

Solidarity and competitiveness in a global context: Comparable concepts in global citizenship education?

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Abstract

Any study linking terms such as global education, internationalization, and global citizenship facing the dilemmas of local and global tensions, invariably has to address the questions of globalizations and neoliberalism, two concepts and two global movements that define our time and age, the age of interdependence. Neoliberal globalization, as I have analyzed in other places defines the top down model of global hegemonic dominance, resting on the power of corporations, bilateral and multilateral organisms, and the global and regional power of nations who exercise control over people, territories, capital and resources of all kinds, including the environment.

Neoliberalism has utterly failed as a viable model of economic development, yet the politics of culture associated with neoliberalism is still in force, and has become the new common sense shaping the role of government and education. This 'common sense' has become an ideology playing a major role in constructing hegemony as moral and intellectual leadership in contemporary societies. Universities play a major role in knowledge production and teaching of comparative education. How to cope with these challenges of globalization in the universities is a central concern of this keynote in which I address the challenges of global education for social transformation, focusing on frontiers and boundaries of citizenship. Three themes are central for this conversation namely a) how multiple globalizations are impacting global life and academics b) how networks have become privileged sites for global education collaboration, and c) what are the implications of globalization and networks for global citizenship, global universities and comparative education. Looming in the shadows of this conversation is an important question: What should be the goals of global citizenship education in a decade marked by the UN Education First Initiative with a special focus on the question of furthering global citizenship and the responsibilities of universities and governments?

LIMINAL: EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Learned and leisurely hospitality is the only antidote to the stance of deadline cleverness that is acquired in the professional pursuit of objectively secured knowledge.

(Illich, The Cultivation of Conspiracy, cited in Torres, 2013, p. 468).

Education has in modern times been part and parcel in the construction of the nation-state, and if one were to take a classical Durkheimian sociological perspective, in the socialization of the new generations in the culture(s), mores, knowledge, and experience of the older generations. It has been shaped by the demands within the state to prepare the labor force for participation in the economy and to prepare citizens to participate in the polity. It is supposed to create conditions for social cohesion and conflict resolution.

Lester Thurow, one of the best political economists of our time, put it boldly: ‘The invention of universal compulsory publicly funded education was mankind’s greatest social invention’ (1999, p. 130). This approximate congruence of nation-state and formalized education becomes problematic as globalization blurs national sovereignty and puts limits on state autonomy. We are now forced to move beyond assumptions about national boundaries and goals internal to national agendas.

Discussions on citizenship must address straightforward questions: Will globalization make human rights and democratic participation more universal, or will globalization redefine human enterprise as market exchanges invulnerable to traditional civic forms of democratic governance? Whether education as a publicly shared invention, contributing to civic life and human rights, can thrive depends on the future of globalization—a future that may offer the internationalization of the ideals of a democratic education or may reduce education, and civic participation, to narrow instruments of remote and seemingly ungovernable market forces.

In several works (Torres, 2009a, 2009b; 2013, in press), I have suggested that multiple and intersecting globalization processes do place limits on state autonomy and national sovereignty. These limits are expressed in tensions between global and local dynamics in virtually every decision and policy domain in the social, cultural, and economic spheres.

These limits, however, do not mean that the State has withered away and the regulatory power of the state has vanished completely. Most politicians believe, and a great deal of the general public concur, that politics is mostly if not always local. The problem for this point of view which has a great deal of persuasiveness, particularly if one tries to understand the tensions and dynamics of the national, the regional, the provincial, the municipal and the community level, is that the political economy constraining and enabling politics is built in the translational interpenetration of global forces vis a vis local forces, stake holders, and agents. Put it simply, wealth accumulation, production, distribution, and all sorts of commodity exchanges (from price levels to currency value) are subject to the globalization of economies and markets.

Multiple globalization therefore not only blurs national boundaries but also shifts solidarities within and outside the national state. Globalization cannot be defined exclusively by the post-Fordist organization of production, but emerges as a major characteristic of a global world economy.

Issues of human rights, regional states, and cosmopolitan democracy will play a major role affecting civic minimums at the state level, the performance of capital and labor in different domains, and particularly the dynamics of citizenship, democracy, and multiculturalism in the modern state (Torres, 1998, Torres in press). To understand the issues at stake in education, we have to consider these tensions within globalization and their implications for reshaping the limits and potentials for civil society.

