

Education for global Citizenship

Philip Guin

There is plenty of enthusiasm for the idea of global citizenship. There is in fact ample support for education to promote global citizenship, judging by large sections of school supply catalogs, their programs, films and books proudly and handsomely displayed. Columbia Teachers College has a program, as does Montclair State University, and our doctoral program at Iberoamericana includes a course entitled Education for Global Citizenship. All the more reason why the words of detractors seem so stark and peevish - especially those of many conservative political opponents who shower disdain on globalisms of any sort, for example, on the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. There are, of course, reasoned opponents of global citizenship, or rather, those who question its feasibility, and a brief review of philosophical and educational critiques will help expose crucial problems in sustaining global education.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

In general, the pros and cons of education for global citizenship resolve themselves into part/whole beliefs and observations. Those in favor argue that, to the extent we see the whole picture, our thinking and behavior will change for the better, for we will be less inclined to think and act out of feelings of indifference, ignorance and selfishness. Not just locally, but through increasing awareness, and especially through education, children will be encouraged to appreciate their relation to and involvement in a global initiative. For instance, Richard Falk envisions global citizenship as a shift in thinking from spatial identity, as citizens of this or that location, to a temporal concept, whereby,

citizenship... becomes an essentially religious and normative undertaking, based on faith in the unseen, salvation in a world to come-not in heaven, but on earth-guided by convictions, beliefs, and values. So conceived, citizenship brings deep satisfaction to adherents arising from their engagement in such future possibilities, but without the consoling and demeaning illusion that global citizenship can be practiced effectively in the world today or the deforming persistence of associating citizenship with unthinking patriotism of the sort mobilized by sovereign states during times of war.¹

In terms of education, global citizenship would be an ideal, continuously evolving and renewing itself, while the student might be thought of as "a 'citizen pilgrim', that is, someone on a journey to 'country'" to be established in the future in accordance with more idealistic and normatively rich conceptions of political community."²

Opposed to the ideal, Isaiah Berlin has long insisted that it is the parts rather than the whole which deserve our attention. Berlin cites the irreducible and irreconcilable plurality of human values as evidence that whole picture solutions are impossible.

The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable ... but conceptually incoherent; I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth.³

For example, consider Plato's ideal of knowing and choosing the good. A perfectly conceivable interpretation,

and one that Berlin calls a “monstrous impersonation,” separates individuals into empirical (the contingent everyday world of choice) and ideal or real selves, and equates what persons would invariably choose, if only they knew, with “the ‘real’ self which discerns the good, and cannot help choosing it once it is revealed.” The mischief begins in identifying the ideal self “with the pursuit of some ideal purpose not dreamed of by (the) empirical self. .. a state, a class, a nation or the march of history itself...”⁴ On this interpretation, global citizenship would surely fail, for any number of contradictory worlds could be implied and sustained, each full of rogue individuals, each beholden to its antecedent notion of the ideal.

The difficulty, on this view, with say Falk’s idealistic future oriented global citizen, seems to be twofold: (1) If the parts (plurality of values) are incommensurate among themselves, what meaning can be attached to “global citizen”? (2) But supposing there to be a way to reconcile a plurality of values, what protection is afforded the “citizen pilgrim” from those who would then insist, in the name of wholeness and exclusiveness, that the reconciliation implies a particular notion of the good - one which in practice would inevitably have a narrowing and conceivably virulent effect, based on assumptions about the good, for example the focused violence of skinheads against immigrants; the ethnic cleansing and tunnel vision of some nationalists; the resolute paternalism of U.S. foreign policy; Second Amendment interpretations by zealous militia groups?

Now supposing we hold that education for global citizenship is precisely the attempt to heal the breach between parts and wholes; between particularity and idealism; between individual focus and global commitment, what questions then, need to be addressed? A partial list might include: are there befitting dispositions and attitudes to be fostered, in search of a better world?; can we identify the mechanisms required to excite in children a widening perspective, while maintaining a hold on particulars?; given that the perspective is widened, what guarantee is there that children will begin to think and behave in the responsible ways needed to bring about a better world?; indeed what would constitute the general features of a better world? These questions are surely addressed to those with commitment to global citizenship and education, for the problem is really twofold: (1) enabling children everywhere to grasp the relation of parts and wholes, and (2) translating the resulting knowledge into commensurate plans, projects and actions. Clearly, the community of inquiry, as an objective and impartial forum, can be of enormous help, in its normative capacity to generate alternative views, and in its critical capacity for self-correction.

THE EDUCATIONAL CRITIQUE

Writing in *Educational Theory*, Madhu Suri Prakash explicates and defends the beliefs of Wendell Berry regarding society and education. There are many facets to Berry’s background, as a popular poet, writer and social critic, and of particular interest in his scathing attack on global education. His vision of a return to the soil, “of our closeness to the land, without the alienation we suffer because of being ‘educated’ to work for inhuman modern institutions and technologies” runs in contrast to a global vision - perhaps even in contrast to a vision of what is happening on the other side of the mountain.

