

Global citizenship in higher education: learning to debate through cross-cultural dialogues (0218)

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* provide background information and/or indicate the context of the study and how it relates to previous research and literature in the field

This paper seeks to engage with current debate around the role of global education in higher education (e.g. Maguth & Hilburn, 2015; Maringe & Foskett, 2010) and the accompanying notions of citizenship and internationalization bringing the debate to individual as well as institutional levels. The “expanding” notion of citizenship expects citizens “to be educated and literate, so that they can understand, critique, and deliberate on matters of public policy” (Lee & Arthur 2015:xiii) with education often perceived as an important key. The UN’s Global Education First Initiative is to foster global citizenship to ensure sustainable development recognising that

the role of education is moving beyond the development of knowledge and cognitive skills to the building of values, soft skills and attitudes among learners. Education is expected to facilitate international cooperation and promote social transformation in an innovative way towards a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, there is a need for transformative pedagogy that enables learners to resolve persistent challenges related to sustainable development and peace that concern all humanity (UNESCO 2014a, p. 11)

* explain the theoretical approach or methodology adopted

It is based on this understanding of education that the participatory Education for All (EFA) seminars have been organised on an annual basis at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland since 2011. This seminar is an opportunity for experts on global education to meet and dialogue with national and international students of education and university staff. In 2014 students from various degree programmes in education, exchange students, visiting scholars from partner universities and representatives of collaboration networks, government and civil society organisations, and university staff attended. In addition to those physically present and participating in the different activities of the seminar, the keynote sessions were also broadcast to national and international partners. The participants represented a broad range of geographical, disciplinary, cultural and social experiences suggesting rich possibilities for cross-cultural dialogues.

Aware of the need for debate and dialogue around global education (Caruana, 2010 : Barrett, 2011, Sayed & Ahmed, 2015), this seminar has become part of a research project focusing on university students’ meaningful learning experiences around global connectedness (Lehtomaki, Moate & Posti-Ahokas, 2015) and the desire to make internationalisation in higher education meaningful to students and staff to contribute to the wider debate around global citizenship. On this basis we thematically analysed 43 learning assignments from students attending the seminar as part of a course on international education policies and practices. The assignment required the students to choose an EFA Global Monitoring Report and to discuss the theme of the report in

relation to their home country another country. Most of the assignments were completed individually. Furthermore, students reflected on their own experience around the chosen theme in conjunction with the selected country, key issues in global development and their learning experiences during the two-day EFA seminar. The research questions underpinning our analysis were:

- 1) In what ways do students reconsider local in light of the global?
- 2) Where is responsibility for education development placed?
- 3) How do students use the EFA reports and related research literature to debate on education locally and globally?

* indicate results (preliminary or final) and other findings or conceptual arguments

The results of our analysis with regard to question one indicate that an official report, such as the EFA report, can close down dialogue when positioned as an authority. If, however, an official report is viewed as a valued participant within an ongoing dialogue, then the report can be used to open up a much wider dialogic space around education and global citizenship. Our results also indicate that the participatory seminar in addition to the EFA report helped the students to discern the bigger picture of global education and to be more critically responsive to issues they deemed to be important. Our results also showed that encountering something other, whether other people, reported experiences, official documents or formal lectures can support the development of more critical perspectives and increased gratitude for what that which was previously taken for granted. Finally, the experience of the participatory seminar appeared to offer the students an expansive experience. Several of their accounts expressed an awareness of something more, of greater possibilities, although exactly what this “more” was difficult to define.

With regard to the placement of responsibility, the participants were more likely to see others, such as educational authorities, policy makers and governments as responsible for the development of education rather than seeing themselves as part of the wider process. When students did indicate a sense of personal responsibility, this was expressed in concrete terms with regard to the small but significant initiatives they could take as individuals.

* explore the implications of the study (eg for theory, practice and further research)

These findings raise further questions about how to pedagogically support university students to continue participating in the wider dialogue around global citizenship. Whilst on the one hand the participants in this study appeared to become reflective and critical through the participatory seminar and related readings, on the other hand, they seemed to place the responsibility for the ongoing development of education with others in positions of authority, rather than recognising the role they could themselves take on. This is indicative of a significant gap in their development as educational professionals and an area that requires further investment on the part of universities if we do share the view that “education is a value based, contextually and culturally contingent activity and as such, the goals of education should always be subject to review and debate at all levels, from local up to international” (Barrett, 2011: 129).

References

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