12 New Directions for Citizenship, Democracy, and Education

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Introduction

This concluding chapter provides summative reflections on youth, education, and democracy in an era of global change and suggests new directions for citizenship studies in the field of comparative and international education. Citizenship’s convergences and divergences unearthed through the contributions in this book have enabled us to identify key conceptual categories in pursuit of a critical democratic global citizenship and education for the field. The conceptual categories present a new grammar for citizenship studies and offer a research agenda to guide future comparative inquiry. By valuing youth voice; viewing the global as local; and acknowledging diverse actors, theoretical perspectives, and citizenship spaces, we contest existing citizenship discourses rooted in locale, liberalism, and longevity to reimagine citizenship and citizenship education anew.

Valuing youth voice

The topic of youth, democracy, and education is of growing interest—and even more so in the post-COVID environment—as youth social movements and agency come to the forefront and challenge traditional understandings of citizenship in light of globalizing influences. Youth are not neutral in the world or in the environments they inhabit. Rather, youth are both impacted by, and influencers of, social inclusion, opportunity, and well-being. They are digital users and content producers, culturally and linguistically diverse, and represent persons from dominant and non-dominant cultures, as well as migrant, refugee, and indigenous populations. This focus on youth in our book has challenged several binaries for re-imagining citizenship and framing global citizenship education anew. The contested citizen binaries include: the public/private schism; the online/offline divide; the global/local division of space, place, and engagement; and systemic/individual spheres of responsibility and change.

In this book, we have argued that citizenship occurs in multiple locales, including that of the public and home; that citizenship must be informed by
theoretical and epistemic positions beyond liberalism; and that youth are not waiting for a future time to act as citizens but are already engaged in, and engaging, social challenge and change. Youth are leading the way in educating adults, including educators, about how to be active citizens. Thus, youth—in diverse locales and cultural contexts—are blurring the lines of what counts as citizenship or civic activity. In many ways, we are no longer seeing a public-private schism; rather, citizen identity and citizen action are being observed and undertaken in the private domain of the home, laptop, and smartphone. Technology is allowing youth to enter the public through the private. The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased working, schooling, and learning from home as opposed to public spaces. Although cultural difference plays an important role in how active citizenship is conceived and implemented, there is a lack of plurality within “the global” in terms of how global citizenship education is currently conceived.

Understanding the conceptions that young people have about the exercise of citizenship and how these are acquired is key to imagining the new ways in which this is manifested. The conceptions of citizenship in their traditional frameworks, anchored to the idea of the nation-state, already present a series of challenges and limitations in their relationship with the youth population, both in the school stage and in young adulthood. This book shows that these challenges and limitations are even greater when citizenship is considered from a global perspective. For example, Treviño et al. in this book show that a large majority of young people are aware of global economic, environmental, and sociopolitical threats, although with important variations between world regions. Along the same lines, Villalobos et al. in their chapter show how civic norms are constructed contextually, influenced by social, political, and territorial factors. In this sense, the challenges experienced by the new generation to global problems imply a permanent movement toward critique of the limits of what is possible by traditional forms of citizenship toward agency in exercising their role as citizens, which is no longer solely in a community within nation-state limits but as citizens in the world.

Yet, in reimagining and perhaps even transgressing the limits of citizenship, children and youth still struggle within the constraints of national and global power structures. Bickmore and Barrero Jaramillo illustrate how the realities of global power asymmetries and resource exploitation produce persistent anxieties among economically marginalized youth in Canada and Mexico. In Liberia, Blanks Jones and Juaquellie show how the theater activism of youth performers is deeply shaped by legacies of colonialism, conflict, and international development regimes. Thus, the new generation negotiates and renegotiates their belonging as members of a global community, under vastly different circumstances. The traditional forms defined normatively from the adult and institutional world meet the understanding, experiences, and appropriation that young people make of their role, as Fahning in this book shows in a rural community in the American Midwest.
To reconceptualize citizenship by taking account of youth voice has been undertreated in the field. Our text introduces new themes to citizenship studies, including the shape of youth social movements, engagements with environmental conflicts, the notion of spatial politics of citizenship, pockets of belonging, as well as data about young people’s constructions of citizenship. In our view, the strength of the text lies in its ambition to address how, in an era of global change, social diversity is being affected and how diverse young people are responding. In some cases, the concept of citizenship is being reframed; there are diverse spaces in which citizenship is being enacted, and young people are negotiating citizenship and social change in diverse ways. Another line of interest that is still on the margins, but extremely important, is the relationship of young people to new global citizenships through digital worlds and social media. How does this reshape their civic identities, engagements, and activism? The book seeks to enrich the comparative and international education literature with the focus on reimagining citizenships from the perspective of youth and with sophisticated cross-cultural perspectives and a range of quantitative and qualitative methodological choices. The scholarship displays the range of methodologies that can be used to research young people’s civic identifications, negotiations, and activism. The aim is to strengthen recognition of the roles, positionalities, agencies, and actions of youth so that the field of global citizenship education studies changes.

Peter McInerney (2009) argues that

if we deny subjectivity, silence student voices, show scant respect for children and their culture, suppress the creative capacities of individuals and close down spaces for inquiry, we are likely to reinforce existing patterns of alienation and disaffection amongst young people.