In my publications I have defended the following theoretical principles: It is imperative to consider the connections of globalization with the concerns about worldwide markets and free trade, and how market competition in the context of neoliberalism affects the notion of citizenship and democracy at national, regional, and global level. In the same vein but from the very different

political-ideological standpoint of universal human rights, we should understand the limits of national citizenship and sovereignty.

Two principles become antagonistic, namely, national sovereignty and universal human rights (Torres, in press). For Nuhoglu Soysal (1994), ‘...these two global precepts simultaneously constrain and enhance the nation-state’s scope of action’ (pp. 7–8). This creates an incongruity between the normative and the organizational bases of rights, as well as between constitutional prescriptions and laws. Nuhoglu Soysal (1994, pp. 164–165) has argued that:

The state is no longer an autonomous and independent organization closed over a nationally defined population. Instead, we have a system of constitutionally interconnected states with a multiplicity of membership. [Hence] . . . the logic of personhood supersedes the logic of national citizenship, [and] individual rights and obligations, which were historically located in the nation-state, have increasingly moved to a universalistic plane, transcending the boundaries of particular nation-states.

Nuhoglu Soysal’s analysis has multiple implications. First at the level of citizenship, where notions of identity and rights are decoupled. Second at the level of the politics of identity and multiculturalism, where the emergence of membership in the polity, he argues, ‘is multiple in the sense of spanning local, regional, and global identities, and . . . accommodates intersecting complexes of rights, duties and loyalties (p. 166). Third at the level of what could be termed *cosmopolitan democracies*, which Soysal highlights as emerging from the importance of the international system for the attainment of democracy worldwide. Cosmopolitan democracies constitute a system relatively divorced in its origins and constitutive dynamics from codes of the nation-states. The recent inception in the world system of the Education First Initiative produced by the U.N. Secretary Ban Ki-Moon in 2012 is an example of these global dynamics affecting local realities.

In neoliberal times the main questions are how globalization is affecting organized solidarity and how citizenship is being checked by market forces and globalization dynamics. This is so because the unstable linkage between democracy and capitalism has been blurred to levels rarely seen before.

What follows is an analysis of the concept of global citizenship education caught in the web of proposals to instill solidarity at a global level to support our common humanity, and proposals that global citizenship education will propel more competitiveness of the labor forces in the global markets. Clearly one may question whether both concepts—solidarity and competitiveness—are comparable concepts in global citizenship education.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: COMPETITIVENESS VERSUS SOLIDARITY

To achieve the expansive possibilities of global citizenship, particularly as a social justice endeavor, and to avoid the being caught in the neoliberal trap of proclaiming globalized equity while creating its opposite [we need to understand] global citizenship in diverse ways, from an ancient commitment of interconnectivity to a hyper capitalist and globalized mobile individualized citizen.

(Shultz, Abdi, & Richardson, 2011. p.3)

The main thesis of this paper is that solidarity versus competitiveness is an irresolvable tension in the world system. They could be seen in its more generic form as two extremes of a continuum. There are comparable concepts in global citizenship education only because in their most extreme definition they are antagonist concepts. Together they confront us with several conundrums.

First, to assume that human nature will be fully tamed by cultural nurturing is a wonderful assumption that we inherited from the Enlightenment. It is a goal and a dream that justifies our educational efforts. Yet, is not reflected in reality because there are plenty of political conflicts related to local and global identities, some are nationalistic in nature, other are ethnic or religious, or a mixture of all three undermining all forms of citizenship. Moreover, everywhere there are deep fractures between goals of political unity versus goals of cultural unity. Solidarity rather than competition may help cultural nurturing.

Second, to assume that oppressors and oppressed can co-exist (compete and have degrees of solidarity) harmoniously in the World System is also a wonderful hope, but, unfortunately, not represented in actual data and theoretical analyses. Consider for instance the analysis provided by post-colonialist traditions, those provided by critical traditions in gender studies or race/and ethnic studies or class analyses, or consider the growing bibliography signalling that there are too many inequalities within and among nations for this co-existence to work in the long run.

