(Re)Centring Complicity and Coloniality in Critical Global Citizenship Education in Europe

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Introduction

Aligning with the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7, the UNESCO positions global citizenship education (GCE) as central to 'preparing children and young people to deal with the challenges of today's increasingly interconnected and interdependent world' (UNESCO, 2014, p. 15). The focus on interdependence is important, and, for us, it needs to go beyond merely linking local and global concerns. We write from and work in North and Western Europe and recognise that so many of these interconnections and the independence that define the aspirations of GCE are rooted in global power structures (economic, social, cultural, etc.). These are tied to unequal patterns of exploitation established through various processes of colonialism that have been harmful for the planet and have disproportionally affected large portions of the global population who do not bear the same level of responsibility. In this context, we find the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 helpful in articulating the importance of education that enables 'people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it…to bring about a world of social and climate justice…' (GENE, 2022, p. 3). In this paper we reflect on our work to support critical approaches to GCE alongside SDG 4.7 and articulate why it remains important to centre coloniality in this work, making an argument for the importance of hyper-self-reflexivity. We ask, what are we holding on to in 'critical' GCE that is important and what are critical approaches 'doing/not doing'?

Centering Coloniality

Following Mignolo (2011, 2018, 2021), we understand coloniality as the longstanding and often invisible interlinked global systems of oppression, such as capitalism, racism and environmental destruction which were established during colonialism and have been sustained through Eurocentric ways of knowing and making sense of/explaining the world. Thus, we understand, also with Mignolo, that the power and oppression evident in coloniality requires

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epistemic support, specifically provided by a Eurocentric episteme – a worldview rooted in the radical and emancipatory movements of the 1500s that partially broke with Christianity and God as the source of all knowledge and bestowed this power onto the European white man (Wynter, 2003). This episteme is based on a belief in ontological separability between subject and object, which conveys to the subject an objective position and, therefore, the possibility to produce universal truths. It brought about many welcomed changes in Europe such as scientific knowledge, technological progress, and democracy – or the shiny side of modernity (Mignolo, 2011). However, the very theories (e.g. Cartesian dualism, Darwinism), philosophies (e.g. humanism, liberalism), concepts (e.g. development, democracy) and categories (e.g. developed, citizen) that brought about such celebrated developments in Europe were also mobilised to justify, legitimise and sustain coloniality by constructing large parts of the world's population as non-human along religious, racial, gender and class lines – the dark side of modernity, or coloniality (Mignolo, 2011). The inherent colonial logic of Eurocentrism constructs a totalising onto-epistemological perspective that we understand is inherited in the critical work of GCE (including our own) over the past decade.

Of course, working outside the dominant episteme is no easy task. To challenge Eurocentrism, Mignolo (2018, p. 222) contends that it is necessary to delink 'from the fiction of the totality of knowledge'. This entails questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and universal categories that are commonly used to interpret and intervene in the world. And, as Andreotti (2016: online) suggests, it involves a shift from epistemic certainty, where fixed and universal categories are accepted uncritically, to epistemic reflexivity, which traces the origins and limitations of knowledge. This process is less about rejecting or (heroically) breaking with Eurocentric epistemology and more about (humbly) interrogating its dominance and limitations while fostering dialogue and collaboration across geopolitical and colonial differences (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Critical reflections on critical GCE

Vanessa Andreotti's work sparked an important era of reflection on GCE and its entanglement in the Eurocentric episteme. She (2006, see also 2012, 2014) articulated the need for a critical form of GCE research and practice, rather than a "soft" one, engaged with decolonial scholarship, to focus on a type of critical literacy that makes intelligible the long-lasting roots/legacy of coloniality in global learning as a pedagogical imperative. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s there were great efforts to map the different approaches to GCE which we tried to take stock of and reflect on (e.g., Oxley & Morris, 2013; Shultz, 2007; Stein 2015). We found scholarship in the field tended to define critical GCE in opposition to the mainstream approaches characterized by neoliberal and liberal discursive orientations and agendas that tended to step over and, therefore, sustain global power inequalities (Pashby et al., 2020). In this way, critical GCE discussions tended to emerge as the alternative answer to these mainstream approaches, highlighting a concern with challenging the unequal status quo and promoting social justice instead of filling *curriculum vitae* notches and fulfilling individual enlightenment.

