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Interlocutors of Transformation and Reform: Decolonising Global Citizenship Education through Cosmubuntism

Abstract

While the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) views the goal of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as empowering learners to engage and become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world, new-liberal approaches to GCE in service of the market, threatens to diminish these goals. This paper highlights the need for reconciliatory pedagogies in a fragmented world, emphasising the importance of a shared humanity in GCE. I argue that while European Enlightenment frameworks prioritise individualism and universalism, transformative African philosophies like Ubuntu emphasise communal interdependence, relational ethics, and decolonial knowledge systems. To address the diverse educational aspirations and challenges of all nations, GCE must engage scholars and communities from both the Global North and South. Cosmubuntism, offers a reinterpretation of cosmopolitanism grounded in Ubuntu, which directly confronts structural and cultural violence, advocating for care, non-violence, social justice, and participatory democracy. This, I believe, offers a necessary shift from Eurocentric, neoliberal models toward a justice-oriented framework in education, guiding curriculum, teacher training, and policy.

Keywords: *Ubuntu, Decolonised Education, Cosmubuntism*

Zusammenfassung

Während die Organisation der Vereinten Nationen für Erziehung, Wissenschaft und Kultur (UNESCO) das Ziel der Global Citizenship Education (GCE) darin sieht, Lernende zu befähigen, sich für eine gerechtere, friedlichere, tolerantere, integrativere, sicherere und nachhaltigere Welt zu engagieren und aktiv dazu beizutragen, drohen neoliberale Ansätze der GCE im Dienste des Marktes diese Ziele zu untergraben. Dieser Beitrag unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit einer versöhnenden Pädagogik in einer fragmentierten Welt und betont die Bedeutung einer gemeinsamen Menschlichkeit in der allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung. Ich behaupte, dass die europäische Aufklärung Individualismus und Universalismus in den Vordergrund stellt, während afrikanische Philosophien wie Ubuntu die gemeinschaftliche Interdependenz, die Beziehungsethik und dekoloniale Wissenssysteme betonen. Um den vielfältigen Bildungsbestrebungen und Herausforderungen aller Nationen gerecht zu werden, muss GCE Wissenschaftler und Gemeinschaften aus dem globalen Norden und Süden einbeziehen. Kosmubuntismus bietet eine Neuinterpretation des Kosmopolitismus auf der Grundlage von Ubuntu, die sich direkt gegen strukturelle und kulturelle Gewalt wendet und für Fürsorge, Gewaltlosigkeit, soziale Gerechtigkeit und partizipative Demokratie eintritt. Ich glaube, dass dies eine notwendige Abkehr von eurozentrischen, neoliberalen Modellen hin zu einem gerechtigkeitsorientierten Rahmen von Bildung darstellt, der Lehrpläne, Lehrerbildung und Politik bestimmen sollte.

Schlüsselworte: *Ubuntu, entkolonialisierte Bildung, Cosmubuntism*

GCED – revisited and contextualised

Global citizenship, a concept discussed by Appiah (2007), Miller (2013), and Nussbaum (1997) in international discourse, is said to trace back to the fourth century BCE, when the Greek Cynic philosopher, Diogenes declared, "I am a citizen of the world." Shiel and Mann (2006) believe that a global citizen is one who understands the workings of the economic, political, social, cultural, technological, and environmental world and has a sense of their role in it. For others, global citizens respect and value diversity, challenge social injustice, participate on various community levels from local to global, take responsibility for their actions, and care for the fate of human beings across societies (Appiah, 2007; Shiel & Mann, 2006). UNESCO defines global citizenship as "a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global" (2015, p.14).

The United Nation's self-declared transformative Agenda for Sustainable Development focus on quality education (goal 4), specifically target 4.7, envisage that all learners "acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture

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of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development." (UN, 2015, p.17).

