

THE GIFT THAT DOESN'T STOP GIVING: GCE AS AN ASPIRTIONAL AND CONTESTED CONCEPT

Dialogues on Global Citizenship Education: Interview with Karen Pashby

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Abstract

Karen Pashby, Professor of Global Citizenship Education at Manchester Metropolitan University, docent at University of Helsinki, and Adjunct Professor at University of Alberta, is a renowned researcher and educator in the field of Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Her work draws on de/post/anti-colonial theoretical resources to support critically reflexive practices in GCE in 'Global North' contexts. In this interview, Pashby emphasizes the aspirational and contested paradox of GCE, aiming to engage learners in thinking about ethical relations of rights and responsibilities. She highlights the need for multiple transformations in the structures that frame our relations as cohabitants of the planet, while at the same time warning about the risk of the tendency towards solutionism. As a critical GCE scholar, Pashby highlights that learners and educators must acknowledge they are both part of the problem and the solution, and therefore, build on critical reflexivity and deep thinking to understand their ethical relations.

Keywords: GCE; Critical Perspective; Reflexivity

TESTO

Prof. Pashby, how would you define GCE?

I have been working for my whole academic career around this question, because it is actually impossible to firmly define it and that is also why Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is such an important and even beautiful concept. I would say that for me GCE is an aspirational and contested concept because there is a paradox there, and interestingly that paradox maps onto the deep complexities that we have in our world today.

GCE first emerged at the end of the 20th century, and it aimed to re-imagine global relations beyond the nation-state structures based on the need to learn, but also unlearn from the 20th century around our increasing interdependencies. This is a bit of a simplistic overview and in political science there is a lot of debate about it because legally, there is not global citizenship in the same way that there is national citizenship. To re-think global relations and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship beyond nation-state structures can be considered impossible. However, in educational spaces, global citizenship has more traction because we can learn and unlearn ways of relating and being interdependent. In fact, it is undeniable that we are still organised by nation-states and international relations, but, if we challenge this assumption in educational settings, we could evoke other possibilities.

Therefore, I would define GCE as an education that engages with this aspirational and contested paradox. The concept of GCE can mobilise ideas about how to share this planet together, how to relate ethically, and how to think about citizenship in terms of rights and responsibilities within and beyond nation-state structures. It can open serious discussions inherent to the concept of citizenship about belonging and tensions, the good and the bad, inclusion and exclusion. As an ideal, GCE aspires towards multiple transformations in the various structures that frame our relations as cohabitants on the planet. And, the discussions and debates can and should continue. For example, connected to its contested nature, we can see increasing calls for the inclusion of "more-than-humans" into this aspiration.

Relating to this definition, could you bring examples of projects or experiences that in your opinion express GCE's main characteristics?

I think you know that I have been particularly and heavily involved in trying to define Critical Global Citizenship Education and, just like GCE, it is quite difficult to define. I would say that GCE is “the gift that doesn't stop giving” to a researcher because there is so much it evokes that you can research and try to make sense of. It is like a touchstone for all of the other big issues in the world, and also for education. I think that in critical work we are trying to develop deep reflexivity and even generating critiques of critical approaches themselves. We are hearing now about post critical or critical perspectives (Andreotti, 2021) because we try to “*walk the walk and talk the talk*”, i.e., we seek consistency between what we say and what we do, and we want to push the edges of the debate and of what is possible. In terms of Critical GCE, we are really focusing on understanding that we are always both part of the problem and part of the solution, based on our different positionings within these wider structures that frame our ability or inability to relate ethically. There are several projects that demonstrate this to me. An example is the *International Youth White Paper on Global Citizenship*¹ (Shultz et.al., 2017), written by a group of students on behalf of their colleagues from each continent. I think they did a very good job of both treating GCE's complexities, but also its possibilities. They got a standing ovation at the *UNESCO World Forum* in Ottawa and made specific recommendations that included more support for their teachers because they realized it is a really challenging work.

To respond to these recommendations, I worked on a project with my research partner Louise Sund to adapt a reflexive and critical global citizenship tool² for classroom practice with teachers in England, Finland, and Sweden. This research was focused on Critical GCE in northern Europe, and so responded to key concerns in those contexts around the need to respond to a tendency to reproduce colonial systems of power in teaching global issues. The resource based on that project has now been translated into four languages with four more on the way. We think that something struck a chord. At the same time, we became aware of some of the possibilities and tensions of this work in classrooms, and the need for longer term work together with educators. This awareness has led to our current project working with 15 upper secondary school

¹ <https://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/resources/national-youth-white-paper-global-citizenship>

² <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/research/research-centres/esri/projects/teaching-sustainable-development>

teachers in Sweden over three years to explore the possibilities and challenges of engaging with decolonial concepts in practice and particularly in relation to climate change education.

Based on your study and research experience, which do you think are the elements of GCE that can help address the current historical challenges, and which are the critical ones?

I am not convinced that GCE is going to address all our problems, and I certainly do not think we can promise specific solutions. This assumption has certainly to do with what one believes is the purpose of education. Marta da Costa and I have discussed this in a recent article (Pashby & Costa, 2021) in which we warned about the tendency towards solutionism if the aims for education is to lead students to solve problems. They should be engaged in problems and have a lot to offer in terms of responses, of course, but sometimes solution-focused approaches can step over opportunities for ethical reflexivity and understanding complexities. This can put youth in positions to have to solve problems that adults in actual positions of responsibility should. It sounds quite unpopular when I push for not always putting action first because it seems I am promoting intellectualization and not actually making changes in the world, but that is not what I am saying. I think we have to be very careful about what we claim that our work can and cannot do as educators and then in terms of action and possibilities link up with communities and social movements as well. In this way I think GCE represents a mobilising concept also at the international level, because it is increasingly in policies and practice, and it can therefore support multiple and pluralizing approaches to encourage learners of all ages across their lifespan. Formal education should not and cannot do everything and should retain the space for deep thinking and learning, and this could also include experiential and active pedagogies.

