

Global citizenship education as education for social justice

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Introduction

In this discussion of global citizenship education (GCED) in Aotearoa, I will be drawing upon my experiences teaching in international education, teaching the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (*NZC*), and my research in the field of citizenship-and social-justice education in Aotearoa New Zealand. I advocate approaching GCED as part of a broader educational approach that embraces teaching *for* and *about* social justice; a process that enables people (young and not so young) to understand their lives and experiences in relationship with the planet, one another, and the systems and structures of the societies in which those relationships exist.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a democratic society made up of a diverse range of citizens who operate in a global sphere. These three facets of our society—democracy, diversity, and globalisation—underpin our everyday experiences, our values, our actions, and our knowledge (Barr, Graham, Hunter, Keown, & McGee, 1997). They are highly visible throughout the vision, principles, values, and key competencies of *NZC*. They are also foundational to the concept of GCED. New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO states that “GCED aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world” (New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, n.d.). Although democracy is not explicitly named in the New Zealand National Commission definition, democratic values and behaviours permeate the statement. In this discussion, I question whether this implicit reference to democracy is enough.

GCED as social-justice education

A taken-for-granted aspect of GCED is that the global citizens we strive for—the ideal—are citizens fully capable of participating in democratic processes.

However, human beings are not born with an innate ability to function in such a way: we must learn how to be democratic. It is important to note that, while democratic values such as freedom of speech, equity, human rights, education, tolerance, and peace are heralded as foundational to democracy, not all democracies safeguard these rights. Not all democracies actually allow all of the people living in those nations full access to participate in and contribute to democratic processes. Even democracies held up to be highly democratic, such as our own, perpetuate highly undemocratic practices in certain areas. How we educate for global citizenship founded upon ideals and values that are yet to be realised is a very real challenge and one that must be taken seriously if the aims of GCED are to be met. Moreover, if we are striving towards a shared understanding of the type of citizen the world needs in order for it to be “a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world” (New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, n.d.), making it explicit that democratic processes are fundamental to the development of this citizenry would be useful.

A strength of the statement defining GCED is the focus on critically active citizenship that is directed towards the myriad global issues that human societies and our planet currently face. The definition provided by the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO positions human agency front and centre: it is within our power to solve these complex global issues. This is the message that is of paramount importance to me as an educator; it is also the focus of the doctoral research I have carried out over the past 4 years. In my work, I ask: How do we move from aspirational statements and affirmations of agency to the performance of citizenship that is not only critically active, but radically transformative?

The answer, I believe, is through a framework of social-justice education that encompasses both education *for* and *about* social justice. Education *for* social justice is concerned with creating and working within a framework of social justice to bring about a more socially just world; it advocates a social justice pedagogy. Education *about* social justice engages people with positive examples of what social justice looks like, as well as exploring what injustices have taken place, why they existed, and how they have been overcome. Social-justice education is an ongoing process. It is fostered in formal educational institutions such as schools and universities as well as more informal educative spaces such as community groups and organisations.

Imagine a global citizenry empowered to transform the oppressive structures that prevent fairness and equity of opportunity; citizens who can—without fear—be critical and analytical of society, how it came to be structured, and how that structure works to perpetuate hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality; citizens who will not accept the normalisation of the privilege and power of some groups over others. This is the power of GCED in a social-justice framework.

The role of identity and critical consciousness

I have been interested in how critically active citizens come into being for well over a decade now. My journey leads me to believe that for transformative change to occur in societies around the world those citizens must first understand the need for change and then know that change is not only possible, but their actions can bring about those changes. I want to briefly discuss the ideas of two writers to the development of my views on GCED. The first is the multicultural education scholar, James Banks. The second is Paulo Freire, whose work is considered foundational to the development of critical pedagogy.

Banks (2008) argues that the goal of citizenship education is societal transformation. In order for people to be able to identify at a cosmopolitan, or global, level people must first be secure, comfortable, and confident in their own cultural, ethnic, religious identities as well as national identities. Only then, he argues, can they truly identify as citizens of the world with responsibilities to diverse peoples and places of that world.

