

Perspectives

INFORMAL SPACES IN GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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Abstract: Literature on global citizenship education (GCE) has helped to build a framework of best practice for its implementation and delivery. Creating safe spaces and open environments for teaching, learning and discussion have been widely supported by scholars. However, while research shows that the constraints of formal education make it increasingly difficult to deliver GCE, there remains little in-depth research into the spaces beyond the walls of formal education as a place for GCE. Using data from fieldwork conducted within an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) aimed at building ‘active global citizens’, as well as reflections from working in the field, this article will argue that both as scholars and practitioners we need to understand in more depth the impact these informal spaces and encounters have on fostering global citizenship.

Key Words: Global Citizenship Education; Informal spaces / interactions; Non-formal education; Experiential learning; Habitual interaction; Play.

Introduction

Scholarly research on global citizenship education (GCE) has often concentrated on formal education, its teaching within a school (Crotty, 2006; ...). The literature has helped to build a framework of best practice for the implementation and practice of GCE providing guidelines for programming and policy. The environment or setting in which teaching and learning takes place has been especially highlighted as central to enabling the next generation to not only understand our increasingly globalised world but to explore and

actively engage in making it a more peaceful one. Yet, little research looks beyond the classroom environment at informal spaces as a place where global citizenship is developed and expressed. This is surprising given the recognition of the importance of play and social interaction for a holistic learning experience (Göncü and Gaskins, 2007), the role of experiences and emotions within development research (see Baillie Smith and Humble, 2007; Griffiths and Brown, 2016), as well as fostering independent, real-world, experiential learning (Andreotti, 2006; Percy Smith, 2012; Van Peski, 2012).

This article will argue that although previous literature helps to build a rich picture of how GCE should be taught, the impact of informal spaces and encounters, between structured educational activities, on developing active global citizens needs to be explored in more depth. To do this it will firstly outline the key themes found in current literature that have helped to develop a rich picture of GCE theoretically and empirically, and have helped to build a framework of best practice. This in turn will also reveal some of the gaps which are yet to be explored concerning GCE. Drawing on doctoral research and experience as a practitioner, it will be argued that informal spaces beyond purposefully constructed environments for learning, and the interactions which take place here, need to be more widely acknowledged and better understood as sites for GCE.

Global Citizenship Education Literature

Global citizenship is a contested idea, meaning many different things to many different groups (Griffiths and Brown, 2016). For contemporary scholars it has often been conceptualised as a term which addresses the inadequacies in conventional ideas of citizenship through the acknowledgement of the cosmopolitan nature of modern society, providing identities, knowledge, skills and critical thinking to help individuals manage its complexities (Dower, 2003; Andreotti, 2006; Golmohamad, 2007; Nussbaum, 2010). It features in state policies on development and education (Marshall and Arnot, 2008) forming part of

school curricula (Oxley and Morris, 2013), volunteering programmes (for example, CISV International) and the policies of international civil society groups (for example, Oxfam International).

Research and discussion within global citizenship literature is extensive and covers a wide range of topics. This section will focus on literature on education for global citizenship and the three key themes identified within it: the importance of the environment and spaces in which GCE is taught; the impact of teachers' own knowledge on how topics are delivered and assimilated; and the need and ability of current GCE to nurture critical, reflective global citizens.

'Safe spaces' and GCE

Ensuring a safe space is created for teaching and learning has been highlighted by many scholars as essential in GCE. Percy Smith (2012) argues that context and environment influence how children process and participate in social learning. Although it is argued that multiple elements from the micro to the macro-level impact upon an individual's participation in different contexts, Percy Smith claims creating settings which are facilitated so that children are allowed to express themselves freely, evolve at their own pace and where interaction with adults is optional is key for cultivating a sense of agency and empowerment.

This reflects an experiential approach to learning where individuals are given the space and freedom to explore, experiment and reflect. This is especially important due to the complex, ambiguous and often controversial nature of the topics covered in GCE be it, for example, climate change, gender inequality or race relations. Cultivating the right environment provides room for what Percy Smith argues is essential space to let the next generation of global citizens build 'trust, respect and reciprocity', paving the way for global citizenship and, ultimately, shape the world (2012: 24). At the same time, it is recognised that these voices that are welcomed and heard, must be diverse in nature, and that this is only possible if participants feel safe enough to voice their views and ideas

without judgement or negative consequence (see Andreotti, 2006). This is important not only to ensure diversity and authenticity in viewpoints but also in enabling controversial issues to be explored thoroughly from all angles.

