

## Global Citizenship: Several Educative Challenges A Canadian's Perspective

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(This paper was derived from a longitudinal study on the impact of a global citizenship practicum as depicted in a book written by the author: Kornelsen, Lloyd (2014). *Stories of transformation: Memories of a global citizenship practicum*. The International Center for Innovation in Education: Ulm, Germany.)

### Abstract

Today, in 2016, educating for global citizenship is considered a central concern in many secondary schools' social studies curricula. But what does the term, global citizen, actually mean, and what are some of its most basic educative challenges? Responses to these questions will be derived from the speaker's recently published book, *Stories of Transformation: Memories of a Global Citizenship Practicum*, and examined through audience participation and discussion.

### Introduction

In the past twenty-five years there has been a surge of academic interest in topics of world citizenship and cosmopolitanism. This interest seems to be occasioned by two global phenomena. The first is the end of the cold war and a bi-polar political framework, deeply divided by ideology and military struggle. With the world no longer divided into two opposing armed camps, it has made it easier for people to see the world from a broader perspective, and to develop a global consciousness and focus of concern. The second phenomenon is the growing reality and recognition of 'globalization.' Global interconnectedness today is unprecedented, with people around the world affected by, and facing daily choices, issues and dilemmas of global impact and concern. Moreover, since in part, today's globalization is characterized by globalization from the top down - the hegemonic, pervasive and undemocratic global impact of corporate interest and power, what is necessitated according to people like Richard Falk (1995) is globalization from the bottom up, where the rights of democratic citizenship are accorded every person in the world.

In Manitoba, Canada, as in many places, the education community has embraced the concept enthusiastically, encouraging teachers to cultivate qualities in students that are commensurate with global citizenship. But, notwithstanding the contested nature of 'world citizenship', what does the term actually mean? What is it that teachers are expected to educate for and what are some of the critical pedagogical challenges? It is with this that this paper is concerned: What traits are critical to world citizenship and what teaching challenges arise from endeavouring to cultivate those traits? My perspective stems from 25 years of teaching high school social studies in Manitoba, Canada and from revisiting a high school global citizenship practicum I facilitated in 2003 (Canada – Costa Rica). My analysis is informed by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and John Dewey's progressive pragmatism.

### **Global Citizenship**

A review of the research literature sympathetic to the concept of world citizenship by Kornelsen (2014) revealed a clustering of three characteristics. A global citizen is someone who: (1) recognizes a common humanity, and hence appeals to a universal sense of justice and cares about the human and environmental dimensions of global injustices; (2) has an open predisposition, being able to see the world through the lens of people who are different from themselves, and hence respects and values cultural diversity; and (3) has a sense of agency and responsibility, and hence is able and willing to engage the world thoughtfully, helpfully and hopefully (Nussbaum, 1997; Boulding, 1990; Heater, 2002; Appiah, 2008; Schattle, 2008). Even though, as stated earlier, global citizenship is a contested and differentiated concept, for the purposes of this discussion, I will assume that the objectives of global citizenship education are in line with the traits delineated above, and from which arise several critical pedagogical challenges.

### **Balancing Universalism and Pluralism**

The first challenge has to do with helping students reconcile or navigate the terrain between the first two traits, a universal sense of justice and a sympathetic imagination of the different, between universalism and pluralism – learning to know when to judge or criticize and when to be open and curious. These are choices and dilemmas young people face daily, as they engage with others and with their world – oftentimes looking to their elders (teachers) for guidance in how to understand and interpret difference. A teacher's global bearing may have lasting consequences for their global outlook and perspective. One example\*\* is recounted in Kornelsen, 2013 and Kornelsen, 2017. In 2003, colleague (Adrienne\*\*\*) and I from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada took a group of high school students to Costa Rica for two weeks to live and work in a village in the Costa Rica highlands. Several days after we arrived, two students came to us, confused and upset about a situation in their homestay. There was a man in the backyard, locked in a cell-like structure that was keeping them awake at night, howling like a wolf. He was their host mom's older brother; he had been brain damaged in a car crash several years earlier.

Jayne and Lily\*\*\* were looking for help, guidance and advice. What were they to do, or think? Adrienne and I were not sure how to respond or what to say. On the one hand, we needed to keep our students safe, not overwhelmed, and to help them know right from wrong; on the other, we wanted them to respect their hosting families and to be open to cultural difference and difficulty. What exactly were our teacher-ly responsibilities here – for cultivating global perspectives? Did this situation call for universal critique and judgment (What was happening to this man was wrong and it should be acknowledged) or for curiosity and openness (We did not know enough about the situation or the culture for us to entirely understand the situation)? Where was the balance between letting Lily and Jayne interpret their own experience and for Adrienne and I offering guidance and judgment?