Modernity brought about significant changes in workplaces, family structures, and governance, which necessitated a transformation in education systems to better prepare learners for an increasingly dynamic world. In response to these social and cultural shifts, reform pedagogy emerged to reconceptualise education, moving away from traditional, rigid, and content-driven approaches. As Dewey (1938) and Montessori (2019) emphasised, this new vision of education aimed not only on changing the way knowledge was imparted, but also to foster personal development, creativity, and social responsibility. Lang-Wojtasik and Neff (2014) further note that reform pedagogy arose as a reaction against outdated educational structures, promoting a more flexible, learner-centred approach. Influenced by the critical consciousness and liberation ideas of Nyerere's (1967) and Freire's (2018), among others, South Africa's post-apartheid educational transformation, as part of reform pedagogy, shifted from a rigid, hierarchical system that upheld racial segregation to one focused on inclusivity, critical thinking, and preparing students for democratic participation.

The Global Education Network Europe (GENE) (2022) shares the ideals of fostering sustainable development and global citizenship through education. The Dublin Declaration is a framework that aligns with the UN's idea of education as education being instrumental in fostering a world characterised by global social justice, peace, sustainability, international solidarity and respect for human rights across the globe. The African Agenda 2063 aligns with the UN's and the Dublin Declaration's educational aspirations in that it also emphasises quality education, gender equality, and economic growth, reflecting a mutual commitment to sustainable development. While the SDGs provide a framework for all nations and with broad targets, and the Dublin Declaration, a more regional, European focus, Agenda 2063 is tailored specifically to Africa's unique contexts and addressing continental unity and independence, promoting indigenous knowledge and heritage as vital components of development (Parikh & Royo, 2022). Neoliberalist tendencies in education around the world, however, represent an ideological shift away from the humane traits envisaged by UNESCO to a commodification of education, emphasising market efficiency, competition, and individualism. This shift in focus may undermine efforts to promote global citizenship. Booth (2021, p. 63) cites Edmiston (2017) to argue that in the face of dominant neoliberal narratives that underplay the role of structural forces in inequality, individuals living with poverty and social disadvantage are framed – and come to frame themselves – as being poor because they are 'bad citizens'. While the UN and European educational ideals have been praised for its promotion of cosmopolitan and social rights, some scholars, particularly from African perspectives have raised concerns.

GCE – criticised

Tikly (2019), asserts that the GENE's current policy agendas often overlook the historical role of education in supporting unsustainable development and emphasises the need for education policies to be reoriented towards social and environmental justice, addressing the colonial legacy and Africa's position in global processes. Motala, Sayed, and Maggot (2023) add that there is a lack of clear focus on equity and racism in the perpetuation of Western[1] dominance in knowledge production, which hinders the decolonisation of education in Africa. Jooste and Heleta (2017) note that GCE often carries Western-centric biases that potentially undermine non-Western values and exclude indigenous knowledge systems. For Jooste and Heleta (2017), the term global citizenship is loaded and patronising and that the concept is a Northern idea that does not apply to the global South. Instead, they propose the development of 'globally competent graduates' such as Ubuntu. Jooste and Heleta vehemently dismiss GCE with the assertion that "it is not worthwhile to spend time and resources on vague rhetoric and an attempt to popularize buzzwords while most students in the Global South lives in an unjust world" (2017, p. 38). Similarly, Bowden (2003) argues that global citizenship is both a Western and a political notion that offers false hope to stateless individuals such as refugees. The term, "citizen" generally means rights and security provided by a sovereign state (Bowden, 2003). However, to claim oneself a citizen of the world will not afford help from any government because individuals have no rights at the world level (Miller, 2013). Aktas et al. (2017) in Massaro (2022, p. 100) cautioned that institutions offering a degree in global citizenship could send the message that global citizenship is something to be earned rather than developed. Further, Lilley et al. (2015a) suggested that universities promoting the idea of global citizenship have "limited evidence in practice" (p. 957) of how to accomplish this goal.

