Global Education as a space of resistance and defence of social and climatic justice, equality and global solidarity

Liam Wegimont[1] e Ana Larcher[2]

Resistance is about the struggles for freedom, equality, global justice and international solidarity; but it may also take the form of patient, long term and in depth work to build the conditions for a better world. Education has long been considered an essential part of this work, grounded in the belief that education can provide the foundation for building a better world and seek social change (Bourn, 2022).

This vision of education is not new and can be traced back to ancient philosophers from both the West and the East. It reflects the perspectives of many educationalists, although it differs from the forms of education that tend to dominate policy and practice around the world (Bourn, 2022)[3]. It was clearly enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that education should strengthen respect for human rights, freedom, peace and understanding among all nations and people. Today education is still considered "one of our strongest assets in shifting the world onto a better path" (UN, 2023)[4].

This is a vision of an education that inspires and prepares people to contribute to a better world, grounded in the pursuit of equality, social and ecological justice, the defence of human rights, peace, international solidarity, and planetary sustainability. It is "education that opens

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1 Liam Wegimont is the Executive Director of *GENE - Global Education Network Europe* - bringing together 60 ministries and agencies responsible for Global Education policy and provision across Europe. He has over 30 years' experience in education for social change, local and global - spanning teaching, youth work, research, school leadership, network building and international policy development. He co-founded both GENE and *ANGEL - the Academic Network on Global Education Learning*, and co-led the process of the *European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 - the Dublin Declaration*. He has published widely in the field of global education.

2 Ana Larcher works at *GENE - Global Education Network Europe*, focusing on network building, supporting policymakers through research, and strengthening links between researchers and policymakers. She holds a PhD from Imperial College London and is a researcher at the *Centre for International Studies* (CEI-Iscte). Her research focuses on development education, critical perspectives on international development, evaluation, and socioeconomic analysis. She has also worked for many years as a consultant in international development with UN agencies, the European Commission, and other international organisations across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.

3 Bourn, D. (2022). *Education for social change: Perspectives on global learning*. Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350192874

4 United Nations. (2023). *Our Common Agenda policy brief 10: Transforming education*. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-transforming-education-en.pdf

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people's eyes to the causes of injustice, local and global, and encourages us to get involved to learn how to change things" (Prof. Annette Scheunpflug, Chair of GENE). This vision of Global Education is understood as encompassing anti-racist education, development education, global citizenship education, human rights, intercultural education, peace education and other critical educational approaches. It draws on a long tradition of education inspired by "the emancipatory, Freirean-inspired movement which seeks to address the root causes of global injustice" (Bryan & Mochizuki, 2023[5]).

From this perspective, Global Education can in itself be understood as a forms of resistance. Its power of resistance lies in the commitment to enabling people to reflect critically about the world and their place in it, encouraging them to understand and question the structures and power relations that reproduce injustice, inequality, exclusion and violence, and to recognise that these can, and should, be transformed.

This resistance lies also in the committed and long term work of creating and sustaining educational spaces in which people can learn, reflect, question and imagine different futures. Resistance also lies in the work of building the institutions and policies that support these spaces. These are the foundations that have allowed Global Education to expand across Europe and become a central dimension of quality education. As has been argued: "Unless Global Education is at the heart of education, then it's simply not quality education[6]."

However, the gains made over recent decades have been uneven, incomplete, and remain vulnerable to regression in the face of current threats.

Their protection therefore depends not only on defending the place of Global Education within policy and institutions, but also on remaining attentive to the kind of education being promoted. As Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux and many others, argued, education, including Global Education, can be equally as liberating as a repressive force (Freire, 1972; Giroux, 2011 cit. in Bourn, 2022). To be liberating, it needs to be adopt counter-hegemonic perspectives and approaches (Bourn, 2022).

