability to see from different perspectives and decide about what can be taken to a certain location and taught or not, the person may still . . . not be aware of this.

In former conversations with the Frontrunners, Annelies shared observations in Mumbai with the teachers. She had observed parts and consequences of several Frontrunners projects in Mumbai between 2009 and 2013. For example, two Frontrunners gave lectures on leadership in International Sign that were not understood: both the sign language and the concepts were too foreign for the audience to readily comprehend. Other Frontrunners came to film a documentary about “deaf life in Mumbai” by visiting three deaf associations they visited once, where they

gave a lecture to elicit perspectives rather than observing and hence got a skewed image of deaf life in Mumbai. Other Frontrunners introduced the concept of audism in deaf schools, which led to tensions between teachers and students in these schools. In addition, some Frontrunners were inspired by the (western) philosophy of age limits for youth clubs and imposed an age limit (eighteen to thirty) on an existing all-ages club for the deaf in Mumbai in order to turn it into a youth club. This led to tensions between deaf youth and older deaf people. As a result of Annelies's and two Indian people's observations in Mumbai, anecdotes and stories from Frontrunners themselves such as the abovementioned participant from the Asian country, and the Ghana project during Frontrunners 6, the aims of module 2 (as envisaged by the teachers) became more modest. Today the teachers encourage the participants to plan a visit to another country using the principles of exchange, observation, and learning about another culture, rather than giving lectures about the concepts they have learned in Frontrunners.

Outi: The participants of the group go out, and it does not matter where, it could be their home location. They have got the tools to closely examine, to see if the theories work, or there are some sharp differences, or if it's more like they sit back and look at things, decide what they can use from the theories we have given them to suit whichever location. Or they go to a very different location where they are not from, not to offer them those theories but to see what the deaf community is like there and what the different values and philosophies are there, and don't bring things from here with them, but more step away from that and see the varying factors in the deaf community there. We can't give them the matching theories for each situation. It's more like seeing that there are so many varying factors in the deaf communities. . . . When we teach, there are some things that are DEAF-SAME,

but once they're out in the field, it's surprising to see that it's not all DEAF-SAME.

We want them to observe more. To learn from what's there. . . .

Ole: A Frontrunner who came here asked if Frontrunners have to so intensely try to empower. And I said no, no, it's about what <i>you want to do. This person wanted to do art in Japan with a famous deaf artist and asked if they can meet with and learn about how the artist worked. And I thought, this is a good idea. But they said that others [such as previous Frontrunners] had told them that you had to try to intensely empower.

Preparing Frontrunners for Stays in the Global South

When preparing the Frontrunners for module 2, the teachers are aware of their own strongly Western background. None of the teachers have been active in development work or long-term stays in the Global South.

Outi: I can't give guidance on how to teach over there. I can only hope that they can themselves understand the different perspectives and decide. And I thought that this would be possible, but it wasn't. Things unfolded and it didn't work out [in the case of the Frontrunner from the Asian country]. . . . And we [the teachers] didn't know what to do. We said, hmm, and tried to take a step back and look at things with some objectivity. . . . It has to be more self-reflection and critical thinking from us whether they are really ready for what they want to do. . . . It's more about pushing them to examine whether their thinking is a good match to the location they're going to and guiding them into a suitable direction.

<noindenttxt>This is one of the areas in which the guest teachers are seen as crucial:

Outi: I think that my vision about the best way to nurture thinking about module 2 is to recruit teachers who themselves have experience and who know more. . . . Our teaching philosophy is not to try to show that we know everything. It's more about nurturing, bringing in people with a wealth of knowledge. Using people . . . who have looked more deeply into other cultures and countries. . . . They can relate all kinds of things and our hope is that the Frontrunners will take advantage of this knowledge. My job is to ask what each Frontrunners' clear ambition is and then to bring information in.

<noindenttxt>The teachers discussed the need for a balance between steering the participants on the one hand, and leaving things up to them as much as possible on the other hand:

Outi: We caution them to be aware that they have a big responsibility. To go into a different culture that they do not know and they are only one person. Can you really give a speech? Can you match the local culture? Do you know if the local people need this topic that you are talking about? . . .

