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Training future members of the world with an understanding of global citizenship

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Abstract

Globalism, in the modern sense, requires training global citizens with a logic viewing of individuals as members of a large family known as global world. In this process, national values, virtues, behaviors, traditions and aspirations must align with global expectations. However there may be differences in every aspect between nations, there must be conclusive attempts to make the bridge among different peoples of the world closer. To provide a better, safer and more livable world for the next generations, those in charge of education in today's world must do their best to determine the nature of global citizenship without disregarding national characteristics, and to lay the foundations for the future of humanity. This paper is intended to address the issue of global citizenship with a focus regarding national features as parts of a global whole.

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1. Introduction

We are living in a period of history which demonstrates itself, among other things peculiar to this age, with the large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers. Repercussions of this case is visible even more at present due to the escape of civilians from war zones, poverty and administrative pressures from some problematic countries and ruling systems to some parts of the world where, they believe, they will have a better life. Of course there are winners and losers in this process; while some are able to gain employment opportunities and lead a life they could not have imagined in their native countries, others will lose even what they previously owned and become socially excluded individuals who have no feeling of national belonging or citizenship.

2. National citizenship

As a term denoting the place of the individual as part of the society in which he lives, citizenship may be described as the relationship between the individual and the state. The state protects citizens through a set of laws and policing and provides some collective benefits such as security, a system of justice, education, health care, transport infrastructure and so on. In return, citizens are expected and obliged to contribute to the costs of collective benefits through taxation and possibly military service (Osler and Starkey, 2005: 10). In modern communities

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citizens cannot expect and claim to be free from these responsibilities because living as a part of a whole imposes some burdens on the individual. In this regard, moving from personhood to citizenship requires a perspective for “wider socio-political matters” (Bartlett and O’Connor, 2007: 114) because citizenship is to be evaluated with such broad notions as social rights and obligations of individuals and some social forces producing some general rules for the benefits of members of societies (Turner, 2000: 3). Kondo outlines the nature of citizenship in a way parallel to this context noting that the definition of citizenship should have two main meanings: “(i) membership of a state; and (ii) a set of rights and duties in a polity”. (2001: 228)

In theory, everyone may think that he has a say on these subjects and most of the opinions may be correct because they are expressed by persons sharing life with others. Yet, in practice, everyone will agree on a relevant and accurate process of education to substantiate the validity of their views on the nature of citizenship in a world that has become increasingly more global in the last few decades.

3. Global citizenship

Education is a term which should intrinsically include moral values which are to be globally acceptable. An understanding of human rights that should be not only nationally but also universally acceptable and applicable must take place in the very centre of education in the modern sense. As a matter of fact, “there is to be a statutory requirement on schools to ensure that education for citizenship is part of the entitlement of all pupils” (Olssen, Codd and O’Neill, 2004: 275). Schools are to play an indispensable role for the present and future of societies in general and individuals in particular by presenting versions of reality and to help students explore alternative visions and critical thinking. These visions and critical thinking must pave the way also from a conception of national citizenship to global citizenship constituting segments of global life in countries, continents and on earth.

In national citizenship the focus of individuals inevitably concentrates on national interests. This ultimately leads to an understanding of utilizing global resources for national purposes, disregarding the needs of others at present and even one nation’s own needs for the future. In global citizenship the focus is expected to be on global interests and equality among nations. Of course the nation-state system will not disappear in the near or foreseeable future, but it is time for those who direct the affairs of the world to take into close consideration the essence of global citizenship since globalization, as in practice today, cannot be said to assist global citizenship. In order to alleviate the existing problems, a global understanding in which human rights “should transcend the boundaries of any political community” (Bellamy, 2008: 16) should be created and the requirements for this awareness should be met by peoples who will, in the long run, take advantage of this course of action.

Education for global citizenship is a sphere necessitating consensus. In fact, it demands an evaluation of a wide agenda so that every person should feel that he or she has a voice on the subject. No one should have the right to claim that the problem does not concern him nor should one consider local priorities. However, while important individual needs may appear in a short term analysis, it should be accepted as a universal fact that in the long term global rather than personal interests count. People should have the perception that the relationship “between local action and global change is critical to actualizing the full potential of global citizenship. (Pike, 2008: 232)

As understood from Pike’s statement, a proper understanding of the foundations of global citizenship can be established through a collaborative effort of creative and constructive minds of peoples of the world. Besides, it is clearly articulated in the same assertion that the notion of global citizenship cannot be dealt with local, regional or national objectives. Each human being will naturally want to see that a global context will be peculiar to no single nation but will include the whole historical accumulation and heritage of the world. At this point, a relevant explanation of the case in point needs clarification. In other words, we need to define “who” is a global citizen as the first step to global citizenship. Oxfam, an international confederation with the aim to find lasting solutions to famine and related injustice as expressed in the website, sees the Global Citizen as someone who:

- is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen
- respects and values diversity
- has an understanding of how the world works
- is outraged by social injustice
- participates in the community at a range of levels, from the local to the global
- is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place

- takes responsibility for their actions. (2006: 3)

If we set out from the above definition, we can deduce that globalization today “is actually nothing more than some fundamental structural changes in a world technological system that has existed for some time” (Strijbos, 2001: 531). This shows that it will be wrong to tell about “globalization” with a meaning and contribution to human existence in the world. Since every concept intended for the benefit of humanity will be expected to serve human race, it may rightly be claimed that at present we cannot see applications and reflections of globalization in the actual sense.

To overcome the barriers on the way to global citizenship, the role of politicians is to call attention to provide solutions to this problem with a deep interest in enlightening citizens of the world about the urgent need to build bridges between individuals and peoples. In this respect, “the governmental and institutional tendency to rely on community to solve problems and to integrate marginalized groups needs to be understood as a moral politics” (Staheli, 2008: 18), an issue with a focus on global awareness and culture.