This is particularly urgent in the face of the serious threats we are confronting today: the advance of far right and democratic backsliding, misinformation and the erosion of our shared foundations for knowledge, the attack on values and human rights, the intensification of war and conflict; as well as the erosion (or collapse) of multilateralism and the shared norms that sustain it (Abreu, 2025[7]). In this context, education is becoming a fundamental field of dispute (Diez-Guttierrez *et al*., 2025)[8].

As we know, social change is neither secure nor irreversible. So, unless the forces behind these attacks are actively resisted, what has been built can be lost. This leads us to ask how to resist the rollback of the hard won gains of recent decades in Global Education?

It is against this backdrop that we reflect on Global Education as a form of resistance, drawing on our work within GENE, Global Education Network Europe[9]. In recent years, these ques-

5 Bryan, A., & Mochizuki, Y. (2023). Crisis transformationism and the de-radicalisation of development education in a new global governance landscape. *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review, 36*, 51–76.

6 Finnish Board of Education

7 Abreu, A. (2025, October 15). A crise da cooperação e o colapso da ordem internacional. Mundo Crítico, (12). https://mundocritico.org/revista/a-crise-da-cooperacao-e-o-colapso-da-ordem-internacional/

8 Díez-Gutiérrez, E.-J., Alonso-Martínez, H. and Palomo-Cermeño, E. (2025) 'Education under the far right in Europe and its impact on global citizenship education'. International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning, 17 (2), 81–96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/IJDEGL.17.2.02.

9 GENE is the European network of Ministries and Agencies with national responsibility for policymaking, funding and support in the field of Global Education (www.gene.eu).

tions have become increasingly central to the concerns of GENE member countries and have been the subject of growing reflection. We share here some elements of that reflection.

1. Global Education as a force for resistance and transformation

The first idea is that resistance is, above all, inscribed in the very concept of Global Education. In the face of current threats, there is a growing awareness among those working in the field of its importance in defending and reaffirming the values we share and in resisting regressions.

The power of resistance of Global Education lies in the values on which it is grounded, in its critical perspective on the world, and in the pedagogical practices, participatory and emancipatory, it promotes. It seeks to encourage people to understand the root causes of inequality and injustice, and the connections between local and global challenges. It provides tools to analyse the political, social and economic structures that produce inequality, to question power relations, and to reflect on the historical legacies and colonial inheritances that continue to shape relations between countries, communities and people.

In this sense, Global Education is a form of resistance because it encourages people to question the world and to recognise that social structures and relations can, and should, be transformed. It also seeks to develop an understanding that the challenges we face do not have simple solutions and that seeking responses requires us to recognise complexity and uncertainty and consider different perspectives and sources of knowledge.

Hope is also a central element of Global Education, and hope can itself be a form of resistance. Global Education seeks to nurture a critical hope, one that does not ignore the seriousness of the situation or the complexity of possible solutions, but refuses to accept that injustice must remain.

It is in this potential to understand, question, imagine alternatives and participate collectively in shaping a better world that we find a first level of resistance.

Global Education is, however, a contested concept and subject to multiple interpretations, informed by different views of the world (Akkari & Maleq, 2020)[10]. Vanessa Andreotti's offers one way of making sense of this complexity by distinguishing between soft and critical approaches to Global Education (Andreotti, 2006[11]). Critical approaches recognise the need not only to change behaviours and institutions, but also to question the forms of thinking that inform them. They involve a critique of aspects of modernity, including capitalism and racism, and seek to examine the structures, assumptions and relations of power that reproduce injustice. Soft approaches are generally less politically ambitious, less critical and less self-reflexive. They focus more on awareness, individual responsibility and the desire to help others, without sufficiently examining the structures, histories and unequal power relations that produce injustice. As such, there is a risk of repeating the same mistakes that it is trying to resolve (Suša, 2019[12]).