Ole: In truth, for me, when I work with the group, preparing module 2, . . . once they have made contact and made an agreement on how to go forward, . . . if both parties have agreed then I take a step back. I think the important thing is that both parties agree. I think the host location can say, mmm, no, I don't like this and I don't want this. . . . For example, one girl wanted to go to Africa last year. She made plans and I asked her if she had made contact. She said she had. I asked if the involved people in the host country were aware of the program that she planned to carry out. She said no, only she knew the details. I asked, how do you

know then that the people there want the program you are planning? There needs to be contact and mutual agreement. That's important to me. In reality, sometimes the people in the host country may take a look and say “no, we do not like this and we do not want this. That's not a good idea and changes need to be made.” And maybe after changes are made, they will welcome the Frontrunner. But it's impossible for us to go over and see. . . .

Filip: If I mentor them, I always say, one, don't set your sights big. Set them small. Choose a small project. Many think grandiosely, and I don't encourage that. . . . And second, I need to remind many that they need self-reflection and they need to think about ethical questions. When looking back, they have to be honest and admit a mistake. . . . We need to . . . emphasize more the need to adjust to the other culture. . . . Looking back, there should have been more thought about ethical issues. More thought about what it means to be a Westerner going over somewhere to sort of help or save the world. That's not what it should be like. Maybe before that was okay, but not now. Maybe our philosophies have changed.

Ole: Also, we need to be more aware. People tell us things [such as about Frontrunners projects in Mumbai] and we have just been getting on with things here unaware and then when we learn of certain things, we're blown away. We look at each other and say, is this the way it really is? And then we realize yes, that's how it is, and try to think of what we should do about it. But what to change, how—maybe we should make more contact with people in the host countries,

making sure that their needs are a close match with what the person will come and do there. That's one thing. Another thing is changing module 2, but module 2 doesn't need to be paid for. It is free. How do I force people not to go over to these places? That's an example of the difficulties of the framework.

Follow-up and Feedback after Travels to the Global South

During module 3, an important element is reflection on the projects in module 2:

Outi: When they come back to us, they have had various experiences of learning from wherever they have been. Individual ability to think and to reflect is very different from person to person. That risk is always going to be there: they go over and then they come back, and we see whether they have in fact been able to take advantage of everything they could, or there's the risk that things haven't really worked out as well as we hoped. . . . I noticed that there have been clashes, so I ask them to be honest towards us. What were they frustrated with. Maybe the group together can sit down and analyze where the frustration comes from. . . .

Once it's looked at from different angles, I think they will be better able to look at themselves and address where the frustration comes from. Maybe they don't know the country and culture, they had too little time there, they brought too much of their own background over with them when they should have set it aside, stayed open, and tried to learn as much as possible from where they were.

The teachers note that a challenge is that all the reflection comes from the Frontrunners themselves and not from the people in the places where they have done projects.

Filip: There have been previous experiences where things have really failed.

And I say, that's okay, failure is okay. That's an experience in itself, a new experience. And then there have been people who have felt good about what they did. But has it been good for the people around, who are affected by the project? I have no idea. . . .

Outi: We really don't have anyone looking in from the other side, we don't have that contact. . . . We'd like more contact with people looking in from the other side. . . . Do the accounts match up or are there many differences? . . . I think it's taken us a long time to realize we need to have contact with people in other countries. It's been a while. And now we're stopping ourselves and saying, wait. Trying to make changes in the Frontrunners program. From Frontrunners 6, changes were being made.

Frontrunners 6 Trip to Ghana

An important turning point during Frontrunners 6 was the five-week trip to Ghana during module 1, as part of the curriculum (and thus the module 1 fee for Frontrunners 6 was higher than the other years; see <http://fr6.frontrunners.dk>). The Frontrunners 6 group consisted of thirteen people. Outi and Filip both went to Ghana along with the group: Filip stayed for the first two and a half weeks and Outi stayed the full five weeks. Before going over with the group, Outi visited Ghana to plan the program. During the trip, Frontrunners 6 organized activities such as theater and dance in a large deaf school in the town of Mampong and gave lectures on human rights and social justice. Deaf Ghanaians in turn gave lectures about deaf organizations and deaf life in Ghana. The decision to go to Ghana was motivated by the history of Danish people from

the Danish Deaf Association (DDL) and the Danish Youth Deaf Association (DDU) working in Ghana to strengthen its national and youth deaf association. There were thus existing contacts and a network between deaf Ghanaians and Danish deaf people. Outi narrates the aim of the trip as follows:

Outi: The aim was a desire to see how the deaf communities were different. . . .
When we went there, it was with the aim of an exchange.