For Jessica Pykett and colleagues "a key part of what citizens do concerns what they are enabled to do, in terms of what they know, what skills they have, their access to material resources and what subject positions are available to them as accepted norms, expectations and virtuous character" (2010, p. 527). Booth (2021, p. 63) also notes that people from marginalised groups should not be seen simply as objects of study, or groups that need to be 'helped' or 'put right', their disadvantage stemming from poor choices and 'bad citizenship'. Instead, education for global citizenship must make visible the many structural antecedents of inequality. Bowden (2003) reminds us that to be a globally minded citizen means abiding by the phrase, "think globally, act locally" (p. 359). It is thus imperative that GCE incorporate local epistemologies, values and norms (Waghid & Hungwe, 2023, p. 216).

GCE – challenged by 'common good'

Messner describes common good as "the social cooperation that individuals obtain as members of society for the fulfilment of their existential ends" where the ends include those conditions that support the flourishing of lives (cited in Melé, 2009, p. 235). Common good espouses the idea that ultimately, institutions and society exist for the human person (Argandoña, 1998, p. 194). In line with Eva & Norren's, (2014, p. 257) contention, humanity should not have any boundari-

es. The United Nations and its numerous organs, World Trade Organisations (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Health Organisations (WHO) and other institutions are legitimised as institutions that galvanise global collective responses to collective problems often in collaboration with national, local and citizen-led organisations. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Balfour, Bomassi and Martinelli (2022) note, the West used its resources and policy innovations to shield itself from the worst of the pandemic's economic effects and refused to help developing countries, who were already economically vulnerable. The pandemic could have been a watershed moment, an opportunity for the EU to reframe donor-recipient relations, build on ongoing efforts to eliminate global poverty, and demonstrate the value of multilateralism, yet the EU pursued insular strategies, from hoarding COVID-19 vaccinations to opposing vaccine waivers (Balfour, Bomassi & Martinelli, 2022, p. 2). This was one of many instances where the Global North showed its interpretation of common good.

In April 2022, the United Kingdom passed a law that those who seek refugee status wait in Rwanda for the outcome of the application (Syal & Nadeem, 2022). However, the country's borders are open to refugees fleeing from Ukraine. This shows the hypocrisy in the British-Rwanda-agreement to be integrated in society. There are other instances where the western world was found wanting in terms of their sincerity about common good and common humanity. When the Russia-Ukrainian war disrupted higher education, Black African international students experienced racial discrimination while White European international students had easier access to transport across national borders from Ukraine (Waghid & Hungwe, 2023, p. 217). This brings the cultivation of common humanity in search of safety and security into question (Pietromarchi, 2022). Most notably is the recent case that South Africa brought against Israel at the International Criminal Court of Justice for genocide against Palestinians in which numerous Western countries were complicit, either in the supply of weapons and logistics, repeating false narratives through their media or simply looking the other way while thousands of Palestinians (mostly women and children) lost their lives. Even after the prosecutor issued an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu and his defence minister, Yoav Gallant, Western heads of states, starting with the United States' Joe Biden, expressed outrage. To this end, Enzo Traverso notes in his book, titled Gaza faces history (2024, p. 18): "We have reached the core of the dialectic of Enlightenment: The International Court of Justice is indeed the legal expression of a universal idea of humanity inherited from the Enlightenment, but its principles clash with Orientalist prejudices, which limit its scope to within the borders of the West, the cradle of civilization".

These incidents show up a double standard in the West and raises serious concerns about its sincerity in its interpretation and application of common good goals. In these cases, it appeared that, while people in many pockets of the world, such as student protests on campuses and in the streets of South Africa, New York, and London, to name but a few, were showing solidarity and expressing common humanity, the idea of universalism was merely about the West extending its values to the whole planet. Therefore, an alternative approach is warranted.

