*International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations,* Volume 9, Issue 1, pp. 59-64

Educating for Global Citizenship in the New Millennium

2009

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of higher education in developing global citizens. By internationalizing the curriculum and the campus culture, institutions of higher education are uniquely positioned to positively affect the world. Increasing knowledge and understanding of differences enables people to work more effectively together to solve the world’s pressing problems. To promote a global perspective and to ultimately become a transformative experience for students, both curriculum content and pedagogy need to be examined and revised. Other ways that help build global awareness include service learning, study abroad programs, faculty and student exchanges, advocacy actions, the display of global symbols and diversity awareness initiatives. Global citizenship advances human potential and prosperity through the creation of peace and social justice worldwide.

Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that,   
         if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the   
         science of human relationships - the ability of all   
         peoples, of all kinds, to live together and to work   
         together in the same world, at peace.... /   
                   Franklin D. Roosevelt

1. Global Citizenship: Definition and Rationale

Traditionally, citizenship has been limited to the nation state. This situation has been maintained for centuries due to many factors such as parochialism, territorialism, ethnocentrism, and lack of reciprocal engagement due to economic and technological limitations of world travel and international communication. Thus, increased travel, communication and economic interdependency in a global context have challenged this traditional concept of citizenship. These challenges to the traditional notion of citizenship have created a number of problems related to globalism such as disenfranchisement of citizens, air and water pollution, destruction of rain forests, the spread of life threatening diseases, war, genocide, violation of human rights, exploitation of human and natural resources and lack of accountability of transnational corporations. As a consequence of these serious issues, the concept of the global citizen is emerging, and is being advanced by those seeking a more peaceful and just world working in concert with business and government leaders seeking to develop robust economies.

An effort to define global citizenship was undertaken by Lagos (2003) who sated that “global citizenship remains the purview of individuals to live, work and play within trans-national norms and status that defy national boundaries and sovereignty…you choose where you work, live or play, and therefore are not tied down to your land of birth…Many of newly emerging global citizens are actively engaged in global efforts – whether in business ventures, environmentalism, concern for nuclear weapons, health or immigration problems. Rather than citizenship, being the result of rights and obligations granted by a central authority, the lack of such authority gives primacy to the global citizens themselves: not a top-down but a down-up scenario… The lack of a world body puts the initiative upon global citizens themselves to create rights and obligations”. Falk (1994) described different types of global citizens. These include global reformers, elite global business people, global environmental managers, politically conscious regionalists, and trans-national activists. When such a typology is considered, it places limitations on defining global citizenship. We propose to expand this typology to include every human being as a global citizen by virtue of living on planet earth. Specifically, we see the global citizen as a person who is both a citizen of his or her country and a citizen of the world with all the rights, privileges and risks involved. Thus, we suggest that becoming a global citizen does not imply relinquishment of national citizenship. Instead, it implies that dual or multiple citizenships (which always includes global citizenship) is both desired and possible. Traditional notions of citizenship pose grave threats to the social, economic and political sustainability of all people on earth. Therefore, it is imperative that comprehensive efforts are swiftly undertaken to educate for global citizenship.

1. Culture of Educational Institutions

While the process of educating for global citizenship is one that must permeate various layers of societies, the role of higher education institutions is a pivotal one. College campuses around the globe are uniquely positioned to reach directly into local communities, across their respective countries and internationally. It is through this reach, which now includes students, alumni, faculty and staff, that campuses are able to influence the knowledge, skill and value bases of large numbers of people worldwide.

