

# Global Citizenship Education in Hong Kong

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**Abstract**—Education is in the midst of massive reforms in different parts of the world. Over the last few decades, there is an increasing call for global citizenship education(GCE) in the academy. In this paper, the author will first explain why the concept is a game changer in higher education, and then explore the opportunities as well challenges for GCE, particularly in the Hong Kong academy, from the perspectives of public policies, curriculum and pedagogy. Finally, the author wants to explore how the pedagogy of service learning (SL) can serve as a powerful vehicle to achieve the intended learning outcomes of GCE while, in the meantime,GCE can inform the theory and practice of international SL.

**Index Terms**—Citizenship, global citizenship education, Hong Kong, international service learning.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the American Council on Education, with support from the Ford Foundation, initiated a curricular project called “Global Learning for All” in which it defines global learning as “the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students acquire through a variety of experiences that enable them to understand world cultures and events; and appreciate their lives and analyze global systems; appreciate cultural differences; and apply this knowledge and appreciation to their lives as citizens and workers” [1]. This definition is commonly known as the “competency” model that emphasizes three key learning outcomes for GCE, namely, knowledge, skills and values. Alongside this “softer” version of global citizenship, there is also another increasing popular understanding of GCE, which is often described by scholars as the social-justice approach, which emphasizes the awareness of global problems, such as concentrated poverty, healthcare disparities, environmental issues and capacity building for its resolution.

For either approach, GCE is a game changer in two important ways. First, it helps reformulate the discourse of international education. In the United States, for example, after the turn of the century, there has been a sea change of attitudes toward the value of overseas experience and an explosion of new international initiatives and programs on university campuses. However, as Clara M. Lovett, former president of Northern Arizona University, argues that American universities need to tune down their rhetoric of economic competition and threats to the national security. Instead, they need to emphasize common global interests and issues that shape the future of the world, and promote

training of world citizens with a global mind-set ready to tackle those issues.

In the meantime, GCE also represents a new model for diversity training and multicultural education for the academy. For decades, there seems to be a serious disconnect between diversity education and international education, at least in the U.S. context. Again, on American campuses, diversity training often has a local focus on the ethnic and racial minorities, while international education is regarded as the study of or learning related to foreign cultures or experience gained overseas. GCE, as scholars argue, has the potential to link the local and the international. It can weave together local community-based diversity training with learning for global literacy. As a theoretical framework, according to those scholars, GCE emphasizes global citizenship as a core competency for student civic professionalism without the artificial distinction between the local and global.[2] In a sense, GCE offers a different paradigm for international education and diversity training.

## II. CHALLENGES FOR THE HONG KONG ACADEMY

Citizenship education, including GCE, by nature is a highly political discourse. It is particularly true in Hong Kong due to the territory’s unique history and circumstances, including its colonial heritage, its “one country two systems” framework, and its citizens’ multiple self-identities as being Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, Hong Konger and local resident but a foreign national. For the purpose of this paper, the author intends to highlight three major challenges, including the ideological, the programmatic and the pedagogical.

### A. Ideological Challenges

Since the return of sovereignty to China, the SAR government in Hong Kong was caught between its drive for a stronger Chinese national identity and its desire to maintain the city’s competitiveness as a global commercial center. This deeply-seated tension is further complicated by the potential bias reflective of two of Hong Kong’s major political camps: the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing camp. The former would demand an emphasis on universal values and global perspectives that emphasize human rights and the rule of law while the latter advocate for national education and propaganda that focus on the “China elements.” A good case in point was the recent controversy over the government’s plan to implement the new “National Education” subject in elementary schools in Fall of 2012, followed by secondary schools in 2013. The local SAR government, under pressure from Beijing, intends to strengthen national education by adopting

Chinese mainland civic education program into Hong Kong's public school curriculum. This plan sparked a public outcry among local residents who claimed that the policy amounted to Chinese party-style "brainwashing." At the center of the debate was a booklet of guidelines, entitled "The China Model," published by the government's National Education Services Center. It claimed that China's ruling Communist party was "progressive, selfless and united." It also criticized multi-party systems as bringing disasters to countries such as the United States. This highly political rhetoric enraged teachers, parents and students who organized public protests throughout the city. Under tremendous public pressure, the National Education plan was temporarily placed on hold for the year.

