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GLOBAL SOCIETY

The Moral Education of Global Citizens

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Global citizenship education is one of the fastest growing educational reform movements today. Although still in its incipient stages, it has support from all corners—teacher unions, governments, corporations, foundations, global institutions, etc.—and thus it is likely to continue on its growth curve. It is best understood as a pedagogical response to the problems, challenges, and opportunities of globalization: migration, cultural difference, environmental crises, and a growing list of global social problems. The world seemingly gets smaller and smaller, boundaries appear to fade away, and we feel more and more connected to corners of the globe that previously felt, quite literally, half a world away. In response to these transformations, schools around the world are focusing their curricular and extra-curricular attention on expanding the consciousness of their students to prepare them for the opportunities and challenges of a global society.

For centuries, schools have been interested in forming the next generation of members for society. In the modern era, this notion has taken the form of citizen formation for the nation-state. The efforts to form global citizens, in some ways, are simply the next logical step in this long development. Our society is now global, so proponents argue, and naturally our schools must begin preparing members for this society. Just as educators in earlier periods of massive societal transition attempted to adjust schooling in order to make education relevant, teachers in the twenty-first century are attempting to make students into "global citizens" equipped with the consciousness and competencies needed to prosper in a more tolerant, just and peaceful world.[1]

But beyond this, global citizenship education, like all pedagogical ideals, represents a vision of the good. At the level of these more fundamental moral purposes, a subtle contradiction lies at the heart of global citizenship education: it demands moral commitment and empathy beyond the individual and his/her own interests, but at the same time it sacralizes the individual autonomous chooser above all other forms. The implicit effort attempts to make students into secular, liberal, consumer-oriented cosmopolitan subjects. Global citizens should minimize individual interests and demonstrate their commitment to an abstract group, but the underlying philosophical anthropology is highly Western and individualistic. The universal humanity that represents the deepest longings of proponents of global citizenship education requires significant commitment to others beyond the self. But its strategies undermine and erode local attachments and group belonging, important sources of identity, meaning, and commitment beyond the self. Whether real or aspired to, welcomed or opposed, global citizenship education is widely held to be a revolutionary paradigm shift in our schooling practices. Upon closer inspection, it turns out to be the latest chapter in one particular narrative of Western modernity, a long story of liberating individuals from group identities.[2]

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[1] Global citizenship education also has a strong focus on economic skills and competencies, often called 21st century skills. This essay focuses on the consciousness component of global citizenship. See Dill 2011 for more on the interaction between both the consciousness and competencies elements of global citizenship education.

[2] Data for this essay are drawn from a larger study of global citizenship education, collected from site visits and teacher interviews at ten high schools explicitly committed to global citizenship. The sample includes public and private schools located in the United States and Asia. See Dill 2011.

Using data from teacher interviews and classroom observations, in both elite private schools and public schools, I first describe the nature of the "global consciousness" teachers see as a primary element of global citizenship and then offer a critical assessment of strategies and practices that are antithetical to the stated goals.

Cultivating a Universal Global Consciousness

As scholars of nationalism have pointed out, schools facilitated the cultivation of a "national consciousness" that transcended local, religious, and ethnic affiliations and became essential to the imagining of the modern nation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Similarly, many twenty-first century schools that emphasize global citizenship seek to cultivate a "global consciousness" that transcends geographic, economic, political, and religious boundaries. The global consciousness element of global citizenship, as articulated by teachers and schools in this study, creates lofty moral expectations: it consists of an awareness of other perspectives, a single humanity as the primary level of community, and a moral conscience to act for the good of the world.

Beth, a social studies teacher at Hickory High School articulates the distinctive of the global citizen in terms of an enlarged perspective that transcends borders[3]:

"The global citizen I want my students to become is someone who is aware of the world around them. Not just aware of their neighborhood, not just their state, not just their nation, but the whole world. And they think about things in terms of how this can affect what we're doing in the world, not just kind of staying in our little corner".

