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Education for Global Citizenship

New ways to think, to act, to learn

Zusammenfassung:

In diesem Beitrag stellt die Autorin das Projekt Education for Global Citizenship vor. Dieses Projekt kann im Bereich internationaler pädagogischer Partnerschaften als Pilotprojekt angesehen werden. Es wird sowohl das Projekt selbst als auch sein konzeptioneller Hintergrund beschrieben.

Abstract:

In this article the author introduces a pilot project for international educational partnership in the field of Education for Global Citizenship outlining not only the project itself but its conceptual background.

The project

The project Education for Global Citizenship was initiated by two Austrian Non-Governmental Organisations – Interkulturelles Zentrum and Südwind Agentur – and supported by The European Union and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It was conducted together with educators from the partner organizations Alice-O in the Netherlands, the Christian Sisters Association in Cameroon, CICSENE-Pianeta Possibile in Italy and PIIE in Chile and set up with the aim of establishing greater awareness of global issues by inspiring the young people involved to tackle some of the problems in a global world and by developing concrete concepts for global and citizenship education.

A major task of the project was the development of lively and functioning partnerships between project participants. The following challenges emerged for the students, teachers and educational experts involved during the project:¹

- Actors in North and South exchanged ideas, content, methods and educational concepts to gain stimuli for a new educational cooperation, one which goes beyond 'learning about others' and leads to 'learning with others'.
- The understanding of one's role changed based on educational partnerships between teachers, educational workers and students. The project participants met on an eye-to-eye level.
- While the teachers took on the role of advisers, moderators and companions, the students were confronted with the challenge to create and take over responsibility for independent educational processes.
- Through the cooperation between non-governmental organizations and schools or school administrations in the countries involved, different possibilities for the improvement of existing educational systems were developed.

The school selection: the Chilean example

School selection in Chile was an important part of the process. The following criteria were considered:

1. To identify five schools representing the existing systems: municipal, private subsidized and private.
2. To consider among the schools a representation of the range of socio-economic conditions: one school located in a low income community, two schools located in a middle-low income community, one school located in a middle-high income community and one school located in a high income community.
3. The participating schools had to show a certain standard of quality to assure that this project could be a significant opportunity for the learning process of teachers and students and that the intended learning process would become part of the educational culture of the school
4. The participating schools were required to sign a letter of commitment, assuring their support of the teachers and of the classes involved, and the promotion of the introduction of some strategies of Education For Global Citizenship in the school's culture.

In each school one teacher acted as a coordinator to implement the project on school based level. Each coordinator committed to participate in every activity and to maintain permanent communication with the national coordinator.

From these schools, 150 students were involved from five participating classes (30 students each), while 750 parents became involved (in activities such as special meetings for parents). The schools involved chose five teachers as coordinators (who were very enthusiastic and deeply involved in the project) and the project also engaged the five principals of the schools taking part in the project. In some schools the project was implemented and monitored by other professionals, such as the Director of the Pedagogic Unit (in two schools); in one school a designated teacher was assigned to the task, while the Unit of transversal goals of the Ministry of Education and the OEI (Iberamerican States Organization) were also involved.

Approaching the concept of globalization: the starting point

Globalization as an irreversible process causes uncertainties about identities and belonging that historically have followed people and communities of a specific territory. These uncertainties have their base in the very concept of globalization itself, because globalization in a deepest sense shows an unde-

terminated, ungovernable and self-propelled character of world issues; the lack of a center, a control office, a general management. Globalization is the new “world disorder” (Bauman 1999).

The effects of globalization are not only linked with a worldwide financial and economic system but also irradiate into different aspects of life, such as culture, education, social relations, family. As an example, the traditional family systems are changing in many areas in the world, among other reasons because of the demand for gender equality. There has not yet been a society, as far as we know, where women have had the same rights and opportunities than man. This is a real global revolution in daily life, and the consequences can be seen in various ways, at our workplace and in politics.

Globalization is above all, a new way to face relationships between individuals and people. The globalization process has strong impact on local identities, on the type of organizations where networks become stronger and, above all, on the ways knowledge is approached in the acquisition of competences and abilities. The project has tried to take this reality of globalization into account.

Approaching the concept of global citizenship: the focus

Citizenship is above all a dynamic process, because it responds to the different historical moments and the conditions in which it is respectively developed and shaped. In this historical construction of citizenship notion there prevails the common principle: the ‘universality’ of rights for all people.

