



Dissertation title: The moral dimension of Global Citizenship Education in the Province of Trento. Perspectives and practices of lower secondary school teachers in a context of local and global policy changes

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Abstract

Rising nationalism and populism, the threat of neo-fascism, increasing xenophobia and racism, the growth of violent extremism pose significant challenges to human rights and the democratic values that have been the cornerstone of Western democracies since the end of World War two. These challenges are manifestations of a globalised system characterised by high levels of interconnectedness but also dominated by great poverty, rising inequalities within and between countries, violent conflicts, and transnational challenges such as forced migrations, environmental destruction and climate change. In this context, the last two decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in a global notion of citizenship. While global citizenship is an ambiguous and contested concept, it is widely used in education to stress the need for a new citizenship education with a global orientation. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is presented as a new agenda for citizenship education in a global era and has recently been recognised as one of the educational priorities of the 21st century. Yet, GCE is a highly complex and ambiguous idea, is infused with a variety of meanings, and is understood and used differently within and across a variety of contexts, including various sites of education.

This thesis explores how GCE is conceptualised and practiced in the Province of Trento in northern Italy. It studies the multiple meanings and perspectives that different provincial actors (decision-makers, key informants, teachers) convey through GCE. Based on Constructivist and Informed Grounded Theory, the thesis provides a nuanced understanding of how GCE is conceptualised and translated into policies and practice. In the first phase of data collection, intensive interviews were conducted with 21 teachers from nine local

secondary schools and with six provincial representatives and key informants. Theoretical sampling was used in the second phase of data collection to elaborate and refine the provisional interpretative categories. It included thematic analysis of provincial policy documents, participation in a group of experts, interviews with two additional key informants, and re-interview of nine teachers.

Combining the conceptual categories constructed from the analysis of the empirical data with the theoretical concepts in the scholarly literature, the thesis presents a typology illustrating four GCE ideal-types: Neo-liberal human capitalism, Cosmopolitan humanism, Social justice activism, and Critical counter-practice. The thesis highlights that GCE in the Province of Trento is broadly consistent with the Cosmopolitan humanism ideal-type, and is characterized by a distinctive moral dimension. On the one hand, GCE is constructed as a 'new moral pedagogy', which reflects adherence and commitment to what is perceived to be as a universal moral structure based on humanistic cosmopolitan values. GCE has a distinctive socialisation function, articulated in terms of the promotion and acquisition by young people of certain values and identities to become 'better' citizens of the global world. But GCE presents also elements of Neo-liberal human capitalism. It is in fact infused with a qualification function aimed at equipping students with the skills they need for life in the global society and work in the global economy. On the other hand, the moral dimension of GCE finds expression in the fact that GCE is not an educational imperative but it is rather a personal 'moral' choice. It is not a provincial educational priority and is not structurally embedded in the curriculum. Hence GCE is just a 'moral optional' in the hands of 'willing and able teachers' who are committed to cosmopolitan values. These teachers are highly motivated and see GCE as a 'moral duty' for the teachers of the 21st century. The thesis suggests that overcoming a constellation of institutional, curricular, organisational and conceptual barriers is essential to facilitate the structural and systematic integration of GCE in the curriculum. The role of teacher education and an alliance between academia and practice are of paramount importance. They are essential to facilitate a more structural grounding of GCE in the curriculum and stimulate reflection on the necessity for political and critical GCE perspectives and approaches.

Keywords: *Citizenship Education; Global Citizenship Education; Global Education; Intercultural Education; Grounded Theory.*

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