She emphasizes that the Frontrunners took away a lot from it:

Outi: Frontrunners 6 went to Ghana and had a very positive awakening there. [They observed that] there was no real separation between deaf and hard of hearing people in Ghana. Deaf and hard of hearing people mixed together effortlessly. They asked the deaf association, GNAD [the Ghanaian National Association of the Deaf], if there were structural differences between deaf and hard of hearing people. They said no, we all use sign language so there are the same aims for everyone. This was an awakening for the Frontrunners. Ghana was ahead in this way. . . . Here in Europe, deaf and hard of hearing are more separate, still. It's more focused on the amount of hearing you have. In Ghana it was more about the shared language. The Frontrunners were openmouthed about this difference. . . . It was surprising and different for them—the forms, the differences in the deaf communities, the philosophies, everything.

However, Outi experienced a sharp disconnect between the aim of exchange and the reality during the stay in Ghana:

Outi: The Frontrunners got satisfaction and experience but the local people didn't get much. Just another white group that came and went. I found that interesting. The idea of an exchange wasn't 100 percent fulfilled. The schoolkids were inspired by the experience of theater and dance, yes, but that wasn't something sustainable. . . . We worked with teachers and staff who said in a negative way that people kept on coming and coming. What did the people here at the school gain? People gave things, but of what value was it? The people went hooray and they went back home to their countries with a feeling that they had achieved change but for the local people, everything felt the same. Nothing had been achieved. . . . Where was the genuine exchange? . . . I felt I saw who takes most advantage of these opportunities of this sort of project: the Frontrunners. . . . Every year there would be a different group in Ghana and the locals would feel that it was the same thing over and over, every year. For the Frontrunners it would be exciting and new, but not for the locals. It would always return to the same spot, a sort of regression.

The teachers realized that even when the aim is exchange (rather than empowerment), there may be a clash in expectations. The relationship developed during this one-time encounter did not have a chance to develop into something sustainable over the years.

Outi: What eats at me is that the Ghanaians asked when the Frontrunners would be back. "From now on, will there be no more? What do we get from it?" I saw two big differing perspectives. Just the other day, someone from Ghana got in touch with me on Facebook and asked when the Frontrunners would be back again and was a bit like, "what's up with that, what happened?" I felt uneasy. . . .

Yes, experience is good, but I could see two very different perspectives here that didn't meet in the middle.

Talking about the Ghana project led us back to module 2, in which individual projects are undertaken without the security of the group. Filip stressed the advantages of going as a group rather than as an individual, while Outi pointed out the disadvantages of going as a group, based on a comment of a Ghanaian man.

Filip: The positive thing is that when a Frontrunners group goes out, they have meetings most evenings. These meetings, they're more about not thinking that you're above the other people. It's about everyone being on the same level. An example, they went over [to the deaf school in Mampong] and in the mornings everyone queued. If someone was late, the teacher would smack them and tell them to go. Many Frontrunners felt that this was wrong. But they needed to hush up and leave things alone. This was their [Ghanaian] culture. . . . You can't meddle with it. At the evening meetings, there would be potential and space for us teachers [i.e., Outi and Filip] to manage things a little, or for them. To see things from different perspectives. . . . In this way, a group is better. But is a group of people going over a good idea?

Outi: A Ghanaian man, Robert Sampana, had been [to the Rochester Institute of Technology] to study and then he came back to Ghana. He worked in the GNAD. The Frontrunners were there and he said to them: "You come here to do volunteer work. But you aren't truly doing volunteer work." The Frontrunners said, "no, we are volunteering." He said "no, you are in a group and you are safe within your

own culture in the group. You haven't gone out on your own into this country and culture. You should be on your own, you should dismantle the group. . . . The Frontrunners were taken aback and surprised and didn't agree, but I could see that his point was real. They are safe within the group and their sameness in front of any differences that come to them.

The Thin Line between Interventions That Are “Okay” and “Not Okay”

Following the discussion of the Ghana trip, a distinction was made between module 2 projects in Europe and in the global South.

Ole: Suppose they want a project in Italy—that's okay. If they want a project in Turkey . . . that's okay, that's possible. We need to understand the spectrum of what [kinds of projects in what locations] are okay and what's not okay. That's hard.

Outi: An example . . . one year ago, a Frontrunner, a girl from [South American country] . . . was active in the [South American country] deaf youth association, and she wanted to do a project in [South Europe]. . . . She asked their youth association to give her work and at the same time she wanted to see the structure and goals of her own country's deaf youth association and compare it to [South European country's] and see what they had in common, compare all the points. This person said that this experience was advantageous and the [South European country's] deaf youth association said that she really helped them with her work. . . . They were able to learn a bit from her about how things were done in [her

South American country], and she learned a lot about the [South European country's] way and their differences. . . . Both got something out of it. I think it worked well. . . . In Ghana, that didn't happen. It was more the Frontrunners who got something out of it, but the Ghanaians did not. . . . The [South American country's] girl—it was two-way. There has been talk about [the South European country's] group going to [the South American country], to see how they do things there and at the association there and so forth, . . . so that it would be a true exchange. . . .

