Conclusion: Revisiting the Globally Oriented Citizen and Priorities for Empirical Research on Global Citizenship Education

Abstract  This shorter, concluding chapter draws together and summarises the main arguments of the book by way of returning to the concept of the ‘globally oriented citizen’ before scoping out several areas in need of further, more detailed empirical research, whether in Australia or elsewhere. In offering these arguments, which look back over the analysis in the previous chapters and look forward to further research, the stance taken is underpinned by two key concerns outlined in the introduction to the book. First, the fundamental importance of (re)connecting the relationship between the global, the national and the local—focusing on citizenship as the key concept rather than the “global citizen”. Second, a desire to understand and portray how various discourses, of varying degrees of positivity, operate concurrently and how, in turn, educational actors work with, mediate and challenge such discourses.

Keywords  Global citizenship education • Globally oriented citizen • Research needs • Professional development • Optimism

My main aim in this book has been to examine the concept and practice of global citizenship education through an exploration of how senior leaders, teachers and students in six Australian schools committed to educating for global citizenship conceived, implemented and experienced their work in this area. In this shorter, concluding chapter I draw together and
summarise the main arguments of the book by way of returning to the concept of the ‘globally oriented citizen’ before scoping out several areas in need of further, more detailed empirical research, whether in Australia or elsewhere. In offering these further arguments, which in a sense look back over the analysis in the previous chapters and look forward to further research, my intention is that these build from the overall argument set out at the end of the introductory chapter of this book. To repeat this here, my argument has been that the senior leaders and teachers in this study understood and presented global citizenship education in ways that were largely un-theorised and did not explicitly draw upon key discourses surveyed in Chap. 2. While the large-scale absence of economic framings of the global citizen was notable, oftentimes (and noting the exceptions described in the previous pages) senior leaders and teachers relied on personal commitments and understandings to describe their understandings and practices. So too it was clear that important aspects of the provision of global citizenship education were highly dependent on the commitments and preferences of individual teachers, including the extent to which those teachers felt ‘constrained by the curriculum’ in teaching global citizenship education. There was a strong sense, as well, that a number of students were cognisant and, indeed, were critically aware of some of the tensions and limitations involved in the forms of global citizenship education they were experiencing. Most notable among these was the general lack of opportunity to engage in open, critical discussion about current global issues.

Revisiting the Globally Oriented Citizen

In Chap. 2 I argued that an extended version of Bhikhu Parekh’s (2003) concept of the ‘globally oriented citizenship’ offers a fruitful way of conceiving of global citizenship for the extent to which it (1) prioritises human relationships based on the notion of common humanity and (2) recognises that the globally oriented citizen can only be understood through recourse to the various contextual notions and practices of citizenship that impact on citizens and which, in turn, shape and delimit the nature of and possibilities for global citizenship. In this section, I draw on the core elements of the globally oriented citizen to offer three concluding reflections on the empirical data collected from the six schools.

The first reflection stems from the principle that a globally oriented citizen has a ‘valued home of his own, from which he reaches out to and
forms different kinds of alliances with others having homes of their own’ and that in doing so ‘globally oriented citizenship recognises both the reality and the value of political communities, not necessarily in their current form but at least in some suitably revised form’ (Parekh, 2003: 17). Though not necessarily universal, the perspectives shared by participants captured a view of global citizenship education and the global citizen that appreciated the location and formation of the student/citizen more generally, but did so almost exclusively in terms of local, everyday citizenship rather than in the (not necessarily exclusive) terms of national citizenship. While notions of having a global awareness, mindset and consciousness were heavily emphasised, these stemmed from, were largely dependent on, and interconnected with local and individual relationships. Similarly, though social action in global spaces was central to the aspirations and practices shared by participants, these frequently connected to the more immediate locality, and only a few of the teachers made any reference to national politics, policies and citizenship beyond very general statements about Australia/Australians being “fortunate”. As I suggested in Chap. 3, explaining the lack of focus on national citizenship could be explained in two ways. Either national forms of citizenship are really just not important to the respondents in this study, or they take this citizenship somewhat for granted, failing to be critically reflexive about the possibilities their national citizenship offers them and denies other Australians who are not able to access the sorts of educational opportunities available to the students in these schools.

The second, related, reflection centres on criticality, or indeed lack thereof. Again as set out in Chap. 2, a core element of globally oriented citizenship is being able to examine and respond to the effects of locally/ nationally developed and enacted policies, practices and actions on others elsewhere in the world. As the preceding pages evidence, for most of the participants there was a lack of such critical engagement. There was a clear commitment among the teachers spoken with that they wanted their students to be globally aware and to act in particular, positive ways. However, while—as I hope to have shown—there were some teachers that worked actively to develop their students’ critical consciousness, most senior leaders and teachers wanted students to be considerate, culturally aware and globally engaged. Though these are positive attributes, they are suggestive of maintaining rather than actively challenging current global relationships and structural inequalities. Indeed, while a number of senior leaders, teachers and students spoke in general terms about global communities
and a commitment to working with others, very few drew on concepts of social justice or global ethics in order to frame this commitment.

