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Teaching for Global Citizenship with Young Adult Literature in the Social Studies

Casey Holmes

The world has experienced a rapid increase in the level of communicative and technological integration since the advent and growth of the internet in the late 1990s. This period of technological innovation has also encouraged a general increase in global trade, aided by cheaper and faster transportation than ever before. The increasingly global and technologically connected world that today's students inhabit has reinvigorated the discussion around the need to prepare young people not just for life in the American democracy, but also for life as global citizens. The scholarly definition of "global citizenship" has been debated over the years since citizenship usually refers to a national or regional identity that includes a set of rights and responsibilities prescribed by the government, but as there is not one overarching global government this definition is not sufficient in capturing the essence of global citizenship (Noddings 2005). Despite the lack of consensus in the academic community, psychologists Stephen Reysen and Iva Katzarska-Miller (2013) have proposed a definition of global citizenship as an individual's "awareness, caring, and embracing diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act" (860). While critical analysis of this definition is warranted, it is sufficient for the purposes of this piece to serve as a conceptual foundation for the vision of global citizenship discussed here.

Due to the nature of the increasingly diverse and global 21st-century society in which our students are growing up, it is critical that we explore the current approaches to teaching global citizenship in school classrooms and investigate instructional practices by which teachers and other educators may seek to develop and improve students' competencies of global citizenship. One such approach may be the inclusion of multicultural young adult literature in the social studies classroom, as the social studies discipline exists to address just such concerns. The review of the relevant literature that is presented here will explore the necessity of teaching for global citizenship in the social studies classroom, the challenges teachers face when considering teaching for global citizenship, and the possibilities and opportunities afforded by the use of young adult literature in the social studies classroom as a means of expanding students' awareness, caring, and embrace of diversity towards a deeper identity of global citizenship.

Global Citizenship Competencies

Recognizing the increasing importance and prevalence of global interactions and interdependence, global institutions and national governments have sought to determine how global citizenship might be measured. In doing so, these organizations have identified several key competencies of global citizens that include values, skills, and fundamental understandings. According to the Global Citizenship Education Working Group (GCED-WG), a collegium of 90 organizations and experts convened by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), global citizenship competencies include: empathy; critical thinking/problem solving; ability to communicate and collaborate with others; conflict resolution; sense and security of identity; shared universal human values such as human rights, peace, and justice;

respect for diversity and intercultural understanding; and the recognition of the existence and interdependence of environmental, social, economic, and political global issues (Center for Universal Education at Brookings 2017).

The United States seems to be generally slower than other countries in encouraging the teaching and learning of skills, knowledge, and competencies relating to global citizenship (Rapoport 2009). However, the expansion of curricula surrounding this topic is now encouraged not just due to social realities but also by the pressures of standardized examinations which so frequently serve as the basis for educational policy decisions. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is conducted every three years by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD) and is among the most widely used measures for global education standards; earlier this year, OECD announced that PISA guidelines will now include global competence in their measures (Coughlan 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2018).

When 2018 PISA test results are published in 2019, the subject of global competence will be the headline measure by which a comparison is constructed among students of different nations. OECD reports that in addition to a general questionnaire about students' attitudes towards and interest in people from other cultures, the test questions will relate to skills such as understanding multiple perspectives and critical examination of local and global issues. The OECD's director of education, Andrea Schleicher, indicates that these changes to PISA are necessary because the international right to quality education for all must now include "learning to live together" (Coughlan 2017).

Critical and historical thinking skills are already taught in many social studies classrooms, and have been particularly emphasized since the advent of Common Core standards and the C3 Framework for State Social Studies Standards (National Council for the Social Studies 2013). Thus, these crucial concepts and abilities tested on the PISA exam should also find a ready home in the social studies classroom. Teaching for global citizenship can be challenging, but the incorporation of young adult literature into the social studies classroom provides a vehicle by which students can engage with multiple perspectives and critically examine local and global issues as they develop the competencies of global citizenship.

Teaching for Global Citizenship in the Social Studies: Challenging but Essential

By now it has been widely agreed that the central purpose for schooling and more specifically social studies education in this country is to prepare students to be engaged, thoughtful, and knowledgeable citizens who will participate in a democratic society (see NCSS 2008; Niemi and Junn 1988; Parker 1996). President George Washington himself justified a national investment in education in the early days of the new nation by arguing for the need for public opinion to "be enlightened" if it were to be given power over the government (Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE 2003, 11).

