CIVIC ACTION WITHIN GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AS AN ANTIDOTE TO DESPAIR

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Abstract: Global citizenship education (GCE) as developed by UNESCO in 2015 is a pedagogy that aims to foster learners who contribute to a more just and peaceful world. UNESCO's framework for GCE is based on three dimensions: cognition, socio-emotions, and behaviour. Freire (2017) stated that learning about oppressive structures in the world cannot only be an intellectual endeavour but must include action to accomplish a more just and peaceful world. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire (2014: 80) wrote about the importance of hope as a catalyst for change: 'there is no change without dream, as there is no dream without hope'. For young people, however, the ability to dream becomes harder when they feel a collective sense of anxiety and distress around global problems, such as the climate crisis (Hickman et al., 2021). Actions towards solving complex global problems should address the intertwinement between individual acts and state-corporate behaviours (Bryan, 2022). This article reflects on a study that implemented such a justice-oriented GCE during three consecutive academic years in one Grade Nine class, as students participated in a ten-week action-oriented unit on the climate emergency. The outcome of the Action Research shows the importance of taking collective action as a part of GCE, since students derived hope from experiencing a sense of success when engaging in civic action. Social media, furthermore, was highlighted by students as their main form of civic engagement and could therefore be utilised as means for civic action within formal education. Lastly, the article suggests that insights from citizenship education into strategising and organising collective actions might help to address the complexity of global issues.

Key words: Civic Action; Social Media; Action Research; Global Citizenship Education; Paulo Freire.

Introduction

Active citizenry is necessary for a democracy to function: citizens need to be engaged to influence decisions and take well-informed actions. Civic action, in

the form of collective initiatives addressing issues of public concern, is the cornerstone of active citizenship. The opportunity to develop skills and competences necessary to be an active citizen should be a part of any education for active citizenship (Ross, 2008). The study of citizenship education is relatively young and, therefore, somewhat unsettled (Arthur, Davies and Hahn, 2008). There is no clear conceptual structure that forms the foundation of knowledge and understanding within citizenship education (Jerome, 2018: 496). Besides deliberations on citizenship education for any national curriculum, there is also the increasingly popular concept of global citizenship education (GCE). GCE originates from a variety of different educational initiatives that belong to a distinctive pedagogical approach: global education (GE). The different educational approaches that form GE are development education, human rights education, education for sustainability, and GCE (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016: 6). UNESCO published an extensive guide on the educational framework for GCE in 2015. According to this document, GCE aims to 'build the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world' (UNESCO, 2015: 15). The references at the end of the guide show the influence of critical pedagogues, such as Vanessa Andreotti, James Banks, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Geneva Gay, and bell hooks. The UNESCO guide from 2015 promotes a justice-oriented citizen: one that investigates structures and patterns underlying injustices to take action that addresses the root causes of the problem (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Recent discourses within the United Nations (UN) indicate a less critical approach to global issues, by highlighting a solution that calls for individuals to develop resilience or kindness (Bryan and Mochizuki, 2023). This tendency reflects the dominance of neoliberalism in all facets of society, asserting the belief that 'all problems are personal and individual, making it almost impossible to translate private troubles into wider systemic considerations' (Giroux, 2022: 112). Competences of self-development, however, are not skills related to citizenship, as the former does not require a relationship between the individual and wider society. Civic engagement is about being concerned with public issues and finding solutions through collective initiatives.

This article examines the role of civic action within GCE that aims to develop a justice-oriented citizenry. I investigated my own teaching practice by

paying specific attention to the role of civic action within the implementation of GCE. By following the UNESCO guide from 2015, the aim was for students to go beyond individual acts of kindness and responsibility and think about transforming broader unjust structures and systems in society. After three cycles of Action Research, the findings suggest that students engage with civic action in the form of awareness raising but remain focused on influencing individual mindsets and attitudes. Students engaged mostly with politics through social media, and this deserves more attention within the formal curriculum. Lastly, students expressed feelings of hopefulness after organising their own action which emphasises the importance of civic action within GCE.

Global citizenship education

Since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015, GCE has gained increasing prominence. SDG 4.7 explicitly aims to educate for sustainable development and global citizenship (UNESCO, 2017). The UNESCO guidelines from 2015 divided GCE in three different domains: cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioural. I briefly summarised the three different domains in figure 1, as all three included long and detailed overviews of learning progressions and topic lists.

Figure 1: Summary of GCE based on UNESCO's 2015 framework.

The cognitive domain	Focuses on acquiring knowledge and understanding about historical influence on and current-day influences of global power structures on local realities.
The social-emotional domain	Elaborates on identity forming and cultivating collective well-being through respecting diversity.
The behavioural domain	Deals with effective civic engagement through taking action in order to achieve social justice and becoming an agent of positive change.

