

Global Education in Times of Discomfort¹

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Abstract:

The development of global education as a grassroots movement for educational change has always been subject to the influences of prevailing economic and political forces. Perspectives are offered on how the formative years of global education in the United Kingdom and Canada were shaped, including the impacts of controversies and tensions among proponents and opposition from governments in power. A retrospective assessment of my experiences as a global educator during this period gives rise to some personal reflections on how my perceptions of global education have changed over time and some thoughts on how the movement might tackle some key challenges that inhibit its broader acceptance. In the current era of neoliberalism, it is argued that the visionary goals of global education are now more urgently needed in order to provide future decision makers with the tools required to make ethically sound judgments on matters that will determine the fate of humankind.

Key words: global education, futures education, neoliberalism, reflective global education

Introduction

The haunting image of Mr. Gradgrind in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* is never far from my mind as I reflect on trends in public education over the past twenty years. 'Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts' (Dickens, 1969, p. 47) was the command he gave to a new teacher who was struggling to overcome the naturally creative and fanciful urges of the children in his class. Dickens' wry commentary on educational trends in mid-19th century Britain, at the height of her powers as the leading industrial nation of the era, is a salutary reminder of the dangers in forging too close an alignment between schooling and the perceived needs of the workforce, especially where the skills required for the latter are narrowly defined and leave little to nurture the imagination. The comparison between the current era of technological and communications innovation and the industrial grime of the nineteenth century may seem a little far-fetched, but I want to suggest that both can be viewed as times of discomfort for educational visions that favor the holistic development of the child and place a premium on learning rather than on the simpler acquisition of factual knowledge. Just as Dickens wished to critique the obsessive focus on memorization and the treatment of children as manufactured products, global educators in the 21st century are having to combat the trends that have prioritized education for employment and economic growth and have defined value in education as that which can be measured. Today's 'learning outcomes are hopefully more sophisticated than those envisaged for the latter day industrial worker but the premise of schooling principally as a training ground for an unquestioning workforce is, arguably, not much different.

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In this article, I want to revisit some of the key ideas, debates and tensions that have influenced my vision of the purpose and practice of global education and reflect on some personal lessons learnt over 35 years as an educator in the United Kingdom and Canada. In so doing, I hope to illustrate the need for constant reassessment of, and reinvestment in, global education's visionary goals, especially during periods of time when economic interests, as determined by the global free market, trump the broader concerns of planetary health and the common good. As I will indicate, conflict and controversy have always shaped the global education narrative but the neoliberal values that dominate contemporary discourse on public education pose a challenge of an entirely different magnitude. These are very personal reflections on an era that has witnessed monumental changes in geopolitical and economic systems, all of which, inevitably, have influenced educational thinking. The probable continuance of such rapid change, allied to the uncertainty of its outcomes, is the context for a discussion later in the article on the future of global education in the current era of discomfort.

Inauspicious beginnings

My initiation in the field of global education began when I joined the Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC), a London-based non-governmental organization that was a leader in the promotion of the concept of global citizenship in the formal education system in the UK. My role, as Deputy Director and Conference Organizer, was to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge, perspectives and ideas about world events, global systems and trends through conferences for students, newsletters and briefing notes, and a speakers' service that dispatched high-profile and expert speakers to schools across the country. It was, in my view at the time, a challenging but non-controversial role: in the last quarter of the 20th century, given the horrors that century had already witnessed, who could argue against the desire to instill in young people greater global understanding and cross-cultural tolerance? As I was to learn, painfully at times, throughout my career the concept of global citizenship is, at best, contested and oftentimes subjected to a plethora of overt and covert forces that attempt to undermine its key principles or denigrate its feasibility.

Controversy was, in fact, imbued in the very beginnings of CEWC itself. At the time of the official opening of the organization in 1940 – a time when rampant nationalism was the order of the day – CEWC's founders were accused of 'humbug and false piety' and the leading educational newspaper, *The Times Education Supplement*, commented: 'Fundamentally, their claim is not different from that of the Nazis and Communists' (Heater, 1984, p. 56). It would not be unreasonable to hope that the memories of World War II would have snuffed out such sentiments for good, at least in Europe, but it seems that nationalism's stronghold is persistent and pervasive, even extending its tentacles to infuse the development of global education itself (Pike, 2000).

