Global citizenship education in international and comparative perspective: Testimonies from emerging educators in Jamaica and Canada

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Purpose

This paper presents findings from global citizenship education (GCE) research that seeks perspectives beyond traditional and mainstream viewpoints. By purposively sampling small, comparative groups of post-secondary education students at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Mona, Jamaica and at Lakehead University in Orillia, Canada, this research develops narratives of GCE that draw connections between students' locations, their lived experiences, and their self-identities, in relation to their perspectives of GCE. This research re-examines conventional typecasts of GCE that have typically emanated from hegemonic spheres by soliciting expressions and emphases of GCE from selected, comparative locations.

Background

Within schooling systems, the educative goal of creating "global citizens" equipped for an escalating global society is a central objective in curriculums across Canada and abroad, not least in the *Ontario Curriculum*, surfacing most prominently through the curricular texts of social studies. For example, this recently revised elementary curriculum purports that studying social studies topics such as history "helps prepare students to fulfil their role as informed and responsible *global citizens* (Government of Ontario, 2018, p. 12). While mainstream approaches to GCE suggest that all individuals can be(come) global citizens, this assertion remains irreconcilable with fundamental problems of citizenship related to access and exclusion around the world. Indeed, this cursory analysis conflicts with common definitions of global citizenship, such as this one adopted by various UN agencies that

describes it as "social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally-minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale" (United Nations, 2019). Such agendas, prescribed within the English-speaking branch of the field, remain dominated by an extremely narrow group of constituents—scholars, organizations, and policy-makers—hailing largely from Canada, the United States, Great Britain and Australia, as well as a handful of other countries of the minority world (Wang & Hoffman, 2016). With the normative construction developed within such a concentrated political, cultural and geographic sphere, the notion of *global* ultimately and inevitably represents essentially Western perspectives, issues, and priorities.

Reacting to such critiques, Shultz (2015) emphasizes the importance of deconstructing the destructive and artificial borders that have been created by "development" and "charity" discourses, transcending towards a more just distribution of the benefits of human life. This approach to global citizenship is a major tenant of the critical perspective of GCE that draws on theories of colonialism, critical multicultural social justice education, and critical pedagogy (Carr, Pluim and Howard, 2014). However, even approaches that reflect a critical uptake of GCE, while they consider the systemic relations that lead to global inequalities, are typically framed and voiced from the West. Despite a commonly presumed universalism of this field, marginalized voices have limited representation in GCE discourses. The full scope of these marginalized voices corresponds to race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, religion, age, geography and other forms of personal identity that disproportionately give voice to some groups within each category over others.

Methods and Techniques

In Global Citizenship Education: A Critical Introduction to Key Concepts and Debates, Sant et al. (2018) question "what extent we can talk about global citizenship education unless we consider this a worldwide project" (p. 174). To that end, I have partnered with Dr. Saran Stewart of the Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut for this project. Dr. Stewart was formerly a Senior Lecturer and

Deputy Dean at UWI, where she was an instructor of "Comparative Perspectives of Higher Education".

In this research partnership we designed a two-step, mixed-method project that is founded upon qualitative approaches in data collection and analyses that compare perspectives of GCE between our two distinct, international sites in North America, one typically associated with the Global South, the other, the Global North. The methodological centrepiece of the research is the examination of themes from students' critical, reflexive autobiographies. The autobiographies were assigned to students in each of our education courses—Dr. Stewart's aforementioned course, and my online "Global Citizenship Education: Issues for Teachers" course. The course curriculums, and these assignments were used as an entry point to analyze students' priorities within, positions on, and approaches to GCE. In the autobiographies, students were encouraged to think about their experiences, biases, social identities, positions and assumptions, and to reflect on how these affect their interpretation of their place in society and how they see the world. As part of their writing, students discussed the deeply-seed beliefs, values, worldviews, ideologies, and perspectives that have informed their perspectives of citizenship and GCE. Some of the nuances of these early, comparative findings are detailed in an upcoming chapter, published in the *Handbook on Caribbean Education (*Pluim & Stewart, 2020).

Interpretations, Importance and Directions forward

Many typologies for GCE tend to focus on broad spectra of global citizenship orientations, ranging anywhere from soft or critical *global consciousness* perspectives, to humanist or neo-liberally-oriented *global capability* approaches (Andreotti, 2006; Moon & Tocci, 2020; O'Sullivan & Pashby, 2008; Sant et al., 2018; Veugelers, 2020). The findings of this study aim to re-examine these typecasts and interpretations by diversifying the voices in the international GCE conversation. Longstanding tendencies of international initiatives emerging from the West have been predicated on the assumed benefits for the recipients of these initiatives. The realm of GCE is not immune to this tendency, and

following, the research presented here focuses on giving voice to those upon whom GCE has been projected.

This pilot study is informed by the work of others that have consciously integrated the perspectives of GCE from global locations (i.e. see Schugurensky & Wolhuter, 2020). An extension of this project is an upcoming, edited book that will highlight the importance of place, culture, and local context in GCE conceptualizations by assembling narratives of GCE from across the majority world. If you are interested in contributing to this volume, please contact the author at gpluim@lakeheadu.ca.

As this study progresses, it is hoped that as education students unearth and represent their perspectives, experiences, and identities relating to GCE, the bodies of theory and practice of GCE will be enriched, further nuanced, and re-conceptualized. Developing a better understanding of students' perspectives of GCE through the case studies will not only benefit various realms of educational theory, but also in Canadian curriculum and policy development, such as recruitment strategies in teacher education programs, clarity on how to select students for teacher education programs, and enlightening which experiences benefit education students in various education programs—all of which might be replicated in teacher training for GCE.

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