On the one hand, the guide contained a detailed explanation on how to implement GCE in schools, but was vague and ambiguous about concrete

examples or topics. For example, even though the legacy of colonialism or slavery is mentioned, no clear connection is made between this legacy and present-day economic inequalities between the global North and South. The behavioural domain mentioned developing the skills of strategising, organising, and mobilising, while it also highlighted entrepreneurship, financial skills, and innovation as relevant skills for taking action (UNESCO, 2015: 43). The ambiguities of GCE are the result of the variety of educational programmes within GE.

GCE can be divided into three major orientations: neoliberal, liberal, and critical (Pashby et al., 2020). Neoliberal understandings of GCE focused on an economic narrative, whereby there is an entrepreneurial position noticeable and competitiveness for employability encouraged (Ibid.). Liberal typologies of GCE highlighted the role of democracy based on universal values including openness, love, and respect, along with cultural equality and a strong focus on civic engagement through dialogue (Ibid.). Critical approaches to GCE addressed and acknowledged social injustices, thereby critiquing current power structures and ideas of modernity and recognising complicity (Ibid.).   Additionally, Pashby et al. (2020) looked for crossovers between the different typologies to show that liberal and neoliberal - and some critical - orientations shared a Western perspective on the world which perpetuates existing colonial and capitalist social relations (Ibid.: 3). This strong influence of liberal and neoliberal discourses within GCE can be considered as a battle between idealism and the increasing influence of corporations on the UN Education programmes.

Neoliberalism's influence on UN policymaking is clearly noticeable since economic growth is at the centre of the SDGs and thus GCE. There is a silence regarding consumerism and neoliberal economic agendas as a cause of today's global inequality within UN initiatives to better the world (Selby and Kagawa, 2011). Bryan and Mochizuki (2023) indicated how recent discourses within the UN deviated from a politically engaging orientation of citizenship towards a more de-politicised and individualised approach. The UNESCO framework (2015) was influenced by Freirean interpretations of transformative education as an enabler of social and ecological justice. However, a UN Summit in 2022 identified transformative education 'as a *lynchpin* for (green) economic

growth in a digitised economy' (Bryan and Mochizuki, 2023: 55). These two understandings of education foster different kinds of citizenship education. Whereas the latter emphasised competences and skills to become employable in a flexible workforce (Ibid: 63), the former encouraged inquiry into global relationships and structures behind the economic exploitation of people and the planet in the global South and North (Shultz, 2007). Within GCE there is little discussion about the characteristics of citizenship education as an academic field, although a better understanding of citizenship education could ensure that empowerment of citizens is at the core of GCE.

Active citizens are empowered citizens

Citizenship as status can be considered a political and legal relationship between a state and its inhabitants. In recent decades the concept of citizenship expanded to include a relationship with the wider planet rather than only with a state, along with encompassing ideas about living together as fellow citizens (Veugelers, 2021). This enhancement of 'citizenship' happened paradoxically while neoliberal philosophies guided government policies, withdrawing the government from public life and replacing it with market structures (Ibid.). As a consequence, citizenship is mainly perceived as an individual identity that grants rights to *individuals,* along with capabilities and choices that *individuals* can exert through participation in society (Soysal, 2022). Such a participatory perception of citizenship is based on an individualistic approach to citizenship and represents just one interpretation of the concept.

Citizenship education teaches students knowledge and understandings about governmental systems and should provide them with opportunities to practice the necessary skills for taking civic action. Any effective citizenship education contains three elements: values and dispositions, skills and competences, and knowledge and understanding (Ross, 2008). The latter is sufficient for a passive citizenship, whereas the first two are essential to educate active citizens who feel empowered to engage with and seek to change a given situation (Ibid.). These three elements correspond with UNESCO's three domains for GCE and all three should have a place in schools' curricula. Ross (2008: 496) highlighted the importance of skills and competence within citizenship education for students to be active citizens:

"sophisticated skills of communication, which include being able to consider and respond to the views of others, being able to persuade, and being capable of being persuaded; skills of participation, which include an understanding of group dynamics and of how to contribute to the social development of civic action and skills of social action".

Civic action is about interacting with others to inform, deliberate, persuade or motivate in order to challenge or transform an injustice concerning the community.

Westheimer and Kahne, in their influential publication from 2004, conceptualised three main types of citizenship that education might promote (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Overview of three kinds of citizens (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004: 239)

	Personally Responsible Citizen	Participatory Citizen	Justice-Oriented Citizen
Description	· Acts responsible in his/her community · Works and pays taxes · Obeys laws · Recycles, gives blood · Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis	· Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts · Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment. · Knows how government agencies work · Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	· Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes · Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice · Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic change
Sample Action	Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core Assumptions	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good characters; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community.	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures.	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time.