Moreover, senior leaders and teachers seemed to be cognisant of the way that the lived realities of citizenship often operate at an interpersonal, everyday level, requiring citizens to work with others in their various communities in humble and hospitable ways in order that all humans, so far as is possible, are able to lead good lives. However, and crucially, this latter reflection cannot be understood apart from the finding of this study that participants emphasised a form of global awareness that was open to difference and that was sensitive to difference, but that did not engage critically with conflicts and tensions associated with difference. As such, for the most part, global citizenship education in the schools did not seem to be engaging students in open, critical dialogue about deeper differences between cultures, religions and worldviews in attentive and open-minded ways. Where criticality was developed, there was only limited sense (driven by individual teachers) that this comprised—even if not fully, noting the age of the students involved—the form of criticality endorsed by Andreotti (2006: 49) that engenders a “space” for students to reflect ‘on their context and their own and others’ epistemological and ontological assumptions: how we came to think/be/feel/act the way we do’. It is these spaces, which include opportunities to enter into dialogue with difference, that are vital to any educational endeavour to understand and be attentive to the interests of others and which, furthermore, are also crucial for positioning oneself and one’s communities in relation to other selves and communities in positive and humane ways of being.

The third reflection is the way in which the global citizen was rendered an individual actor and chooser by most participants. Though it was notable, as has been pointed out in earlier chapters, that preparation for the global workforce was barely mentioned explicitly by participants, there was a strong current of individualism in how participants spoke of the global citizen. This is not to say that there were no mentions of collective identities; notions of the global were viewed as inherently about connections with others, for example, and senior leaders, teachers and students frequently spoke about their local communities. It is to say, however, that even in those cases where collective identities were referenced, these were largely deemed to be a choice on behalf of individuals who “choose” their views, who “choose” to be globally minded, and who choose which causes to support and which actions to undertake. What was missing from all but a few participants was a sense of the embeddedness in communities that
ties members to those communities and through which members gain important features of their personhood. Even where collective actions were spoken of such as fundraising for a particular charity or cause, this was approached from the view that each individual student could choose (whether to be moved by the issue, whether to donate and so on) rather than from the view that the collective action itself was of particular value (collective action might tighten bonds between students and their community, collective action brings together various viewpoints that can be shared and discussed and so on). In his study, Dill (2013: 100; emphasis in original) found similarly, and he argues that as a result:

difference is pushed to the level of the individual, which allows consequential boundaries to be ignored, delegitimizing group identities as merely results of choice or preference. In effect, this implicitly creates voluntaristic collective identities—the individual acts as a chooser and consumer of various identities he or she would like to embrace. These group identities are void of the “givenness” or the binding nature usually associated with collective identity, largely because such “strong” identities lead to consequential differences and thus conflict.

As such, and partly for this reason, there was little sense of the ‘delicate balance’ between at times complimentary and at times conflicting virtues and ideas, such as interdependence and autonomy, stability and equity, or rootedness and open-mindedness (Parekh, 2003: 17).

**Priorities for Empirical Research on Global Citizenship Education**

Given the complex and essentially contested understandings of global citizenship and the vast array of ways that global citizenship education can (and does) manifest in schools, there remains a real need for further empirical studies that illuminate the perceptions, approaches and experiences of global citizenship education in and across contexts. While not an exhaustive list, reflecting on the findings of this particular study, I believe that four research priorities (in no particular order) are particularly significant.

Embracing Reid, Gill and Sears’ (2010: 5) assertion about global citizenship education that ‘no matter how tightly the state seeks to prescribe educational practice to conform with the educational settlement, there is
always “wriggle room” for educators ... That is, there is never a one-to-one correspondence between the state’s agenda and its realisation in the classroom’, a first research priority is to understand how different discourses of global citizenship, including policies and practices that impact upon how global citizenship education is framed and enacted, manifest within individual schools. Fundamental to this priority are to understand the origins and purposes of these discourses and the nuanced and detailed ways that different discourses are mediated—implicitly and explicitly—by senior leaders and teachers (and indeed by students) in practice. Too often conceptual dialogues between academic researchers and the practical approaches of those working in schools talk past each other, and more work is needed that brings these dialogues into relation.

Connected to this first research priority, the study reported in this book found that while each of the six schools had a stated commitment to educating for global citizenship, the form, approach and depth of global citizenship education varied between schools. This variation was caused by a range of factors, including the developmental stage of implementation at which the respective schools were. Within this variation, the role of individual teachers—how they work with students, what scope they provide students to engage meaningful and so on—is clearly crucial. As a number of researchers on global/citizenship education have argued (see, for example, Demaine, 2004; Leighton, 2013), effective education in these spheres is heavily dependent on teachers—their knowledge, their approaches, and their commitment. A second research priority, then, is to understand how individual teachers make a difference, and whether, and if so how, their leading practice is shared with colleagues to deepen global citizenship education across the school.