It is also important to acknowledge where these 'spaces' for GCE teaching and research are found, with the majority located in a formal education setting. These spaces have been frequently critiqued by scholars as restrictive in nature. In the UK time, space and funding for GCE within formal education has been increasingly limited by the government in favour of fostering competitive, target-driven individualism (Baillie Smith, 2014). Teachers are time limited in the classroom and there remains little space in the curriculum for GCE with topics such as numeracy and literacy taking priority. While more broadly, multiple studies from the global North and global South have identified a trend in the professionalisation of development spaces including areas of education (Bondi and Laurie, 2005).

This can be seen in the way organisations outside of formal education are forced to operate. Global Youth Work provides what Jeffs and Smith (2005) distinguish as an 'informal education' setting, which 'encourages a critical understanding of the links between personal, local and global issues' (Development Education Association, 2007: 23). Similarly, there are multiple INGOs which work outside the classroom environment on development education issues (see for example CISV International). Yet, even actors working on Global Youth Work or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) that have tried to fill these gaps by teaching in schools or within the community have had to navigate working within these pressures with limited time, space and funding to do so (Baillie Smith, 2014). Thus, GCE actors working both inside and beyond the classroom setting are forced to negotiate between the informal and formalised neoliberalised structures.

Teaching practices and GCE

Best practice for teaching GCE through experiential learning has been widely discussed by scholars such as Van Peski (2012) and Percy Smith (2012) who regard active learning facilitation rather than traditional teaching methods or lecturing as key when exploring topics covered in GCE. This is supported by Laycock and Temple who stress that GCE's aim is not about *changing* learners but bringing about a *change in* learners (2008: 102). Teachers, thus, should provide learners with the facts but it is down to those learning to decide how they reflect and act upon the information.

The literature on teaching practice has also highlighted the effect teachers' own background, interest and understanding on global issues influences what and how topics are taught and understood (see O'Toole, 2006; Hicks and Holden, 2007; Augustine and Harshman, 2013; Baillie Smith and Skinner, 2015). The concern here is that instead of presenting facts, information will be led by teachers' own personal understanding and opinion rather than allowing learners' views to develop organically. Although it is inevitable that our own backgrounds and prejudices influence the way we see the world, when teaching about contested or controversial issues the consensus is that this should not influence teachings (see Freire, 1970; Hicks and Holden, 2007; Leduc, 2013; Augustine and Harshman, 2013). Unfortunately, this often means that teachers' own opinion and knowledge, or lack of, leads to some crucial issues or subjects not being taught at all. Studies by Hicks and Holden (2007), and Oxley and Morris (2013) found this to be the case within schools in the UK where more controversial topics were given little or no coverage compared to those which are less complex or in line with neoliberal norms.

Osler's (1994) work looking into student teachers' journeys while delivering GCE pinpoints the real issue that needs to be tackled to prevent this. The study showed that student teachers were not confident in delivering the topics covered, suggesting that there is a need for

teachers to not only reflect on their own opinions and values but also their personal deficiencies in knowledge. GCE has been chronically under taught in schools meaning teachers themselves have not necessarily learnt about the issues they cover or been taught about them in the same way as they deliver them. Moreover, the complex and often controversial nature of the subjects which they lead on make it difficult for them to even grasp the subject before they deliver it, leading to oversimplified teaching or topics not being covered at all.

Critical thinking and GCE

The literature calls upon GCE practitioners to create an environment and teaching methods which help to build independent critical thinkers, who are informed, engaged, empowered, and ultimately equipped for a life-long learning journey as global citizens (Nussbaum, 2010; Merryfield, 2002; O'Toole, 2006; Andreotti, 2006; Hicks and Holden, 2007; Scheunplung, 2008). Research has helped to shape the practices of GCE, shedding light on what and how it is taught within a classroom setting, building a framework of aims and best practices (such as Osler, 1994; Hicks and Holden, 2007; Oxley and Morris, 2013). Yet, studies such as Oxley and Morris (2013) have also exposed the limitations of teaching GCE within formal education. Rather than teaching 'critical' global citizenship or one which promotes a 'social justice mentality', what is often covered and promoted is more 'soft' in nature with a 'charity mentality' based on dependency or subordination of the global South (Andreotti, 2006; Simpson 2017).

The prominent scholar Paulo Freire claimed through his pedagogical theory that a process of 'action-reflective-transformative action' was necessary to foster global citizens who could 'deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (1970: 15). However, scholars such as Andreotti (2006) and Dobson (2006) argue that what is often taught in schools is an oversimplified view of what are complex, interwoven issues. This could be because either teachers do not feel confident in the subjects

they are teaching or the limited time-frame in which they have to teach GCE; either way, the full story of these intricate topics are often lost. Andreotti calls this 'soft' global citizenship, one that fails to acknowledge the wider historical social and economic power structures and the continued exploitation by mainly northern constituencies, which in turn fosters ideas of dependency and charity (Andreotti, 2006).