GCE – Cosmubutized

South Africa comes from a violent past but is striving towards a South African sense of nationhood. The country adopted as coat of arms, the source of African humanist philosophy, the Khoi-San expression "!ke e: /xarra //ke", meaning "diverse people unite". Along-side this expression is the Zulu phrase: "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" – meaning, a person (human) is a person through other people (humans), or "I am what I am because of who we all are" (Kabantu, 1999). Ubuntu is an African philosophy that places humanity or humanness at the centre. Ubuntu means that "one's humanity only comes through the humanity of others, or that our humanity is bound or linked together" (Etieyibo, 2017, p. 318). In Ubuntu-thinking, individual success is tied to community well-being. Tutu (1999) uses Ubuntu to mean "generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate" and emphasise that it is not "I think therefore I am", as expressed by philosopher Descartes, but rather, "I am human because I belong" (Tutu, 1999).The term ubuntu belongs to the Nguni language family in South Africa, but has equivalents in many other African languages, like utu in Swahili (for the etymology of ubuntu see e.g. Ramose, 1999). In a transformative way, it is an approach of African enlightenment, overcoming the colonial impact of individualist-universalist thinking of European Enlightenment.

Ubuntu is applied in various ways, including ubuntu as a human quality, as an ethics or world view, and as a postcolonial ideology. No matter the application, Ubuntu is essentially a relational concept, where interdependence and connectedness are essential. Ubuntu is an understanding that every human being is integrated into a comprehensive network of mutual dependencies and that the human self exists only in relationship to its surroundings: these relationships are what constitutes the human self. A person can exist only in relation to other persons; the human self can exist only in relationship to its surroundings and these relationships are what the human being is (Shutte, 2001, p. 23). Ubuntu also recognizes "the interconnection between the natural and supernatural, physical and metaphysical, visible and invisible dimensions of the world. Currently living human and nonhuman beings, ancestors, the yet unborn, and the natural world are interconnected" (Kelbessa, 2011, pp. 569–570). Ethically, Ubuntu suggests that to be human is to 'affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish relations with them' (Ramose, 1999, p. 52, p. 194). "Ubuntu societies" (Murithi, 2009) existed long before colonialism and provided the initial "social capital" that made human interaction amongst culturally diverse people possible. South Africa's history is filled with the spirit of Ubuntu. Before Apartheid, the presence of Ubuntu was visible in cosmopolitan communities such as District Six (Cape

Town), Sophiatown (Johannesburg), South End (Port Elizabeth), etc. that were destroyed during apartheid. These communities were multi-cultural in composition and expressed one of the features of Ubuntu- people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, peacefully co-existing as one community. While Nelson Mandela's charisma and leadership were undeniably crucial in uniting South Africa, his success in gaining support across racial groups was deeply rooted in his ability to tap into something that existed amongst the indigenous people, Ubuntu. By appealing to a common humanity rather than racial or political differences, Mandela's leadership stood out. Unto a quick word on cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism originates in ancient Greek philosophy that describes the ideal citizen as "a citizen of the world" or global citizen (Ribeiro, 2005, p. 19). The cosmopolitan's allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings, of diverse ethnic extractions, beliefs and political persuasions that stand "in relation rather than in opposition" (Eze, 2017). Eze however identifies deficiencies in prevailing concepts of cosmopolitanism. Eze argues that, while the dominant discourses on cosmopolitanism address such issues as the necessity of inclusive human community and the eradication of geopolitical boundaries, these discussions nevertheless remain elitist (Eze, 2017, p. 86). The dominant forms of cosmopolitanism are elitist because they favour only select groups of our world communities, such as world travellers, or certain lifestyles characterized by the partial integration of different cultural practices, languages or even religions (like Buddhism) into one's life. This concept of cosmopolitanism excludes all those unable to live such a lifestyle and brands them as primitive, ethnocentric, biased, or uninformed (Eze, 2017, p. 87).