Despite the vestiges of nationalism lurking in the wings, the growth of world studies (the forerunner to global education in the UK) during the 1970s and 80s was a time of excitement, of dizzying creativity among its many proponents and, most importantly, a time of relative curricular freedom in the formal education system. Non-governmental organizations, such as Oxfam, Christian Aid and the World Wildlife Fund, played a key role in the promotion of key ideas through conferences and workshops, funding for worthy initiatives, and an array of

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exciting print resources that demonstrated how teachers could engage students' minds in the consideration of complex global issues through thought-provoking (though not always thoughtful) activities and simulation games in the classroom. Given the primary global concerns of the time – the seemingly intractable Cold War and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation – teachers of many subjects eagerly devoured these innovative teaching methods and found space for them in their curricula. It could be said that the coming of age of world studies was marked by funding from the UK government for the World Studies 8-13 Project, aimed at the middle school years (Fisher & Hicks, 1985).

Multiple influences were beginning to shape world studies during this growth period. The influence of the global education movement in the United States was certainly evident, particularly in discussions of the key concept of global interdependence (Anderson, 1979) and through explorations of this idea in activities such as *The World in the Neighbourhood* (Richardson, 1976), echoing the pioneering work of Chad Alger in Columbus, Ohio (Tye, 1990). Robert Harvey's (1975) seminal work was also influential in sharpening understanding of the implications of global systems and in defining the concept of perspective consciousness. These ideas from across the Atlantic meshed, though not without ideological tensions, with the discourse emanating from the British development education and peace education movements, both of which had made good progress in helping teachers explore some critical concepts such as injustice, inequality, disarmament and conflict resolution. A new ingredient in the world studies mix was a shameless appropriation of some key insights from the New Science, particularly the work of physicists such as Fritjof Capra and David Bohm, and scholars in the 'human potential movement', including Jean Houston, Marilyn Ferguson and Theodore Roszak. The application of theories of quantum mechanics to explain contemporary global phenomena offered a scientific underpinning for world studies proponents' exploration of global systems and provided a conceptual framework for critiquing the fragmentation of knowledge that they perceived as endemic in the construction of school curricula (Pike & Selby, 1988). Supporting and strengthening this critique of mainstream practice in UK schools were arguments and models developed by learning theorists such as Carl Rogers, David Kolb and Bernice McCarthy with regard to the necessity of paying attention to the process of learning and teaching, not just to curriculum content. World studies embraced such theories with gusto, advocating for a fundamental overhaul of classroom practice and thereby transforming the role of the teacher from an imparter of knowledge to a facilitator of students' learning. The proposed changes in practice (which were probably more evident in teachers' handbooks than in actual classrooms) caused one commentator to suggest that world studies was 'process rich and content poor . . . as students were subjected to "one damned simulation" after another' (Lister, 1987, p. 59).

It would be remiss to ignore the impact of some tensions and controversies among world studies proponents during this growth period. At one notable national conference in 1982, a keynote speaker criticized the world studies movement for legitimizing racial inequality, an attack that fractured the movement and led to considerable soul searching with regard to the relationship between world studies and anti-racist education (Starkey, 1982). At about the same time, a similar challenge was thrown down by feminist educators, including those working under the umbrella of world studies. Aileen McKenzie (1987), writing in the *World Studies Journal*, refers to 'the amazing, self-deluding games men in world studies play' and asserts that women

'engaged in world studies are very much aware that our contribution is likely to be of far greater significance than that made by all or most men involved in the same field of work' (p. 2).

From a longer-term perspective, the significance of such challenges lies more in the fact that the educational climate of the time allowed, even fostered, the occurrence of such debate among educators. The discourse of the day was conducted in forums, such as conferences and professional journals, by those at the leading edge of thinking about public education's responsibilities with regard to contemporary social issues. Debates were infused with the passionate beliefs emanating from diverse political positions, but the notion that education had a primary responsibility to help create a more just, equitable and sustainable global society was shared by all. In a sense, this was a 'golden age' for global education in the UK, and it was about to change.

