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The Longings and Limits of Global Citizenship Education

*The Moral Pedagogy of Schooling in a
Cosmopolitan Age*

Jeffrey S. Dill



The Longings and Limits of Global Citizenship Education

As the world seemingly gets smaller and smaller, schools around the globe are focusing their attention on expanding the consciousness and competencies of their students to prepare them for the conditions of globalization. Global citizenship education is rapidly growing in popularity because it captures the longings of so many—to help make a world of prosperity, universal benevolence, and human rights in the midst of globalization's varied processes of change.

This book offers an empirical account from the perspective of teachers and classrooms, based on a qualitative study of ten secondary schools in the United States and Asia that explicitly focus on making global citizens. Global citizenship in these schools has two main elements, both global competencies (economic skills) and global consciousness (ethical orientations) that proponents hope will bring global prosperity and peace. However, many of the moral assumptions of global citizenship education are more complex and contradict these goals, and are just as likely to have the unintended consequence of reinforcing a more particular Western individualism. While not arguing against global citizenship education per se, the book argues that in its current forms it has significant limits that proponents have not yet acknowledged, which may very well undermine it in the long run.

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For Heather

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Introduction

Since 2008, headlines in the United States regularly feature the global financial crisis, which transcends any one nation's control or responsibility, as well as perceived economic threats from Asian countries like China and India. In the midst of all this economic anxiety, great attention is given to the lowly state of education in the United States, whether from international test score comparisons or documentary films like *Waiting for Superman* or *Race to Nowhere*. Of course, anxieties about the world and anxieties about our schools are deeply connected: we look to our schools to shape and form the next generation, while realizing that the world for which students are being prepared is highly complex and uncertain.

These anxieties are rooted in the variability and speed of changes in the processes we call “globalization.” The problems, challenges, and opportunities of globalization are many and, by now, familiar: migration, cultural difference, a global economy, environmental crises, and a growing list of global social problems. The world seemingly gets smaller and smaller, boundaries appear to fade away, and we feel more and more connected to corners of the globe that previously felt, quite literally, a world away. Barriers are broken and distant people and places feel closer, and yet these same processes radically intensify difference and competition. Students in our schools are, on the one hand, encouraged to develop understanding and awareness of cultural differences that are part of their everyday experience; on the other hand, they are expected to learn skills that will equip them to compete with workers around the world for jobs in a survival-of-the-fittest global economy. This world of shrinking borders simultaneously expands our hopes for a better, more prosperous and just world, while also increasing our anxieties and fears about economic uncertainties and increasing inequalities.

Global citizenship education—in its various forms—is one of the fastest growing educational reform movements today and lies at the crosshairs of many of these anxieties and hopes. Although still in its incipient stages, it has support from all corners—teacher unions, governments, corporations, foundations, global institutions—and thus is likely to continue on its growth curve. Schools around the globe are focusing their curricular and

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extra-curricular attention on expanding the consciousness and the competencies of students to prepare them for the opportunities and problems of globalization. The ideal of global citizenship captures the longings of many teachers and educators—not to mention scholars, politicians, and business people—to help make a better world in the midst of globalization’s varied processes of change. Just as educators in earlier periods of massive transition attempted to adjust schooling in order to make education relevant, teachers in the twenty-first century are attempting to make students into “global citizens” equipped with the consciousness and competencies needed to prosper in the hoped-for empathic civilization. These longings cut to the heart of educational aspirations to form the young and prepare them for life in the world.

This book offers an empirical account of this rapidly growing educational trend and an interpretive analysis of both its longings and limits, relying on a wide range of data including curricula and political and public discourse focused on global citizenship education. The main source of data is interviews with teachers and administrators and classroom observations from a sample of ten high schools in the United States and Asia that are specifically committed to global citizenship. The sample includes elite private international schools and public schools in the U.S. that serve large populations of minorities and low-income students. The sample includes secular schools and religious schools, public schools and private schools, and schools of varying size, from about 1,600 to about 200. Although schools were selected to be broadly representative of the larger movement for global citizenship education, the sample is limited in how much it can fully represent this growing and diverse population. More information and detail about the school sample and the method for data collection can be found in Appendix A. In spite of its inherent limits, the sample does offer a picture of global citizenship education “on the ground” in schools and classrooms at the early stages of its development and growing importance.

