

Decolonising the Global Citizenship Agenda in History Education

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UNESCO (2015) defines Global citizenship as 'a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global'. Therefore, global citizenship education is a form of practical humanism that challenges the legacies of dichotomisation of the western colonial project of the last five hundred years.

It does this by drawing on African concepts of communitarianism, such as the Xhosa and Zulu concept of ubuntu advanced by thinkers such as John Mbiti and Western concepts that veer towards this, such as the concept of cosmopolitanism, as advanced by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant. It also reflects the ideals of the global human rights consensus advanced by the anti-imperial, anti-fascist, and civil rights movements of the 20th century. Thus, global citizenship seems like a noble intellectual framework to understand the cultural evolution needed to extend peace and justice in the world.

What role can history education play in the development of global citizenship in young people? This paper will explore this question while also considering some of the criticisms of the global citizenship agenda, particularly the belief by many scholars in the inherent colonialisms embedded in the semantics and idioms of global citizenship theory.

In pursuit of a 'common humanity'

As mentioned, the central aim of global citizenship theory is to extend ideals of peace and justice on a world scale by fostering supranational identities not defined by race or religion but by a 'common humanity'. On first consideration, the phrase 'common humanity' seems redundant in that humanity is, by definition, that which is common to all animals of the homo sapiens species. However, the idea of belonging to a 'common humanity' only makes sense if it is de-materialised and historicised, meaning distinguishing humanity from humanness. Our humanness includes the physiology that differentiates us from other organisms and the mental and psychological capacities that establish homo sapiens as the dominant conscious species on the planet. In addition to including our inherent humanness, our humanity on the other hand incorporates the societal norms we as a species have developed over time that govern our ethical selves. Understanding humanity thus requires exploring past human activity to understand the processes that led to the

formation of our current political, social, economic and intellectual settlements.

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Residing at the level of conscience, humanity includes such capacities as a capacity to conscience itself and a capacity to consciousness, meaning the ability to observe and understand the world beyond its material structures, such as understanding societal and intellectual constructs and their effects on the human experience. Above all, it includes a capacity for empathy and a capacity for justice. Humanity is the capacity to appreciate the equality of the humanness of all people, that humans are not merely a function of their physiologies but of the historicised social constructs that govern their daily lives, and that one's humanness guarantees one freedom from physical and societal exploitation.

Humanity can also be said to include a capacity to extend the standards of humanness to non-human animal species, the environment, the community as a single whole, and even one's progeny. This would thus require the extension of one's humanity, i.e. one's capacity for empathy and justice, to apply to these things. In the western world, this last point is perhaps an ultraliberal extrapolation of the meaning of humanity, but in the African consciousness, it is a defining attribute. Such an extrapolation is finding new revival in western political thought in response to the unabating capitalism that has dominated western consciousness for much of the last half a millennium. For example, the west's indigenous cultures are re-discovering various ritual, societal and political practices such as sustainable consumption and periodic or permanent abstention from meat. Thus, humanity is distinct from humanness and, while possessing some core and, dare one say, universal concepts, in many respects, it is a culturally determined phenomenon that is constantly changing as societies change.

In its aim to foster affinity with a 'common humanity', global citizenship thus has high ideological aims. Success requires an appreciation for, as opposed to an attempt at a dislocation from, the multiplicited and historicised human experience. It is perhaps at its core an attempt at the imprinting of "goodness"; it is a moral endeavour in which "goodness" derives not from one's religion or

race but one's humanness. This goodness is perfectly manifested only in our collective, global and universal humanness. Only once this is understood and appreciated can we begin to manifest collective and global humanity, still sensitive to place, people, present and past, but that will deliver an extension of peace and prosperity in the global human experience.

But what role can history education play in delivering this vision?

UNESCO's Domains of Learning and Key Learning Outcomes

In thinking about how to deliver global citizenship education, UNESCO (2015) offers three domains of learning – cognitive, socio-emotional and behaviour. The first two domains are the most relevant for history education, so the rest of the essay will focus on these.

UNESCO defines the aim of the cognitive domain as to support students 'to acquire knowledge, understanding and critical thinking about global, regional, national and local issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations'. The education system is the primary vehicle of knowledge acquisition, and educators are the primary agents that facilitate understanding in young people. History education, in particular, can help students think critically about issues, not only as a function of space (e.g. local, national and global considerations) but also as a function of time. In particular, as history is concerned with change over time, by historicising current patterns of interconnectedness and interdependency, students can think critically about how and why certain connections came to exist and how inequalities came to be embedded in them. Thus, history education has a lot to offer the global citizenship agenda in the cognitive domain of learning.