A parallel can be drawn between the UNESCO publication from 2015 and Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) conceptualisation of justice-oriented citizens. Both frameworks highlighted assessment of root causes of local, national, and global injustices, along with an emphasis on analysing structures and unequal power dynamics in perpetuating existing global inequalities. Both frameworks also promote civic action that challenges issues of social justice through individual and collective action directed at transforming oneself and society as a whole. However, the most common interpretation of GCE is arguably more related to personally responsible citizens through its focus on donations and volunteering, rather than on actions that would question and challenge root causes of structural injustices (McCloskey, 2016). Neoliberal philosophies that guide institutional policies nowadays address citizens as personally responsible and participatory individuals.

Global citizenship education from a justice-oriented perspective

The kind of learning aligned with a justice-oriented GCE is scarce within GCE, as the focus seems to be on personal acts rather than collective initiatives (Tarc, 2015: 53). GCE is, therefore, teaching citizenship instead of what Biesta (2011) described as learning democracy. According to Biesta (Ibid.), learning to be a citizen is not only about knowledge, skills, or values but about opportunities for students to enact upon their citizenship through exposure and engagement with democracy. A report by the Development Education Research Centre evaluated the impact of a three-year project that aimed to develop active global citizens in different countries (Hunt, 2017). The report highlighted that GCE encouraged students to reflect on their own behaviour and they became more interested in global issues and action, but there was no significant impact on the willingness and participation in civic action to make the world fairer. This seems like a missed opportunity since citizenship education aims to develop citizens who are able to engage, organise, strategise and mobilise with others in order to address a public concern.

A justice-oriented citizenship education considers *acting* as a part of *knowing* so that a critical understanding of the world can emerge. The work of the Brazilian pedagogue, Paulo Freire, formed the basis on which the conceptualisation of a justice-oriented citizen is developed by Westheimer and

Kahne (2004). Freire (2017) suggested problem-posing education to educate citizens according to democratic principles. This method of teaching aimed to bring down the barrier between the teacher and the student by creating a dialogue between the two, without one being in control of the conversation. Students are in charge of their own inquiries about the world in which they live, thereby investigating the root causes of the problems their communities face. The inquiries would expose the exploitative structures and systems that create a given situation, which would consequently instil a sense of obligation to address the exposed realities. This is what Freire referred to as the emergence of consciousness or *conscientização*. For Freire (Ibid.: 131), *conscientização* was not only a cognitive development, but involved taking action to transform oppressive structures as an inherent part of this process:

> "People will be truly critical if they live the plenitude of the praxis, that is, if their action encompasses a critical reflection which increasingly organises their thinking and thus leads them to move from a purely naive knowledge of reality to a higher level, one which enables them to perceive the causes of reality".

Thus, reflection and action aimed to transform structures are at the core of Freire's educational philosophy and the educational philosophy upon which justice-oriented citizenship is based.

Freire's educational ideas were rooted in his work with those who were oppressed by the structures that needed to be transformed, hence the implementation of his pedagogy in the global North might be considered somewhat incongruous. Freire used problem-posing education to empower illiterate poor farmers in Brazil, whereas the implementation of this educational approach in the global North involves those who bear responsibility for the existence of the structures they aim to transform. Within formal education, students often participate in actions that are superficial and focussed on quick fixes aimed at self-fulfilment rather than reflecting on their own complicity and responsibility (Karsgaard, 2019: 70). However, the realisation of complicity can be a disempowering experience, as students do not actively choose to be complicit or have the power to change the situation (Zembylas, 2020: 10). The goal of