Graness, (2018, p. 396) links cosmopolitanism and ubuntu. Citing Pogge, Graness (2018) argues that all cosmopolitan positions are marked by three features, namely individualism (individual human beings are what ultimately matters); universality (they matter equally, and nobody is exempted by distance or lack of a shared community from potential demands arising out of the counting of everybody equally); and generality (every human being is the ultimate unit of concern for everyone) (Pogge, 1994, p. 89). The relationship between the individual and the community is also the central point of African authors' criticism of Western cosmopolitan theories. This is where the indigenous concept ubuntu can help search for an alternative approach to think cosmopolitanism. Theoretically, the concept of cosmopolitanism is both fixed and not flexible to accommodate the dynamic and ever-changing nature of society. To allow for a decolonized, inclusive, African notion of GCE, cosmubuntism (Davids, 2018) is suggested.

Cosmubuntism is derived from cosmopolitan and Ubuntu. Cosmubuntism respects human dignity (Appiah, 2007), reciprocal generosity and hospitality based on a common humanity (Tutu, 1999). Cosmubuntu communities have the characteristics of heterogeneity in terms of population; display cultural diversity; operate on the basis of respect, human dignity, and tolerance; show generosity, caring, and compassion; foster a sense of belonging; and are in a state of ever-changing and becoming. A few examples of the use of cosmubuntism in South African classrooms suggest that reconciliatory pedagogies (Nussey, 2018) and social justice can be useful to teach democratic citizenship and nation-building. This shows paths to humanity enlightenment beyond a narrow European thinking.

The subject, Life Orientation for example covers human rights, social justice, and cultural diversity, promoting understanding across racial and cultural lines and for citizens to contribute actively to a more inclusive society (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Another subject, History, in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) creates space in the history curriculum to address democratic citizenship and social cohesion. South African teachers are encouraged to use non-violent communication ideas of empathy and understanding in human engagements feature in their pedagogical approaches in the country's journey towards nationhood. Crispin Hemson (2024) in his book chapter, "Education for transformation", explores the role of education in fostering critical consciousness and active citizenship, challenging narrow Eurocentric Enlightenment notions of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) by promoting social justice and global responsibility. By using a critical pedagogy, Hemson emphasises the importance of critical pedagogy in enabling learners to question and transform societal structures that perpetuate inequality and violence. By engaging in reflective dialogue and praxis, students develop a deeper understanding of their socio-political contexts, empowering them to become active agents of change. Hemson advocates for decolonising educational curricula and methodologies to reflect indigenous knowledge systems and African epistemologies – an approach which counters the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives in GCE, fostering a more inclusive and culturally relevant educational experience that resonates with African learners. By incorporating Ubuntu into educational practices, Hemson challenges the individualistic orientation of traditional GCE models rooted in Enlightenment thinking. His focus on communal values, interconnectedness, and collective well-being, aligns GCE with the lived experiences and cultural contexts of African societies.

Similarly, Kaye & Harris (2017) promotes a more inclusive form of GCE that respects local contexts and indigenous knowledge systems. The authors espouse the idea that direct community involvement in research and curriculum development through dialogue and collaborative problem-solving, incorporating local languages, histories and cultural practices foster a sense of ownership and agency which challenges narrow, Eurocentric perspectives and promote a more equitable approach to GCE. Bosio & Waghid (2023), add another level of critique against Western-centric and neoliberal conceptions of GCE by advocating for a more inclusive and transformative framework. As a counter to the narrow framing of GCE, Bosio & Waghid suggest six pedagogical priorities – praxis, reflective dialogue, decolonialism, ecocritical perspectives, caring ethics, and empowering humanity – which they argue will help students to move beyond individualistic, passive, de-solidarized, de-politicized and complacent to the status quo tendencies

allowing them to understand and take action regarding matters of injustice, inequality, power, oppression and exclusion that appear globally and locally as a consequence of growing neo-liberalism (Bosio & Waghid, 2023, p. 29).

These two sentences should read: The use of protest songs as a form of literature can be a creative way of engaging learners in classrooms. As a literary and historical device, it has great pedagogical potential (Msila, 2013). During the tensest moments in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation sessions, the chairperson, Desmond Tutu often used song to break the tension in an emotive atmosphere. and to show the aggrieved mutual care and understanding thereby bridging the divide between them and the perpetrators in the room.