However, this principle of ‘universality’ has not been applied in the exercise of a planetary culture where we recognize ourselves regardless of our differences as equal in dignity and rights. This has made space for diversity in form of civic construction tied to the socioeconomic and political conditions that have enlarged the inequity gap. In this way, “the universality of the civic rights has invisibilized the excluded sectors of the hegemonic pattern: man, white and Westerner”².

This ambivalence that has defined citizenship according to the location of people and social groups, can be seen from different perspectives: “i) citizenship as a masquerade of inequalities (by giving appearance of equality among unequal), ii) citizenship as an impulse to the development of the equality, iii) citizenship as the conquest of rights and as a space of conflict between two opposed principles – equality and inequality –, iv) citizenship as integration of the classes and subordinate sectors on the part of the elites, to form a political community, v) citizenship as a space for the of construction of the public sphere. All these dimensions are also present in the dynamics of construction of global citizenship.”³

The scene in which we are immersed has – in the sense of the varied and dramatic changes in the economic, social, cultural and political dynamics at world level – in its center a complexity that has produced a significant effect especially in the Southern part of the world, so also in the case of Latin America.

We are living in a period in which the Western dream of democracy is in crisis. It’s not enough to recognize the virtues of democracy as a government system. There is a general feeling of disappointment regarding how democracy has been developed and it seems that it has become a cloister, reducing spaces for participation and integration to become a significant system for citizens.

Democratic institutions are seen as fortresses unable to integrate the expectations of citizens. It is evident that the lack of credibility of public administrators, corruption and the crisis of political parties has resulted in a democratic weakness in many Latin American countries.

This situation calls for a review of what kind of democracy has been installed after long and painful dictatorships in many Latin American countries such as Chile.

In this scenario, certain conditions are generated that make the emergence of global citizenships and global civil societies possible. To understand their reach, possibilities and limitations, it is necessary to provide a distanced position towards the habitual ways of thinking and of perceiving social, economic, political and cultural phenomena. It is necessary to assume that the attention is not focused on the national dynamics, neither on the international dynamics of the States nor on the geopolitical logic, although all these dynamics and logics have great impact and significance. It rather implies consideration for the social actors committed to the fight for the respect of the human rights and the break of exclusion/inclusion in their specific realities, extending and connecting them at regional and global level.

The project has also been based on this analysis of citizenship in the context of weakened democratic institutions and weakened public confidence in such institutions

Education for global citizenship of young people: the context

Global citizenship is, no doubt, a concept better known to young people than to adults. The reason for this can be seen in the fact that young people have grown up and been formed in a society characterized by constant influences of the media and of technology from which they receive much information regarding other cultures, different events at world level, diverse forms of life, types of music, style of clothes, food, etc.

Also, and due to the impact of globalization on economic processes and consumption, young people today assume as part of their daily life the use of native products from other cultures. This whole scenario rebounds in the social imaginary in which we move and in the type of society we wish to build.

However, living in a global society doesn’t necessarily mean being a global citizen. Being a spectator of this vertiginous exchange of cultures, products, economies, etc. locates those who have access to the consumption as consumers and excludes those who live in poverty of the possibilities that this diversity offers.

Therefore, assuming that young people grow up in an increasingly global context, the citizenship formation should be understood as located in a wider context related with other more distant spaces and not only concerning the territory, but rather fundamentally with regard to the cultural dimension. With the aim to propitiate in young people an awareness of this global dimension of citizenship, it is necessary to develop formation processes regarding the nature of their environment and the different ways this relates to the world where they live.

In Latin America, the concept of globalization as an ideal of unity to the continent under the aspiration of the patria grande (where we all are the same and can live in dignity) was inspired and promoted by major thinkers and revolutionaries such as Simón Bolívar and Ché Guevara. However, the dream of a large homeland was substituted by a globalization process

that has brought serious consequences to the economic, social, political and cultural plan. One of those consequences is the installation of a model that privileges the market, controlled by transnationals with tendencies to lack of civic protection, generating social exclusion in every level and an evident debilitation of the State as a regulating entity of society.

Being aware of this process raises a permanent discussion on the possibilities and difficulties that emerge in this scenario. Thus, in the forming of young people towards global citizenship, it is necessary to incorporate an analysis of the impact of the technological information and media, of the different cultures not only concerning the national territory but also concerning the cultural diversity that enriches the world and of the impact of globalization in all spheres of daily life. The purpose of this is to promote a sense of ownership and responsibility for the world, beyond national or local loyalties. In this way, the development of an education for global citizenship in a globalized context can open or deny possibilities and thus accentuate the exclusion.