justice-oriented citizenship education would be to translate the realisation of complicity into specific individual and collective acts resisting the perpetuation of the injustice (Ibid). For complex global problems, civic action would require an understanding that 'ordinary harms' committed by individuals are embedded in the structural behaviours of states and corporations that facilitate these acts (Bryan, 2022: 335). This calls for a pedagogy that addresses the responsibility of individuals as well as institutions, by identifying the complex connections between the acts of individuals and structures that perpetuate and incentivise these activities (Ibid). Thus, civic action within a justice-oriented GCE should focus on specific acts that translate complicity into individual and collective action aiming to address the complexity of global problems.
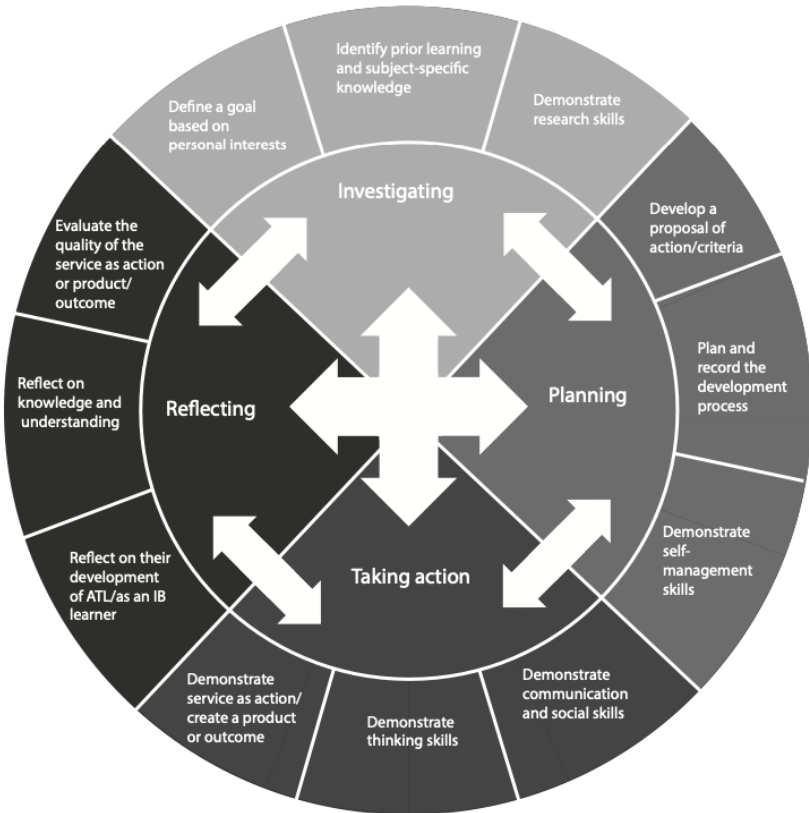
The study

The UNESCO framework of GCE aspired to develop citizens who feel empowered to make the world more inclusive, just, and peaceful through knowledge, values, and skills. As I outlined in the previous sections, citizenship education is about engaging in civic action as much as it is about knowing political processes and procedures or embracing values such as diversity and respect. However, there is a lack of initiatives within GCE that develop active citizens through engagement with civic action, as the focus is more on nurturing citizens that prioritise individual acts without challenging the status quo. The research question that guides this article is the following: How can engagement with civic action help to develop justice-oriented citizens within GCE?

The study presented in this article draws upon my doctoral research that investigated the implementation of GCE as a pedagogy through Action Research (AR). My aim was to investigate how engagement with civic action, as an integral part of GCE, could enable students to see beyond simplistic individual acts and encourage them to take action that would target global structures of injustices. The study took place in the Netherlands at an international school that followed the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. One of the required components of this programme is Service as Action. Students need to design, organise, and participate in actions that make a positive difference in their community throughout the Middle Years Programme (MYP). This stems from the IB's mission to create a better world through education by enabling students

'to make sense of the complexities of the world around them, as well as equipping them with the skills and dispositions needed for taking responsible action for the future' (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2019: 1). The IB Director General Olli-Pekka Heinonen made this further explicit by referring to the IB's mandate to provide an education that is relevant during the current climate emergency, so that students can be active participants in saving the world from this global crisis caused by selfishness, greed, and apathy (Heinonen, 2022). The IB curriculum, therefore, promotes the idea of inspiring students to become 'agents of change', who are equipped to explore local and global issues and able to take principled action to realise change in the world (Heinonen, 2021). Justice-oriented citizens who first investigate complex issues before taking action fits with the IB philosophy to educate agents of change.

The data for this study was collected while students participated in a ten-week action project about the climate emergency, which followed a twelve-week unit on human rights that used systems thinking. Teaching climate change allows educators to highlight the interconnectedness of the planet by examining how consumer practices and government policies in the global North impact other parts of the world, thereby promoting individual as well as collective actions (Mallon, 2015). The IB model for action-oriented projects contains a four steps sequence so that students' actions are appropriate, ethical, and necessary (Figure 3). The data was collected throughout the 2020-23 academic years and the study took place in Grade Nine; students were fourteen and fifteen years old. Consent was asked from students, parents, and the educational institute, leading to a total of 39 participants. The school was a semi-private institute, which means that parents pay a school fee in contrast to free public education in the Netherlands. Thus students attending the school came from economically privileged backgrounds. The nationality of the students was diverse since international schools serve an international community who are highly mobile.