In relation to the socio-emotional domain, the aim is to help young people 'to have a sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity'. 'Belonging' is often a function of culture, which has an inherent historical aspect. Culture incorporates traditions derived from the past. Therefore, with its unique ability to facilitate conversations with the past, history can help students understand the sources of traditions and begin to appreciate their agency in shaping how customs are updated, reinvigorated, and passed down to the next generation. In addition, through thematic and comparative histories, commonalities and differences across time, space and cultures

could be explored. Thus, history education has a central part to play in the socio-emotional domain of global citizenship education.

Criticisms of Global Citizenship Education

As mentioned before, global citizenship education is highly ideological. It aims to foster a particular political mindset in entire populations through the proliferation of its principles in every part of the education system, in both academic and extra-curricular activities. Its ideals seem noble enough, but there has been criticism of the content of global citizenship education, which some scholars believe assumes the universality of western cultural norms and ideals: ‘...the apparent categories that now shape prevalent global citizenship discourses and scholarships also demonstrate the problematic, epistemically non-inclusive constructions and exportations that are more or less, managed by people in the west who possess more institutional research capacities which are themselves developed through centuries-old massively disempowering relations that marginalised southern ideas, theories and practices’ (Abdi, 2015).

One of the consequences of this is the devaluation of local historical narratives, as that which is global comes to have more value. For example, for a long time in the United Kingdom, North American slavery and the American Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s dominated Black history teaching, to the exclusion of Black British histories or even the national histories of the former British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, from where most Black Britons hail. This is summed up well by Abdi (2015) when he says of the predicament, ‘...anything that is classified as global, especially when it is uni-theoretically conceived and produced, can too easily be co-opted into serving neo-colonial, neo-imperial or even neo-patriarchy systems that deliberately globalise neoliberal ideologies which de-legitimate the needs and aspirations of marginalised populations’. Therefore, globalising discourses can be repressive as well as liberating, divisive as well as unifying. This is because a focus on the global may allow for neglect of the intra-national. This is what allows the United States to declare itself the leader of the free world when so many of its Black citizens lack the protection of their fundamental civil rights.

In addition, with its emphasis on peace and justice and diversity and difference, global citizenship education tends to seek economisation by choosing topics that meet multiple criteria. The result is that difference is taught only in the context of conflict and injustice. Black history teaching

becomes little more than the study of slavery, immigration and campaigns for civil rights. Rather than encouraging the wholesale reinsertion of multiplicity into all narratives, the guidance produced by UNESCO (2015) and similar organisations accept each national experience as a homogenous whole. They see differences only between nations, ignoring that most injustice, violence and inculcation of prejudice is national, local, and even domestic, i.e. at the family level. Thus, global citizenship education tends to legitimise national hegemonies, political and social.

In the case of the United Kingdom, the focus in history education has thus been on the injustices against Black peoples without the same energy put into the reinsertion of Black historical figures into un-racialised discourses on the development of key ideas such as modernity, democracy and free-market economics. The assumption is that the tenets of modernity are inherently “white”, and the task of global citizenship is to work to (a) legitimise “black” experiences and (b) require white consciousness to appreciate the role it has played in the de-legitimisation of “black” experiences. However, a de-colonised approach would challenge the integrity of the “white” experience and question whether all that it claims to encompass should be considered the singular creation of the “white” experience. A de-colonised approach to global citizenship education thus challenges the hegemony itself to champion multiplicity and unearth the very real contributions of those excluded from the white experience to the formation of the ideas that govern our world.

The result would be a global citizenship education that is not an enabler of the proliferation of the pathology of western truth, but rather re-inserts Black historical figures into “white” historical spaces into local, national, and global historical discourses, while simultaneously de-racialising and historicising such discourses. In other words, not only should the global citizenship agenda in history education legitimise “black” experiences, it should de-racialise all experiences and humanise discourse. The impact of failing to do this is conveyed by Adbi (2015) when he notes ‘...the way one constructs others through dominant knowledge categories constitutes the most effective method to fix them for posterior applications that limit agentic capacities to liberate themselves from oppression and attached arbitrary categorisations’. Thus, the global citizenship agenda in history education cannot merely add new “black” narratives centred on conflict and exploitation; it must challenge the exclusion of the Black experience from the existing narratives, and the total exclusion of constructive Black narratives from all intellectual discourse in the western tradition.