Circular conversations in Critical GCE?: Tensions between critique and action

We found far fewer 'types' of GCE in the typologies we mapped aligned with a critical orientation compared to many within liberal orientations (Pashby et al., 2020). So, the interface be-

tween liberal and critical was important. Critical GCE might be conceptualized as an expansion of a liberal cosmopolitan approach that appeals to a sense of a common humanity whereby individuals' citizenship is extended beyond national boarders onto the globe. While we share these aspirations and recognise the often gutsy, subversive, and labour-intensive work of educators applying these critical approaches in practice, they do take for granted a Eurocentric epistemic position. And this position can lead to circular conversation in the field.

An important tension also remains in trying to connect the critique of systems of oppression with the ability to take action within them (Bourn, 2021). On the one hand, critical GCE can focus on identifying solutions/ actions which often foreclose possibilities for deeper engagements with coloniality (e.g. Pashby, da Costa & Sund, 2020). On the other hand, constantly lining up critiques of the system can become an intellectualising exercise of Eurocentric critiques of Eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2011) that forecloses opportunities to respond and have agency. In either case, as Stein (2015, p. 247) argues, we 'inadvertently assert [our] own innocence or heroism by failing to recognize [our] complicity in the systems under critique or to question their own assumptions and motivations'. We, thus, reinforce Stein and Andreotti's (2017) warning that 'resistance is shaped by the very conditions that we seek to contest and, as a result, can unintentionally reproduce them' (p. 174).

In our meta-review of typologies, and later in a review of the literature (Pashby & da Costa, 2021), we found that the theoretical and empirical critical GCE research operates at an epistemological level of analysis which is helpful in both identifying dominant discourses and the power relations embedded in knowledge production in GCE *and* making that work also a pedagogical imperative (Pashby et al., 2020). Explicitly addressing Eurocentrism requires a long commitment to epistemic reflexivity whereby the subjects of knowledge (i.e. researchers, educators, students) recognize their position of implicatedness with a knowledge system that has consistently produced unequal structures and subjectivities, tracing the enunciative position from where this knowledge emerges (e.g. Mignolo, 2021). As such, GCE research must interrogate not only the enunciated – present discursive formations that define problems, aspirations, and solutions – but also the terms of enunciation – the epistemic matrix that structures what can be said and known (see Mignolo, 2018). Starting from the assumption of Eurocentrism (and therefore coloniality), rather than offering more and more critiques of the status quo, GCE researchers and educators might re-orient conversations in the field by providing not only critique but also generate alternative forms of critical engagements with our present global issues in research (Stein, 2018). These engagements highlight the relational and responsive aspects of reflexivity.

Critical GCE: Not a fix, but a space of enunciation and reflection

For us, this work of epistemic reflexivity has meant re-engaging with GCE by starting with the colonial legacies and our implication in them; not as something GCE can fix, but rather as a space of enunciation from a position of non-innocence (Bryan, 2022). This does not mean an approach that starts with guilt for nor apathy in the face of countless entwined systems of oppression and inequalities. Rather, as with Bryan (2022), there is an agential quality to starting from positions of non-innocence, acting and responding in ways that recognize the challenges and what actions can make movements and possibilities beyond feel good and superficial solutions. In this way, we can respect the aspirational spirit of GCE while critically reflecting on dynamic relations and productive tensions inherent to some core concepts (e.g. a sense

of common humanity, universal rights and values, and even democracy). Pedagogically, this approach focuses more on what Mignolo (2018) would describe as delinking from, and Stein (2015, drawing on Nayar, 2013, p. 248) calls denaturalizing, 'colonial assumptions about universal humanity and recognize different modes of existence as both co-eval and indispensable, rather than as indications of lack, inferiority, or insufficient evolution'. In this way, we see promise within critical GCE in, while intervening at an epistemological level of analysis, also asking ontological questions.