In my mind, the future of schooling will not be a question of global citizenship education or no global citizenship education, but rather *what kind* of global citizenship education? This is not to say global citizenship education has arrived en masse—there are still many, many schools (a majority, in fact) in the United States and around the world that have not made the curricular and programmatic changes discussed above. As already noted, this movement is still in its embryonic stages. But given its widespread support from key institutional partners and rapid rise (discussed further in Chapter 1) it is difficult to imagine it as merely an educational trend or fad. And yet this growth has not been without opposition. Global citizenship education programs have been met with resistance in some places in the United States, and small “culture war” battles have erupted over its implementation, with the familiar division of “progressives” in favor of it and “orthodox” opposed for fear of an anti-American, anti-Christian, UN-backed ideology of “globalism.”¹ And yet the presence of such conflicts

symbolizes more the debate over the *content* of these programs and how it may form our children than they do objections to the core longings of global citizenship education. The question still seems to be not *whether* or *if* but rather *what kind* of global citizenship education.

In this climate, it is very important at this early stage to begin a public conversation about the deeper moral purposes of education in this global age. What do we want our children to become? And how do we want to educate them towards these ends? These are essential questions that often get overlooked in the press to find solutions and answers in the political sphere. As I argue in Chapter 1, schooling is fundamentally about inculcating the rising generation into particular stories that confer upon children an understanding of themselves and their place in the world. What are the identity-forming narratives implicitly or explicitly told through global citizenship education?

Global citizenship represents an ideal, and therefore, like all pedagogical ideals, global citizenship education represents a vision of the good. The moral purposes of education are the focus of the analysis in this book. I unpack the particular moral vision of global citizenship education—a form of “cosmopolitan thriving”—and ask if it will sustain us in our increasingly pluralistic societies. I argue that in our rush to make global citizens, we should pause and critically reflect on where this will take us and whether or not it is indeed where we want to go (or *should* want to go). While I affirm the well-intended longings of global citizenship education in its dominant forms, I question the moral sources and strategies employed to achieve them. Ultimately, despite the best intentions, there is a cultural logic at work that limits the deepest longings for a better world.

For centuries, schools have been interested in forming the next generation of members for the society to which they belong. In the modern era, the predominant nature of the stories told through schooling have been around ideas of citizen formation for the nation-state. Chapter 2 examines this historical picture as a background for emerging global citizenship programs. The efforts to form global citizens in schools—to tell a bigger story—are simply the next logical step in this long development in modern Western schooling. Our “society” is now global, so proponents argue, and naturally our schools must begin preparing members—global citizens—for this society.

But global citizenship—at least as articulated by the teachers, curricula, and other institutional supporters examined in this study—is not understood as a political ideal; it is not membership in a specific political body with certain rights and responsibilities. This is important for readers to note at the outset; “citizenship” as conceived by the educators and proponents in this book is not political citizenship that assumes a world-level state or constitution. As noted above, it is rather a moral ideal, a vision of what the good person should be, and what he or she needs in order to flourish and thrive in a cosmopolitan age. The discussion of global citizenship education

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in this book follows this more capacious understanding of citizenship, not the narrower and more commonly understood political definitions.

There are two distinct features of global citizenship understood in this way. On the one hand, global citizenship education focuses on a specific “global consciousness,” described in Chapter 3, which is a particular way of understanding one’s self and the world. This global consciousness includes an awareness of other perspectives, a vision of oneself as part of a global community of humanity as a whole, and a moral conscience to act for the good of the world. On the other hand, global citizenship education features “global competencies,” described in Chapter 4, that are required for economic success in the cosmopolitan age. These competencies are the skills and knowledge believed to be necessary to achieve prosperity in a highly competitive, and fundamentally new and different global marketplace. These two main features—global consciousness and global competencies—are the constitutive elements of global citizenship embodied through these emerging educational practices.

On the surface, the two primary features of global citizenship could appear to contradict one another. The ethical sensibilities of a global consciousness—a focus on human rights, universal benevolence, and peace—may stand in conflict with the economic framework for global competencies—a focus on success in the competitive global marketplace. Perhaps there is a struggle between the ideologies of, for example, the United Nations on the one hand and the World Bank on the other for control over the essence of global citizenship. There is indeed a tension here that many proponents recognize and struggle with. And yet, as I argue in the final section of the book, these two features are not as contradictory as they appear, sharing some fundamental themes that work together to create a particular vision of human flourishing and its unintended consequences. There are indeed contradictions in the current forms of global citizenship education, but they may not be the most obvious ones.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine potential problems and pitfalls with the moral sources that undergird the dominant forms of global citizenship education and some of the strategies employed in schools. Chapter 5 argues that the economic focus of the competencies approach relies on a vision of the citizen as worker-consumer deeply embedded in a certain understanding of global “creative” capitalism dependent on a specific idealized self and individualized identity. Though purported to be a new approach for a new age, the competencies framework is rooted in an older narrative of Western Enlightenment ideas of a self that is freed from inherited obligations and commitments. Although unintended, this vision of an “enterprising self” demands conformity to an individualism of autonomous choosers whose very identities are fixed to no person and no place. Chapter 6 argues that the consciousness framework is also rooted in a highly particular Western liberal individualism that is masked by the universal rhetoric of global citizenship. Its strategies to deal with difference and diversity fall short of