For Beth, this awareness is not parochial, not limited to immediate surroundings or relationships. As a teacher in a small manufacturing town in the rural Midwest, with students who often have not traveled far outside of "our little corner," she makes efforts to cultivate an awareness of the "whole world" and the larger consequences of their actions. Erin's students at the American Academy of Asia in Hong Kong are at the other end of the social class spectrum; they are children of diplomats and multinational corporate executives. But she too wants to help students in her social studies classes see beyond borders: "A global citizen is someone who is rooted in a national identity, but they have a consciousness that is greater than that. They have appreciation for other cultures, they have tolerance for other points of view, and they see issues on a global scale rather than just from their national boundaries."

It is precisely this openness to different perspectives on a number of levels that defines the "global citizen" teachers hope to create. Krishanu, a teacher at the elite Southeast Asia International School, described his ideal students as "flexible and critical thinkers" who examine their own ideas and are open to new ones: "I think it's an attitude more than anything else—an attitude of openness."

Teachers believe that this openness and awareness of different perspectives will help their students to develop the global consciousness that they believe is the heart of "global citizenship." They strive to raise awareness of the world as a whole, that there is more to their students' lives than "our little corner." Jill, an English teacher at Hickory, explained her desire to expand the horizons of understanding for her students and connect them to a community on a much larger scale: "So I really hope that it will have opened their mind to the world outside of Hickory, and that they would just realize that there is so much more 'out there'—we are connected to other people in the world. And it's just not this community or this state or this country, that there are a lot of people who, that the majority of the world lives outside of this country."

Jill wants her students to have knowledge of a world beyond the small town of Hickory and to be interested in a much more expansive community that connects people around the globe. This colorful global humanity is an expansive, unbounded community, at least as Tiffany, from the Global Studies Academy in the western United States, wants her students to see it. She wants them "to be people who consider themselves part of a community that is local but that also includes the whole world, not just their city or that they're an American, but they're part of a common humanity that transcends all those boundaries." In this way, awareness of the "world as a whole," in Roland Roberston's phrase, leads to understanding humanity as a single people (see Robertson 1992 and Yates 2009). Teachers believe this notion, the global consciousness as a global community of common humanity, though highly abstract in theory, can introduce certain obligations.

The global consciousness these teachers seek to cultivate understands other perspectives and identifies with a common humanity, but it is also clearly a consciousness with a conscience. That is, it does not stop at awareness of the global community, it wants active participation within it, as Tiffany suggests: "I think that the term citizen implies that you're someone who's actively involved as a citizen. You're not just sitting there…a global citizen, I think, implies that you're doing something active to make a difference in your community." When Antonio, a social studies teacher at Global Studies Academy, is pressed about what he means when he says that we wants his students to be part of a world community, he articulated a similar vision of

[3] All names for individuals and schools are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

active participation: “they’re not just observers on the world stage, they’re active participants. So a sense of community they have with their neighbors is a personal one, but it can also extend so that when you travel on the seas, they feel that they’re part of this human race, the world, one group.”

The obligations embedded in the global consciousness usually take the form of “global problems” and it is these problems that are most pressed upon students through unique programs designed to help students develop a global consciousness with a moral conscience. The senior class at one public school takes a trip to Washington, D.C. that is designed around the U.N. Millennium Development Goals. Students are assigned a specific goal such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and hunger, universal education, or environmental sustainability. They research the “global problem” before the trip and make contacts with relevant embassies (of countries where their particular goal is an issue) and INGOs working in that area. The trip includes making visits to these embassies and INGO headquarters to discuss the problems and relevant “solutions.”

The global consciousness element of global citizenship, as articulated by teachers and schools in this study, creates lofty moral expectations: it consists of an awareness of other perspectives, a single humanity as the primary level of community, and a moral conscience to act for the good of the world. Thus the global citizen is a moral ideal, a vision of a person who thinks and acts about the world in specific ways: as a universal community without boundaries whose members care for each other and the planet. It represents the ideal of the good person for the cosmopolitan age; teachers believe the world will become a better place if all its inhabitants can develop the universal perspective of a global consciousness.

