

Marco Aurelio Navarro-Leal & Lidia Celia Colmenares-González

Exploring Teachers' Notions of Global Citizenship Education in the US-Mexico Border

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the notions that teachers in the US-Mexican border have about global citizenship education; the specific research questions were: do these notions refer to an education that leads to action? Or to an active sense of citizenship? Do these notions contain a global scope? It was expected that living in the border, their daily exposition to an international experience would lead notions to a global perspective. Five teachers of normal schools were interviewed, and their notions were grouped into three main ideas: with the highest consensus there were values; second, normative life; and third, some aspects related to community life. Although some of the findings express notions of an active citizenship, there was nothing related to a global scope of citizenship. The explanation could be that their notions of citizenship are highly influenced by local concerns about insecurity, leaving aside a global perspective.

Keywords: global citizenship, citizenship education, civic education, active citizenship

Introduction

According to Freire, alphabetization of adults requires meaningful problematizing issues taken from their daily life. In the discussion groups, adults and educators together, learn to read the world critically, to become aware of their conditions of oppression and to take group action for common liberation (Freire, 2005). Similarly, the dialogical possibilities of Ubuntu have “the potential to engender deliberative action” and “may contribute to enrich the learning processes and the pursuit of socially constructive learning outcomes” (Assié-Lumumba, 2017). Both perspectives assume learning as an outcome that leads to action for collective wellbeing, either in the form of liberation from oppression or in the quest for a positive handling of the environment. In both perspectives, there is a sense of belonging to a group, where identity plays an important role in developing involvement and commitment with the affairs of society. That is one of the main ideas of citizenship, either with a local or a global scope.

This paper explores the teachers' notions about citizenship in a city of US-Mexican border. The main research question is: do these notions refer to an education that leads to action? Or to an active sense of citizenship? Do these notions contain a global scope? The first section of the paper is devoted to review some theoretical elements about global citizenship education. The second section depicts the cultural context of the people living in the US-Mexico border, where the teachers interviewed spend their daily life. The third section describes the methodology for this exploration; and a last section dedicated to conclusions.

Foundations

There is not a unique concept of citizenship. Nevertheless, there are authors that have found that there is a generalized notion referring to *active citizenship* as a function of involvement in public life (Stuart, 2008). Although, considering the current changes of societies, such as the different types of migrations and the interconnectedness of communities, it is usual to find the coexistence of more than one form of citizenship, with different kinds of *active citizenships*, as well as individuals with “multiple citizenships”, depending on their cosmopolitanism. Citizenship is a cultural concept.

Beyond the discussion of whether cosmopolitanism is in the lines of Eurocentric narratives, the raising international mobility of the current process of globalization has called the attention of all visions that focus human connectedness to cope with world issues; such is the case of *Ubuntu* and other social perspectives, like Chaos theory, or Complex thinking, that emphasize a sense of human interdependence. Within this wide approach is that the notion of global citizenship is brought about from different perspectives. Estellés & Romero (2016, p. 22) doing a review of the literature, have found that the discourses to global or transnational citizenship generally start from three premises: the first is supported in a cosmopolitan view (or stoic) that recognizes human beings from another states; therefore, education should focus on diversity and human rights; the second premise is related to economic, political and social globalization in which relations transcend national or regional boundaries and the educational focus is in the far reaching effects that social and economic decisions have across the planet, therefore education is to promote commitment to cope with global issues; the third premise assumes that globalization exerts supranational powers and therefore education citizenship promotes the participation in interdependent movements, such as social justice and equity, sustainable development and cultural diversity.

These three premises are mutually complementary and together can give a fair view, about the contribution of education to produce a comprehensive profile: “the persons aware of the world amplitude and their own function in it; they respect and value the diversity and understand the global economy and the social and political issues and are critical towards social injustice, get involved and contribute to the community at different levels, from the local to the global” (Stuart, 2008, p. 79). For a comprehensive view some divergences should not be left aside, like the ones identified by Torres (2015) between the concepts of solidarity and competitiveness; or between internationalization and globalization as found by Navarro-Leal & Salinas-Escandón (2018).