During their action-project, the students worked in groups to prepare and execute an action that would either mitigate the causes of the climate emergency or adapt to the inevitable consequences of an increase in temperature. Between 2020 and 2023, students were offered different topics from which they could choose. In 2020-21 and 2021-22 the focus was on prominent sectors that emit the most carbon dioxide, such as industries and agriculture·, whereas in 2022-23, the students focused on the causes and consequences of the climate

emergency in the Netherlands to emphasise the connection between the local and the global. Students first investigated their topic, which included issues such as fast fashion, factory farming or rising tides. Hereby students used systems thinking tools, like cause-and-effect diagrams and connection circles, to reveal the impact of societal structures on individual behaviours. Thereafter, the students planned their action, executed it and reflected on the impact of the action on themselves and the community at large. Examples of actions that students took during this project were petitions, lobbying political leaders, or conducting workshops at school. Their progress and effort were captured in a graded report that included evidence of all four components equally.
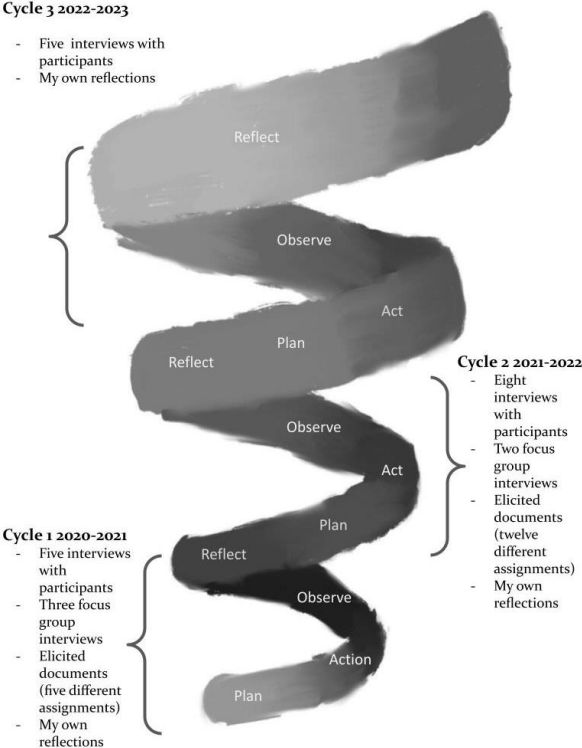
Methodology

This AR took place in three consecutive academic years, during which I revised my teaching to improve the implementation of GCE. The aim of an AR is to improve a given social situation through research by the practitioner, who engages in systematic and critical inquiry in order to better understand their own practice and share this publicly (Altrichter et al., 2008: 6).   As the aim of AR is for practitioners to solve their own challenges, self-reflective cycles of action and reflection form the core of knowledge creation (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, 2014: 26). Therefore, I reflected during and after each cycle on my practice by interviewing students, collecting elicited documents, and conducting conversations with a critical friend who taught the parallel class so as to better understand the effect of action-oriented teaching (Figure 4).

During the interviews, I asked students about their experiences of the teaching and learning. The interviews were based on assignments that students did as a part of the unit, such as a mind map on the climate emergency or a graphic organiser about a class reading. The language of instruction is English at the school, therefore, the interviews were conducted in English. I would ask students to explain their work and to indicate if something from the assignment was considered significant to them personally or if they had any outstanding questions about the assignments. By interviewing students on the basis of elicited documents, I aimed to mitigate the power imbalance between them as the students and myself as their teacher. The students were in control of the information they

wanted to share and their ideas guided the conversation, as the questions were about assignments they had undertaken beforehand (Barton, 2015).

On the basis of the data collected and analysed, I planned the next cycle of teaching, leading to changes that provided more examples of young people engaging with civic action, making use of system thinking tools to focus on structural causes, and connecting the climate emergency to urgent local issues. Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was used to guide the collecting and processing of data.

Figure 4: Overview of the data collection

Cycle 3 2022-2023
- Five interviews with participants
- My own reflections

Reflect

Observe

Act

Plan

Reflect

Cycle 2 2021-2022
- Eight interviews with participants
- Two focus group interviews
- Elicited documents (twelve different assignments)
- My own reflections

Observe

Act

Plan

Cycle 1 2020-2021
- Five interviews with participants
- Three focus group interviews
- Elicited documents (five different assignments)
- My own reflections

Reflect

Observe

Action

Plan

The aim of CGT is to formulate a theoretical understanding of an experience that is well-grounded in the data. Just as AR relies on the reflexivity of the researcher, CGT highlights the need for the researcher to be self-conscious about their relationship to the data and the emerging themes (Charmaz, 2020). One key feature of a grounded theory is the simultaneous collecting and analysing of the data (Charmaz, 2014); the interviewing of participants and the coding of those interviews happened within the same cycle. In line with CGT procedures, I initially coded data through 'in vivo' coding, so that words from the participants guided the codes that emerged (Tarozzi, 2020). Throughout the data collection, the coding of the interviews became more focused as particular themes started to emerge. I applied theoretical sampling by purposefully interviewing participants that could either confirm the emerging theory or contradict it. During this process, I made continuous memos to justify choices made in the coding and to reflect on the emerging theory by connecting different codes. Based on those memos, theoretical coding took place which is captured in the four themes that eventually explained the role of civic action within GCE.

