

LET US WALK THE TALK: SUCCESSES AND STRUGGLES IN IMPLEMENTING GLOBAL EDUCATION AS A REGULAR COURSE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (Margaret Mead, anthropologist).

Introduction

In this article Otilia Chareka, Garry Leyte and Alicia Mills emphasise the importance of teaching global education at university level as a regular course, and reflect on the successes and struggles of trying to implement global education at university and school level in the Canadian context. They also focus on the need for the inclusion of global education courses in the university calendar as a regular elective course both for the graduate Masters in Education program and Bachelor of Education program.

Global education

In a world increasingly interconnected through technological advances, it is becoming more critical for today's students to become globally educated. Students need to learn how their actions and the actions of others are affecting people around the world, and how they can promote change through their own critical thinking and actions. In order to provide students with the skills to think critically about global issues, teachers must be confident and creative in providing the students with opportunities to discuss and explore these complex issues through the delivery of global education. Chareka (1994) argues in the context of continual discussion about a shrinking world, that global education and its inclusion in formal education is becoming more important than ever before. The inclusion of global education at St. Francis Xavier University to teach students to think critically and reflect on global issues is a focus within the Masters of Education (M.Ed.) Program at the University where the course is still taught as a 'special topic' to practicing teachers, however not taught at all to students in the Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.) program.

This article aims to encourage colleagues to teach students about global issues and the importance of being a global citizen in a proactive manner that is transformative in respect to knowledge and development. Educators need to equip students with knowledge, critical thinking skills and values which can help them become informed citizens. Osler and Vincent (2002) contend that teachers face the challenge of teaching for equity, justice and solidarity. Teachers need to realize that their position gives them a degree of power and authority that dictates what their students learn, understand and how they act. The Secretary of the Economic and Social Council for the United Nations in 1986 argued:

“A child born today will be faced as an adult almost daily with problems of a global interdependent nature, be it peace, food, quality of resources. He [the child] will be both an actor and beneficiary or victim in the total world fabric and may rightly ask: Why was I not warned? Why did my teachers not tell me about these problems and indicated my behaviour as a member of an interdependent human race? It is therefore the duty and the self-enlightened interest of governments to educate their children properly about the type of world in which they are going to live” (Alladin, 1989:8).

The limitations of the University system

Despite the positive feedback of students who have taken the global education course, it should be noted that it was only taught online as a ‘special topic’ as it is not in the University calendar. University policy stipulates that a professor cannot continue to teach a course as a special topic after teaching/offering it on three consecutive occasions. Given the positive impact of this course on all the three streams Chareka has taught, it was very disappointing to no longer be able to offer the course unless it is approved and listed in the University calendar in the future. Inspired by continual positive feedback from students including co-authors Mills and Leyte, Chareka persevered, and has developed the special topic ‘global education’ into a course in October 2008 that is currently awaiting approval as an elective in the University calendar.

The positive experiences and feedback of the students who took the online global education course demonstrated that it helped provide in-service teachers with an opportunity to become more confident in teaching global issues and provided opportunities for students in to become active, responsible global

citizens. In a more interconnected world, it is important for students to learn global issues and bring about positive developmental changes as Chareka and Van Dommelen argued:

“Students should know and understand social justice and equity, diversity, globalization and interdependence, sustainable development, peace, conflict and others. The key skills students should be developing include: critical thinking; ability to argue effectively; ability to challenge injustice and inequities; respect for people and things; cooperation; and conflict resolution. The values and attitudes global education and citizenship education fosters are: sense of identity and self-esteem; empathy; commitment to social justice and equity; and value and respect for diversity. As authors, we feel that if all teachers can be taught to understand this, and their students [are able to] grasp such knowledge, values, attitudes and critical thinking skills then the world might be a better place to live in. However, in order for teachers to teach this effectively, they need to be equipped” (Chareka & Van Dommelen, in press).

The need for global education in the formal education system

Leyte and Mills utilised the knowledge gained in the online global education course in their own teaching both pre-service and in-service. Leyte developed and adapted various global education resources which Mills has also adapted and both used in their classes. They found that teaching global education with an interdisciplinary infusion approach helped young students to situate themselves in the global context as evidenced by Bourn (2008), who argues the critical need for young people to make sense of their identity and develop a sense of belonging, in order to establish the relationship between global processes and local experiences.

Engaging in global education inspired both Leyte and Mills to continually seek out new knowledge about world issues such as child labour, fair trade, HIV/AIDS, global warming and the global water crisis, and to share this new knowledge with their students. Specifically, global education helped to broaden his very limited perspective on several international issues, particularly HIV/AIDS and how it has impacted on developed and developing countries, including Canada.

In their teaching, the authors recognize the importance of guiding and facilitating learning among their students, motivating them to be active citizens and bringing about developmental change at a local level which has a global impact. Students realized that they can be proactive by not seeing ‘us’ and ‘them’ and not perpetuating the ‘otherness’, but by bringing a sense of local, national and global community belonging, and realizing that we are all human beings sharing one earth who need and want the same things to survive, for example clean water.

Global education helps students to recognize that they are also contributors to the global problems shared by rich and poor countries alike, and they need to take action to address these problems. This view is supported by Andreotti in her analysis of global citizenship education where she discussed the idea of empowering learners and stated:

“In this sense, critical literacy is not about ‘unveiling’ the ‘truth’ for the learners, but about providing the space for them to reflect on their context and their own and others’ epistemological and ontological assumptions: how we came to think/be/feel/act the way we do and the implications of our systems of belief in local/global terms in relation to power, social relationships and the distribution of labour and resources” (Andreotti, 2006:7).

Students should learn about global issues while having the opportunity to critically engage with the material. Rather than being presented concepts that promote the ‘otherness’ of other cultures, such as dress, music, dance and food, students should have the opportunity to engage with issues that they can relate to and could be affecting them as well. Andreotti argued:

“...this approach tries to promote change without telling learners what they should think or do, by creating spaces where they are safe to analyse and experiment with other forms of seeing/thinking and being/relating to one another” (Andreotti, 2006:7).

Conclusion

Considering the evidence of success in engaging in global education and the need for it in today’s world, why does it take so long for a course to be approved at University level? Various institutions around the world, even here in

Canada, have taken global education seriously in their teacher training programs either as a required course or as an elective. There is obviously a need to support teachers, both in-service and pre-service, as they embark on teaching global education given that the school curriculum has global education objectives. However, most teacher education programs in Canada lack global education content, and where it is offered, it is an elective and not a required course. It would be interesting to see how the issues and politics of institutional power and bureaucracy influence decision-making in regard to courses that are approved to the University calendar.

Despite the positive influence on the authors' work and worldviews and the need to integrate global education initiatives into pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, it should be noted that the course is still in the process of being approved. However there are grounds for optimism facing into the future. The newly created Faculty of Education has new administrators, and a new course approval procedure and Committee has been formed for professional studies. These new operating structures offer some hope that our teacher training program will soon be approved.

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