Even though these different views of Global Education are complex and exist on a continuum, to be resistance, "Global Education must always maintain a counter-hegemonic stance

[10] Akkari, A., & Maleq, K. (Eds.). (2020). *Global citizenship education: Critical and international perspectives*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44617-8

[11] Andreotti, V. (2006). Soft versus critical global citizenship education. *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review, 3*, 40–51

[12] Suša, R. (2019). *Global citizenship education for unknown futures: Mapping past and current experiments and debates*. Bridge 47

and remain critical in its approach" (Doug Bourn, closing remarks, Lisbon Global Education Conference, 2018).

2. Resistance is built through practice and educational communities

But it is in the spaces where Global Education is put into practice that its force comes alive. These spaces are built by a networks of actors working to create a different world.

Civil society organisations have been central to Global Education, through a wide range of initiatives and projects in formal and non-formal education, developing educational practices and resources, supporting teachers, building networks and advocating for the integration of Global Education into formal education. Resistance lies in their accumulated knowledge and experience, their critical and innovative approaches, the relationships built over the long time, and their unwavering commitment to justice and equality.

In schools, teachers play a central role in bringing to life these educational spaces. Resistance can be found when educationalists "who wish to resist dominant ideological influences turn directly to the factors that address this hegemony, namely class and capitalism (Apple 2013 cit. in Bourn, 2022). The growing recognition of the importance of having the whole school involved in Global Education processes has brought to this space a wider community of practice that includes school leaders, school staff, families and communities. Local and regional governments also support these processes.

Resistance can also be found in young people and learners who learn to question dominant narratives and commit to justice and equality. They are active participants who bring to the debates knowledge grounded in their own lives and contexts. They are able to imagine different futures and different forms of action.

These spaces are also linked to wider struggles for justice. At its roots, Global Education was shaped through engagement with social movements, solidarity groups, critical educators and partners across the Global North and South (Skinner et al., 2013)[13] . It is in these "phenomenal networks of people labouring to create a different, a more humane and, as Paulo Freire would underscore, a more beautiful world" (Ramalho, 2022[14]) that resistance lies.

3. Resistance is also built through policies and institutions

But resistance is also built through the sustained work of developing public policies and building institutions that support Global Education. Over several decades, we have seen the development of a policy and institutional environment that supports Global Education.

Global Education has historically been led by Civil Society Organisations and policymakers committed to or knowledgeable in the field of GE were few and far between. Those who had been working in CSOs and social sectors like youth organisations, devoted to these educational practices, began to see that unless policymakers were involved, there was a glass ceiling that could not be broken and systemic change in favour of Global Education would be unlikely. GENE was created in 2001 out of the conviction that policymakers active involvement was essential.

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13 Skinner, A., Blum, N., & Bourn, D. (2013). Development education and education in international development policy: Raising quality through critical pedagogy and global skills. *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement, 4*(3), 89–103. https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.1654

14 Ramalho, T. (2022). Foreword. In D. Bourn, *Education for social change: Perspectives on global learning* (pp. vii–viii). Bloomsbury Academic.

Over these last decades, national strategies have been developed in several European countries. Global Education has been integrated into public education policies, institutions and coordination mechanisms have been strengthened, and Global Education has been incorporated into curricula and teacher education. It has also increasingly been integrated into whole school approaches, which have gained greater prominence in education policy.

These are the foundations that help sustain the work of Global Education and create the conditions for continued action. By embedding its principles and values in policy, they provide direction to institutions, facilitate coordination and secure resources. They also help create an enabling environment for civil society organisations, for schools, and other actors by protecting educational spaces, recognising their role, promoting dialogue and responding to their needs.

This progress, however, has not been linear, with advances and regressions in several countries. The growing inclusion of GE in policy and curricula does not mean that transformative education approaches are being adopted. Within policy, there are different understandings of Global Education, some are more critical while others are less challenging of dominant models. For this reason, we need to pay close attention to the kind understanding of Global Education in the different policies (Suša, 2019).