The study had several limitations: it was conducted in one educational institution, which serves a particular student body and offers a specific curriculum, with only one instructor. To verify my findings with others, I coded one interview together with my critical friend, who taught the parallel class, to confirm my interpretation of the participant's experiences. After each cycle, I also presented the initial findings to the participants by asking them for feedback. Participants might have given socially desirable answers during interviews while holding contrasting views privately. I sought to mitigate these challenges by triangulating the data from the individual interviews with insights from focus group discussions and elicited documents, and by working with a critical friend.

Findings

The findings of the study directly relate to the role of civic action in developing justice-oriented global citizens. The goal of AR is to support practitioners with a particular challenge that they are facing in their practice, however 'such "situational understandings" can also be of universal significance by throwing light on possibilities for action in other situations' (Elliott, 2009: 35). By sharing these findings, I hope to contribute to conversations among GE educators about

possible practices that advance justice-oriented GCE in developing active citizens. From the data, four themes emerged that gave me insights into the role of action within GCE. These themes were derived from a combination of interviews with students as well as group discussions and elicited documents. Students mostly mentioned awareness raising as a method to take action: to mobilise more people to create a change. Students raised awareness most often on social media, which was an important way for them to take action. However, students remained focused on individuals who need to change their mindset, rather than mentioning the changing of unjust structures. Most importantly, students indicated that learning how to take action gave them hope that change is possible.

Recognising awareness raising as a catalyst for change

The act of awareness raising was by far the most often-mentioned example of civic action that could create change. Students explicitly mentioned raising awareness as a useful way to ignite a significant impact on an issue. An example is this observation from one student:

> "So I think it could also be our responsibility to raise a bit of awareness about it [an injustice] because we know about it and some people don't know about it. So raising awareness about it could make people who don't know about or realise what's happening and they could help more people raise awareness about it. So it's more like a chain".

Students recognised the need to inform others about a certain issue in order to create a change, thereby acknowledging that a necessary transformation required a joint effort. For such a collaborative approach the students identified several requirements: clear goal setting, campaigning, and advocating on behalf of others. One student expressed the importance of goal setting for collective action: 'because [...] without clear goals, we just become a nuisance to the public view'. Campaigning could be done in several forms according to the students: addressing politicians through petitions, informing the public, or participating in protests. One student summarised it as follows: 'personally I would, I would do like activism. I would do like multiple stuff because I don't think one is enough, like protesting, making a petition...gathering people for that'. Lastly, the importance of awareness raising was connected to the act of advocating for those

who are in need, or as the students worded it 'standing up for others'. This was mentioned mostly in relation to the Black Lives Matter protests that took place in the summer of 2020. Students referred to standing against racism by participating in campaigns such as protests or informing others about the existence of racism. The act of raising awareness about a certain issue was considered by students as a way to eventually create a more consequential impact by using the power of the masses rather than working as an individual. Social media was the main method that students themselves used to spread awareness about certain causes.

Using social media to be informed and to give voice

Social media plays an important role in young people's lives, by providing information about issues around the world and by giving them an opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions. Especially after the several lockdowns during COVID-19, young people spent more time on social media than ever (Groenestein and Portegies, 2020). Students talked about social media in a positive manner, as it allowed them to build connections and develop a sense of belonging. One student described it as a 'giant supportive system that I didn't have before'. At the same time, they acknowledged that social media has become hard to ignore: 'I mean like, it's kind of hard [...], you just see it, you know. Like no matter if you try or not, it's like everywhere basically, everybody is sharing different things'. In doing so students used social media to connect with others and to gain information about the world through those connections. Students also saw commenting on posts or reposting other people's videos or messages as a way to spread awareness. One student explained it as follows:

> "when I see it online, like on Instagram for example something, fire somewhere due to like climate hazards and then I also try to spread awareness about it, like posting the post on my story and stuff".

This quote shows how students use social media as a medium to gain information and as a means to spread awareness about a certain issue.