We ended up doing little. Adrienne and I visited the home-stay the next afternoon and had tea with Lily, Jayne and their 'Baba'. (All seemed well; No mention was made of the man in the backyard.) But was that enough? Was that the right thing to do? Should we have done more, or should we have done nothing at all? These questions have lingered. The perspective of two respected experiential learning philosophers only accentuates the dilemma. According to John Dewey (1938), eminent experiential

learning theorist, for students to learn, they must be free; yet, teachers he said are obliged to ensure students' freedom is commensurate with their ability. Was the caged-man-in-the-backyard' within the range of Jayne and Lily capacity (or ours) to understand, interpret and make sense? According to Paulo Freire, critical theorist and pedagogue, only when learners are Subjects can they unveil the world, and only for themselves; yet other Subjects may help initiate the unveiling. And so the question is, ought we, their teachers, to have helped Jayne and Lily interpret their experience, to initiate the unveiling? (Kornelsen, 2013; Kornelsen, 2017)

Almost nine years after the event, I had an opportunity to pose these questions to Lily and Jayne. As part of a research project, I interviewed former participants of the 2003 Costa Rica practicum. Jayne and Lily were among them. They had not forgotten the caged man. What they said about that experience, how they remembered it, and what sense they made of it, spoke to the challenges of helping students understand and reconcile the tension between judgment and curiosity. Here is Jayne:

Jayne: I still can't make sense of it. And, yeah, I'll never forget (it). I'll never forget the image of the cell because the union of love and imprisonment were and still are difficult for me to understand

Lloyd: What sense did you make of it at the time? You still remember it.

Jayne: Remembering how we had been prepared that we were supposed to be very open to the places that we were going, and the cultural differences. There was always a big emphasis put on, 'this is a cultural . . . you're going into a different culture.' And I think Lily and I both didn't really know what to do with it. So we responded in as 'OK, we understand', but being pretty confused as to wanting very much to talk to you or Adrienne because we didn't know . . . I don't know you just meet these people so how do you know. What do you compare it to? I'd never seen that before.

Lloyd: Do you think we should have done more, Adrienne and I?

Jayne: No. I think that would have made us feel like it was wrong. Like it wasn't really supposed to happen that way, but that would imply an expectation or preconceived notion of this experience and we weren't supposed to have any of those . . . I think Lily and I laugh about it now. Or I laugh about it, because it probably was pretty shocking, more than I probably know.

Lloyd: I remember at the time how it bothered you, not quite knowing what to do with it yourself.

Jayne: Yeah, and now when I look back on it I don't think about that part of it. And I wonder whether if that's because I feel like it was treated like it was OK. Maybe it's not OK; maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm still terribly confused and I'm only realizing that now. But I guess, had you guys come in and said and tried to walk us through it I think that would have been different because we kind of had to deal with . . . So, I don't know, it was our experience. And I'm glad that it was left that way. (pp. Kornelsen, 2014)

Jayne's recollections speak of the challenges of reconciling sensitivity to injustice with openness to motivations of people who are different – the global citizen's dilemma. Furthermore, they speak of the power of teachers: Whether or how teachers respond in these situations may shape the meaning students ascribe to those situations years later. In addition, they remind of the moral call on teachers for judgment: knowing when to 'let be' and be quiet, when to engage and speak. These are challenges in most any teaching-learning situation, whether experientially focused or classroom based. The implications for teaching practice are considerable, because experiences that challenge

students' understanding of the world may reverberate for a lifetime. It suggests that a teacher's presence and bearing matter, as they may be deeply consequential for fostering a critical quality of world citizenship: effectively navigating the universalist – pluralist tension inherent in balancing the first two traits of global citizenship cited above, appealing to a universal sense of justice and having an open disposition to difference. But it also matters for fostering a third trait of global citizenship: *having a sense of agency and responsibility, and being able and willing to engage the world thoughtfully, helpfully and hopefully*. It is to this that we now turn, and the teaching dilemma that it calls forth.

### **Cultivating Agency and Responsibility**

Some of the most influential scholars of education of the past 100 years have argued that agency and authentic global engagement can be fostered only when students are free from the undue influence of their teachers—through participating in their own learning, being treated as equals and fellow subjects, and being free in how they respond to, and engage with, new information.

Fred Dallmayr (2007) citing numerous cases of peaceful cross-cultural learning through history, from religious exchanges between Japan, China and India, to intellectual influences of Islam on pre-Renaissance Europe, concludes that cross-cultural learning was typically not an effort to foist a doctrine or established canon on alien populations, thereby subjecting them to foreign control. Rather, in almost every instance, great care was taken to find resonance for transmitted ideas in indigenous cultural and religious traditions, that is, to treat the latter as the very resources needed for genuine learning and transformation. In this manner, a measure of inter-human equality was preserved, and the danger of unilateral violence or manipulation was avoided (p. 160).

Dallmayr contends that this mode of transmission and exchange is central to all learning, one where ideas are transmitted without coercion and where students are respected for their autonomous capacities to learn and self-discover – a cornerstone for cultivating agency and responsibility. Furthermore, just as Dewey had argued many years earlier, freedom is a critical pre-requisite for students getting to know themselves and their relationship to the world.