The need to counter this with what Andreotti calls 'critical' global citizenship has been supported by other GCE scholars who state the need to ensure that topics are not only explored thoroughly but multiple authentic viewpoints are heard and individuals are able to critically analyse hegemonic sources of knowledge as well as democratic structures and institutions (Dobson, 2006; Bourn, 2008). Osler (1994) also emphasises the need for topics to be relatable and engaging, where self-reflection can be exercised and self-development nurtured. The idea here is that individuals consider their positionality in the world, push their personal and society's boundaries, and act for positive change (Conway and Heynen, 2002; Khoo, 2006; Asbrand, 2008). This links with Baillie Smith's (2013) argument that the social relations of engagement are missing from development studies but play a significant role in how we view the world. The scholar states we need to acknowledge, reflect and gain a better understanding into how factors such as locality, race and gender come together through our lifetimes to shape the way we engage with development issues (Baillie Smith, 2013). Thus, scholars see critical thinking as essential for nurturing independent, self-reflective, active global citizens (Osler, 1994; Armstrong, 2006; Asbrand, 2008; Bourn, 2008; Nussbaum, 2010; Van Peski, 2012; Percy Smith, 2012).

What this section has shown are the key thematics identified in GCE literature such as critical thinking run against the constraints of formal education, while there remains a lack of space and power for designated teaching on its subjects. Educational global environments outside of formal education, such as global youth work and work done by INGOs, provide a worthy platform for GCE outside of the classroom.

Although, it is also acknowledged that they too must negotiate between neoliberal structures. Yet, little research has been done to look at the micro-level interactions in between and beyond structured educational activities where informal and organic interactions take place. These natural encounters are what we now turn to consider, showing that they too are fertile sites for GCE.

Informal spaces and interaction

The importance of nurturing independent and active, motivated learners is a common theme throughout literature, seen as a way of stimulating organic acts of global citizenship outside the learning environment (see Van Peski, 2012; Nussbaum, 2010; Brunell, 2013; Armstrong, 2006; Asbrand, 2008; Bourn, 2008). Although these spaces are recognised as fruitful sites of global citizenship development and practice, richer insight is needed to understand what is actually happening in the day-to-day micro-level interactions of individuals and the impact they have on their journey in encountering, understanding and expressing ideas of global citizenship.

Working both as a practitioner and researcher within international non-governmental organisations with a GCE remit, the importance of the time and space between structured learning has become abundantly clear. These informal spaces and interactions not only allow individuals to digest and reflect on what they have learned but also open up space for organic learning, further in-depth understanding of topics, developing critical thinking skills and an opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt. This was identified as happening through three ways in my research: through experiencing the ‘real-world’, by habitual interactions with others and through play, which we will now consider in turn.

Experience

The experiential learning practices championed within the literature are not only relevant within the classroom but continue beyond it. By

engaging with issues directly or through independent research, learners are able to gain deeper understanding of the topic in hand, develop critical thinking and even take action. It allows room for individuals to discover and investigate topics at their own pace in their own time so that a natural process of inquiry can take place. Experience also makes topics real and tangible rather than an abstract idea they only think about in the classroom. An example of this could be experiencing different languages and cultures. A large part of global citizenship education is about ensuring authentic voices are heard. In a classroom, this could be through videos or books presented or written by a particular person from a certain culture.

Activities that support experiential learning such as role-play enable learners to gain a deeper understanding of topics and make them more relatable. Yet, informal spaces provide an opportunity for learners to directly hear, see, feel, touch, and even taste the cultures they learn about, providing an organic and holistic sensorial learning experience. While researching with an INGO providing GCE to a group of international participants in India, it was evident that by experiencing cultures in such an intimate way, participants began to seek an even greater and deeper understanding of them independently. Inquiry and conversations in between GCE activities were common during fieldwork with individuals wanting to know more about each other's countries and backgrounds, as well as reflecting on the environment in which they were living. One participant said:

“I think because when you think about foreign countries or poverty it's just a thought but until you experience it and see then it becomes much more real. So to be there and... it's more personal”.

While another participant reflecting on the different habits between the cultural groups, claimed: 'I think being exposed to something like that is far more educational than hearing about it or seeing about it like that'.

This suggests that informal spaces allow individuals to further develop and reflect on what they have learned but more importantly provide natural, real-world experiences. In other words, informal spaces allow for organic engagement with cultures and topics, which are not necessarily provided in GCE activities. This does not mean that experiential learning does not enable this to an extent, but that these informal spaces provide an extra layer for more natural encounters. Thus, informal spaces play a vital role in the individual's life-long learning journey as a global citizen.