But even when there are slight divergences about some elements of the broad focus of global citizenship, there is a general understanding about the importance of citizenship education. An international comparison by Zaman (2006) of citizenship education policy and practice as they are perceived by teachers in the United States, England, and Hong Kong, found that there was a consensus in suggesting that civics education matters a great deal for students' political development and that teacher-centered methods dominate civics education classrooms, and also that political socialization in the form of knowledge transmission is the most emphasized objective in these countries' schools.

Borderlands

It would be easy to assume that in large cities with a high component of cosmopolitan population, people will be more acquainted with the global dimensions of civic education and on the contrary, for people living in communities with very weak international relations, citizenship will not go beyond a local view, because the sense of belonging is related to closeness. But what about the borderlands between countries? How does the sense of belonging affect the perception of citizenship?

During the last century, the US-Mexico border has been one of the most dynamic of the world; either in terms of demographic mobility or in terms of freight transfer. There are estimates that the exchange is worth one million of US Dollars per minute during last years. This economic dynamism, however, does not make it a more cosmopolitan territory. According to Giménez (2009) the border is an area where two cultures get in touch and that exceeds both sides of the territorial demarcation between the nations and does not necessarily produce a “blended” culture.

Borderlands is a conflicting place of exasperated identities, where dominant identities struggle to maintain hegemony, while subaltern identities struggle for social recognition, promoting cohesion and manifesting adhesion to traditions and symbols. Social groups within these areas come to build their own culture, with their own language, rituals, symbols. They defend their own culture from dominant cultures.

Method of inquiry

Interviews were made adopting the guidelines devised by Torres & Dorio (2015) for an international project of the UNESCO Chair on Global Citizenship Education. The subjects were five Mexican teacher educators linked to a Normal School in Matamoros, México, a twin city of Brownsville, Texas. Their names have been changed:

- Antonio is from Matamoros and after his graduation as a teacher he obtained a master’s degree in Language and Communication. He teaches in a primary school at the outskirts of Matamoros and teaches at the private normal school. He lives in a neighborhood considered to be one with the best status of the city, located near the border bridge.
- Mariana came from Ciudad Mante, a city located to the south of Matamoros, about six hours by bus. She has studied pedagogy with a specialization in mathematics and teaches at the local public normal school.
- Eloisa is not from Matamoros, she came from a small city at about one hour by bus, with the aim to study and become a teacher; she succeeded and teaches in a private normal school. She has established her home in a neighborhood considered of a low status and characterized by dysfunctional families, as she states in the interview.
- Guadalupe was teaching during 20 years at the School of Education of the University of Texas in Brownsville, in charge of the bilingual courses for international students, and teaching the courses for those who have applied to

become US citizens and needed to sit for a federal governmental assessment. She is now retired and lives in the south of Corpus Christi, Texas.

- Delfina is a teacher who lives in Matamoros and for more than 18 years has been teaching in the public normal school of that locality, in charge of the curricular line of practical teacher training. She was studying a master's degree at the University of Texas in Brownsville, which was concluded in Matamoros, because of migratory matters, she is now enrolled in a doctoral program at a local university.

Results

This section presents a close synthesis of the interviews conducted in Spanish.

The first question they answered was: What is a good citizen? The answers were related to someone with values, virtues, love to the country and family, respect, responsibility, respect for others; to exhibit tolerance for difference, to be aware of rights and responsibilities, coexistence, to vote, commitment with society; the phrase "to be honest" was in almost all the answers.

The question about the meaning of an outstanding citizenship, all of them answered basically the same values as above, except for Guadalupe, who added that an outstanding citizen "is someone who always aspire to get some more". Meaning with that, someone who performs those values beyond the average.