### *B. Programmatic Challenges*

This deep ideological tension influenced curriculum design, including the recent development of the new four-year program by the eight public universities. With the conversion from the 3-year British-style to the four-year American-style baccalaureate program, government-funded universities have gone through a laborious process of establishing their general education programs. The struggle to strike a balance a national Chinese identity and global citizenship was fully reflected in both program design and implementation. For example, in setting up their GE learning outlines (GELO's), all eight UGC-funded universities have put citizenship as one of their key GE competencies. However, when it comes to the specific ways to achieve citizenship, strategies vary significantly from institution to institution. For example, on the one hand, Hong Kong University (HKU) has established a well-balanced "common core" program, where "global issues" and "China: Culture, State and Society" are two of the four major areas of inquiry. On the other, Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) put "Chinese cultural heritage" as one of its four core general education requirements, along with "nature, science and technology," "society and culture" and "self and humanity." This "China-focused" GE program should be no surprise to people who know CUHK's history since its original mission was to promote Chinese cultural studies as a counter balance to HKU's "colonial education." Ref. [3] this programmatic challenge is probably best reflected in the case of Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU). Ever since 1997, when GE was first introduced on its campus, China studies was one of the only two required GE subjects along with broadening. In designing its new General University Requirement (GUR), although China studies was no longer listed as one of the four cluster area requirements (CAR), the University mandated that half of the distribution subjects, 8 out of 16 credits, should be "China-related," which, to some faculty members, defeats the purpose of "distribution," which was often meant to allow students to take courses across a wide range of subjects and disciplines. Despite its controversial nature, this requirement was pushed through by the senior management. However, six months later, after a semester of implementation, the requirement was cut back to 4 credits with broadly based campus support. This policy flip-flop demonstrates the complexity and uneven

development of GEC for the Hong Kong academy.

### *C. Pedagogical Challenges*

Finally, in the debate over GCE in Hong Kong as elsewhere, pedagogical issues present unique questions as well. Two immediate issues come to mind. First, what are the intended learning outcomes for GCE? Nowadays, everybody seems to agree that when students leave campus and enter the real world, they must have the cultural sensitivities and social skills, in addition to their professional training, to compete in a globalized knowledge-based economy. In response, Hong Kong's institutions of higher education need to turn out thoughtful citizens instead of technocrats. For example, a number of universities have been working on an integrated set of key attributes for their own graduates. Alongside professional competency, critical thinking, effective communication, innovative problem-solving, lifelong learning and ethical leadership are often cited among the given and desired key attributes for the general education curriculum. While there is broadly shared agreement about those general student profiles, how to achieve those key competencies are often open to debate. For example, what is a model citizen? Should he or she become blindly loyal to the nation state or principled citizens who could be loyal but also critical of the nation at the same time.

Furthermore, for GCE practitioners, what would be the best way to teach GCE in and outside the classroom? In its "Global Citizenship Education School Guide," Hong Kong Oxfam declares that "GCE is not an independent and specific curriculum," but "its important concepts, elements and values can be incorporated into any subject or any form of teaching activity." Ref. [4] for the author, this definition suggested by Hong Kong Oxfam best captures the nature of GCE. It is more of a pedagogical approach that helps students to learn about the world from a critical and engaged perspective instead of being a separate curriculum.

## III. GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND SERVICE LEARNING

For American educators familiar with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), they should know its recent literature about the promotion of high-impact practices in higher education. SL, along with the first-year experience, undergraduate research, capstone experience and learning communities is often cited as one of nine or ten high-impact learning and teaching activities that have contributed to student success. Indeed, over recent decades, many leading university and colleges across have established service-learning centers or programs, supporting a dedicated core of faculty and serving an increasingly larger student population. This is equally true in Hong Kong. Almost all eight public universities have integrated some form of community-based learning in their curriculum. Lingnan University, for example, was the first to set up the Office of Service Learning (OSL) on campus. The CBI (community based instruction) program at Hong Kong Baptist University was also among the earliest service-learning programs in Hong Kong. In the process of

switching from three-year to the four-year program, other universities, such as Hong Kong Polytechnic University, have made SL a requirement in the general education program.