Unintended Consequences: Global (Western) Individualism

Although teachers aspire to a global citizenship that brings universal benevolence and peace, current strategies to organize diversity in the classroom appear to point in the other direction. In spite of the good intentions of teachers, and their desire to cultivate a moral commitment that transcends the self and looks towards a global community, a cultural logic is at work in classroom strategies that seem to intensify a radical individualism associated with Western liberalism. In actual practice, cultural or group differences are elided into individual preferences for autonomous choosers. This domestication of difference imposes an unarticulated, particular cultural order within the universal ethos of global citizenship education, that of Western liberal individualism.

In several elite schools in the sample, teachers noted that their students were “color blind” because they do not see race and ethnicity as a category of difference. These schools generally have very high tuition (around $25,000 per year) and primarily serve a population of expatriates working as diplomats or for multinational corporations. Because of this, the student population is incredibly diverse in terms of race/ethnicity (not, however, in terms of social class). There are usually between 50 and 100 different nationalities represented in the student body. In other words, in many cases over half of all the countries in the world are represented in the student body of one school.

This kind of diversity, according to teachers, becomes a part of the students’ consciousness, their taken-for-granted background assumptions. Spencer, a math teacher at Southeast Asia International School, notes that “what I love about the international environment, and in turn, this concept of a global citizen, is the fact that our kids don’t really see color at all. It’s just not a part of what they see when they look at people.” Similarly, his colleague in the Spanish department, Marta Solé observed that “the kids don’t understand why people are divided, they don’t understand racism. They’re color blind.” According to their teachers, students in these international schools do not “see” the categories that divide them. The question is, of course, whether or not such a strategy actually eliminates the categories (as they say it does) or merely ignores them. Given their social class status, such categories are simply out of their line of vision.

As expats in a foreign culture, these students share much in common, notably extreme wealth and privilege, and this is likely what enables them to see beyond race as a category of difference. For instance, we can imagine two male students in one of these schools, a white American Protestant and a Saudi Arabian Muslim. They have a great deal that divides them racially, ethnically, and religiously, but their elite social class and subsequent patterns of consumption create strong connections that allow them to overlook their differences. In the language of social theory, their shared habitus and comparable cultural capital bind them together. Although there are particular elements of each young man’s identity that link them to collectives marked by certain boundaries, these are ignored and their identity as individuals and consumers is prominent. Their shared love of the iPod unites them more than their status as members of opposing sides in any—real or imagined—clash of civilizations. That world, the one where fundamental differences exist so much that people resort to violence, somehow seems quite distant from them, and in fact, “they don’t understand it.”

Teachers in these international schools were often confused when asked about “deep differences” among the diverse students in their classrooms. Again and again, they said that they do not really have issues of non-trivializing difference in their classrooms. Erin, a social studies teacher at the American Academy of Asia, answered the question

about difference this way: "Not really. Not really. For instance, we don't have any students who wear traditional Muslim attire. Although we do have Muslim students, they tend to be quite contemporary and progressive." A French teacher at Southeast Asia International School concurred: "Actually, we experience that kind of difference quite rarely because it seems that the students have a common language here. They are broad-minded. They are educated in this international school system, in which they seem to have common values and beliefs. Very rarely do we every have clashes with racial or national differences. It is very, very rare." At the Northeast International School in the United States, where close to 150 nations are represented, a social studies teacher named James said, "we don't really have problems with religious differences, for instance, because fundamentalism is not present here. I mean, only a certain kind of person comes to a school like this. We have very little friction about the different backgrounds of our students." There was a clear sense at these schools that what was held in common (elite social class) was stronger than that which could divide.