In Spanish the word "compromiso" has different meanings, commonly it is used to refer either to an obligation or to a commitment. So, when they were asked about the difference between civic awareness and civic commitment, they answered that the former was "to know one's rights and obligations" and that the latter had to do with obligations, as in obligations with patriot symbols and with community. In their words, civic commitment is related to a sense of active citizenship.

What does it mean citizenship education in the school? The answers were related to the promotion of values like equality, equity, tolerance, ethics, discipline. Eloise's answer was slightly different: citizenship in the school is to follow the rules, to teach more than the minimum, to teach by example.

Is citizenship education promoted in your school?

- Antonio: yes, but is not reinforced by parents.
- Mariana: yes, fellowship, collaborative work, group agreements.
- Eloisa: respect, democracy, coexistence, honesty.
- Guadalupe: to become aware, that they do not steal.
- Delfina: because of insecurity, now we do not have community work at the school.

When asked if they promoted citizenship education in their lessons, their answers were positive, saying that they promote democracy when organizing for collaborative work, or team work and fellowship, honesty. For the community we organize civic acts and festivities.

Conclusions

The argument that has been structured from the theoretical departure of this study, is that action for collective wellbeing is a socially constructed learning outcome from a kind of education that develops involvement and commitment with

the affairs of society. Therefore, there is a link between a cultural sense of belonging to a group, or a community, and the notion of citizenship, either with a global or a local scope.

The purpose of this study was to explore the notions and scope of citizenship education that a group of teachers have in a setting such as a city in the US-Mexico border, since it was assumed that people exposed to an international daily experience would have developed a notion of citizenship education with a global scope. The subjects selected for interviews are not street people, they hold graduate education certificates and teach in schools for teachers (a public and a private normal schools).

What these teachers have expressed may be grouped into three main ideas: the strongest, or the one with a wider consensus, is related to values (respect, responsibility, honesty, equity, tolerance, ethics, discipline); the second is related to the normative life (to be aware of rights and responsibilities, fellowship, collaborative work); and the third is related with community life (democracy, community work, civic activity, patriotic symbols). Their notions are closer to a notion of active citizenship, but they do not express any clue in relation to a global notion of citizenship education, like climate change, sustainable development, internationalization, migrations, human rights, poverty, and so on.

Although in a weak way, their notions of citizenship education do include aspects related to community affairs, but do their local scope has something to do with a cultural sense of belonging to a community? Perhaps there are local circumstances that concern the community more than the global ones. During the last decade the area of Matamoros has become a dangerous place. According to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the US Department of State, “there are no safe areas in Matamoros due to gunfights, grenade attacks, and kidnappings. Crime and violence related to the activities of Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) are continuing concerns” (OSAC, 2018). And with more detail states that:

The primary security threat stems from the TCOs and the on-going turf war between rival factions of the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas. Drug-related violence grew in 2017 in the Matamoros-Rio Bravo-Reynosa corridor. (...) statistics indicate an increase in the number of local nationals killed as a result of drug-related violence largely due to the chronic volatility around Reynosa. The true number of drug-related deaths, however, is difficult to obtain due to underreporting. Gun battles may occur at any time, as rival TCO gunmen engage in hit-and-run attacks and as military and federal police encounter TCO gunmen while on patrol. (OSAC, 2018)

The weight of insecurity is stronger than any global concern and, as a matter of fact this is a topic included in Delfina's narrative when she refers that students are not going for teaching practices to the schools, because of this problem; and when she says that the Normal School has canceled community projects and activities because of the same reason. Under these circumstances, borderlands are not only conflicting places of exasperated identities; in this case are conflicting societies. Teacher's notions of global citizenship education are influenced not only by their relationship with a cultural identity, but also by the circumstances of their environment. After all, citizenship is a socio-historical learning outcome.

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Dr. Marco Aurelio Navarro-Leal, Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas, México

Dr. Lidia Celia Colmenares-González, Escuela Normal Particular Profr. Gregorio Torres Quintero, Matamoros, México