GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

ARE THE UNIVERSAL VALUES DEFENDED BY GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION UNIVERSAL?

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Global Citizenship Education (GCE) aims to provide learners across the globe with the competences and tools needed to make them into individuals that can help build a better world based on values such as justice, sustainability, inclusion and pacifism. In this sense, GCE carries assumptions as to universality, since it intends to implement in all education systems across the globe a certain idea of education and certain values considered essential to bring about a better world. In theory, the plan seems perfect and it seems hard to think that anyone could oppose to this.

Likewise, the values that should guide this approach seem irreproachable: justice, equality and peace, for instance, intuitively seem to be aspirations that lie at the heart of humanity and therefore are universal and should be promoted. Yet, "every time I think of a value that could be universal I am faced with a contradiction", said the anthropologist Descola (2013) at a meeting on the issue of the universality of values. The matter of the universality of values promoted by GCE is particularly relevant when decolonial thinking enters the public debate: Some question the claim to the universality of these values and wonder whether the promotion of these values through GCE should not be seen as a (conscious or unconscious) attempt by the West to impose its norms and principles on the rest of the world.

This brief paper does not pretend to decide the millennial question of the universal dimension of values; instead, it simply intends to offer some avenues of reflection on the basis of the literature on the matter.

THE UNIVERSAL VALUES OF GCE

GCE clearly claim its position in favour of a set of values (considered here as a good worth pursuing, a horizon towards which to engage into action) that underpin its approach and conception of the "good society" and which are also values that it intends to instil in learners around the world. UNESCO, the foremost institutional promoter of GCE, explains, for example, that "GCE aims to instil in learners the values (...) that support responsible global citizenship". These values are mainly: respect for human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability. In Belgium, ACODEV also defines GCE as based on principles and values it intends to strengthen in learners. While these values may at first sight seem

universally good and desirable, their universality can be questioned in at least three ways:

The first is how to justify the universality of universal values. The question is as old as philosophy and two positions can be taken: justification of the universality of universal values from a transcendent source (God, a "human nature", a "world order") and justification from an immanent source; universality is a construction of the mind, the product of rationality. If the universal is a construction of the mind, then it is always, paradoxically, a particular universal.

The second way to question the universality of universal values is then to question the origin and history of these so-called universal values (Drerup 2019). With regard to GCE values, at least according to the way they are expressed by UNESCO it should be noted that these principles, which are also the principles expressed in the Constitution of UNESCO (international understanding, intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity, the common prosperity of humanity, universal respect for justice, the law, human rights and fundamental freedoms) are legacies of Enlightenment humanism (Maurel 2006). In this sense, they come from a particular history, that of the West, and are the result of a rationality and categories of specific thought.

Finally, we must question the meaning of these values and their translations over time and in different societies. Let us consider for a moment a value that seems intuitively to be considered as a universal good towards which humanity has always striven (thus in this sense, a universal value): peace. For our Western liberal societies based on the values of equality, autonomy and freedom, the state of peace is strongly correlated with the idea of security, a situation that allows individuals to freely pursue the goals they have set for themselves; and we see security as a state guaranteed by democracy and the principle of self-determination, the rule of law and the permanence of solid and independent institutions capable of upholding human rights.

But other conceptions of peace exist, and other ways of achieving peace: in his study on peace-building in Afghanistan, Tadjbakhsh (2009) shows, for example, how processes based on a Western liberal conception of peace have been poorly received by the Afghan populations, who are more open to an Islamic conception

of peace based on justice and morality, rather than to a liberal conception associated with the promotion of individualism. With regards to the definition of peace, Moman (2015) reports, for example, through a study on peace in Uganda how conceptions of peace vary among the Ugandans he met. For some, peace is conceived as a state of stability, and whether it is guaranteed by the state of emergency, the application of martial law and the use of violence by the army, or by the actions of local guerrillas ensuring a form of security is equal and does not in itself constitute a threat for peace; for others, peace is equal to prosperity, and the absence of conflict and violence does not mean that the state of peace is achieved; for still others, peace is equivalent to justice, which does not, by the way, mean that justice cannot be administered directly by those who feel aggrieved, rather than by judicial institutions. Thus, even a value that would intuitively be considered universally good is subject to translations and interpretations relating to cultural, social and historic and political systems.

If the universal values defended by GCE cannot therefore be considered universal by themselves, and relate to a political and philosophical history and to particular translations specific to the West, then it seems legitimate to question the global GCE approach and its implementation. Many decolonisal researchers nowadays question the Western roots of the universal values promoted by GCE and then wonder whether GCE is not a tool at the service of a kind of expanding Eurocentrism (Akkari 2020).

Increase the universal scope of universal values

GCE, at least as it has materialised and been translated into educational content, was born in the West and is based on a Western version of cosmopolitanism, that is to say the idea that it is possible to behave as a citizen of the world and not simply as a citizen of a locality. While the Western tradition of cosmopolitanism is overhanging the debate, some are trying to address the question of the universal outside the Western tradition, in order to broaden its scope and really make it truly universal. For some this can be achieved by including the contributions of non-Western thinkers in the definition of cosmopolitanism. One can read the UNESCO document (2018), for example, seeking to value non-Western

conceptions of cosmopolitanism (called 'local approaches to GCE': Buen Vivir, Ubuntu, Sumak Kawsay, etc.) as an attempt in this direction. However, some point out that this is then only an attempt to integrate non-Western traditions into a system of thought created and largely dominated by the West (Delanty 2014), and that it is the West that keeps the hand and decides which conceptions of cosmopolitanism are legitimate and translatable into Western categories of thought (Godrej 2012).