During one "Theory of Knowledge" class at Northeast International School, I observed student presentations on ongoing research projects. The class of eleventh graders had 15 students in it that came from 14 different countries on every inhabited continent. They all had impeccable American accents. One of the presentations was titled "How do you decide whether or not to believe in God?" Two male students (from Western European countries) presented some classic arguments for and against the existence of God, including a version of Anselm's ontological argument that appeared to be ripped from a Wikipedia entry. Their general point: there are many arguments both for and against the existence of God, but we cannot really know if a divine exists. They emphasized "believing is different than knowing" (the teacher told me that this point is emphasized in the course curriculum). The presentation included a YouTube video that featured a Christian fundamentalist giving proofs for God. The video elicited laughter from many in the class, including the presenters. During discussion following the video, students raised skepticism about the arguments and several students ridiculed the person in the video. Were the students mocking the certainty of the fundamentalist's perspective? Or the content of his beliefs? Or the fact that he did not fall within the bounds of their learned frameworks for legitimate knowledge? It was difficult to discern, but the tenor of the discussion certainly suggested that religious belief fell outside the bounds of rational thinking. Notably, other perspectives were not represented; not one student from a non-Western country spoke during the discussion. Such conclusions—true or not—reflect a highly particular liberal-secular view of the world. Regardless of what one thinks of religious belief, the extent to which this handling of "difference" prepares students for the realties of a world where some differences, for many people, are worth killing and dying for, is questionable.

There is a tendency in these schools, in spite of the affirmation of difference, to draw implicit boundaries and label certain forms of human social identity as outside the accepted norm. The Southeast Asia International School's marketing materials, for instance, talk about their school as a place that embraces the "unity of shared values from around the globe." They move "beyond tolerance to true acceptance of others." Are these universal values really as unbounded as they sound?

Spencer seemed to stumble his way through this question when discussing his tolerance for the religious practices of the local culture. He worked hard to avoid being narrow-minded and insensitive to these practices: "I'll go through interesting times as a coach and as a teacher during the fasting month, which is very important for the local culture. And so, I suppose, within the framework of being a global citizen, there's a responsibility to have a certain amount of knowledge so that you are not insensitive, and so that you are not, I don't know, too narrow-minded, I guess."

He said that everything is a "little bit harder" during the month of Ramadan, "factories slow down, traffic is a little worse" and he understood his commitment to global citizenship as tolerating and learning to appreciate such inconveniences. When pushed about it, he was obviously conflicted and wanted to draw boundaries:

> *Spencer*: I'm tolerant of it, hopefully. But I do question, not openly, I mean, in my mind, I question whether a 13-year-old girl should be fasting when she's participating in sports, you know. And so, I do take a Western view of it in the sense that when religion and when culture becomes a health risk, then I begin to question its blind following. And so, I think in an environment like this the loftier notions of global citizenship force you to have to challenge those kinds of things, and that makes things a little bit uncomfortable. This notion of the preservation of cultures, absolutely they should be preserved, but not all of them—I mean, all religions, I think, would do well to ask—re-ask themselves questions and update themselves, you know, periodically.
> *Interviewer*: Would you say that there are certain standards you are using to make those kinds of judgments?
> *Spencer*: Well…I don't know…I mean, yeah. I don't think someone's health—I don't think human rights should ever be violated in the name of cultural preservation.

What's intriguing about Spencer's picture of human flourishing is that he's obviously framing his "tolerance" with a Western liberal stance that sees the 13-year-old girl as a bearer of individual rights, not as a member of a group

with certain traditions and rituals. In essence, he is advocating that religious faiths be re-interpreted in accordance with the prevailing assumptions of the age. But beyond just that, he articulates a highly normative view of "the loftier notions of global citizenship" that he believes force him to challenge the legitimacy of his student's fasting practice. By this account, global citizenship neither affirms the practice, nor does it tolerate the practice; it implicitly delegitimizes it.