Working at an epistemological level, critical GCE inherits some of the tensions intrinsic to important radical critiques that Eurocentric knowledge traditions have helpfully contributed to recognise social inequalities and injustices (e.g. Marxism, Posthumanism). These critiques tend to take for granted Eurocentric onto-epistemological assumptions and the categories they produce which are at the root of coloniality (Mignolo, 2018). Recently, amid a deep concern about the rise of far-right populism threatening democracy (Giroux, 2022), critical approaches to GCE citing Freire are mobilised to help 'save' democracy through critical literacy that enables recognition of the roots of the problems and a will to act progressively. To what extent do applications of critical literacy in practice recognise that critical thinking remains informed by the dominant episteme (Dreamson, 2018)? How/do critical GCE approaches include a recognition that democracy – and the Eurocentric ways in which it was constructed and mobilised – may also be part of the problem (da Costa, 2023)? Similarly, and more in the field of environmental and sustainability education, Posthuman approaches have called to decentre the human and to recognise the impact of humans via concepts like the Anthropocene. Some of these approaches step over the critique of Eurocentrism and the colonial logic through which the human – and the non-humans – was constructed (Sund & Pashby, 2020). Posthuman approaches also tend to emphasise horizontal processes and affective approaches, though this can often happen at the expense of sustaining a political orientation that recognises coloniality. What are the pedagogical possibilities among these tensions?

GCE Otherwise: raising ontological questions

Recently, Andreotti (2021) added a third GCE 'type' onto her original typology in a way that arguably reframes critical GCE as more situated within a Marxist/ Freirean tradition and distinguishes it from a decolonial approach that is concerned with recognising complicity in harm and interrupting sanctioned ignorance as GCE otherwise. In this new typology, Andreotti defines critical GCE as advocacy and solidarity work with historically marginalised groups. GCE Otherwise is more concerned with the ontological (and potentially pedagogical) work of reflecting on complicity in harm and engaging and sitting with the complexities, tensions and uncertainties of our current global challenges, which are a consequence of Eurocentric ways of knowing and being. In this new typology, Andreotti distinguishes between a critical GCE that is driven by what 'feels right' and a GCE Otherwise that is more concerned with denaturalising that feeling and reflecting on the ways in which we are invested in it and how we might relate differently. We read Andreotti's new typology as mobilising an epistemological layer of analysis that aims not only to challenge the totality of knowledge but also to develop affective and relational dispositions that might help us build individual and collective stamina. This is about pedagogies that support staying in the discomfort brought by being (and remaining) implicated in harm, the incredibly complex problems at hand, and the lack of certainty that comes from deeply engaging with global issues and relating across Eurocentric ways of knowing and being.

Pushing and responding to the edges in Critical GCE

Twenty years on from Andreotti's distinction between soft versus critical, the epistemological space within which critical GCE operates remains ever more complex and nuanced. After a decade working within critical GCE, we maintain its transformative potential lies in explicitly addressing coloniality from a place of non-innocence. As we aspire towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable planet, we ought to recognize that these aspirations and the emancipatory concepts we mobilize to reach them (e.g. human rights, democracy, freedom) are themselves embedded within a Eurocentric episteme. This recognition does not mean getting rid of Eurocentric concepts nor denying important contributions of human rights and democratic processes. It means engaging with what Stein and colleagues (2022) call hyper-self-reflexivity – the process of continuously reflecting on the ways in which we might be, inadvertently, recentring a dominant Eurocentric perspective and reproducing the conditions we aim to challenge.

As we push the edges of critical GCE work, we might engage also with ontological questions related also to affective and relational pedagogies that recognise other ways of being in the world, but without losing track of colonial structures. As we increasingly see entwined critical conversations in GCE and environmental and sustainability education, this is particularly salient (Khoo & Jørgenson, 2021). IImportantly, critical GCE in Europe has arguably not yet seriously engaged with/(un)learned from indigenous and other non-western perspectives. What might an ethical dialogue across incommensurable onto-epistemological imaginaries look like in critical GCE?

In this paper we reflected on our work to support critical approaches to GCE alongside SDG 4.7 and what critical GCE is/is not doing in relation to addressing coloniality. Since 2015, critical GCE scholars, educators, policy makers and practitioners have done tireless work in pushing GCE to offer more than the neo/liberal approaches that reduce education about global issues to entrepreneurial or charity-based activities. Critical GCE has contributed to making it education's business to explicitly address global systems of oppression, often by historicizing global issues to their colonial roots. The task at hand now appears twofold: a) extend this historicization to more explicitly address our own implication – as individuals and as a field – in coloniality and reflect on how that repositioning might shift our approach and perspective to our work; and b) move with the critique and – while keeping tabs on Eurocentrism and the ways in which we tend to inadvertently recentre it – start asking ontological questions and engaging/ (un) learning from alternative epistemes. This work might not always feel good or even right, and it is likely to be a non-linear and uncertain process. It might, nevertheless, lead us out of what have felt like circular conversations in the past few years and onto new mistakes.

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