The impact of neoliberalism

My first real confrontation with the ideological opponents of global education in the UK occurred with the publication by Roger Scruton, a junior minister in Margaret Thatcher's government, of a report entitled *World Studies: Education or Indoctrination?* (Scruton, 1985). In this pamphlet, Scruton argues that world studies is essentially Marxist indoctrination and is neither a proper subject nor a necessary component of the school curriculum. In order to provide evidence for a central tenet in his argument, Scruton claims that Emily Brontë had achieved a profound understanding of the world around her without ever having left her North Yorkshire home. In our response to Scruton's paper (Pike & Selby, 1986), we pointed out, perhaps rather too gleefully, that the writer had in fact attended a finishing school in Switzerland. Notwithstanding such moments of light-hearted academic banter, the attacks by Scruton and others of like mind (e.g. Marks, 1984, Cox & Scruton, 1984) marked a serious and significant shift in the political discourse surrounding world studies and related fields in social and political education. From having enjoyed some, albeit limited, support from the Department of Education and Science, world studies was now directly under attack by government ministers and influential academics. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the freedom enjoyed by teachers to debate the place and scope of teaching contemporary global issues in the K-12 curriculum was severely restricted by the multiple impacts of the 1988 Education Reform Act that heralded the arrival of the first National Curriculum in England and Wales. Not only was the National Curriculum, for the most part, unreceptive to the substance and style of teaching advocated by world studies, but also the pervasive and relentless shift towards the standardization of curriculum and assessment left teachers with little time or energy to explore ways to integrate topics that were deemed to be peripheral, despite some evidence of initial resistance on the part of global educators (Vulliamy & Webb, 1993).

At the time of my move to the University of Toronto in 1992, it seemed that the tide of neoliberal thinking sweeping the UK had not yet infused education systems in Canada. Indeed, the federal government, under the auspices of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), had committed significant funding to global education projects in 8 of the 10 provinces. Innovative projects undertaken in collaboration with teachers' unions, including the development of global schools in one province, were nurturing a generation of global educators that were building on best practice ideas from many countries. School boards were actively

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promoting global education as a key strand in the social studies curriculum and were funding teachers' workshops and summer institutes. Some provincial governments, where responsibility for education resides, demonstrated direct support: *The Common Curriculum* (Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 1995), developed by a working group under the auspices of the New Democratic government in Ontario was, arguably, the most pro-global education curriculum ever produced by a government in power.

It could be argued that many of the values that Canadians espouse provide a fertile soil for global education to grow and flourish. A passion for internationalism, most notable in the pioneering work of former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, is integral to Canadians' belief about their role in the world (Moore, 1992). As a self-evidently multicultural society that continues to actively encourage immigration, acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity is a fundamental principle to which most Canadians would ascribe. A fascination for the resource-rich land, particularly the vast areas of remaining wilderness, is also deeply engrained in the Canadian psyche; it is no coincidence that Greenpeace began its controversial existence as an environmental pressure group in Vancouver. Thus, the commitment of significant funding from CIDA was not surprising at the time. It should not be inferred, however, that global education enjoyed a trouble-free period of growth in Canada. As in the UK, tensions existed between proponents of related fields in social and political education and the jostling for position of various global education models and theories was also similar. Toh's (1993) assertion of the deep divide between the liberal technocratic and the transformative paradigms of global education, with the vast majority of classroom practice steeped in the former, was startling for many in the field but probably an accurate assessment of the challenges faced by many teachers in introducing global education's more radical ideas and practice.

By the mid-1990s, the tide of widespread support for global education in Canada was rapidly turning. CIDA, without warning, cut its funding for the provincial global education projects in 1995, leaving many projects and organizations struggling for alternative funds and destroying the provincial and national dialogues and support networks that were so important to teachers. *The Common Curriculum* was thrown out by the incoming Conservative government in Ontario and replaced with a much more traditional model. Recently established Global Schools discovered that their visions were no longer in line with school board mandates and withered on the vine. Inexorably, the hallmarks of neoliberal ideology began to take hold in education thinking and systems: curricula increasingly oriented to the imperatives of a free-market global economy and the honing of skills necessary to perpetuate it; an insistence on learning outcomes that were closely allied to the perceived needs of employers; the prioritization of STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) subjects over the softer and more creative arts, humanities and social sciences; an attribution of greater value to learning that can be immediately measured; and an increasing commercialization of education that views learning as a product to be bought, rather than as a lifelong way of being.