Despite the positive aspects that are unique to higher education institutions and the clear accomplishments by some campuses in promoting global citizens, there remain multiple barriers to more fully utilizing our college campuses to fulfill this crucial need. Jonathan Fanton (2006) in addressing the Council of Independent Colleges in Washington, DC stated that “colleges are, by design, deeply conservative institutions when it comes to changing cultures and curricula.” In realizing that his remarks reflect real barriers to affording college students the type of educational experiences that produce the most informed and engaged global citizens, it is essential to develop systematic mechanisms to merge such learning experiences that promote these types of citizens with the existing demands for general education and completion of costly degrees in the shortest amount of time possible. Fanton further elaborated on the many U.S. colleges with existing methods to effectively move their students into educational activities that promote the informed and engaged global citizen. These include Goucher College that requires study abroad for graduation, Concordia College that conducts summer language villages in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Japenese, Korean, Russian, etc. and Arcadia University that has a study abroad program that is used by more than 3000 students from 300 other colleges yearly (Fanton, 2006).

If we are to succeed in this aim, the university mission statement should provide the justification for an international curriculum to be supported and advanced. Therefore, universities need to continuously reflect on their mission statements in order to ensure that their curricular and co-curricular activities effectively promote global citizenship. For example, at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire, the General Education program includes a Global Awareness Connection that states, “Educated people are aware that human beings are interdependent members of a world community, that there are both similarities and differences in the societies and cultures of the world and that the manners in which people live their lives need not to be exactly alike” (PSU Catalog 2007-2008, p. 72). It seems reasonable to assume that a positive reciprocal influence can occur when universities educate students to effectively participate in the global society and when global activities guide many key components of campus life.

To some this notion of higher education promoting global citizenship suggests a strictly idealistic pursuit by ivory tower intellectuals with no connection to the real world. However, this is not the case. An illustration of how crucial internationalizing the curriculum is to strengthening local and global economies is provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education that developed a goal for the K-16 curricula to infuse international studies. Their reasoning was that this would ensure a workforce ready for global competition. This was articulated in the state’s International Strategic Plan as follows:

“Sustainable economic development requires the availability of a workforce that understands the economic threats and opportunities of the global economy and is prepared for productive performance in such a setting. Education is the key to such understanding. Attention must be directed both to current employees as well as students at all educational institution levels who will become the workers of tomorrow” (Blanke & Dahlem, 2006).

The Oklahoma example may appear totally pragmatic; however, it uniquely identifies the critical interface of humanitarian principles and practices with the pursuit of commerce. For example, the Oklahoma International Strategic Plan, in addition to identifying education and training as being a leading export, it was also stated that, “we hope to develop citizens that can see past the Oklahoma state line, as well as the U.S. coastline to know and value the other peoples, cultures, and nations in the world we share” (Blanke & Dahlem, 2006).

In addition to promoting commerce and lofty humanitarian goals, there are very specific ways that globalizing the curriculum can vitalize the university as well as reduce some of the persistent problems that plague institutions of higher learning and society in general. For example, “Would we not see less racial tension on our campus because more understanding of our global neighbor will provide more understanding of our neighbor next door? Will our graduates reminisce about their international experiences to others and spark conversations that ripple their understanding on to others?” (Blanke & Dahlem, 2006).

The nature of academic culture and its curriculum operate in a reciprocal fashion. Each in turn shapes the other which suggests that campuses that want to produce global citizens must attend to both. A climate of internationalism is a key ingredient that spurs curriculum change that promotes and maintains a culture favorable to a global perspective.

1. Educating for Global Citizenship

# In order to educate for global citizenship, colleges and universities must critically examine their curricula to determine where and to what extent, peace and justice material, including service learning, can be integrated. In terms of a general education required component, the proposal put forth by Robert Muller (1984), titled “A World Core Curriculum”, is a good starting place. His broad categories include Our Planetary Home (e.g., animal, plant and human life, earth’s climate and water and atmosphere); The Human Family (e.g., world population, human longevity, nutrition, health, levels of education, moral and spiritual levels, families, nations and religions); Our Place in Time defined as past, present and future perspectives on both the universe (e.g., globe , climate, cells, genes and atoms) and the human family (e.g., age composition, levels of health and standards of living); and The Miracle of Individual Life (e.g., physical, mental, moral and spiritual lives).