Social media was perceived by many students as a helpful tool to organise collective action which could eventually lead to change. The spreading of information through social media about injustices such as climate change, racial

discrimination or homophobia was seen as a way of educating those who might be unaware. Social media was seen as a driver of change, rather than a hindrance:

> "The young generation, we also have a huge role because we have social media and other platforms where we can spread awareness, because in the olden days there was like newspapers and all. But these days more people are using social media".

Social media was thus perceived by students as making it easier to participate in action, which the following quote illustrates:

> "I feel like it has never been easier for us to campaign because there are so many different ways. We can do it on social media, we can participate in real life [...]. So I feel like social media is looked at very negatively. I feel like if we use social media in the proper way, it can prove really useful in many areas".

Social media was for students a natural way to participate in civic action as they already utilise this tool in their daily lives, outside of any formal educational setting.

Focusing on changing individuals rather than structures

Even though students referred to the importance of awareness raising in order to organise with others, the suggested solution was often focused on changing individual attitudes rather than systems or structures that facilitate certain behaviours. Under this theme were coded any answers from students that referred to the need for individual people to adjust their mindset for a fairer world to be achieved. Students often saw open-mindedness as a solution to the injustices they investigated as a part of their project. The following quote illustrates this idea:

> "There should be ways that people can have an opportunity to change their mindsets and grow from that [discriminatory attitudes]. I would say mostly in the education systems [is the responsibility for changing people's mindset] and how much priority they give towards discrimination and stuff. In some schools, I don't know specifically

what school, but maybe in some schools bullying or what people say to each other, they don't really care much about what happens. So, that's where a lot of these problems still continue".

The student refers to a system, namely education, that might not prioritise teaching fairness and equity, as such discrimination still happens. However, the student does not question the system that allows and normalises discriminatory behaviours of individuals by disregarding it.

This focus on educating yourself and others was considered by many students as the solution to global injustices. The idea ties in with the act of awareness raising; educating others was deemed to have a potential domino effect. An example of such reasoning is the following quote:

"Whenever I see something that I wasn't aware of, I just repost it so that other people are also aware. For example, if it's like a charity then I repost it, so other people can also donate to it".

Although students considered raising awareness as a way to gain support for a cause, there was no mentioning of a potential successive collective action. The raising of awareness was supposed to prompt individuals to act in the form of making a donation. This relates to a personally responsible citizenship, instead of a justice-oriented one.

Very few students articulated the idea that change might only be possible if many people are working together in an organised movement. The following quote was an exception, with regard to those who considered joining an already existing social movement:

"You could first start by taking into like consideration big movements, such as the Zero Hour or the Black Lives Matter. You could take into consideration what they're doing and you could either try to involve more people in it or get involved yourself and try to make change".

Taking action gives hope

Regardless of students' ideas about the kind of action that is most useful, the fact that they participated in an action brought them hope. Learning about global issues, such as the climate emergency, might create anxiety amongst students about the society in which they live. Hickman et al. (2021) showed that young people globally experience distress about inadequate governmental responses to the climate emergency because it compromises their futures. Some students gained new ideas about the kind of actions they could participate in through the organisation of their own action. This one student gained knowledge about a specific form of action: 'the petition, I didn't think of that before, I really thought about that and I did some research and I found that petitions make an impact'. So the experience of organising their own action gave students the insight that there are several ways in which they can make a difference. It is important that students feel that they can make change, as otherwise they might end up feeling rather hopeless in the midst of complex problems. The following quotation from a student shows how they experienced this:

> "I felt that just one person doing things won't be impactful, doing this more efficiently may help, but we have to raise awareness to gain more results. [...] After getting 100 signatures, like getting support from others. I felt happy that I raised awareness about whatever is happening, I thought I could do more [...], after that I got a little hope.

Another student also expressed confidence in their ability to organise another action after doing research into a topic: 'I was disappointed with so much emission from cows, which I didn't think of before. [...] So I thought we could spread awareness, for people to be more mindful about what they eat'. Both responses of students show that they felt disappointment about the current situation, but experienced a sense of hope when participating in taking action. This hopefulness might inspire future actions to feel less disappointed or overwhelmed by the problems that our planet is facing. Not all students were so explicit in referring to their own action as giving inspiration; others relied on examples that were given of young people who took climate action in their own communities.

Discussion

This article reflected on a study that investigated the role of civic action in developing justice-oriented citizens in line with the IB programme and critical GCE. My aim was to understand how engagement with civic action could stimulate students to aim for necessary systemic transformations, rather than focusing solely on shallow quick fixes by individuals which have a limited impact.