Due to this history of schools and the social studies as a place to encourage engaged and informed citizenship, it is up to schools to now also serve as a provider of global citizenship education. Many scholars have written in encouragement of a more global and inclusive vision

of citizenship (see Banks 2004; Banks 2008; Castro 2013). This vision is supported by the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for State Social Studies Standards, released in 2013 after a massive three-year collaborative effort by social studies experts, teachers, scholars, and curriculum specialists from around the country. The C3 Framework supports the teaching of social studies through inquiry, highlighting the need for students to build critical thinking, problem solving, and participatory skills to become engaged citizens. The C3 Framework provides ample opportunity for social studies educators to engage with their students on issues of global relevance and importance, and for students to conduct investigations into historical and contemporary inquiries from a variety of perspectives (National Council for the Social Studies 2013). The inquiry design model upon which C3 inquiries are based conclude with students taking informed action in some capacity - a substantial component of Reysen and Katzarska-Miller's (2013) definition of global citizenship that is used here.

Despite the possibilities afforded by the C3 Framework, many American educators remain hesitant to teach with a vision of global citizenship (Rapoport 2009). Even among teachers who are willing and interested in teaching global citizenship, many educators feel unprepared to teach about global issues and otherwise confront the consequences of global interconnectedness (Merryfield and Kasai 2004). At the same time, many educators may also be fearful of backlash from students, parents, administrators, or the larger community: some people believe that global education actively teaches students disrespect towards American ideals, institutions, and heroes and that cultural pluralism in the United States is causing the loss of the American national identity and notions of domestic patriotism and exceptionalism (Dunn 2002; Merryfield and Kasai 2004; Myers 2006; Rapoport 2009).

However, while the idea of global citizenship education does raise questions about primacy and compatibility of domestic and foreign concerns and citizenships (Noddings 2005), it is vital to acknowledge that teaching for global citizenship is possible without encouraging disrespect for American culture and can therefore be compatible with patriotism and national citizenship (Dunn 2002). Encouraging critical reflection upon governmental policies and social injustices or inequalities need not be mutually exclusive with respect for and love of one's country and appreciation of its accomplishments.

Indeed, a global orientation towards citizenship may actually help bolster the competencies of national citizens. A narrow conception of citizenship, the version most frequently taught in America's schools, is generally not consistent with today's increasing student diversity, and to deny the reality of the fluid and contextual nature of identity is to do a disservice to young people's development of their own identity (Banks 2008). Without having the opportunity to examine their own cultural identities, young people will be less able to develop a connection with their own nation-state and will therefore be less prepared and less interested in the type of immersive participation in a diverse, democratic society that we claim to value (Banks 2008; Castro 2013).

This work towards inclusive citizenship is particularly well-suited for the disciplines of the social studies. If social studies education is intended to foster students' critical thinking skills and decision-making abilities so they can effectively participate in democratic institutions as informed and active citizens, then these courses must also highlight the ways in which national

issues are linked to social, economic, and political issues at the global level (Banks 2004; Myers 2006).

Incorporating Young Adult Literature into the Social Studies Classroom

The inclusion of young adult literature into the social studies classroom provides a useful opportunity for cross-curricular and interdisciplinary learning, while at the same time supplying students with a means of engaging with stories that might be different from their own. Young adult literature, both fiction and non-fiction, provides a medium through which both adolescents and their teachers can confront the social contradictions and complexities that are part of their lives (Groenke et al. 2010); this literature gives students the opportunity to see that each person, regardless of background, culture, religion, or language, shares the feelings and emotions that are essential to the human experience (George and Stix 2000; Landt 2006; Van Middendorp and Lee 1994).

The presentation of characters as real people, rather than “faceless masses of people,” allows students to develop a personal connection with the literature (Louie 2005, 566). In turn, these deeper connections may lead to the development and growth of empathy within the readers, which may help students bridge cultural gaps to understand the perspectives, actions, and experiences of the characters they see within the literature (Louie 2005). Empathy may also foster greater respect and intercultural understanding as students recognize that people of all cultures and places can experience and understand human values such as human rights and peace. Deeper and more personal understandings will support students’ conceptions of conflict resolution, as they are more readily able to empathize with individuals or groups they may have once considered “the other.” The Global Citizenship Education Working Group recognizes each of these elements as markers of global citizenship (Center for Universal Education at Brookings 2017).

The inclusion of young adult literature that is more multicultural and culturally relevant in school classrooms can also serve as a form of counter-storytelling: telling stories of people whose experiences often do not gain recognition or popularity. Chimamanda Adichie (2009) highlights the way in which storying is connected to power- the people and groups who are able to tell stories, and under what circumstances, is a reflection of power dynamics and socially constructed status. This reality leads to the danger of the telling of a single story, which may simplify and flatten a very complex human experience and exclude a vast number of perspectives from being represented.