Habitual interaction

The habits that form the flow of everyday life also create an opportunity for GCE. This became apparent during my fieldwork. Many participants often remarked upon meal times as the 'best' times during the day where they could relax, talk and eat together. The sharing of a meal provides a familiar space for all participants, which seemed to create feelings of safety but also commonality. During these moments you could see participants visually relax and in doing so begin to interact naturally with those they did not necessarily share a common language; pointing at food, smiling approvingly, attempting to ask about what they ate at home. Not only did it provide a common habitual and enjoyable practice, they shared the experience of trying new foods and thus experiencing new cultures together. But most importantly it provided space for participants to reflect together on what they had learned. Being lucky enough to 'eat a warm meal' was often commented on by participants at meal times or the amount of food they consumed. One participant commented on what he had learned about food during one mealtime, stating:

"I used to eat loads more food... now I just take a little and see what I need...I'm eating a lot less red meat too. It's because, I think, of how I see other cultures respect for food and talking about food... I think it's made the kids think its unfair others have so little".

These meal time experiences highlighted three things in particular. Firstly, no matter where they were from during meal times they were simply humans needing food. Sharing this human necessity and everyday routine, made each other part of the normal rhythm of everyday life. Secondly, the relaxed atmosphere created through the enjoyment of the habit itself helped to break down barriers and make individuals more susceptible to interaction. It created a natural safe space in which participants felt comfortable to get out of their comfort zone. Lastly, it provided a talking point that often led to discussing each other's cultural eating habits or reflecting on wider social issues around poverty, food security and the environment. Thus, meal times were a space for continuous, deeper learning through habitual practices in other cultures.

What is important to take from this is that this could have been any shared habit, from cleaning, to playing a game or even travelling. These informal moments created spaces for interactions in which individuals could use and build on what they had learned from the more structured GCE environments.

Play

Play has been recognised as an important part of the learning process (Göncü and Gaskins, 2007) and this needs to be more widely recognised as the case for GCE too. Engaging in play can be extremely beneficial as not only a shared practice as explored earlier, but as a stimulus for further learning. Games and play promote ideas of teamwork, foster bonds and connections, and in turn possible opportunities to practice ideas of conflict resolution. It brings experiential learning into the 'real world', creating safe spaces for learners to test out and experience what they have learned. Moreover, through the exchange of ideas individuals are exposed to different points of view and even other cultures, be it through learning new games, listening to new stories or making up imaginary worlds. Importantly, play allows individuals to interact earnestly. This is not only true for children but adults too. Both for child participants and the adult facilitators, relaxing together as a group was identified through my own

fieldwork observations and interviews as key times for establishing bonds, building trust and learning about each other: ‘The moments for bonding, for intense bonding, because every single moment is bonding, like even activities, but like the most intense bonding... is in our own time’.

Moreover, playing games often exposed the differences between cultures and led to questions and discussions on topics. Relaxing once children had gone to bed often led to late night discussions on the politics in each other’s countries for the adult participants. While for the child participants, a Japanese girl being assigned the role as ‘maid’ in free time play led to children asking adults about, and discussing, domestic workers in different countries.

These examples show how informal spaces between activities and structured learning, where both adults and children were allowed to interact and ‘play’, led to further development of GCE. Not only did it allow for bonds and trust to be consolidated but free time and play also allowed participants to explore topics that arose naturally. As a life-long learning process, it is therefore, important to acknowledge that play or informal encounters are essential and natural elements to ensuring a holistic approach to GCE.

Conclusion

These three elements of informal interaction outside of the structured GCE learning environment provide insight into how learning takes place beyond the classroom or structured educational environment setting. Experience, habitual interaction and play all provide organic spaces for earnest interaction in which GCE can be reflected upon, developed and even practiced. Such natural encounters, inquiry and learning help to stimulate and develop independent critical thinking skills through real life experience. As practitioners and scholars, this exploration highlights the need for more in depth research into the spaces beyond the structural learning environments as sites for GCE. This is not only important because

it is a life-long process but also to find alternative places for GCE beyond the restricted education environment.

As well as providing further insight into the practical elements of teaching GCE, acknowledging the need for these informal spaces and interactions highlight and offer a deeper understanding of the importance of building bonds and trust for global citizenship. The atmosphere created in the informal, intimate moments provide safe, relaxed spaces where individuals are able to engage with each other and interact earnestly. This is extremely exciting for global citizenship research, helping us not only to understand better the process of global citizenship education but a way to capture the 'doing', or practice of global citizenship.

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