Globalization may open possibilities, since it generates a 'proximity-sensation' with the world that some time ago seemed unimaginable. Having access to the whole world's information and perceiving the world as a global village makes us reconsider the territorial and cultural spaces, as well as analyze the sense of identity of the local and the global. In other words, globalization can open a possibility to conceive humanity like a family and the interconnection of nations like home, overcoming the barriers of borders and focusing the citizen towards the development of human dignity, understanding, friendship, cooperation, trust and solidarity.

However, globalization also builds barriers due to – among other factors – the asymmetry that exists in opportunities of using the technology, which rebounds strongly in the opportunity of people getting access to culture and information. For example, in the United States one fifth of its inhabitants are users of Internet whereas in the Latin American countries this rate doesn't rise over 2%.⁴ In Chile 27,74% of the inhabitants have access to a computer. A negative impact takes place concerning on the one hand the educational levels and on the other hand the access to the power in a society that has passed to be industrial and aspires to be a society of knowledge, because it enlarges the breach of the inequity and it excludes those that stay outside of the system for its condition of poverty.

Added to the above-mentioned, the revolution of the information and communication system is still in the hands of a small group that interprets the world and transmits it according to their values. This has resulted in a serious ethical phenomenon, although it opens possibilities of wide communication.

Based on that the incorporation of this global dimension in the education for citizenship is imperative since this allows for the promotion of the understanding and critical vision of young people regarding situations that are located in the immediate or distant environment or regarding situations that can be experienced indirectly – such as war and global conflicts, violations of human rights, international crime, terrorism and traffic of illicit drugs, increase of pandemic illnesses as AIDS, degradation of the environment, racism, classicism, migration etc. The capacity to develop a critical vision of these situations allows young people to adopt a sensitive attitude and to act responsible at the level of their community, country and in the whole world.

Therefore, education for global citizenship is more than transfer of knowledge about other countries and situations that affect the inhabitants on this planet. The teaching and learning process should not only focus on complex problems such as sustainable development or others mentioned previously, but should especially take into consideration the global dimension of those processes that affect us locally and that are present in our lives.

The school as a space to build global citizenship: the possibility

The school is the privileged space to develop processes of social change, because it itself is a microcosm where students can learn something on citizenship beyond contents that are specified in the curriculum. Many present situations in the whole world are on small scale replicated in school and it is important to recognize this fact and not to conceive the educational space as a neutral, aseptic place where nothing of what happens outside the walls of the institution influences the educational process.

To teach global citizenship means to promote the practice of values as respect for the dignity of people, justness, freedom, solidarity etc. It also implies to necessity of allowing students to be agents of their own process and collective history, as long as the participative methods are prioritized and conditions generated that facilitate the participation of teachers, students, parents and community in the creation and production of knowledge and in the educational administration in general.⁵

The pedagogic proposal

In Latin America the educational work for citizenship and human rights started in 1980 in a context of authoritarian regimes in that the civic rights suffered massive violations from the State. In this scenario, it was first of all the education in some popular sectors that – aware that it would not be enough to denounce these violations – assumed the task of developing competencies for the defense and protection of the human rights, giving origin to the first experiences in this field, which had a decisive list in the reconstruction of democratic processes on the whole continent. The generating force manifested in this process was demonstrated in the general perception of the necessity of incorporating the citizenship and the human rights to the national and regional culture. In this way, diverse pedagogic proposals for the formation of citizenship have been carried out on the continent. In the creative diversity of all of them, some common features can be mentioned on articulated axes that can contribute to education for global citizenship. Some of them are the following:

To educate from daily life:

The daily life is a permanent reference of the educational action, since we build life from everyday references, at personal and collective level. This axis supposes to advance the students in their capacity to wonder over the meaning of what happens day by day, understanding the interrelation and mutual influence between what occurs (in the community, the city, the country, the world) and their impact on the next environment (the own life, family, school and friends), and vice versa.

To educate from and for dialogue:

Education for citizenship is not only restricted to its formal and legal dimension. Also and especially, it is oriented towards the

recognition and transformative action of situations that attempt against the human rights (personally and socially). This action is based on permanent dialogue and can be seen as an effort of combined construction that allows to make the right of being different visible and to face the conflicts. Establishing dialogues as daily practice in school and in the classroom is necessary to create possibilities of participation and organization.