Global education was patently unprepared for this onslaught. Not only were some of its key principles a poor fit with neoliberal thinking, but also the movement itself – both in the UK and Canada – had paid insufficient attention to the fundamentals of gaining credibility within either academic or political establishments. Indeed, being essentially a grassroots movement, global educators had eschewed the idea of aligning themselves with establishment thinking, arguing

that such thinking was at the roots of many contemporary global crises and, therefore, needed to be challenged. Additionally, global education proponents had made many assertions about the efficacy of their favored teaching and learning strategies, but had devoted little time to providing supporting, research-based evidence (Lister, 1987). When faced with the sweeping reforms of curricula and assessment practices that neoliberal thinking instigated, global educators were ill-equipped to demonstrate the validity of their beliefs and practice or to adapt to the changing circumstances in education thinking. The current era of discomfort for global education has been further exacerbated by the pervasive impacts of subsequent global events, notably 9/11 and the economic collapse of 2008. The irony, of course, is that global educators believe that their vision for education is key to developing safer and more sustainable societies, but they are struggling to be heard amidst the strident neoliberal voices.

Some personal lessons learned

The challenges to the global education movement over the past 25 years have not shaken my belief in the correctness and necessity of its vision but they have caused me to retrospectively assess my perceptions and practice as a global educator. The reflections that follow are personal in nature and are not intended to be comments on how global education in general has been shaped.

1. A shift in perception of the role and purpose of global education

My first encounter with ideas that were to become global education was exhilarating and inspiring. It represented for me a new way of teaching that energized a tired social studies curriculum and made students' learning more relevant to the real world. Teaching about global issues and systems, about other cultures and their perspectives on the world, created a new dimension that I considered to be an important addition to the store of knowledge and ideas that students should attain from their schooling. It was, in a sense, a value-added component that enriched the K-12 experience. As my career progressed, and my understanding of global issues matured, my perception of global education changed; far from being an add-on, I have come to believe in its necessity and urgency for ensuring a sustainable future. The major global events of the past quarter of a century have illustrated, with alarming clarity and regularity, the need for informed, globally-minded citizens who can take thoughtful decisions and actions with due regard for the long-term health of the planet and all its inhabitants. The best evidence available on the potential impacts of climate change suggests that there is very limited time remaining to take substantive action globally to mitigate the worst effects of a warming planet and to adapt to the inevitable changes that are already in progress. Unfortunately, education on climate change and sustainability appear peripheral to the dominant agenda of education for employment and economic growth. As democratic rights and freedoms become available, at long last, to more people around the world, the need for informed citizenry becomes starkly evident: with more people participating in the political process, the impacts of democratic decisions in multiple locations begin to play an even more significant role in determining the future of the planet. However, the continuing drama of the Arab Spring has reminded us that the transformation towards responsible civic participation is complex and arduous, with effective and visionary education for all at the heart of the requirements for a successful outcome. In comparison with the world that I attempted to understand and represent at the

start of my career, we live today in an infinitely more complicated, connected and fragile global environment. 'Human history', suggested H.G. Wells in 1920, 'is a race between education and catastrophe' (Partington, 2004, p. 47). Over the last century, we have come to learn much more about the forces of catastrophe and the awesome responsibilities this places on the shoulders of education.

2. Teaching is an act of courage

One of the critical responsibilities of education is the nurturing of forces for change. For Hannah Arendt (1961), change comes about through giving children the freedom to foster it, not through telling them how do it:

Education is the point at which we decide, whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. (p. 196)

In my early teaching years, I pursued Arendt's vision in the classroom. I was content to play the neutral chairperson role, laying out for my students a range of options and perspectives on various issues and accepting their choices without comment, even while believing that many of their decisions would not be in the best interests of society or the planet. Indeed, I thought this to be the only defensible way to teach: remaining as neutral as possible allowed me to feel comfortable in addressing controversial and sensitive issues in the classroom in a manner that would not incite the wrath of political opponents. Mariam Steiner (1987), a leading global educator in the UK, expressed well her discomfort with this position:

One of my dilemmas as a world studies co-ordinator . . . has been a perceived need to make world studies 'safe', an acceptable classroom approach, radicalism without tears. In short, I fall constantly into the liberal mould, excusing my cowardice to confront real issues as pragmatism. (p. 57)

