

Education for Intercultural Identity: One Way to Promote Students' Global Citizenship

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Abstract

This paper highlights the need for an education that involves intercultural identity as a concept for teaching students about global citizenship. It is believed that intercultural identity will help students create a sense of belonging, security, satisfaction, and continuing connectedness in today's global society which is characterized by diverse cultures and customs and where their understanding of these cultures is often very limited. One possible method to accomplish this is through training students to become global citizens. Traditionally, they learn about other cultures in ways promoted by their government, through its education system along with other modes of socialization. Learning to be a global citizen involves learning how to take a wider perspective and to actively engage with people from different cultures. By training, we mean the introduction of new activities, along with the course curriculum, to enhance students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This will involve questioning the taken-for-granted conventions within which one lives, seeking to empathize with the experience of others, and reflecting on the impact of this upon oneself and one's own identity.

Keywords: intercultural identity, global citizenship, culture

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Introduction

The question of cultural identity and its relationship with globalization is very significant. It deserves to be addressed in light of a set of conceptual and methodological tools borrowed from various disciplines within the social sciences (mainly social psychology and anthropology). The identity process is complex and dialectical and so is globalization. If identity allows the individual to both construct and assert his/her being by means of multiple and random references (including territorial), through which all sorts of divergences and/or convergences take place, then globalization is this changing world in which all this happens. The social psychology of acculturation (i.e., cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture) ("Acculturation", n.d.) proposes to understand how things are done in terms of assimilation, integration, marginalization and exclusion of populations struggling with international mobility. This paper explores these questions and analyzes the identity phenomena that give rise to intercultural dynamics which are accelerated by the rise of globalization

Identity Formation

Identity is fundamentally relational and develops into a long series of interactions between the individual and their context, i.e., it is a dynamic system. Identity is initially defined as a relational construct and this notion fits well with the conceptualization of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980, 1989, 1992), who are the most influential theoreticians in the field of identity. The development of identity can be conceived of as an iterative process of transactions with context. We are in the middle of our individual world where we place central importance on our sense of individual self.

Identity tries to answer questions such as "*Who are we?*" and "*What does it mean to be who we are?*" Identity relates to our basic values that dictate the choices we make (e.g., our

relationships and career choices). We each have many different types of identities that can be personal, social or cultural, or made up of all three. More specifically, we have *personal identities* (i.e., our distinctive personalities or character qualities), *social identities* (i.e., our duties or responsibilities in our families, school or the work place), and *cultural identities* (i.e., those aspects affected by our cultural context. This paper will focus on the concept of “cultural identity”, although a few words about personal and social identities are also included.

Personal identity is the notion that one creates about themselves which develops over the course of their existence including all of the characteristics that distinguishes one from others, for example: profession, friends, tastes, passions, and commitments. In social psychology, personal identity refers to a psychological process of self-representation that results in the feeling of existing in a continuity as a singular being and being recognized as such by others, i.e., a person persists to be the same through time. It is a set of characteristics that an individual considers as his own and to which he attributes a socio-affective value (Fischer, 1996). In other words, personal identity indicates the recognition that an individual has recognized their differences from others. It is a unique combination of personal traits and specific attributes that make each individual different from others.

On the one hand, each individual is characterized by personal traits and more specific attributes, but on the other hand, they are characterized by social traits which specify their association with particular groups or categories. These traits define the social identity of a person. It only manifests itself in relation to other groups or categories of non-belonging. So, social identity refers to the fact that the individual views themselves as similar to others based on common characteristics (the "we"). The more identification there is to a group (e.g., gender, language, race, etc.), the more there will be differentiation of this group with other groups. Thus, social identity allows the individual to find his bearings in the system and to be identified socially. Each individual is defined by the different roles he/she must play within the groups to

which he/she belongs. The notion of identity is, therefore, profoundly linked to social structure because it is characterized by the whole of the individual's affiliations in the social system. Therefore, social identity of a person refers to his knowledge of his belonging to certain social groups and the emotional and evaluative significance (i.e., perceive, comprehend, and interpret experiences on scales from positive to negative) that results from this belonging. It is through belonging to different groups that the individual acquires a social identity that defines the particular place he/she occupies in society.