Filip: It's important to have crossover [i.e., learning through exchange, by visiting each other's countries and/or philosophies] . . .

Outi: But is crossover a bit of a Western concept? It's us Westerners who have the money to travel. For example, the Frontrunners who went to Ghana—do the Ghanaians have the money to come over to Europe? Mmmm . . . so how is crossover possible? . . . But my point is “crossover,” what does it mean? “Equal crossover?” Would it benefit them to come here? . . . Do what the Frontrunners did there, have a look around and then go back? Would they be able to bring something back with them that they could then develop, take advantage of, show others?

Other Study Trips and the Difference with the Ghana Trip

The Ghana trip was not only compared with the individual projects in module 2 but also with other study trips that were undertaken in the past, for a few days to a week, during modules 1 and 3. These trips were mostly to Copenhagen, but also to Berlin and Brussels. In Berlin, for example, the Frontrunners visited a deaf politician, a sign language business, a deaf café, a deaf psychologist, and other deaf-related entities.

Ole: [points at Filip] When you went to Berlin [with the Frontrunners], was it a good idea or a bad idea? Frontrunners in Berlin, observing and taking advantage of that experience. What did they bring? How did both sides benefit? Is it more equal in Berlin? . . .

Outi: The people in Berlin were happier that we came. They talked to us, us being there wasn't a problem for them. I feel that it was a problem for the Ghanaians. It was a problem that they are fed up with white people going there all the time without any lasting development coming from it. And us Frontrunners being a part of that. . . . I feel uneasy with that.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, Frontrunners is in its tenth iteration. On one weekend in November 2014, all former Frontrunners were invited to a reunion in Castberggård. The fact that the program has continued to exist for ten years is indicative of the popularity of (and the need for) this international learning environment. The fact that such a program can exist at all is based on commonalities between deaf participants, teachers, and guest teachers from different countries (DEAF-SAME) and the possibility of communication in International Sign. The program

is a beacon not only for the participants but also for many deaf youth who are aware of its existence and who aspire to attend, or who are inspired by Frontrunners groups' websites. Their active presence on the Internet through v-logs in International Sign is one of the strengths of the program. It is an international deaf space, both physical and virtual, that is famous for its opportunities for learning, study, and reflection. It differs from places such as Gallaudet or the former Deaf studies program in Bristol because of its use of International Sign rather than a national sign language, the fact that the threshold (and the fee) to attend is lower, and the frequency with which deaf guest teachers are invited.

During the conversation, the teachers highlighted what happens when people from diverse backgrounds come together in the context of an international classroom in Castbergård. The participants are together in the classroom and during meals, and some of them share rooms. They are constantly confronted with and forced to manage their commonalities and differences. When they went out to the global South, in the frame of the group trip to Ghana and the individual module 2 projects, observers, participants, and teachers experienced a number of disconnects in expectations and disconnects with the experience of "gaining something" (or not). These trips to the global South were contrasted with study trips and module 2 projects in Europe.

The teachers attempt to make the Frontrunners aware of the importance of exchange during their pedagogical practices: creating opportunity for learning and discussion in a nurturing environment where they bring in guest teachers, stimulate ethical consciousness, and steer reflection. They also wish to have more feedback and contacts with people in the host countries in the future. At the same time, the questions that the teachers have raised about whether real exchange is possible, whether real crossover is possible, and about the limits of DEAF-SAME in international contexts are very real.

According to the teachers, the ten-year anniversary of Frontrunners program would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and bravery of the participants to jump into the unknown and test their limits. The teachers have the special privilege to observe the participants' inner journeys and their physical journeys to other deaf people and their cultures. There have been bumps on the road, but they have been open and honest about their efforts and mistakes. Because of their honesty and that of collaborators and observers during module 2, it has been possible to improve the teaching philosophy, psychology, and contents of the program and, most importantly, to expand understanding of the similarities and differences among deaf people. The participants in Frontrunners have shown that one should not be afraid of mistakes, because only through trying one can learn and improve. The teachers want to hold onto this in the future, also in the light of the changes in the curriculum from Frontrunners 11 onwards, which is why they agreed to work together on this article: to encourage open dialogue among deaf people in international encounters, while they observe, define, and name phenomena that are little known.