The hope is that, through creating these educative spaces engaged in complex ethical issues, learners and 'unlearners' of all ages will themselves come up with different responses to issues, maybe outside schools or later in life. However, as Vanessa Andreotti mentions, we need to consider that we might create new problems. It is a possible risk and the reason why one of the main aims needs to be critical reflexivity in order to recognise and respond when this inevitably does happen. So, jumping to find 'solutions' and aiming for that might not be the best approach although we absolutely

want to be responsive to the immediacy of many of our challenges. The spaces of learning and unlearning are so important. I recommend the recent article by Carrie Karsgaard and Debra Davidson to explore this further (Karsgaard & Davidson, 2023). It is also important to encourage different approaches in different contexts because we need to avoid repeating the same things that we have always done, expecting them to be different, and we shouldn't do multiple versions of the same things we've always done.

As scholars who are working in the critical area of GCE, we feel we need to build on critical reflexivity and deep thinking around our ethical relations. For me, this has been very heavily influenced by decolonial theories in the sense of the imperative to make visible repeated patterns of oppression to explore pedagogical possibilities for supporting ethically reflexive framings and responses to global issues.

I should specify that most of my work has been done in formal education, even if I have also done some work in non-formal educational contexts. And, my work has mostly been with teachers and young people in global North contexts. I think that your question could be answered very differently by people within this research field and also by scholars positioned in other fields writing from and about other contexts or even the same one. It is also necessary to consider other deeply different perspectives if we are aspiring to find ways of balancing and working with this paradox.

Could you tell us how your thinking on GCE has evolved over time and what is the common thread that links your major publications on GCE?

When I first started studying and practicing GCE in the first decade of the 21st century, we were already pushing back against a neoliberal, human capitalist and reductive version of GCE. This led to a strong rally towards more social-justice-oriented approaches from leaders in the field, like Carlos Alberto Torres. Harriet Marshall tracked these two agendas in the UK in a couple of great publications (Marshall, 2009, 2014). At the same time, Vanessa Andreotti was doing her doctoral work in the UK, having come from working as an educator in Brazil, where she witnessed the 'Make Poverty History campaign' as a person from the 'global South'. Her work, distinguishing between soft and critical GCE (Andreotti, 2006) was a real wake up call for us doing this work in 'global North' contexts to realise that we could be reproducing the inequalities we are trying to solve. I left teaching to start graduate school and looked at how these similar

tensions ran through my own teaching experiences, especially the assumption that Canada was a perfect place for GCE because of our multiculturalism policy (Pashby, 2013). A post-doc in Finland with Vanessa exploring internationalisation policies of universities led to the creation of a helpful heuristic that pointed to three main discursive orientations and their interfaces, because - as Harriet Marshall and others like Lynette Shultz had pointed out - these types of GCE are not always discrete. Working from there, I researched the emerging discourses from UNESCO around GCE as a growing policy imperative (Pashby, 2018) while doing a postdoc at the *Centre for Global Citizenship and Education* at University of Alberta where we also were facilitating the *White Paper* I mentioned before.

When I moved to the UK, I used the recommendations of those youth to explore work with teachers as I mentioned. I combined forces with Louise Sund, who was looking at these issues in environmental and sustainability education, and we have written some theoretical papers together (Sund & Pashby, 2020). I also tried to keep track of how the discussions were or were not moving to respond to the edges of the debates, by doing a meta review of several of the typologies of GCE that had been proliferating. Together with Marta da Costa, Sharon Stein, and Vanessa Andreotti (Pashby et al, 2020), we considered key questions for the field based on our work with the heuristic and pointing to methodological, epistemological and ontological layers of analysis. With Louise Sund we continue the work with teachers to explore possibilities and challenges. Therefore, I like to think my work is contributing to theoretical work in the field, while being strongly informed by and contributing to practice.

The thread that links my work is critical reflexivity and taking seriously the established critique that GCE can reproduce colonial systems of power. In fact, while a lot of work is being mobilized around taking up decolonial pedagogies in settler contexts, I feel we need more work across Europe to respond, rather than deny or let it all be the problem of the settler contexts.

Has your academic as well as life experience shaped this understanding?

Absolutely, our work is always somewhat autobiographical, it is impossible to keep it separated. This is true especially in the field of GCE because it necessarily seems to involve people that are interested in understanding other people, travelling and/or

engaging in the diversity in their local contexts. For me personally, I would say that my work is parallel to an ongoing reckoning with my own privilege or, as I have recently heard it called, *being a beneficiary of multiple oppressions*. That is absolutely at the core: trying to unravel the problems we have is not something we can put on the side. Trying to work on your own privilege is also quite difficult and risky because it is a never-ending process and even when you are trying to be reflexive, you can re-centre things like Whiteness in many different ways, so you never get to feel complete or good about it. For example, as an educator, looking around me, I see how white middle-class females are still so highly overrepresented in the teaching profession. That absolutely needs to change and that is going to require redistribution of power. However, grappling with one's complicity in the issues we are trying to respond to in fundamentally new ways of relating is dynamic and also imperative. So, working with the possibilities and challenges of this approach in education is also fulfilling in different ways.

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