At these schools, the universal global citizen seems to take highly particularized form. That form reflects a Western, liberal, rational, secular, and consumerist account. For all the look and feel of difference, the reality seems to be a kind of "façade diversity," in John Boli's words (2005), that may homogenize to a vision of the individual stripped of collective identities (see also Hunter 1993, chapter 7). In terms of its organization of diversity, global citizenship may have affinities with the multiculturalism in which, as Joseph Davis observes, "we imagine a sameness of outlook and aspiration, an unwitting projection of ourselves" (2008: 276). The danger here is that, just as in the narrative of the American intercultural and multicultural education, in the name of cultural difference, we make "them" like "us." As Marcus, a social studies teacher at the American Academy of Asia wryly noted: "We have kids from 40 countries or something, but kids here are American. It doesn't take long for kids from different backgrounds to look American. They may have Asian faces, but they're American."

These dynamics are not only at work in elite international schools. Public schools in the U.S. that may be much less homogenous socio-economically have tendencies to organize difference around categories that reflect the highly particular commitments of Western liberalism.

This process is evidenced by a popular curriculum developed by a Peace Corps program that reaches three million students in public schools. Called "Building Bridges," it is designed to promote "cross-cultural understanding." It is part of the Peace Corps larger educational strategy to "engage U.S. students in inquiry about the world, themselves, and others in order to broaden perspectives, promote cultural awareness, appreciate global connections and encourage service."

In the first several lessons, the curriculum attempts to help students understand the concept of culture, and it does this in non-essentializing ways. It goes to great lengths to point out that culture is more than foods and festivals and it is not reducible to individual preference and choice. Rather, the book says that culture "shapes how we see the world, ourselves and others." It goes on to use the metaphor of an iceberg—"some aspects are visible; others are beneath the surface"—and the invisible aspects influence the visible ones. It even points out that different cultures can present challenges for human interaction: "people really do see the world in fundamentally different ways." If students are getting the message in this text, culture is not individualized and may indeed lead to fundamental and consequential differences.

However, the curriculum then moves from the conceptualization of culture itself to its understanding of different cultures. In these lessons, the primary method used to increase cultural sensitivity is asking how students would feel if they were mistreated or stereotyped. In seven of the nine lessons dedicated to understanding cultural differences, students are asked versions of "how does it feel" to be seen by others as different or to be stereotyped. In one activity, students role-play as a Peace Corps volunteer and write a letter home describing an experience of cross-cultural learning. They are instructed to "describe your own needs and feelings" and to describe the needs and feelings of the local people. Individual, personal feelings and issues of self-esteem are the primary barometer through which students are taught to understand and evaluate cultural differences. Although the curriculum makes great efforts to take culture seriously, when it comes to actually navigating students through issues of cultural difference it resorts to emotional appeals. Even if it has laid out a "strong" view of culture, in offering a therapeutic framework of individual feelings for critical reflections of cultural differences, the curriculum undermines its genuine efforts to take them seriously on their own terms. All that is left is personal feelings and preferences expressive of a particular cultural order.

Although the curriculum seeks to have a comprehensive view of culture, its emphasis on emotional appeals for evaluative criteria slips into what Alasdair MacIntrye (1984) calls the "ethic of emotivism" and Philip Rieff (1966) calls the "therapeutic ethos," where personal preferences are the only arbiter of truth. As these commentators have observed, the therapeutic culture is a highly particular reflection of modern, Western (especially American) liberalism. Despite its promising signs, the net effect of the "Building Bridges" curriculum is similar to the organization of diversity in the international schools above: cultural differences are lost in the emotions and preferences of the individual.