Using critical literature pedagogies involves teaching leaners about patriotism and citizenship, by comparing contradictory historic ideas of nationhood. This pedagogy involves a combination of storytelling that is critical and hopeful and stories that tell of grief and oppression (Guilherme & Phipps, 2004). Using an approach where the teacher highlights hidden ideas and practices for deeper discussion and reflection (Skolverket, 2014), facilitates opportunities to discuss nation-building and democratic citizenship (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Mixing Ubuntu-values for example with an acceptance of cosmopolitanism in a future democracy offers some countenance to the negative memories of forced removals and pass laws with which some learners and teachers must live. Not forgetting the past, but working productively with it to develop skills, knowledge and values that prevent people from making the same mistakes are valuable in cosmubuntu pedagogies. Working productively with different learners' ideas of democracy and imagining democracy as future hope, through civic responsibility teaching is also a useful cosmubuntu pedagogy. Achieving the outcomes in the CAPS curriculum (DBE, 2011) requires of teachers to be sensitive to learners' socialisation and cultural background. Davids (2018) asserts that the traumatic and difficult histories concealed in the curriculum require intelligent decoding without losing the learner who is a future citizen.

Graness (2018, p. 400) asserts that integrating indigenous and African perspectives (such as cosmubuntu) into GCE is essential for developing more inclusive and decolonised curriculums. This approach not only enriches learners' understanding of global citizenship but also acknowledges and respects the diversity of cultural perspectives. By incorporating cosmubuntu into GCE, schools and communities can create environments where dialogue, respect, and understanding become the foundation for addressing conflict and fostering harmonious relationships.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of an increasingly fractious world, the need to explore reconciliatory pedagogies has never been more urgent. We need to be clear though about our understanding of a common humanity. To ensure that GCE authentically reflects and address the diverse educational aspirations and challenges of all nations, it is essential to engage Global North and South scholars and communities in the ongoing discourse about global citizenship. While European Enlightenment often position knowledge production within Eurocentric frameworks and emphasise individual rationality, universalism, and rights-based approaches to education, transformative African educational philosophies, such as Ubuntu, prioritise communal interdependence, relational ethics, and decolonial knowledge systems. This dialectical tension highlights the need to move beyond hegemonic narratives and embrace pluralistic, context-sensitive approaches to education. Echoing Lang-Wojtasik & Oza (2020), GCED must serve all people equitably. In order to truly address global inequities, GCED must therefore be co-constructed with diverse stakeholders, integrating the voices, histories, and aspirations of communities in the Global North and South.

Cosmubuntism offers an African-centred reinterpretation of cosmopolitanism, rooted in the principles of Ubuntu, which emphasise care, interdependence, and non-violence. Unlike traditional cosmopolitan ideals Cosmubuntism directly confronts structural and cultural violence, promoting social justice, participatory democracy, and ethical global interactions.

The implications are that future education must transcend Eurocentric, neoliberal models and embrace a pluraliversalist, justice-oriented framework that integrates transformative African epistemologies. Cosmubuntism can play a role in reshaping the curricula, training teachers and rethinking education policy that emphasise reconciliation, ethical relationality, and non-violent communication. In this way a truly inclusive, equitable, and sustainable global citizenship education can be fostered. With increasing global uncertainty, Cosmubuntism is not just a useful guide – it is a necessity for sustainable development, security, and prosperity.

Notes

1 It might be challenging for some readers, that the terms Global North and Western ideas are used in a parallel way in this article. The reason behind it, is due to different discourses, using the two references in different historical contexts. Systematic wise, in both cases, the geographic terms have a strong societal meaning in a decolonial way; to overcome the dominance of imperialistic, colonialist and today neo-liberal approaches, grounded in the narratives of European Enlightenment, and continuing the dominance of master-thinking.

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