Current political shifts to the right exacerbate these tensions with education becoming a fundamental field of dispute (Diez-Guttierrez et al., 2025). In some European contexts, approaches grounded in critical Global Citizenship Education have been challenged by increasing emphasis on national identity, traditional values and patriotic education. The space given to human rights, diversity, international understanding and critical perspectives is being narrowed.

At the same time, a solid international policy framework has been developed through a wide range of international and regional initiatives including the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development (1974, revised in 2023), the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development, several EC council conclusions and recommendations on education and the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (the Dublin Declaration[15]).

We know, however, that 'international policies do not simply 'trickle down' to the national and regional levels to improve educational practice - and to actually have an impact they need to be negotiated at local level by multiple actors (Seggern & Singer-Brodowski cit. in Bourn, 2024). There are also differing ways in which global citizenship is understood in international policy, with implications for their transformative power. The extent to which these various initiatives have produced change within education remains contested (Bourn, 2024).

However, this policy framework provides a very solid foundation for Global Education. It recognises that education is a transformative force, cultivating critical consciousness, empathy and a sense of belonging to a common humanity. International organisations such as UNESCO and the OECD have played an increasingly important role in Global Education. They have helped to place Global Education on policy agendas and now assume an even greater role in helping to protect its principles and values when these come under attack.

[15] The Dublin Declaration, was for GENE an important effort to build resistance and hope. It was an act of collective mobilisation at a moment when many countries felt the tide was changing with growing threats to democracy, human rights and peace. It reaffirms the unwavering commitment to shared values, and a shared vision of the world and of GE and its contribution to a world of peace, human rights, justice, equality and solidarity. At national level it created momentum and sparked transformation at various levels.

4. Connected in networks we resist

It is within this broader process that we would also like to reflect on the role of GENE, and on the way in which its member countries increasingly understand the network itself as a space of resistance.

GENE was created twenty five years ago, when it brought together ministries and agencies responsible for supporting and funding Global Education from six European countries to try out a new kind of focused multilateralism. Twenty five years on, GENE has grown to include 60 ministries and agencies ministries from most European countries.

The simple but powerful idea behind GENE was to create a shared European policy space for Global Education. At its core was the combination of informal cooperation with the formal representation of the national ministries and agencies responsible for Global Education policy and for supporting its development at national level. Around this formal basis, an informal and trusted space was created in which policymakers could share their experiences and challenges, learn from one another and work together to improve Global Education. At the roots of this approach was the principle of starting where people are, with the challenges they face in their own contexts and the support they need, and building from there through participation, exchange and shared learning.

Over time, this shared policy space has also made it possible to develop a common policy language, a common values framework - grounded in global justice, human rights, sustainability, peace, intercultural dialogue, local and global analysis, and participatory and emancipatory educational practices - as well as a clear shared vision for Global Education. These were later reflected in the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050.

At a time when international cooperation, multilateralism, global values and Global Education itself are being questioned, what we see is that the commitment of GENE members, countries, organisations and individuals, does not weaken. On the contrary, we see strengthened commitment from member states to coming together to understand and solve common problems.

This is linked to a growing recognition among GENE members that Global Education is needed now more than ever as a force to uphold our shared values which are under threat. In this context, GENE offers a collective space of support, strength and hope. Part of the power of networks is to inspire people, bring people together, and create spaces where values can be reaffirmed. This becomes particularly powerful when those values are being questioned and attacked.

That GENE countries continue to come together voluntarily around shared values, shared learning and shared commitments is in itself a testimony to the power of multilateralism and of networks, to provide solutions in solidarity, garner and gather hope.

GENE is also part of a wide landscape of networks and communities built around Global Education. ANGEL, the Academic Network on Global Education and Learning, has created an important space for strengthening research in Global Education and connecting researchers and policymakers, but also a space for critical reflection, and, increasingly, for collective resistance. Other connected networks and processes exist across Europe and in several regions of the world. GENE is working alongside a group of critical friends, and following Global Education processes that are taking shape in Latin America[1], Asia Pacific and Africa. Strengthening the

connections between these different spaces is increasingly important allowing us to reaffirm shared values and build the collective strength.