Awareness raising emerged from the data as the most common way of taking action for students, aiming to ignite more impact by informing more people. The act of contributing to a public conversation about political issues can be considered a civic act: pursuing voice. Your voice is one of the voices in the mix of what is considered the public opinion about a certain issue (Allen, 2018). Awareness raising alone, however, does not lead to a justice-oriented citizenry, but rather to what Andreotti (2006) notably called 'soft GCE'. The impact of civic action might be more meaningful when awareness raising goes beyond informing and aims to influence a decision-making process. The findings suggest that students informed others about a certain issue without contemplating a subsequent response to that knowledge. I therefore consider it to be useful for subsequent action-oriented projects to make a distinction between pursuing voice, having an influence or perhaps both (Democratic Knowledge Project, 2023). For students to be able to drive more strategic impact, imparting traditional civic knowledge about advocacy, and dealing with elected representatives, or the power distribution between the local and central government, are necessary (Allen, 2018). This recalls the following recommendation from Jerome and Lalor (2020: 115):

> "We want to suggest that knowledge of how and why one would use a petition reveals students' level of citizenship understanding, whereas the mere knowledge that petitions exist is of limited use. The point for teachers is to consider scaffolding classwork so that students move beyond suggesting simplistic and superficial prescriptions for citizens' action and explain precisely how a proposed action might lead to a desired outcome".

Thus, awareness raising activities among students could potentially lead to more active citizenship by combining it with knowledge about leverage points within a democratic state.

A lack of knowledge and understanding of participatory politics might have contributed to students mainly expressing strategies for actions that align with personally responsible citizenship rather than justice-oriented citizenship. The findings showed that though students realised the importance of working together in order to solve complex global problems, their often-mentioned solution was for individual people to essentially 'know and do better'. Pashby and Sund (2020) explained that existing political actions do not align well with embracing the complexity of global problems, as most of our solutions are embedded within a neoliberal framework and tied to a personally responsible or participatory citizen. Especially in the context of the global North, civic action should involve reflections on complicity and shared responsibility in order to challenge dominant social, economic and political structures (Gyberg, Anshelm, Hallström, 2020). However, a GCE that furthers a justice-oriented approach to global issues, by highlighting the entanglement between individual acts and structural forces, requires more than this one-off project. The findings presented in this article suggest that a better integration of social media as participatory politics within GCE can provide a solution.

Social media was found to be an important tool for civic action as students used this frequently in their daily life. The findings show that students used social media to inform others about causes they cared about. The act of exerting both voice and influence on issues of public concern on social media are considered digital political engagement (Kahne, Hodgin and Eidman-Aadahl, 2016). Typical civic actions are now taking place online, by effectuating change through digital presence. During this action-oriented project, there was no mention of social media specifically, nor was it used as an example for successful campaigning. The importance of social media emerged through the interviews with the students, in which they expressed their usage of the platforms. For Biesta (2011: 6) 'learning democracy' is about young people's 'participation in the contexts and practices that make up their everyday lives, in school, college and university, and in society at large'. It is clear that social media has an important

role in students' everyday lives and therefore should arguably be more embedded as a site for learning citizenship. Besides social media's obvious flaws, there is potential for meaningful civic engagement such as micro-mobilisation, flash-activism, or hybrid-forms of actions (Earl, 2018). For students to utilise social media as civic action, the integration of digital citizenship within citizenship education is recommended. This in combination with critical literacy, to question and highlight power relationships online and offline, could make a justice-oriented GCE attainable (Pathak-Shelat, 2018).

Above all, the findings showed that engaging students in developing, planning, and executing their own action provides them with hope to solve global issues. Justice-oriented citizens look for complexity when trying to understand injustice, which can also lead to desperation and pessimism (Bryan, 2020). The findings, however, indicate that engaging with civic action that contributes to a solution gives young people hope. The experience of organising a collective action made students realise that they are not alone in their concerns but can count on support from others. This encounter provided a remedy for hopelessness and also gave young people the motivation to organise future actions. It underlines the importance of teaching active citizenship, allowing students to practice planning, organising, and executing collective actions.

Conclusion

The implementation of active GCE to develop justice-oriented citizens is a complicated task since neoliberal discourses around citizenship are dominant in most parts of the world. Thus, most political actions that we are familiar with focus on individual acts and attributes, which disregard the responsibility of behaviours by states and corporates. Nevertheless, this research showed the importance for educators of providing students with an opportunity to engage with political actions as a way to work together towards solving complex issues of social justice. As bell hooks (2003: xiv) said: 'when we only name the problem, when we state complaint without a constructive focus on resolution, we take away hope'. By informing GCE with insights from citizenship education, the kinds of civic actions that students can engage with might become more relevant in addressing the complexity of global issues for which there are no straightforward solutions.

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