Third, competition is the essence of sports. Is the impetus for global citizenship education comparable to the Soccer World Cup or the Olympics Games? An assumption in the Olympic Games or World Soccer competition is that people and countries conduct themselves within a code of fair play not cheating in their desires to win. 'Let the best win,' is the motto of any competition. This aphorism could be translated into global citizenship education. Some argue that furthering global citizenship education we can create a better world where we all can win, since all of us may recognize the wonders of our own shared humanity!

There are many examples in the breakdown of the fallacy of a level playing field in sports, contradicting a falsified image of the prevalence of honesty in athletics. For example, cycling is particular problematic because since 1988 more than one third of the top finishers have been busted for doping, with the most egregious case being the seven times winner of the Tour de France, Lance Armstrong.¹

Conceivably, if we want to implement world citizenship education in a world system built on profit taking, like in world sports, we may face similar problems. Let us take an example from mass media. In the 1987 movie *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas playing the role of a Wall Street Tycoon Gordon Gekko provides us the answer of how economic competitiveness may not dovetail nicely with human solidarity, particularly when competition is based solely on greed.

Gordon Gekko speaking to stockholders of a company he bought shares argues: "I am not a destroyer of companies. I am a liberator of them! The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind."²

Fourth, assuming that solidarity and competitiveness can live together harmoniously implies that there is no incommensurability of political, scientific, or ideological discourses.

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/08/24/sports/top-finishers-of-the-tour-de-france-tainted-by-doping.html?_r=0

² From the script of the movie, *Wall Street*. (1987).

Solidarity speaks of cooperation and collaboration. This can be done at the level of distributional and humanitarian policies. Competition in the economic extreme speaks of contest and survival of the fittest, eventually creating conflict. Competition in the economic arena refers to production, accumulation, and profit-taking in wealth creation. Growing levels of solidarity may enhance the legitimacy of systems, but in a cutthroat neoliberal capitalist society, though monopolies thwarting competition exist, market competition is seen as one of the keys to productivity, profit-taking and success.

In fact, we may argue that the two terms that work more closely and should be key in the construction of global identities in global citizenship education are coordination that leads to cooperation. Yet, the problem is how to coordinate divergent interests. Obviously all participants in processes of coordination try to have an agreeable rule or convention in place. But, as Offe (Offe, 2006, p.59) argues:

...the typical case of cooperation, however, is one in which preferences differ as to what the rule should be, and also the cost and efforts required for complying with that rule are not the same for all players involved, as some may have to make more painful adjustments than others.

Solidarity, Competition and Global Citizenship Education

Alienation is the constant and essential element of identity, the objective side of the subject—and not as it is made to appear today, a disease, a psychological condition.

(Marcuse, in Feeberg and Leiss 2007, p. 53).

There are more complications to this continuum between solidarity and competition. First, there is world inequality. From 2000 to 2007, incomes for the bottom 90 percent of earners rose only about 4 percent, once adjusted for inflation. For the top 0.1 percent, incomes climbed about 94 percent (Saenz & Piketty). For instance, OECD reports the growing inequality in the UK, where the top 10 percent have incomes that are 12 times greater than bottom 10 percent, and this is up from eight times greater in 1985.

Second, competition for jobs undermines forms of solidarity.³ The crisis of 2008 has made even more evident the importance of the growing inequality that has deeply affected market democracies. A casualty of these crises in the global economy has been the loss of jobs, which has in turn increased inequality and poverty. Jim Clifton, (2011) Chairman of Gallup Corporation argues that of the 7 billion people in the world, 5 billion are over 15 years old. Three billion said they currently worked or wanted to work, yet only 1.2 billion have full-time formal jobs. Hence there is a shortfall of 1.8 billion jobs worldwide. This does not include those that currently underemployed, working in jobs below their skill levels.

Third, in the last century, the principal source of institutional and organized solidarity in the world has been the presence of various forms of the welfare state, which guarantees individuals minimum levels of welfare, education, income, health care, and affordable housing and transportation as a political right and not as charity. As Offe declares, ‘The welfare state is an

³ Most analysts document that the gap between the U.S. rich (1 percent of the population) has been growing markedly by any measure for the last three decades. There are a number of “teach ins” on the matter, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIKgApqgGgU> (retrieved May 5, 2012). The press has also indicated several reasons for this growing disparity, see Dave Gibson and Carolyn Perot, *It’s the Inequality, Stupid: Eleven Charts That Explain What’s Wrong with America*, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-america-chart-graph> (March/April, 2011).

accumulation of rights that the worker doesn't not have to earn, but which come as an original endowment of 'social citizenship'(Offe, 2006, p. 44).