To educate from and for respect of life and human dignity:

This axis demands of the school to deal with the human rights from a planetary dimension with ethical and political bases. The work in this axis requires the development of a non-discriminatory culture at school where the statement of human dignity is not an abstract principle but is rather expressed in attitudes and commitments towards life, solidarity, mutual respect and acceptance of the diversity.

To educate from and for diversity:

That the students assume the sense of the global citizenship implies the development of learning and competencies for the recognition of the own personal and cultural identity and of other people and groups different to them. „This means to be able to understand that we all belong to an identity and we make ourselves in a language and in a history of multiple significances that, inherited, preserved, developed and communicated by us, they are defining the culture. The ownership of a nuclear identity doesn't prevent us from being able to integrate elements of other cultures. On the contrary, in the conservation of an identity on which we belong we open up to the identity of others. The identity of one is reinforced in the measure that there is openness to the identity of other”.⁶

To educate from and for sensibility:

The civic exercise from a global perspective requires a non-prejudice performance towards other people, groups and cultures. It implies the development of a sensibility of all discrimination types, either of racial, gender, class, nationality, religion, etc. It implies a radical change in school culture where the prejudices and discriminations have taken root. But, just as the prejudices are socially learned, acting without them can be similarly learnt.⁷

The methodology

The overall aim of this international pilot project was to set up an international NGO-schools network leading to new 'global learning experiences' through international exchange and cooperation, informed by the perspectives outlined above. The process of implementation considered the exploration of global citizenship and the development of creative ways of learning and teaching and tried to apply all this in the field of formal high school education. To show a part of the process done, we'll focus at national level on seminars and school based activities:

The National Seminars were attended by delegations from the participating schools. In the first year this was the moment to present the project to both, teachers and students. It was also an opportunity for the national coordinator, teachers and students to share the aims and content framework of the project. The national level was the starting point for the concrete, school-based activities. After these seminars, teachers and

students worked together at class level, undertaking an exploration of the different aspects of global citizenship.

Between the National Seminars and International Conferences, the schools developed work plans. The range of activities encompassed research about the country, about the project and its goals for the whole school and the parents, as well as focus and research on specific global citizenship-related topics.

At the end and to continue

The experience for schools working on a new issue like Education for Global Citizenship was a good opportunity for them to introduce this new way of teaching arts, social sciences and language to the curriculum. In fact, in three of the five participating schools some of the pedagogical approaches were modified, adding contents such as globalization, human rights and equity.

It is important to notice the impact on the students who had the chance to travel to Europe, especially for those from two schools located in poor communities. In those cases, the participation at the International Conferences gave the young ones and the whole school the new insight that is possible for them to be in touch with other realities besides their own.

Even if the main problem was the lack of English, they could communicate with students and teachers from Europe and Africa. This is a lifelong learning that remains until now as a success for the young people, the teachers and the schools.

The project in Chile focused on the development of a pedagogy that demonstrates the reciprocity of learning that is built upon the assumption that both educators and students are learners (Paulo Freire). Learner-centred pedagogy fosters an awareness of this reciprocity of learning, how it facilitates the acquirement of collective knowledge, acknowledges the experiences of all learners involved in the process and increases the likelihood that the values that the program seeks to develop will be adopted and internalized by the people involved. Methods based in a learner-centred pedagogy include, among other possible approaches, critical inquiry and cooperative learning.

Annotations

- 1 Südwind Agentur – Interkulturelles Zentrum (2006): Education for Global Citizenship. New Ways of Learning and Teaching for our Future. Project Handbook. Vienna.
- 2 Vargas, V. (1990): Entre la exclusión y la ciudadanía global. ALAI, América Latina en Movimiento, 1990.
- 3 López, Jiménez, S. (1998): Lo político y lo Social. Bifurcación o Síntesis de una Crisis. En: Socialismo, Autoritarismo y Democracia. Lima, IEP/CLACSO.
- 4 García Canclini, N. (1999): Políticas Culturales: de las identidades nacionales al espacio latinoamericano, p. 40.
- 5 Bretel, L. (1995): Democracia, Ciudadanía y Educación. En: Democracia, Pedagogía y Derechos Humanos. CEAAL, Red Latinoamericana para la paz y los derechos humanos, p. 116.
- 6 Magendzo, A. (1995): Educación en la no-discriminación: una condición para la democracia. En: Democracia, Pedagogía y Derechos Humanos. CEAAL, Red Latinoamericana para la paz y los derechos humanos, p. 142.
- 7 Ibid, p. 143.

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- Bauman, Z. (1999): La Globalización. Consecuencias Humanas. Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina. Buenos Aires.

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