Over the years, various case studies have demonstrated that GCE and SL share their learning outcomes. First, SL practitioners can help promote global citizenship among students in learning across cultures to achieving cross-cultural competency. For example, Chung Chi College from CUHK launched its service-learning program in 2000 and expanded it to include international SL in the summer of 2005 by partnership with five regional universities from India, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea and Japan. In the summer program, students are given the opportunity to serve overseas communities, visit their families and explore indigenous cultures. After completion of the program, students will present their service and learning experience to faculty, staff and students in the College Assembly.[5] The impact of this SL program on student participants is assessed by a study conducted by Dr. Tai-shing Lau, director of Chung Chi College's Service-Learning Program. The data generated were quite revealing. For the pre-service survey, most students had clear anxieties about reaching out to the unknown (a foreign culture), while for the post-service survey, all students put emphasis on personal growth in terms of relationship building across cultures. Some students mention that they want to continue learning about the host country and understand more about its social structure. Many participants say that they enjoy the experience because they could not only understand others, but also were able to know about themselves better in the process. Indeed, as Dr. Lau has noted, the frequency of mentioning serving the disadvantaged is much lower than personal growth. Ref. [6] the survey, though limited in scope, clearly demonstrates benefits of international SL for GCE's outcomes. It offers student exposure to communities that clearly differ from their own by race, class, language, culture or life experiences (knowledge), thus helping them to develop cross-cultural competency (skills) and reducing parochial attitudes or ethnocentric biases among participants (values).

If this competency approach represents the softer model of global citizenship, SL can also promote citizenship, advocacy, social justice, and policy-related learning and community engagement. This social-justice approach is particularly important since faculty members have expressed their skepticism about service-learning simply because they feel such endeavors amount to little more than "charity" work, or even "distractions" from core disciplinary competencies. Indeed, we may have to admit that this "charity" type of service-learning is still around and alive, and some service-learning projects lack a political awareness component and the service students perform treats social symptoms, without addressing the root causes of social disparities, poverty conditions and medical maladies. However, to promote the global citizenship agenda, SL can be effectively linked with the concept of social justice education. A good place to start may be to engage in sustainable and impactful service for the

communities. A good case in point is Lingnan University's long-term SL project in Yunnan. Lingnan University and Deloitte China have been jointly running a village adoption project in Yunnan, mainland China since 2007. The project aims to pilot and develop a model for the sustainable development of a rural community through academic research, corporate sponsorship and SL. Over the past several years, the project has significantly changed the lives of those villagers. A number of sustainable projects have been completed. An elementary school was built and several roads were renovated and developed. Water pipe was installed for all village households. A health survey was conducted by students for WHO and training programs were offered regularly for walnut tree seeding and planting. In addition, designated scholarships were provided for college-bound students. This project successfully breaks down the stereotypical "random acts of kindness" model of SL.

The examples given above clearly demonstrate the potential of SL in helping students develop a transformative perspective on the critical issues of social justice and social inequality. Nowadays, social justice ideals are broadly embraced by faculty and students, but oftentimes students are exposed to issues of injustice or inequity only as an abstraction. SL offers a proven pedagogy for moving the discussion of human rights and social justice from the classroom to the streets, where it takes on human meaning and the very concept of social justice can be, therefore, translated into passion and commitment for participants.

Finally, SL can help link the local and global in citizenship education. For example, a group of faculty from the English Department at PolyU has developed a course-based service-learning subject: ENGL2S01 "Language Arts for Creative Community Projects at PolyU." According to the syllabus, students take the subject will learn how to use highly creative methods, including performance arts, game-playing, creative writing, and storytelling to teach Chinese language skills to ethnic minority children from Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand. "Forced into one of a handful of schools with scarce resources and no classes offering Chinese as a second language," as *South China Morning Post* reported recently, "advocates say not enough is being done to help ethnic minority pupils integrate and break a cycle of poverty." Ref. [7] through working with those immigrant children, PolyU students gain insights into the lives of underprivileged communities and become civic-minded about social issues in their

Indeed, SL as a high-impact practice, when properly implemented, can become a powerful pedagogy for GCE and prepare students to deal with a world that is increasing globalized, but deeply divided by race, gender, class, religion and nationalities, own society.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In closing, the author wants to return to the premise raised at the beginning of this paper that, SL, particularly international SL, contributes to the learning outcomes of GCE while GCE informs the theory and practice of international SL.

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