Given the current state of the planet, and the urgency of the need to find sustainable solutions to complex problems, I wonder now about the wisdom of this non-committed approach on some key global issues. While I would reject Scruton's claim that global education is Marxist indoctrination, I would argue that some elements of indoctrination are necessary at this point in human history. In making this point I am claiming for global education no more, and no less, than the moral authority afforded to teachers when addressing other serious human concerns, such as issues related to race, gender and violence. If it is not acceptable to take a neutral stance when confronting examples of racism, sexism or various forms of violence in the classroom, why do we need to be so equivocal in discussing matters relating to global inequity, nationalism or unsustainable development? Of course, the courageous public battles for social acceptance of the concepts of racial and gender equity, and of non-violence, have already taken place in many parts of the world while we still await the comparable movement for global equity or sustainability (perhaps the 'Occupy' movement is a tentative and faltering beginning?). Nonetheless, just as education has assumed a leading role in advocating for racial and gender equality, and for non-violent solutions to conflict, so too must it bear significant responsibility for creating informed global citizens who are prepared to act in the interests of the planet as a

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whole. Such a position is not neutral; it demands advocacy for responsible and ethical social change; it requires courage, commitment and foresight on the part of teachers.

3. The unshakeable grasp of nationalism

Much of my research and writing in global education has been built on a belief that overt nationalism is too often a negative force, as well as an anachronism in an era of global interconnectedness. While public education systems may have been founded originally to respond to the needs of the nation state (Green, 1990), surely nationalism has no place in 21st century school systems at a time when a nation's fortunes are so obviously intertwined with those of other nations? That said, I have been intrigued by the national distinctiveness of manifestations of global education in various countries and even ways in which it has been used as a vehicle to promote national or regional identity (Pike, 2000; Tye, 1999). Clearly, nationalism is still a formidable force in shaping public education and, perhaps, poses the most direct challenge to the promotion of the concept of global citizenship in schools. Ignatieff (1994) suggests that while we may theorize about the emergence of a 'global village', few of us actually choose to live in that village, preferring in the main to surround ourselves with people who share similar attributes, values and views of the world to our own. As Saul (2004) points out, the number of nations has actually increased as globalization has become widespread because the nation state – at least in democratic societies – remains the best option for the protection of individual choice.

While I remain concerned about the influences of nationalism in education, it is perhaps important to make a distinction between *naked* and *nuanced* nationalism. By naked nationalism, I mean an unquestioning patriotism and belief in the moral superiority of one's own nation or culture. Nuanced nationalism does not preclude a love of one's own country and people, but it demands a critically reflective analysis of the nation's history and contemporary values, as well as an understanding of how the nation is nested in a wider system of global responsibilities. Nuanced nationalism is, I would suggest, an important dimension in the development of personal identity: it creates a psychological grounding in a land and culture, thereby providing an important context for each individual's character formation. Thus, it holds a rightful place in the holistic development of the child at school. Naked nationalism, on the other hand, is antithetical to the development of informed global citizens as it prohibits any reasoned assessment of a nation's actions according to generally accepted international standards and protocols. It also impairs the process of judgment that is critical to 'multiple citizenship' (Heater, 2004), the idea that we all have allegiances to multiple actors – including family, community, region, nation and planet – and that, when conflict arises between two or more actors, discernment is required in assessing the best course of action. Naked and nuanced nationalism, as I have depicted them, exist on a continuum; the further one moves towards the 'naked' end, the more challenging it becomes to practice responsible global citizenship.

4. The elusiveness of global education as a concept

When Derek Heater (1980) saw its 'zany confusion of nomenclature'(p.8) as an inhibiting factor in the development of world studies in the early 1980s, he was signaling a challenge that global education has faced ever since. In the early part of my career, I was frequently disappointed that

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few educators showed any recognition of the term ‘global education’. Now, I am often dismayed at the appropriation of the term to mean a wide array of educational, and not-so-educational, initiatives with conflicting goals and values! Popkewitz (1980) pronounced global education to be a *slogan system*; as globalization has become all-pervasive, so the term has been used as a slogan-like descriptor of any attempts to prepare young people to operate in an increasingly globalized world, regardless of their underlying motives. For example, while many global educators in Canada argue for a critique of the excesses of free-market capitalism, the government of Alberta envisages global education as a vehicle for developing the skills required by workers to more effectively contribute to that free market:

We will need more entrepreneurs, financiers and managers. We need people who are comfortable doing business globally, with multiple languages and cross-cultural skills. To seize the opportunities offered by an economy that functions as an interconnected grid, people need to be attuned to the world and prepared to participate in global networks. The education system at all levels has an important role to play in fostering this mindset. (Premier’s Council for Economic Strategy, 2011, p. 64)

Various definitions of global education have been formulated in the literature. While most contain similar ideas, the overall concept has remained elusive from a public perception point of view. Other relatively new fields in social and political education have more understandable titles: environmental education, multicultural education, peace education and human rights education all convey, in their titles, the substance of their field of scholarship. Global education, which is also used as an ‘umbrella’ term to include many if not all of the fields just mentioned, does not have the same immediate comprehensibility. Additionally, the holistic, cross-disciplinary essence of global education – and the consequent problems in finding its place in the curriculum – renders it even more challenging to grasp. It is not so much a subject as an interdisciplinary way of thinking. For most of us who have been schooled in a discipline-based curriculum, the interlocking elements of global education are both difficult to grasp as a whole and, perhaps more importantly, even more difficult to explain to others.

Succinct definitions are often overly simplistic and unhelpful. It is undoubtedly true that full understanding in global education is individually constructed through the synergetic processes of action and reflection (Tye & Tye, 1992; Merryfield, 1993). The constant interplay of personal beliefs and values with a deepening understanding of global affairs and systems is critical. However, an inability to succinctly characterize or offer an accessible synopsis of global education has, in my view, both limited its wider acceptance and allowed other initiatives with conflicting goals to use the same term. The lack of clarity that ensues creates vulnerabilities that leave global education’s advancement at risk in the face of changing political ideology, educational policy or public mood. New ideas, however complex, need to be accessible if they are to withstand the inevitable challenges of a rapidly changing world that is characterized by short-term decision-making and an expectation of immediate results. I need to work on my global education ‘elevator speech’!

5. *Change has many faces and voices*

In common with many in global education and similar movements for social change, my interests were initially fuelled by a strong – and naïve – vision of a better global society. Of course, the society I envisaged was my utopia, fashioned out of my limited experience of the world and incorporating many of my biases and prejudices. This is an inevitable starting point for most educators and should not, in itself, be regarded negatively. Problems arise, however, when that personal idealism becomes calcified in an over-zealous desire to change the world according to a fixed set of beliefs and principles. Such a vision – however worthy – is inevitably limited and can become easily marginalized if it is not able to adapt to changing circumstances and environments. Flexibility does not have to mean a compromise in fundamental values, but it does require letting go of the belief that those values can only be pursued in certain ways, or by certain people. As democracy has spread around the globe, it has taken on forms and practices quite different from its Western origins; similarly, the major world religions have witnessed the emergence of distinctive manifestations from particular regions. Adaptation is key to survival.

As members of a grassroots movement, global educators can be skeptical of those people and institutions perceived to be holding the reins of power, whether they are in education, government or the corporate world. I have had the good fortune to work with diverse groups in both public and private sectors and I have encountered visionary and principled individuals with a strong commitment to social change in many organizations. This has led me to reassess my perception of the change process and to recognize that the goals to which I aspire can be achieved in multiple ways and by people with whom I may have very little in common. It has also prompted a much more cautious approach to evaluating the act of change itself: while those who deliberately and vocally identify themselves as change agents are easy to identify, change can be promulgated effectively through the collective thoughts and actions of countless others who are quietly influencing those around them. Dower (2003) points out that only the few will become *active* global citizens; the much larger body of *aware* global citizens is also critical, in that the decisions and actions derived from that awareness will subtly change behaviors, not with a fanfare of trumpets but through imperceptible shifts. As Albert Camus (1957/1995) reminds us:

Great ideas come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amidst the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope. (p. 272)

Educating globally in times of discomfort: where do we go from here?