Paulo Freire's (1970) critical and emancipatory pedagogy provides explicatory insight. According to Freire, the ontological vocation of human beings is to become human – to be able to name the world and change it (to be an agent). An educator's responsibility is to help facilitate this human-becoming. This can only be accomplished, Freire says (2007), when education is a practice of freedom, through a method he called dialogue: "the encounter between two people (student and teacher), mediated by the world in order to name the world" (p. 88). Dialogical theory requires that the world be unveiled. However, Freire says, no one can unveil the world for another, not even a teacher, or a system of education. Accordingly, it follows that a teacher's primary responsibility is to help students move from objects who are alienated to Subjects who participate: from being spectators to being Actors. And the goal, according to Freire must always remain the same: to help students be "considerers of the world" (139), and to remember that teachers are not so much preparing students to live in the world, but are living in the world with them, together, now.

Freire's pedagogy helps illuminate the learning that happened in Costa Rica. According to the research data, the most transformative changes that students reported, happened through independent discoveries – encountering new experiences, being open to them, and reflecting on their meaning. These learning events often happened spontaneously, in the moment; no one was there to coerce students to think, experience, or see the event a certain way. From a pedagogic perspective, they were living and thinking autonomously and freely, as Subjects. It was their learning, about their world (Kornelsen 2014); and it were these experiences that students mostly and compellingly attributed for cultivating their greater sense of global awareness, agency, and responsibility today. (And yet and also, nine years after the event, the student-participants emphasized how their teacher's trust had been critical to their self-confidence in embracing those experiences in the first place.)

So the question, if students learn most about the world and about being Subjects through living life freely and reflecting on it autonomously, what is the role of teachers? Should they be entirely absent; and are they without influence? No. Even though students may learn most in circumstances of independence and autonomy and within inter-subjective teacher-student relationships, the reality of teacher power must be acknowledged and tended. Teacher-facilitators, wittingly or not, set tone, make decisions about power and power sharing, and help shape the learning environment. (Yet dialogical pedagogy envisions students and teachers freely, in a spirit of mutuality, 'uncovering' and 'unveiling' the world together.) There are times when teachers are called upon to intervene and to prescribe for the sake of balancing the capacity and challenge for those taught to have worthwhile experiences (Dewey, 1997) and when and how they 'glance'\*\*\*\* is important. The question is how teachers can best navigate their teacher-ly concerns and responsibilities within inter-subjective and dialogic relationships – between respecting freedom and autonomy, and intervening and prescribing. It comes down to the basic teaching dilemma raised when discussing the plural – universal balance: knowing when to speak and when to be quiet and how to do each. As demonstrated by the Costa Rica practicum, how teachers act on this question matters; their choices and bearing can be consequential and lasting.

### Thoughts on Practice

What then is the recommendation for practice? There are probably as many responses to this question as there are teacher-student relationships. That is to say, the most fitting response probably lays within each unique relationship dynamic: the teacher, the student, and the occasion. But wherein exists the sensibility of knowing when to let be, and when to act. And how might it best be known or practiced or cultivated? There are no simple answers. A few years ago, in a study looking to understand the qualities of exemplary adult educators, I asked a similar question. The findings showed that exemplary educators have an instinctive sensibility for knowing when to do what, and how. It comes from experience, intuition, and training; but most significantly it is rooted in an abiding care for students and a deep respect and enthusiasm for the course material (Kornelsen, 2006). This suggests that teachers are at their discriminating best when they are mindfully present. In other words, navigating the terrain between a universal sense of justice and a sympathetic imagination of the different and between a teacher-student power imbalance and an inter-subjective student-teacher relationship requires the sensitivity and judgment of a teacher who is heedful of her or his whole teaching self.

It follows then – and it should always be remembered by teachers –that the person of the teacher, her/his bearing and presence (care), might have great consequence in how students see themselves and their relationship to the world. For as Peggy McIntosh (2005) says,

In school, sometimes it is the heartfelt trust of a teacher in the worth of a student in a completely local situation that produces a faith within the student that he or she is connected to the world in a way that matters, and that the world is worth caring about . . . The global sense of belonging and making spaces for all to belong can be developed close to home by teachers bringing the wholeness of their emotions and capacities into classrooms (38-39).

In short and in sum, being mindfully present may be critical in helping young people learn about themselves and their world – for fostering traits commensurate with global citizenship.

#### Endnotes

- Much has been written recently in response to those who support and articulate a concept of world citizenship. Important issues include: Whose version of global citizenship is being articulated? Is it practically feasible to practice citizenship at a global level? Is it possible or desirable to cultivate an identity and allegiance that is global?
- \*\* Having been an international practicum coordinator for many years, at both the secondary and university levels, I have often witnessed students struggling with this dilemma (and myself) –uncertain about when to judge and when to be open to difference. Marc Epprecht has written extensively on this educative and cross-cultural challenge.
- \*\*\* These names are pseudonyms
- \*\*\*\* Student-participants in the Costa Rica practicum reported having deep trust in the judgment of their teachers. It meant that their teachers were accorded power to bestow recognition and interpret experience. Our ‘nod’ (glance) to individuals, and our view on things mattered in ways that were significantly consequential years later.

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