5. Moving towards collective imagining and mobilisation

Global Education is about the potential to change the world; it is about achieving global and ecological justice and doing it through "cultivating politically engaged, self-reflexive global citizens who have a deep understanding of power and politics and who are firmly committed to working collectively toward fundamental change" (Bryan & Mochizuki, 2023). Global Education is not about "unveiling the truth for the learners, but about providing the space for them to reflect on their contexts and (…) assumptions" (Andreotti, 2006). This entails recognising that all knowledge is incomplete and that we need to engage with perspectives from other contexts, cultures and experiences, to be able to question and transform our views, identities and relationships, and to be able to "think otherwise".

At the same time, Global education needs to engage with critical perspectives and reflect on the limitations, silences, blind spots of the field (Stein, 2024[16]). First of all, in the context of modernity, with its complexity, rapid change, uncertainty, and violences, current education approaches may no longer be sufficient. This raises the question of how Global Education itself can be renewed. Global Education also has to confront violences and inequalities that are often not addressed. These include the violent social and economic relations produced by capitalism, at the roots of inequality and injustice (McCloskey, 2024). It also requires addressing more fully colonial and Eurocentric perspectives in global education (O'Toole, 2024).

Most importantly, there have been deafening silences in Global Education regarding the genocide in Palestine (Khoo, 2024; Murphy, 2024[17]). Learning from Palestine experiences of oppression and resistance is central to a critical Global Education and for the imperative to act in solidarity (de Vries *et al*., 2026[18]). It provides a lived understanding of human rights, dignity, justice, peace in places where they are denied every day and an understanding of resistance in the face extreme suffering (Barham, 2025[19]). It also provides spaces to collectively resist the forces that cause violence and dispossession and has the potential to empower people everywhere (Fasheh, 1990 *cit. in* de Vries *et al.,* 2026).

Global Education needs to put these fundamental issues at the centre and address them critically. We also need to harness the collective power of Global Education and of all those involved in it so that Global Education can more strongly contribute to social and ecological justice. The challenge is to mobilise the collective capacities, knowledge, relationships, institutions and networks that have been built over decades,. This requires reaching out across silos

16 Stein, S. (2024). The paradox of educational silences and cacophonies in liquid modernity. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, 39*, 1–1

17 Khoo, S. M. (2024). Response to *Policy and Practice* call on development education silences: Reflections on a pedagogy of non-silence: Resisting the politics of hopelessness. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, 39*, 145–158.
McCloskey, S. (2024). "An epic portrait of working-class existence" reminds us that class is a neglected issue in development education. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, 39*, 197–205.
Murphy, C. (2024). Development education and Palestine: Confronting the non-response. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, 39*, 136–144.
O'Toole, B. (2024). The silences of global citizenship education: A concept fit for purpose? *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, 39*, 171–183.

18 de Vries, M., Pieniążek, M. A., Posada González, D., Suhonen, R., & Vittori, L. (2026). From silence to action: Taking a collective turn in global citizenship education towards solidarity with and for Palestine and Palestinians. *Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review, 42*, 139–159.

19 Barham, K A, Al-Shaer, N M, Ftayer, O S, et al. (2025) Global citizenship in conflict settings: An-Najah National University as a case study. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, pp. 1–17.

and regions of the world, reaching out to groups, communities and organisations beyond the field of Global Education and connecting with wider social movements involved in struggles for social and ecological justice, equality and peace. The question is how to resist, how to build relations and work together, how to mobilise, organise and strengthen collective action. This is a process that requires collective processes of imagining together possible futures and organising to bring them about.

Global Education can be a force for peace, democracy and collective action.

The way forward lies both in a shared process of continuity and renewal: honouring those who helped build this field, recognising and strengthening your own work at national level and also in reflecting critically, imagine what comes next and act together so that Global Education can contribute to bending the arc of history towards justice.