Social identity is defined by social categorization, which divides an individual's social environment in such a way as to distinguish one's own group from others. According to Turner et al. (1987), the concept of social identity articulates the cognitive process of categorization and social belonging. More specifically, social identity is the psychological structure that makes the link between the individual and the group, generates processes and categorical behaviors. According to Turner et al. (1987), social identity is the sociocognitive foundation of group behavior and the mechanism that makes it possible. Social identity is, then, conceived as a representation of the self in the internalized social environment.

As already mentioned, the focus of this paper is on the concept of 'cultural identity' as a means to connect the student to today's global society. Cultural identity, the feeling of being part of a group or culture which is defined by attitudes and beliefs that a person from each culture believes, are normal for that group. More than that, cultural identity also consists of racial, religious, class, gender, sexuality and familial characteristics. In turn, they can also come from group affiliations due to social status, faith in a religious belief or ideology, sexual orientation, disability or medical condition, and so on. Scholars believe that cultural identity helps us create a sense of belonging, security, satisfaction, and continuing connectedness. What is of particular interest is how this type of identity exists at an intercultural/international level, when one no longer identifies with their nation or ethnic group but instead identifies with a

culture of a different geographic region of the country or even a different country. This type of identity is well-known as intercultural identity.

Intercultural Identity

Intercultural identity is a basic part of intercultural transformation identified in the cross-cultural adaptation theory (i.e., acculturation). The theory explains that immigrants to another country come to understand the norms and values of that culture and adopt salient reference groups of the host society (Kim, 1977). In addition, extensive and prolonged communication across cultural boundaries render a gradual psychological evolution from a largely monocultural identity to an increasingly ‘intercultural’ way of relating to oneself and to others. For Kim (1977), when foreign immigrants move from one culture to another in the first place, their behavioral modes and values from the original setting may prove maladaptive in the new location. In her later work, Kim (1992) believes that an immigrant, a sojourner, or a business person who successfully integrates into a new environment establishes an ‘intercultural identity’ for themselves. As a concept, Kim (1992) uses intercultural identity to identify one’s capacity to grow beyond their original culture and encompass a new culture by gaining additional insight into both cultures through the process.

Intercultural identity has often played a crucial role in intercultural communication, especially when people come in contact with others from different cultural backgrounds and the recognition of identity differences take place. Kim (1994, p. 10) thinks that “through face-to-face or mediated forms of communication, intercultural interfaces often present a multiple of challenges, including those that force people to confront and re-assess their own identity as well as the taken-for-granted practices of thinking, feeling and acting associated with identity”. Understanding foreigners’ intercultural identity in the host environment not only shows the ongoing cognitive and behavioral variations of foreigners but contributes to their successful

intercultural adaptation. This knowledge can be used later in educational settings to help students build up an intercultural identity that inevitably will help them act as global citizens.

Global Citizenship

Global citizenship is all about encouraging young people to develop the knowledge, values and skills they need to successfully engage with the world. It nurtures personal respect and respect for others wherever they live and encourages individuals to think profoundly and seriously about what is fair and just, and what will decrease harm to our planet. A global citizen is, then, someone who is aware of and understands the wider world and his/her place in it. He/she takes a dynamic responsibility in his/her community and works with others to make our planet more equal, fair and sustainable. In general, global citizens are aware of the wider world and have a sense of their own role as world citizens. They admire and value diversity and are eager to act to make the world a more just and sustainable place. They participate in the community at a range of levels from the local to the global and take responsibility for their actions. They have, as well, an understanding of how the world works and tend to be disturbed by social injustice.

Exploring the components of global citizenship helps students grow more confident in standing up for their beliefs and more capable in evaluating the principles and impact of their decisions. Our conception of an education that should set global citizenship development as a key component of the whole educational process comes from our belief that this will help students build their own understanding of world events and get involved in their local, national and global communities. They will also benefit from this type of learning by starting to think about their values and what is important to them as well as develop arguments and voice their opinions. In addition, they will learn to take this knowledge into the real world where they can see that they have power to act and influence the world around them.