These tensions between the empirical reality of "difference" and the individualizing pull of the therapeutic ethos were evident not only in curricular materials but also in some public school classrooms. Several of the large public high schools in the sample were nearly as diverse as the elite international schools: some had no racial majorities and as many as 80 different languages represented in the student body. They also had much higher levels of disadvantaged students, so they lacked the solidarity of conspicuous consumption evident in the international schools. But even in these schools, some teachers avoided questions of difference if at all possible. Eduardo, a Spanish teacher at West Valley High said: "We know there are students who have different religions, different backgrounds, different views. But they've been around this diverse environment long enough to know that they are not supposed to—well, that they're supposed to respect someone else's opinion. So I don't really have discussions around serious conflicts or differences in my

classroom. Now, personally, I don't like to—I just don't bring up topics that I know will cause conflict."

By his account, it is not that differences do not exist, but rather that students know the acceptable behaviors and the teacher avoids discussing controversies that inevitably lie beneath the surface. Such approaches, often by default, become versions of older strategies for assimilation. Antonio, who teaches at Global Studies Academy, clearly wants to give deference to particulars without forcing homogenization: "Well, I think tolerance is not giving up your culture. It's not that you kind of give up something of your own. When you tolerate another religion, for instance, it doesn't mean you're forfeiting yours. It's not saying one is right, one is wrong, they just both are." Clearly, for Antonio, we don't all have to be the same. But yet his comment that one is not wrong and one right, they "just both are" seems to contradict the strong stance on preserving differences he wants to take. How exactly should a student make sense of the fact that they "just both are"? As David Tyack (1993) notes, the "construction of difference" in American schools is always a tradeoff between universals and particulars; these comments suggest that in spite of rhetorical deference to particulars, the universals are still the reigning paradigm.

John, a history teacher at Hickory High, took a similar approach. He is eager to point out the differences in his students: "And we're all plenty different, my goodness. Again, that's why the immigration thing is so much fun here. I mean our population of Hispanics is now over 35 %—that has happened fast [the school was 97 % white in 1980]. And I like to get the kids going a bit, you know, sometimes I point out that I'm darker than some of the Hispanic kids, so therefore, what does that mean? And we have more black kids coming in. And we have a lot of Russians, Ukrainians especially. It is a fun little school to be in."

The diverse, "fun" environment, however, does not result in much discussion about the differences between these various groups in the school. When asked how he deals with issues of genuine conflict in his classroom, he responded: "I don't know if I've ever had an issue like that, seriously, in 30 years." When asked to come up with a hypothetical situation of disagreement, he said "okay, what if I had a student say 'I hate niggers'? First, it's whoa—you correct the use of the term." (This is a town that had the Klu Klux Klan march down Main Street less than a decade ago.) After suggesting some questions he would ask the student "where did you hear that, who uses that word" he then said: "And then everybody is looking at you, and what do you do? I say, 'Lisha, how does that make you feel when you hear that word?'" Although he seems to understand that significant differences exist among his students, John thinks they do not rise to the surface very often. If they did, in the hypothetical situation he created, he would rely on emotions like the Peace Corps curriculum did to try to navigate the differences.

The common theme in the organization of diversity in the elite schools as well as public schools was a certain kind of "domestication of difference." Difference gets softened and neutered either through social class status and consumption patterns or through the language of therapy. Cultural or group differences are elided into individual preferences for autonomous choosers. This domestication of difference imposes an unarticulated and masked particular cultural order within the universal ethos of global citizenship education, that of Western liberal individualism.

Global citizenship education is, of course, *moral* education in as much as it forms students toward particular ends, but these ends may be different than its intended goals. Global citizenship education and its proponents fail, on their own terms, to transcend the self with a strong moral commitment to a global humanity. Its moral ideals, at least in their current forms, thus continue to conform to the standard of the autonomous individual, the hallowed ground of modern liberal, capitalist, and democratic Western civilization. In this sense, global citizenship education does not represent a universal morality calibrated for benevolence and progress in a new global society, but rather conformity to the moral order of a highly particular, originally Western, "global liberalism" (Meyer 2009: 292). While much has been achieved by liberalism of this sort, it remains haunted by certain forms of individualism that that can erode its highest moral ambitions. Global citizenship education appears caught in this trap.

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