The compassion and multiplicities that global citizenship theory claims to promote must challenge national hegemonies and the intellectual hegemonies of the west

Olúfémi Táíwò's (2018) theory of excluded moderns offers some guidance. He holds that in discourses on modernity, philosophers 'write as if all thinkers were white'. He holds that African thinkers have been left 'outside the epidermal universe made up of white canonical thinkers' even when their lives and works were 'contemporaneous with one another and their themes intersected when they were not the same'. This exclusion is 'construed in racial terms' and is accompanied by 'the denigration of all things African', facts we cannot ignore when examining the dearth of Black thinkers, and therefore the nuance of their ideas, in philosophical discourses on modernity. For Táíwò, the very thing we call modernity is incomplete at best, manipulated and contaminated by racisms at worst. Thus, a global citizenship education that looks at concepts such as modernity and its cousins, democracy, pluralism and liberalism, which Abdi (2015) terms 'hegemonic constructs that somehow become absolved of any definitional or analytical investigations', yet disregards the racisms embedded in their definitions and histories actually provides no education at all and is instead a tool of neo-colonial and neo-imperial intrigue. The compassion and multiplicities that global citizenship theory claims to promote must challenge national hegemonies and the intellectual hegemonies of the west by re-inserting Black thought into our understanding of these professed 'global' concepts.

Is there a way that history educators can interpret the guidance in order to deliver de-colonised tuition?

A Critical Reading of UNESCO Topics in Global Citizenship

By diving into a specific UNESCO topic suggestion in the cognitive domain, we will explore how educators could design curricula that would deliver a de-colonised idea of global citizenship:

Topic: identify governance structures and decision-making processes and dimensions of citizenship including an understanding of local, national and global governance

structures and systems and how these are interconnected and interdependent.

This topic is about giving students an understanding of political institutions – how do humans organise themselves and make collective decisions at a local, national and global level. In keeping with the ethos of global citizenship, this would require a rejection of any value judgement in the first instance – essentially, this is about giving students an understanding of different systems, not about telling them which one is best or better.

Firstly, the use of the word 'structure' inherently values centralised and bureaucratic systems of governance. An educator looking for such structures may look for institutions fashioned on the western model, underpinned by western theories of the separation of state institutions, and accompanied by the paraphernalia of state institutions expected in the west, including dedicated buildings and personnel. The result is that a system of governance is deemed to provide nothing to global citizenship education until it has reached a minimum level of "material codification". At best, the result is that where some societies make it to be studied, teaching is done by analogy. A process of "making sense" occurs whereby African institutions are analogised to western institutions to "make them make sense". Obas become "kings", and Asantehemaa's become 'queens'; those around the monarch become his 'court' and heads of families in the provinces his 'lords'. This need to analogise is reductive; time should instead be taken to understand African institutions from the inside out. Here language training can help.

In the context of African history, through the study of African political history, and particularly the study of the history of African political philosophy, students will be able to appreciate that different people have developed their own systems of expressing ideas such as representative government, that the western iteration of the same is but one iteration, and that all iterations have something to teach each other. This would go some way to re-inserting the Black experience into world intellectual and political history, and breed the culture of understanding and tolerance that is at the heart of global citizenship education. World history provides a number of good examples for how this could be done, such as a political history of the Akan or the Zulu that seeks to facilitate students in understanding their systems of governance beyond a superficial understanding of power dynamics. Students could interact with sources and narratives that allow them to understand the institutions of states, not from a western perspective but a concretely African one. These

subjects could be taught in such a way that emphasises the inherent value of these systems. This means not comparing or analogising them to western institutions. By diving into the ideas that underpin these institutions and how they function, students will learn to appreciate the philosophy of African politics on its terms. Knowledge of interconnectedness and interdependence could come, for example, in the study of modern African nation-states, starting with exploring the features they inherited from their African predecessors instead of depicting them as adulterated and dysfunctional iterations of their western inspirations. This decolonisation of the teaching of political history would go a long way to achieving the goals of global citizenship education.

**Global citizenship education has a lot to offer history education.
However, educators must work to prevent the agenda from descending
into a campaign of neo-colonial intrigue.**

Global citizenship education has admirable ideals that history education can play a leading role in delivering. It can provide the context that students need to understand the world we live in today, to understand that state and society are not fixed institutions but societal constructs that students themselves can influence, and that interconnectedness and interdependency develops with time and are also constantly changing realities. The idea of fostering a global identity to foster affinity and empathy on a world scale is integral to kickstarting the cultural changes needed to deliver peace and prosperity in the world. But the global citizenship agenda should not ignore the inherent racisms in many of the concepts the agenda seeks to promote. Educators must think about overcoming these challenges by critically evaluating the assumptions evident in the drafting of the guidance and how the key terms used are themselves a function of western culture and history, so do not represent universally accepted understandings of the words. They should include a critical historicisation of the ideals of global citizenship education in their curriculum. All of this is to say that global citizenship education has a lot to offer history education. However, educators must work to prevent the agenda from descending into a campaign of neo-colonial intrigue.

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UNESCO Global Citizenship Education, Topics and Learning Objectives