Nowadays, the world is so interconnected and interdependent that the “global” sphere is no longer separate from our lives and “out there”. It is now part of our everyday lives as we are linked to others from the four corners of the globe through the media and telecommunications, travel and migration (social and cultural interconnectedness), trade (economic interconnectedness), and international relations and systems of regulation (political interconnectedness). These opportunities that our ‘globalized’ world offers to students are limitless but so are the challenges. Our universities strive to equip students with the knowledge, skills and values they need in understanding the political, legal and economic functions of their society, and the social and moral awareness to succeed in it. However, rarely do they place emphasis on the importance of taking a wider perspective by encouraging engagement with students from different cultures so that these students are not only citizens of their own countries, but citizens of the whole world. We need an educational system that supports their development as Global Citizens that should not be classified as an additional subject but rather a required foundation for learning by reaching beyond the university to the wider global community. It can be promoted in class through the existing curriculum by developing and using new initiatives and activities.

Global Citizenship in the Classroom

Global citizenship education can be addressed in the classroom through a wide and evolving variety of participatory teaching and learning methodologies which promote and encourage intercultural identity development. We know that nowadays, it is very easy to arrange for an intercultural interaction through the internet. This brings students into direct contact with another culture and allows them not only to gain access to authentic publications from that culture, but also to take part in on-line chat rooms, discussion boards and videoconference discussions. In interaction with people from foreign cultures, these students

will develop intercultural competence that allows them to capture and understand their specific concepts in perception, thinking, feeling and acting.

Once interculturally competent, students become sensitive and more aware of other cultures, people, and nations. They understand others' behaviors and ways of thinking, as well as understand feelings and needs of their interactants, i.e., develop empathy. Finally, they develop self-confidence by knowing what the other culture desires along with their strengths and weaknesses, and emotional stability. They are also able to communicate their own point of view more clearly with the goal of being understood and respected by staying flexible and clear when necessary.

Three essential elements can be addressed through the introduction of new activities to develop intercultural identity namely: attitudes, knowledge and skills (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2006). First, students are expected to acquire knowledge about events, significant individuals and various interpretations of events about both countries and the traces left in the national memory as well as about contemporary political and economic factors surrounding each country. This will teach them about issues of global interdependence, diversity of identities and cultures, sustainable development, peace and conflict and inequities of power and resources.

The second element consists of attitudes. Students' attitudes are supposed to change. They start to develop an interest in the others' experience of daily life and not only what is presented through the media. Then they are more willing to look for opportunities to engage with others in a relationship of equality. Likewise, they adopt the others' perspectives in order to contrast and compare the dominant perceptions in their own society. Through intercultural communication, be it face to face or technology-mediated, students are placed in a context of acceptance and rejection. They are able to cope with their own different kinds of experience

with a different culture and try to conform to the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication of the others.

Last but not least, students are expected to learn skills. They learn when observing a social phenomenon to identify ethnocentric perspectives in an event and explain their origins. They learn, as well, how to identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems. Then they use their explanations of the sources of misunderstanding and dysfunction to help interlocutors overcome conflicting perspectives. Finding compromises, seeking consensus, accepting majority decisions, tolerating minorities, promoting encouragement, balancing rights and responsibilities, and showing trust and courage are also included. Additionally, they learn how to make their own opinions (e.g., needs, interests, feelings, values, etc.) clear, speak coherently, explain clearly, and abandon every kind of violence, humiliation, or insult. This is what global citizenship education is all about. As global citizens, students become able to solve problems, make decisions, think critically, communicate ideas effectively and work well within teams and groups.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to shed some light on the importance of global citizenship education for students in order to more effectively prepare them to successfully function in this global society of diverse cultures and customs where their initial understanding of these cultures is often very limited. By promoting the development of intercultural identity in students so that their intercultural competence through their intercultural contact allows them to understand not only the political, legal and economic functions but also the social and moral awareness, will lead them to succeed in their own culture as well as those of other societies. These skills and attributes are increasingly recognized as being essential to succeed in many areas of 21st century life such as family, education, and workplace.

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