When young people are unable to see themselves represented in stories, their imaginations and goals are constrained; however, when readers do see themselves reflected in texts, they can more fully participate in the storying process (Adichie 2009). Thus, counter-storytelling can be empowering for students of color while at the same time giving all students the opportunity to hear the voices of other people and to examine and confront the role of race, gender, power, class, nationality, and other identifiers in American society (Groenke et al. 2010). Understanding and confronting issues of power and access may prepare students more fully to recognize the existence of such issues on a global scale, and to evaluate the environmental, social, economic, and political consequences of such dynamics. As the social studies disciplines have long been

dominated by Eurocentric texts and narratives, counter-storytelling and the inclusion of multiple and varied perspectives is perhaps even more important here than in some other disciplines.

Finally, the use of young adult literature provides a means by which students can experience ideas of social responsibility and civic action (Tyson 2002; Wolk 2009). In the past, the social studies disciplines have been criticized for promoting a passive type of democracy in which citizens watch, rather than participate, in democratic institutions (Ross 2000; Tyson 2002); however, the inclusion of young adult literature and the telling of personal stories may be an effective medium through which students can truly engage in discussion and work to articulate who they are, what they value, and who they would like to become (Wolk 2009; Wolk 2013). This exploration of identity is crucial for achieving security in identity, and along with the ability to communicate and collaborate with others are considered competencies of global citizenship. Non-textbook literature can also foster the development of students' critical thinking and other higher-order thinking skills (Tyson 2002) - also categorized as global citizenship competencies (Center for Universal Education at Brookings 2017).

One recent work that educators may consider is Sara Saedi's (2018) *Americanized: Rebel Without a Green Card*. Ms. Saedi's memoir tells her story of growing up in the United States as an undocumented immigrant from Iran- a status she did not discover until the age of thirteen. Ms. Saedi incorporates Iranian history into the stories of her childhood, providing an opportunity for educators to incorporate historical context into larger discussions of issues related to immigration. Teaching about the Middle East and immigration can be difficult and potentially politically charged topics for teachers to tackle, so using Ms. Saedi's memoir as a vehicle for critical thinking may be an effective way for educators to ground their students' conversations in text and human experience. Ms. Saedi gracefully intertwines her concerns about potential deportation and her journey to receiving a green card with stories of typical teenagehood - worries about acceptance, image, self-esteem, and the prom. Students reading this text in a civics, government, or history class will be faced with the reality of the universality of human experience and understandings. The characters are presented as real people, allowing for students' development of intercultural understanding and empathy. *Americanized* is certainly just one example of potentially transformative young adult texts; additional literature suggestions for teaching for global citizenship in the social studies classroom can be found in Appendix A.

As educators increasingly recognize the growing importance of teaching for global citizenship, they may find the use of young adult literature, particularly in disciplines outside of the traditional English/Language Arts, to be an effective pedagogical decision. The introduction of personal stories may be a way to confront some of the challenges that teachers face when working towards a global vision; students will find literature specifically written for young adults to be much more relatable than other texts they may read, and they will hopefully be encouraged to identify those common elements of what comprises the human experience for all of us. Recognizing our overwhelming similarities as a world of people, rather than highlighting our differences, is a critical step towards achieving a more global vision of what it means to be a responsible, engaged, tolerant, and open-minded citizen.

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Appendix A

- Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2007.
Junior has grown up on the Spokane Indian Reservation, but decides to leave his troubled school on the reservation to attend an all-white rural high school (grades 7+).
- Baillie, Allan. *Little Brother*. London, UK: Puffin Books, 1994.
Two brothers, Mang and Vithy, try to escape from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia following the Cambodian-Vietnamese War of the mid-1970s (grades 5-8).
- Reynolds, Jason and Brendan Kiely. *All American Boys*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015.
African-American teenager Rashad is mistaken for a shoplifter, and the subsequent beating by the White cop on the scene is witnessed by Rashad's white friend, Quinn. Racial tensions subsequently divide their school and town (grades 7+).
- Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2017.

Teenage Starr goes to a fancy suburban college preparatory school but lives in a poor, mostly African-American neighborhood; tensions between these two worlds alight when she witnesses the shooting of unarmed Khalil by a police officer (grades 8+).

Volponi, Paul. *Black and White*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005.

The story of two best friends, one White and one African-American, whose decisions lead them to involvement with the law (grades 7-12).

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2014.

The story of Woodson's childhood, growing up in South Carolina and New York during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (grades 6+).

Yang, Gene L. *American Born Chinese*. New York, NY: First Second, 2006.

Graphic novel that tells the story of three individual plots that turn out to have hidden connections: the Chinese folk hero Monkey King; Jin Wang, the only Chinese-American student at his new school; and the intentionally negative Chinese stereotype Chin-Kee who is ruining his cousin Danny's life (grades 7-9).

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