Education: Perpetuating violence and global conflict or inspiring peace-building through global citizenship learning

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Lynn Davies (2005), internationally renowned education researcher, contends that a focus on conflict and education is one of the most urgent issues of our time, and that education is a key player in the perpetuation of violence in the world. This paper examines curricula and pedagogy that promote warlike outlooks and attitudes, which may perpetuate social and international conflict and violence. Secondly, it explores curricula and pedagogy that foster ways of thinking and being that contribute to social and global peace-building. The paper proposes the contested notion of global citizenship education as a model for peace education.

The focus of the paper is education for youth, roughly the five years between ages 15 to 20. The paper intersperses relevant literature and theory with stories and examples from my own teaching experience, which inform and are informed by findings and perspectives in peace and education scholarship. The impetus for my research endeavour comes from questions and insights arising from 20 years of teaching, developing social studies curricula, and facilitating international global citizenship programs. I plan on using a story-telling format in my presentation. The following is a brief and tentative synopsis of the paper.

Johan Galtung (1990), a modern day pioneer of peace research and education, includes in his definition of violence the following: “(It includes) lies, brainwashing, indoctrination of various kinds, threats etc. that serve to decrease mental potentialities” (p. 10). According to this definition, it can be argued that schooling may promote violent and war-like outlooks. To the extent that there is an emphasis on patriarchal war histories
and distancing discourse, and there is an exclusion of peace history and connective discourse, formal education can indoctrinate and limit mental potentialities. To the extent that knowledge is objectified and learning is prescribed, at the expense of subjective knowledge construction and elicitive learning, formal education can threaten and limit mental potentialities.

Global citizenship (cosmopolitanism) education as conceived by the ancient Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers, the thinking of Immanuel Kant, the appeals of Elise Boulding (1990), and the recent empirical findings of Hans Schattle (2008) can serve as a remedy to education that engenders violent outlooks. The term, global citizen, is somewhat contended in the politics and education literature; however it can be argued that learning to become a global citizen is a pedagogy of peace. The ethos and objectives that motivate and animate the quest for global citizenship are the same as those that give rise to conceptions of peace. The processes of peace-building and global citizenship-becoming are similar and inform one another. Both require openness and care for others, a whole understanding of self and the other, a vision of global harmony amidst cultural diversity, and a sense of responsibility. The means of teaching these attributes are through hopeful and realistic perspectives, meaningful dialogue and democratic participation, and cross-cultural experiences. To educate for global citizenship counters violent, conflict-inducing modes of education, and provides students with knowledge, values and skills to help build a world of peace.
References