It is important to remember that in order for education to be a transformative experience, it is not only what is taught but how it is taught that is important. Thus, the process of education for global citizenship can be facilitated through liberatory or critical pedagogy, such as that advanced by Paulo Freire, Maxine Green, bell hooks, Ira Shor, Stanley Aronowitz, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and others. Wink (2005) defines critical pedagogy as “teaching and learning that transforms us and our world for the better…gives us the courage to say what we have lived…challenges us to question our long held assumptions… (it is) learning, relearning, and unlearning. It often involves rethinking our histories and rewriting our world…(it) encourages us to find the magic of personal discovery based on our own lived experiences…it is radical pedagogy that makes concrete the values of solidarity, social responsibility, creativity, and discipline in the service of the common good and critical spirit” (pp. 67-68). Specifically, students need to critically examine their own values, attitudes and beliefs about themselves and the world in which they live. To achieve this critical awareness, faculty and staff must create assignments and educational experiences that move students beyond their comfort zone through a “pedagogy of discomfort”. For example, students must be increasingly exposed to people, places and ideas that are uniquely different from their own. Controversy must not only be welcomed but vigorously pursued in order to create the kind of cognitive dissonance that leads to higher levels of cognitive restructuring. Advocacy actions should be required of students so that they may experience change agentry at its basic levels. Such actions may include writing letters, signing petitions, participating in demonstrations, attending public hearings and joining organizations that promote peace and social/environmental justice.

One of many other important considerations for higher education institutions is to promote global citizenship is the display of visual symbols. When a visitor comes to most colleges and universities, often the first thing the person sees are three flags – the national flag, the state flag and the institutional flag with the national flag flying prominently above the other two as required by law. Keeping the national flag flying the highest maintains the view that the nation state is the supreme entity. While this has several virtues including national unity, it does give the message that the needs and interests of one’s own country must always supersede those of others. In light of this reality, it is important for faculty to raise student consciousness about the placement of flags by introducing it as a focus for classroom dialogue. While we are not suggesting the total eradication of national sovereignty, we strongly believe that some symbolic acknowledgement be given to our commonality with the rest of humanity. One way to achieve this would be to display an international symbol such as the earth flag or U.N. flag. Each institution could even create its own unique international flag to reflect our connection to others around the globe. The precedents for this include Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, the University of Missouri at Columbia, Cambridge University in the UK and Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts all of which fly the U.N. flag. More recently the faculty, staff and students at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire voted to fly the U.N. flag in a conspicuous place on campus.

1. Implications for Further Study and Action

The first research priority would be to gather data to determine the extent to which institutions of higher education are educating for global citizenship. This would be accomplished by use of a survey instrument developed to provide descriptive data to include identifying the types of learning experiences promoting global citizenship and determining whether such education is optional or required.

Another important focus for future investigation would involve an experimental design that would compare students who take a course or series of courses on global citizenship with students who do not. One possible research design could include static post-test surveys of student knowledge, attitudes and values focusing on the construct of global awareness administered in the senior year. A second design might focus on alumni and include surveys administered to both graduates and their employers.

In terms of a strategy to raise consciousness and advance the importance of global education, the topic of Education for Global Citizenship could be the major focus of an international conference. This would generate many articles and workshops that would allow practitioners to determine the range and depth of what is being done to advance global awareness in higher education.

1. .Conclusion

In summary, colleges and universities have a duty and obligation to expand their missions and curricula in order to provide students with perspectives and experiences that transcend national borders. Through the internet, travel and commerce, the world is rapidly shrinking. It is to everyone’s advantage to find ways to cooperate and collaborate because of the reciprocal influence of the world’s people and nations. There are numerous problems in the world that need to be solved in order to maintain the viability of the planet. Learning to understand others and work with them in cooperative ways is an important aim of higher education. Institutions of higher education are uniquely suited for the role of producing competent global citizens. In order to advance the human condition, it is necessary to expand our reach and our minds so that human beings can live in a world that is characterized by prosperity, peace and social justice, where international law is established and respected and where people enjoy freedom and human rights. This is our challenge as educators in the 21st century to which we must vigorously commit ourselves.

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