Charles Dickens' heavy-handed critique of education's role in the 19th century industrial economy in Britain was entirely appropriate for the time and place. The current era of discomfort for global education demands a much more sophisticated and inclusive response. At a time when public education has been made more accessible to people in more and more communities, through both economic and technological advances, the potential for influencing the development of communities and societies through education has never been greater. At the same time, however, the same economic and technological advances have stimulated expectations for education that are increasingly focused on the satisfaction of a relatively

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narrow set of goals, largely oriented towards the pursuit of economic prosperity and Western-style material comforts. While the very human desire for personal and social improvement is entirely understandable, I would suggest that a key role of public education at this critical stage in human development is to instil a much more sophisticated vision of personal and social well-being. Such vision has to be global in scope, rather than designed to fuel national or regional competitiveness; it needs to be long term and non-partisan, rather than tied to transient political mandates; fundamentally, it needs to recognize the inherent incompatibility between two key ideals, *development* and *equity* (Sachs, 2013). Over the past 30 years the negative impacts of the fruits of development enjoyed by the wealthy top 15% of humanity, resulting largely from the exploitation of fossil fuels, have become increasingly clear. At the same time there has been a growing acceptance of the idea that such benefits are human rights and should be available to all, regardless of geographic location, wealth, ethnicity, class or gender. Unfortunately, equal access to all the comforts enjoyed by the wealthy is, in all likelihood, not possible on a planet with finite and diminishing resources, limited useable space for increased food production and waste disposal, and a steadily growing population. This incompatibility creates a moral dilemma for humankind of immense proportions: do we continue to pursue the current path of development and accept that access to it will remain unequal; or do we strive for equity on a global scale and recognize that our concept of development will need to undergo quite drastic revisions that will undoubtedly challenge and change the lifestyles of the wealthy?

It will be evident from what I have written earlier where my priorities lie. More importantly, however, I believe it is the role and responsibility of public education to nurture citizens who are able and prepared to make informed and ethically sound decisions with regard to this dilemma. There is no other social institution that has the reach and capacity to furnish future decision makers with the knowledge, skills and determination necessary to come to grips with moral questions of this magnitude. This is why global education is so urgent and so crucial. It is why, in the current era of discomfort, global education must find a way to be heard among the global cacophony that is steering humankind in the direction of unsustainable development with scant regard for the long-term consequences.

Certainly, global educators should learn from past mistakes. We need to be nimble in adapting to changing political forces and public moods. We need to recognize the abiding strength of nationalism at a time of accelerating and intensifying global interconnectedness. We need to ensure that we can adequately respond, when required, to questions about or critiques of the appropriateness of a global education approach to learning. We need to find ways to 'sell' the holistic and long-term vision of global education to a public that too often finds comfort in short-term panaceas. Foremost, however, we need to remind ourselves, and a more skeptical public, that no longer do we have the luxury of time. World population will not decline, at least for the next 30-40 years; the desire for greater economic prosperity will not diminish over this period, nor will the environmental degradation that results; the occurrence of insecurity and conflict resulting from these trends is unknown, but highly probable. The time for caution and reasonableness is over; the era requires what Eduardo Galeano has called 'a patient impatience', a sense of urgency tempered by the understanding that fundamental change requires determination, perseverance and time.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o offers a fitting metaphor for the current dilemma facing global education in his novel *Petals of Blood*. One of the main characters, Godfrey Munira, starts his teaching career in a village school. Teaching botany, he decides to give students a hands-on experience and takes them out into the fields. He teaches the names of flowers and their constituent parts; he feels pleased as he imparts factual information in a real context. But soon the fragile social order between teacher and student, maintained by academic knowledge and technical vocabulary, begins to crumble. The children use vivid poetic metaphors, such as suggesting that the red beanflower has 'petals of blood'; they see worm-eaten flowers and ask challenging questions: why does God allow beauty to be destroyed? As the children press him further, Munira reflects:

Man . . . law . . . God . . . nature: he had never thought deeply about these things, and he swore he would never again take the children to the fields. Enclosed in the four walls he was master, aloof, dispensing knowledge to a concentration of faces looking up to him. There he could avoid being drawn in. But out in the fields, outside the walls, he felt insecure. (Ngugi, 1986, p. 22)

The 'concentration of faces looking up' in our classrooms today has equally challenging questions about the state of the planet and how we have allowed it to happen. We have a responsibility to get out into the fields and enable the next generation to find some answers.

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