Berry rejects all the global education paradigms proposed today to save the planet... “Think Globally, Act Locally, “ and other similar slogans reaffirm modern myths and fads of planetary consciousness and a global education paradigm for ecologically regenerating the global village.... Resisting all varieties of global education, ecology, and culture, Berry explains why most international movements to save the planet are not just futile, but positively dangerous: “You can’t think about what you don’t know, and nobody knows this planet.... The people who think globally do so abstractly and statistically, by reducing the globe to quantities. “

At this point one might feel the urge to launch an epistemological challenge to Berry’s abrupt dismissal of the possibility of knowledge of the planet. When does one know anything? Does one know the game of baseball having merely studied the rules? or if in addition having attended a game? or having played the game? played it professionally? coached it professionally? What would count as knowledge of the planet? Berry seems to allow the possibility of knowing “abstractly and statistically, by reducing the globe to quantities.” But this comes across as hardly more than a gesture toward knowledge, as is confirmed later by Prakash’s interpolation calling for “deconstructing our ‘faith’ or folly in modern science, technology, and economics.”

The quantification of knowledge, if that is a proper locution, might be shown to be of some interest to

educators. Though Berry would gladly dispense with the educators as well as the quantifications, in an effort to make us “dwellers,” “stewards” and “husbands of nature”: it might be constructive, all things considered, to examine how statistical findings could have a profound message for those of us still trying to make sense of the old school and society.

Since the early 1970s, Amartya Sen, and more recently, Martha Nussbaum, have been working out of economics and classical Aristotelian ethics to construct a new direction in international development. Ramifications for policy and social action characterize their work. “The importance of ‘growth,’” Sen avers, “must depend on the nature of the variable the expansion of which is considered and seen as ‘growth’.” Consider the following table.

Table 1.1 GNP and life expectancy		
	GNP per head. 1984 (U.S. Dollars)	Life expectancy at birth. 1984 (years)
China	310	69
Sri Lanka	360	70
Brazil	1,720	64
Mexico	2,040	66
South Africa	2,340	54

As Sen explains, since the Second World War, growth has been reckoned, for the most part, on the basis of the gross national product (GNP). Yet, as Table 1.1 suggests, there may be an inverse relation between the GNP and life expectancy, indicating that growth tied exclusively to the GNP may forfeit values we all esteem. “The process of economic development,” Sen continues, “cannot abstract from expanding the supply of food, clothing, housing, medical services, educational facilities, etc ... and these important and crucial changes are undoubtedly matters of economic growth.”⁶

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Sen and Nussbaum are solely concerned with the commodities associated with basic needs. Commodities are expendable; recipients may still be left wanting and needing, and thus development requires a more durable and profound dimension. This is to be identified in the functionings and capabilities needed for human flourishing. In the end, development means the development of individuals. And it is in% this sense of development that education will be essential.

Here, also, the need for global education emerges. Whatever else it may be, fostering the functionings and capabilities of children everywhere must count as a first priority of global education. Perhaps it would be useful to think of functionings and capabilities in Dewey’s sense, as powers needed for human flourishing. Nussbaum says as much, and calls for

*an international dialogue - a provisional, revisable consensus on what it means to be human and to live well. Each participant consults her own experience, the stories and concepts of her group, and the insights of other groups and dialogue partners. International interdependence and boundary crossings of various kinds make it particularly imperative to forge together a global ethic and a conception, as widespread as possible, of human being and flourishing.*⁷

It can be readily seen that following Nussbaum’s agenda would consign Berry’s call for a return to the soil to the position of one candidate for our allegiance - but no more than one. Global education is a dialogue, and its doors must remain open for new and contestable entries. We in Philosophy for Children have the responsibility for keeping the doors open. A robust global education leading to global citizenship would be the goal.

NOTES:

1. Richard Falk, "The Making of Global Citizenship" in *Global Visions*, ed. by Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs, and Jill Cutler (Boston: South End Press, 1993), p.49.
2. Richard Falk, p. 38.
3. Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 13.
4. __, *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford, 1969), pp. 133-34.
5. Madhu Suri Prakash, "What are People For? Wendell Berry on Education, Ecology, and Culture" in *Education Theory*, Vol. 44/n. 2, Spring 1994 pp. 135-37.
6. Arnata Sen, "The Concept of Development" in *Handbook of Development Economics*, Vol. I, Ed. by H. Chenery and T.N. Srinivasan (Elsevier Science Publishers V.V., 1988) pp. 9-26.
7. Martha Nussbaum, quoted by David A. Croker, "Functioning and Capability: The Foundation of Sen's Development Ethic" in *Ethical Principles for Development: Needs, Capacities or Rights*, ed. by Kenneth Arnan (Institute for Critical Thinking, Montclair State, NJ, 1991), pp. 142-43.

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