In Chap. 2, views that global citizenship education should include recognition of Western complicity were discussed. In this same chapter, also discussed were MacKenzie, Enslin and Hedge’s (2016: 134, 135) perceptive statements that ‘caution should be exercised in the face of temptation to pass judgement’ about students’ ‘occasional stereotyping in judging their knowledge of a distant other by not asking too much of them at a young age’ and that ‘it would be too quick and probably unjust to conclude from pupils’ ‘comments about providing charity’ that ‘they were merely demonstrating Jefferess’ (2008) ‘politics of benevolence’ towards a needy Other’. This raises a third research priority, namely the appropriate age in which principles of complicity can, and should, be encountered and engaged with critically by students. For example, in their exposition of
global citizenship education in higher education in Canada, Andreotti et al. (2010: 20) identify ‘seemingly neutral notions of difference that generally fail to engage with conflict and tensions inherent to processes of globalization and ideas of citizenship and nationhood’. My concern is that some of the criticisms and expectations of global citizenship correctly levelled at practices in higher education are being transferred over to schooling. Given this, our expectations of what is possible must reflect the age groups involved and, moreover, must recognise how educators and students are already working critically with what is possible given their contexts. Here, Tarc (2012: 120) offers a very helpful frame when he writes ‘I am not criticizing acts of helping or charity but of how these actions get interpreted as necessarily educative, productive or as representing social transformation’.

A fourth research priority concerns teacher preparation and professional development. The findings presented throughout this book come against a context of now reasonably longstanding attention to global citizenship education in Australian teacher education programs (see, for example, Reynolds et al., 2012; Mills & Tomas, 2014), but little organised and widespread in-service teacher professional development for global citizenship education outside of that provided by NGOs working in the space, particularly since the termination of Federal government funding for the Australian Global Education Project. Existing research on global citizenship education in teacher education programs points to the benefits of collaborative, critical engagement, including dialogical engagement between pre-service teachers about global citizenship education’s contested elements, as well as about more practical aspects relating to the place of global citizenship education within the curriculum and its enactment within schools and classrooms. In their study, Donnelly, Bradbury, Brown, Ferguson-Patrick, Macqueen, and Reynolds (2013: 21) found, for example that it ‘was clearly evident that unique Global Education approaches were linked to specific teaching disciplines, an indication that Global Education continues to be a difficult concept to incorporate without explicit guidance for integration’, suggesting that cross-school collaboration between teachers of specific subjects is also of value in developing understanding and practices. As the research presented in this book suggests, how teachers respond to global citizenship education will necessarily be shaped by how they themselves delimit their own role. While Osler (2008: 125) has argued that ‘a politically literate citizen will need to understand and engage in processes of change at all levels, including the
global’, we could extend this line of thought to suggest that this is required not just of politically literate citizens, but also of politically literature teachers. If a majority of teachers in Australia share a similar lack of confidence about and/or willingness to engage their students in discussing controversial current political, moral and religious issues as the teachers in this study describe it seems questionable as to whether the gap between the high priority of global citizenship education at policy levels and its recognition and expression within Australian schools will be closed in the near future. What we still know little about is whether, and how, pre-service and in-service teacher preparation and professional development impacts on teachers’ work in their schools and classrooms.

Final Words

Young people today are living at a time of opportunity, but also one of uncertainty, risk, vulnerability, fragility, and precarity. That this is so is expressed eloquently by Abdi (2017: 44–45), who suggests that ‘in almost all countries of the world, young people are dealing with less than viable employment and, by extension, economically liable situations so that in some places, descriptions of pessimism that locate youth as the lost generation are being used’ and continues ‘yet, despite all descriptors and indicators that show the quasi-permanentization of precariatized youth, change does not seem to be forthcoming’. The chances that “change” may occur will be significantly heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic that took hold of the world as the manuscript for this book was being finalised, and which seems set to have a long-lasting impact on the way lives are conducted. At the time of writing, it is too soon to speculate the precise changes that may be brought about, let alone whether these will be positive for young people and what forms of global citizenship might be possible and prioritised in the short- and long-term future. Of importance, though, is whether the changes are inspired by ideas of hope, compassion and care or whether they are driven by pessimism, competition and consumerism. If the former win out, we may witness positive and optimistic forms of global citizenship/education within and beyond our schools through which differences and conflicts can be recognised and negotiated, through which longstanding and persistent injustices can be addressed, and through which common humanity can triumph over division and inequality. That, at least, must be our hope.
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