Global awareness brings to the forefront the feeling that a person should be able to understand what other people need and think, what they have and should have in common, what he himself and others need to change on the way to global unity. This awareness is expected to encourage an international team spirit that puts in its very centre the assumption that every human being is an equal inhabitant of this planet. However, at present, the concept of global citizenship is mostly based on exclusion not inclusion of others however much “the modern notion of citizenship has combined political-legal rights and responsibilities with symbolic-affective loyalties and values into a public status of full inclusion and participation within a society” (Chidester, 2005: 28). Dower is right in his claim that “we are not educating people to become global citizens but rather educating them to become aware of themselves as having this status and a set of opportunities that go along with this status” (2008: 39).

To serve humanity, a global culture should be formed through the establishment of universal goals of peace, democracy and human rights for which education is requisite (Osler and Starkey, 2005: 37). And to play its role properly, education with this end is to be planned on the assumption that “intercultural dialogue is indeed possible and can lead to significant socio-political changes in the global culture” (Zajda, 2009: 21). Oxfam’s curriculum for educating global citizens is worth considering as regards the particulars it reveals:

- asking questions and developing critical thinking skills
- equipping young people with knowledge, skills and values to participate as active citizens
- acknowledging the complexity of global issues
- revealing the global as part of everyday local life, whether in a small village or a large city
- understanding how we relate to the environment and to each other as human beings. (2006: 3)

Global interdependence, not independence, is to be realized for global citizenship to occupy individual minds (to wish to lead a global life.) Despite the fact that there may differences in the worldviews of individuals sharing life within societies, there must be a way to establish common principles that will make people gather around a universal whole. Extreme opinions should be eliminated from this universal whole and education should play its role in the effort to create new and decisive visions in order to open horizon for the future.

Global citizenship activities should “go well beyond what is traditionally considered to be “socially responsible” behavior, especially when those activities are restricted to philanthropic and voluntary duties that are discretionary” (Waddock and Smith, 2000 : 59). For this reason, global citizens are supposed to be global reformers and activists. They should be educated to be leaders with aims intended to serve humanity with no concern and intention to serve a privileged group. It is because of this fact that a global planning for education for global citizenship should exceed any other temporary educational applications to save the day. Interests of humankind, not of some who see themselves superior to others in all countries of the world must gain prominence in the educational system to train the future citizens of the world for the future of mankind. Corruption and manipulation should be degraded in this process of education. The principles of this education should be established as a sound belief presupposing the hypothesis that the ultimate purpose of rivalry in every field of human activity must contribute to global welfare.

4. Importance of training future members of the world for global citizenship

Education for global citizenship should assure human race that individuals as active participants of the affairs of the world should deny being oblivious to what is going on in the world. The world may be turned into a more livable place only by individuals with a strong sense of responsibility and active commitment to what concerns humanity. Every issue threatening humanity and the continuation of human life in the world in peace and order will naturally be grappled by global citizens trained as global citizens.

Although globally oriented citizenship is a somewhat utopian concept at present, the whole history of the world in which wars, diseases, hunger and inequalities have caused tragic losses has made it necessary for conscious persons to take actions for the future of the world. In this sense such a motto as “Steps for the sake of humanity” may be an initiative for those responsible people who fervently believe that they should care for the future of civilization. Whoever is eager to contribute to this sublime project will naturally accept as true the assumption that global citizenship;

“Requires active sympathy for human suffering wherever it occurs, both as an expression of our shared humanity and as a form of enlightened self-interest. It also requires empathy, the capacity to enter into the inner lives of others, to cherish them as self-determining subjects with ideas of their own about how they wish to live, and to see the world the way they do. It also requires the disposition and the ability to enter into a robust and critical dialogue with other cultures, civilization and religions, learning from them what is valuable and challenging what is dubious or indefensible in them. Globally oriented citizenship thus calls for a delicate balance between several complementary but also potentially conflicting virtues, such as appreciation of our common humanity and of our deep differences, courage of conviction as well as humility, a firm sense of our moral identity and a willingness to revise it, internationalism as well as patriotism, rootedness in our community as well as openness to others”. (Parekh, 2003: 16-17)

Of course many aspects of the world as regards a global understanding have changed for the better; many international institutions and foundations are serving humanity with an aim to promote peace and universal cooperation, and there are huge numbers of peoples benefiting from global progress in this field of human interest. No one can diminish the level of human contribution to humanity: A number of ministries of education, non-government organizations and private corporations in the West have embarked on efforts for global citizenship. Similar efforts have been spent also in Asia. However, “the lack of capacity and motivation of schools and teachers to run global citizenship education programs” (Lim, 2008: 1074) may be said to be a chief barrier on the way to establish a proper understanding of global citizenship. Yet, at this point, there is one thing left for those who want to make every effort to serve humanity: to establish a universal belief that this is a world which is a whole with every single person in it and no one has the right and privilege to include some within the world in his mind and exclude others. We should keep in mind that the “process of discovering and developing unique potential that is within each of us is essential to the practice of responsible global citizenship”. (Clark, 2010: 214).

5. Conclusion

Human potential to make global citizenship real can best be utilized through schools. Schools, if organized for this purpose, may become model communities composed of global citizens believing in the idea that similarities of people are more important than their differences and that solidarity and equality should precede diversity. A British poet, John Donne summarizes this need in a most conclusive way: “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... A man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” (1986: 1107). Donne’s understanding of globalism within a humanistic circle shows that training global citizens is an area that cannot be neglected with explanations of lack of resources or relevant politics; it is a must for those who care for the future of the world, it is something more than willingness to help Africa’s starving children.

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