Freire also had a vision for ordinary people to take action to transform society. He argued that education had a primary role in achieving that transformation—but not just any education: a liberating, humanising education that allows people to become more fully human. It is a vision that places praxis—involving action upon reality and serious, true reflection—at the heart of people's discovery that they are oppressed and that they are their own liberators (Freire, 2000). This educative process of developing critical consciousness involves democratic processes—dialogue between people where their experiences are heard, acknowledged, and understood in the specific contexts that they have taken place. The purpose of such processes is to illuminate the reality that the structures that exist do so because people

created them. Once this is understood, people are able to plan and take collective action to change the structures so they are fair and equitable for all. Becoming critically conscious fosters citizens' sense of agency and empowers them to take social action.

These two writers' ideas have important implications for GCED: we must not focus solely on the global level of citizenship—we must connect people's local and national identities and experiences to their place within wider global contexts. GCED needs to provide opportunities for people to learn and understand how their experiences are connected to, and with, the experiences of other people in other times and places. People need opportunities to explore the ways in which systemic privilege and structures of power have impacted upon their own lives and those of others. In this sense, GCED must not only be present and future focused, but explicitly historical too. Understanding the past is essential to taking action in the present and visions for the future.

One model of GCED in Aotearoa in the formal education space that embraces such an approach is the social inquiry for social action (Mutch, Perreau, Houliston, & Tatebe, 2016). This inquiry process holds social action at the heart of learning about society and our place as citizens within it. It is designed to develop young people's understandings of what it means to be a critically active *democratic* citizen in a diverse and interconnected world.

Performance of global citizenship in Aotearoa New Zealand

As a nation, we proudly recognise and reaffirm our rights within and responsibilities to the global community through our participation in treaties and conventions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) states that New Zealand is currently party to over 1,900 treaties (MFAT, n.d.). One treaty, The Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2016), is currently under scrutiny for its lack of urgency in taking the necessary actions to prevent irreparable climate change. The criticisms of the Paris climate agreement have highlighted the shortcomings of the system nations are reliant upon to gain any type of binding global action. New Zealand ratified the agreement in 2016, but it does not take effect until 2020. At national policy level all over the world there has been little action to suggest we take those responsibilities seriously right now. It has taken the social action of young people around

the world to even get this inaction noticed by the mainstream media and the general public. Tens of thousands of students have walked out of classrooms in protest of the inaction in addressing climate change. Young people's voices are clear: signing treaties and making promises is not good enough.

The School Strike 4 Climate movement provides recent (and ongoing) evidence of how the concept of global citizenship is being performed in local communities around the world. While the protests are directed at local and national governments, there is an explicitly global message: we will not survive without urgent action from every government, every international agency, and every transnational corporation. We can see this movement as the embodiment of GCED enacted through a social-justice framework.

GCED must embrace such youth-led movements as teaching and learning opportunities for transformative democratic citizenship that hold social-justice values at their core. For far too many years, the simulation processes of programmes such as Model United Nations have been upheld as the pinnacle of engagement in democratic life for young people. That's not to say that such simulations of building diplomacy and international relations are not valuable and worthwhile; they just don't go far enough. We need to be empowering young people to take authentic actions towards transformative change. As young people are telling us, the United Nations model has not led to action on the most urgent and serious global issue facing humanity today.

There are so many other examples of ways in which global citizenship is being performed in Aotearoa, and many of these involve community groups, innovative start-ups, and non-governmental organisations. The participants in my doctoral study take social action for social justice in local and national contexts with the distinct intention of doing their part to provide solutions to global issues of injustice, intolerance, and insecurity. They work towards social-justice horizons, filled with critical hope—"the possibility of possibility" (Amsler, 2013, p. 204)—that transformative change is possible (Perreau, forthcoming). They can see that the actions they are taking, in a myriad of small and not so small ways, are making a difference to people's lives. To me, this is what GCED is all about: people understanding their rights, roles, and responsibilities (as an individual and as a member of a group) in the performance of collective, transformative action for a more *democratic*, just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable world.

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