Clearly the inception of neoliberalism in the early eighties and the working of neoliberal globalization have led to a decline of the welfare state and organized forms of solidarity (Torres, in press). With neoliberalism, we find a drive towards privatization, marketization, performativity and the enterprising individual exemplified by Canadian political scientist Macpherson's concept of 'possessive individualism' in which individuals are conceived as sole proprietors of their own skills and owe nothing to society. In the political philosophy of possessive individualism there are multiple reasons for competition and virtually no reason for solidarity or collaboration with less fortunate people, communities or countries.

Fourth, war is a public policy option for the state more so in the geopolitics of powerful nation-states in the global system. War could be advanced to pursue the goals of competition more often than solidarity. The global defense budget (in 2012 US dollars) shows there is only reigning military super-power, the USA spending \$682 billion, this amount is more than the combined amount of \$652 billion from the subsequent 9 nation-states with the largest defense budgets.⁴ One could only imagine what would happen if a fraction of these defense budgets could be devoted to public services that sustain solidarity policies.

There are plenty of discontents with neoliberal globalization, as there are serious misgivings with the geopolitics of the strongest nations on Earth guiding solidarity and philanthropy. Occasionally, in the name of human rights, we witness the imperialism of human rights being projected by Western countries to justify intervention in order to prevent atrocities of genocide and other ills, but also to justify intervention for the benefits their own competitiveness and interest. I have suggested in many forums that we have to decouple human rights from imperialist interventions.

I have spoken of competition confronting solidarity as two ends of a continuum, and I have been quite sceptical that business-like competition could be very useful in the dictionary of furthering global citizenship education. Yet there are few experiences in which competition and solidarity may intersect.

Universities compete for the best undergraduate and graduate students, the services of the best professors, and, particularly, global universities compete for securing employment of the 'best brains' around the globe. They compete for research resources, growing endowments or better positioning in the rankings, and there is a civilized competition for advancing new knowledge and technologies.

This cultural competition is healthy, and is part of an educational utopia for the Twenty-First Century education, particularly when it is present in our schools, universities and lifelong learning system which seek to build global citizenship through a new paradigm of education well defined by Suárez -Orozco and Sattin-Bajaj when they seek an education:

...privileging disciplined curiosity, the beauty of discovery, a ludic engagement with the world, and an ethic of care and solidarity will be less a luxury and a rarity than an essential requirement for the next generation of children to thrive. We must continue to cultivate, replicate, modify, and improve models of education that are built on these powerful and indispensable architectures.

(Suárez-Orozco and Sattin-Bajaj, 2010, p. 198)

⁴ States including Russia, Japan, UK, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, China, India, and Italy.
<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-top-ten/world-top-ten-countries-with-largest-defence-budget-map.html>

The quest for global citizenship education should be understood in the context of multiple processes of globalization, which are drastically changing our collective and individual worlds and consciousness. While globalization provides the backdrop for any conversation about global citizenship education we are entering new frontiers and we need new narratives in education, which confront the traditional positivist epistemology in education. We should view citizenship marked by an understanding of global interconnectedness and a commitment to the collective good. We should advance a view of citizenship in which the geographic reference point for one's sense of rights and responsibilities is broadened, and in some sense, complicated by a more expansive spatial vision and understanding of the world.

There are three main trends underscoring the need for global citizenship education. First, it should be noted that the world is changing, cultures are intersecting, and borders are more permeable than ever. Hybridity is the quintessential nature of contemporary societies. The second reason is that we have moved from a concept of citizenship in a city to a concept of citizenship in a nation-state and now we are at the sunrise of global citizenship in the age of global interdependence and cosmopolitanism. Historically, education has played a major role in these transformations, hence the quest for global citizenship education. The third main reason for global citizenship education is that the different forms of globalization are confronting cosmopolitan democracies as emerging models of political organization of citizenship (Torres, in press). There must be a vision towards global citizenship education or the people and the planet will perish.

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