its own ideals for tolerance because they are unable to deal with the particularity of traditions and identities that do not share the same commitments to liberal individualism. These strategies ultimately elide cultural and group differences into mere preferences of individual choosers. In these efforts, the consciousness framework actually follows a long history of educational strategies that elevate the individual over and against cultural or group differences. Though on the surface the consciousness and competencies features of global citizenship education seem at odds with each other, both are rooted in certain forms of individualism that undermine their hopes and longings.

A more subtle contradiction lies at the heart of global citizenship education: it demands moral commitment and empathy beyond individual interests while at the same time sacralizing the individual autonomous chooser above all other forms. The implicit effort attempts to make students into secular, liberal, consumer-oriented cosmopolitan subjects. Global citizens must minimize individual interests and demonstrate their commitment to an abstract group (that is, the most expansive of all groups, humanity itself); the underlying philosophical anthropology is Western and individualistic. This individualism becomes its own highly particularized moral order, as Chapter 7 argues, and though liberalism was forged in the fires of ethnic and religious conflict and was crucial for creating peace and tolerance in much of the world, its late modern evolutions construct unacknowledged limits on the stated goals and hopes of global citizenship education. The universal humanity that represents the deepest longings of proponents of global citizenship education requires significant commitment to others beyond the self. But its strategies undermine and erode local attachments and group belonging, important sources of identity, meaning, and commitment beyond the self. Whether real or aspired to, welcomed or opposed, global citizenship education is widely held to be a revolutionary paradigm shift in our schooling practices. Upon closer inspection, it turns out to be the latest chapter in one particular narrative of Western modernity, a long story of liberating individuals from group identities.

Global citizenship education and its moral ideals, at least in their current forms, thus continue to conform to the standard of the autonomous individual, the hallowed ground of modern liberal, capitalist, and democratic Western civilization. While much has been achieved by Western liberalism, it remains troubled by certain forms of individualism that can erode its highest moral ambitions. In its efforts to give individuals maximal freedom to pursue their own interests, liberalism can weaken many forms of belonging that provide the resources for cultivating commitment and common interests beyond the self. This kind of individualism is a powerful and sacred moral order of the modern world, but whether it can sustain a truly global society with longings for a more just and prosperous world remains to be seen. The limits of global citizenship education suggest that its embrace of the liberal individualism that dominated the nineteenth and

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twentieth centuries ill equip us for the realities of highly pluralistic global societies of the twenty-first, especially as empirical realities point to the re-emergence of group and religious identities within the political sphere in many parts of the world.

This is not to say, however, that global citizenship education is irrevocably and exclusively tied to liberal individualism. There may in fact be alternative, perhaps even complementary forms of global citizenship education. Chapter 8 offers descriptions of some alternative possibilities, especially as practiced in several religious schools in the sample. While the global citizenship embraced by these schools has many similarities to approaches in other schools, sharing problems and limitations, the religious schools appear to push against many (but not all) of its liberal individualistic assumptions. Teachers and administrators in these schools explicitly seek to root their commitments to the universals of global citizenship within their particular faith traditions. In such cases, the particularities and traditions that often are minimized or made inconsequential within liberalism because of their threat to peace and tolerance may in fact lead to moral commitments beyond the self that are core elements of global citizenship. While these schools may be exceptional cases, they point to alternative pathways and possibilities for global citizenship education as it expands and evolves.

To be clear, this is not an argument against global citizenship education per se; the longings of its proponents represent sincere hopes for a better world. But its current forms have significant limitations, which proponents have not yet acknowledged, that are problematic for its goals and purposes. Furthermore, these limitations may very well undermine its genuine longings. Global citizenship education in its dominant forms is not universal but rather highly particularized in Western liberal individualism. The implications of this, and the essence of the argument of this book, are twofold: First, proponents of global citizenship education working with these Western assumptions should explicitly embrace this tradition as such—as a specific tradition with limits and boundaries—and begin to think about both the problems and possibilities of these limits. Second, the future of global citizenship education will need to make room for moral sources beyond only Western liberalism—especially religious traditions with their own limits and boundaries—if it is to adequately fulfill its deepest longings.