Others seek to identify a set of minimal values that are common to all cultures and societies (like for instance, Schwartz 2012) and not just from the Western world. But these attempts are also criticised, for several reasons. First, only societies for which the notion of values makes sense can collaborate in this kind of exercise. And as Descola (2013) points out, "I know many societies, especially societies without writing, for which the question 'What do you believe?' (and therefore the question of values) makes no sense".

Then these attempts often use reified and fixed cultural conceptions of values that matter to various societies but fail to grasp their dynamic and changing nature. Still others turn their backs on the Western tradition of cosmopolitanism and advocate pluriversalism (Dussel 2009). In this case, the universal is not established from what is identified as common to all cultures, but it is recognized that all societies have always functioned on the basis of their own value systems (formalised or not) and that no hierarchies should be looked for. Rather, value systems are understood in their diversity, and the different rationalities and universalities that underlie them are placed on an equal footing (Zahra and Dayan-Herzbrun 2017). But this trend has been criticised in particular for leading to cultural relativism. Another way to outplay the Eurocentric dimension of the cosmopolitan approach without falling into cultural relativism is to recognise the diversity of value systems without putting them into a hierarchy, but by proposing points of encounter and dialogue between these value systems (Delanty 2013) and develop critical thinking that can reveal the assumptions of these systems.

Outplay the question of universal values

If universal values are not universal but only the product of a specific rationality that intends to

expand its values to the world, then they are in reality norms, that is, rules of conduct that are the outcome of consensus and that serve to determine behaviours. This means that even if there are no universal values from a descriptive point of view, there are nevertheless principles that some would like to be universally shared, that they would become a norm respected by the whole of humanity: respect for the dignity of people for example, or the principle of self-determination. It is therefore a type of universal that answers this question: *How to build a common world?* A question which, in the age of globalisation, must be valid for the whole of humanity. In this sense, it can be accepted that the GCE initiative, when it intends to propagate values, is a normative project that offers a certain type of answer to this question. The danger then lays in its claim to universalise the response it offers, under the guise that this response is based on universal values that are therefore naturally imposed on humanity.

Instead of a universalism of values, GCE could aim for a universalism of principles. The universalism of values is similar to what Balibar (1993) calls an extensive universalism, that is to say a universalism that says the good, that says what a good life is (we find it embodied in religious or ideological systems for example). Such universalism always includes a hegemonic dimension, it wants to conquer, expand and persuade the refractories (Delruelle 2013). It also promotes conflicts between universals: It is for example in the name of the universal that the crusades were launched or colonisations legitimised; but it is in the name of other universals that anti-colonial struggles or the human rights revolution have been justified.

The universalism of principles is akin to an intensive universalism (Balibar, 1993), that is to say, a universalism that does not defend any universal model of the good, but which consists in being indignant and rising when we see that individuals or groups are in situations of suffering (Delruelle 2013). In this case, the universalism of principles does not imply that a set of values should be instituted and respected to stop suffering, but rather assumes that there are principles to be respected as to how to ask questions about the problems causing suffering, and how to think about solutions to deal with them. Here, solutions are not defined according to their conformity with pre-established universal values, but they are the result of a certain process that can be applied universally: which is based, for example, on the principles according to which everyone is recognized as being able to participate in debates aimed at finding solutions to problems; or that everyone's voice is equal to that of others (Delanty 2014). This universalism of principles remains universalism and some may wonder whether the concepts of rationality and equality, for example, which underlie the principles mentioned above, are not also derived from a Western conception of the human. However, it has the merit of proposing a way to build a common world, without imposing in advance the model according to which it must be built.

Implications for pratice

What can we learn from this short contribution for the GCE practice? I see at least three elements that can guide our GCE design and practice.

First, the question of universality of universal values advocated by GCE is a question that can be asked, which must not be a taboo. I myself was recently challenged by a student who equated GCE with Western imperialism. These questions are legitimate and must be discussed.

Secondly, this philosophical exploration of the universality of GCE's values calls for self-reflection. After all, as human beings we are equally part of a particular socio-historical context that colors our life story. This obviously influences the way we experience and conceive the world as well as our GCE projects. It is therefore important to be aware of the subjectivity of one's own perspective, to listen and be open to the perspective of others, and to pursue co-creation and equality in collaborations.

Third, the critical dimension of GCE, so rightly highlighted by many researchers in the field recently, seems more important than ever. It seems to me that GCE would benefit from focusing more on the development of critical thinking among learners, thinking that is able to examine local-global relationships and to build action wisely rather than making universal values the core of its work.

In the end, GCE deserves its place, not to impose a normative project on the world but to equip learners with the skills required to ask the questions of our time and to work together to solve them.

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