(p. 28)

Interestingly, however, youth are especially using digital spaces to assert their voices and to engage in issues that interest them. Dyrness (2021), for instance, is doubtful that an assimilative, state-led citizenship education designed to “civilize” migrant youth will allow social critique of how state power and violence operate globally. Dyrness (2021) uses the notion of “diasporic citizenship” to explore youth membership and belonging for transnational youth. From this stance, citizenship is viewed as lived experience as opposed to juridical status, thereby highlighting the cultural processes of identity formation (Dyrness, 2021). The work on lived everyday citizenship is a growing field (Kallio et al., 2020) and could be usefully employed in a critical democratic global citizenship education framework.

Recognizing that youth behave differently as citizens in different locales, there is indication of a conceptual turn toward a particular kind of global citizenship and agency. The chapter authors suggest that, in some cases, young people are pushing against traditional nation-state understandings of citizenship. The contestations and tensions associated with citizenship lead us to
consider what global citizenship education beyond the local-global binary might look like. The meanings youth assign to citizenship, and the kinds of citizenship action in which they engage, requires a new social imaginary toward citizenship. Because democracy is contested and does not mean the same thing everywhere and to everyone, what are the implications for developing democratic values and citizen agency in youth? What does a re-positioned, re-imagined, and non-bifurcated citizenship and global citizenship education informed by youth perspective look like? How might this new conceptualization of citizenship orient citizenship studies in the field of comparative and international education?

Valuing youth voice in this book has also meant exploring new methodological approaches and representational politics in our engagements with children and youth. As youth around the world powerfully articulate their own ideas and visions for the future through youth-generated media content, digitally activated movements, community-based organizations, and myriad forms of grassroots leadership, as a field, we are called to center youth not merely as research subjects but also as interlocutors and collaborators. Several contributions in this book offer methodological interventions that may serve as a guide for future directions in research on youth citizenship in its varied and emerging expressions. In their study of economically marginalized youth in Mexico and Canada, for instance, Bickmore and Barrero Jaramillo’s centering of how youth make sense of environmental and economic resource conflicts surfaces “critically-global-minded dimensions of (peacebuilding) citizenship education” that push us beyond dominant/neoliberal narratives. Similarly, in Blanks Jones and Juaquellie’s contribution, the emphasis on youth performances, which served a critical intermediary role between global development actors and local communities during the Ebola epidemic, permits a view of youth as “civic actors” in their own right. In Nafziger’s work with Nigerian youth navigating and discovering histories of ethnic and religious conflict in their community, we see the generative possibilities of collaborative youth research approaches. With empowering democratic collaborative pedagogies, Maudonnet and Monção offer a work group training model that engaged educators in São Paulo, Brazil, in an exploration of the relationship between different actors (i.e., teachers, support staff, and children) in a public early childhood education center for purposes of educational improvement. In sum, these methods direct us toward decolonial and participatory practices that create more space for young people to guide research and theory building.

The global is local

The issues impacting youth and of concern to them, such as environmental degradation, diversity, and inequities, reinforce the notion that the global is local. The findings from the studies detailed in this text reveal several things. First, environmental concerns, and their attendant social and economic aspects, are not only national challenges and global problems but experienced
by youth at the local level. Consideration must be given to how human well-being is linked to the planet’s well-being and how suffering of humans and non-humans might be ameliorated (Sant et al., 2018). Because the global is local, a global citizenship education to be promoted is likely to include ecological and planetary conceptions. There is desire, especially on the part of globalists, to portray the global community as one where citizens, regardless of location and borders, recognize a shared purpose and commonality (Sant et al., 2018). However, in any knowledge project, there must be an examination of differing worldviews and cultures, especially in light of histories and current relations of domination within and between countries (Ermine, 2007).

Conceptions of global identity circulated worldwide are the result of power relations within and between countries. Global citizenship education invokes different interpretations as a result of different histories, geopolitical contexts, motivations, and positionalities among people (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008). There is a great need to guard against the universalism imagined in Western thought and subsequently applied to global identity and global citizenship education. In addition, the oxymoronic nature of “global citizenship” is found in the paradoxes of spatial boundaries and scales, namely that the global is associated with the international sphere and transnational relations, while citizenship is demarcated by a jurisprudential boundary of the nation-state (Swanson, 2015). The detachment of elites from issues of poverty often signifies that elites in various locations of the globe may have more in common with each other than with individuals in their own communities and countries. Global citizenship education as currently conceived and taught is guided by colonial and neoliberal assumptions and positions students unequally. Comparative educators will not only need to recognize the disjunctures between neoliberal aims and global citizenship education but also advocate for a global citizenship education that is more transformational in mission and intent. A formal citizenship education that ignores inequalities is unlikely to develop agentic citizenship or help citizens address conflicts because the global is local.

Conceptual frameworks focused almost solely on individual responsibility, volunteerism, and charity, without analysis of social and political forces, perpetuate an incomplete understanding of a critical democratic global citizenship. Connecting the directly experienced violence and injustice that youth face to their systemic causes and remedies requires a democratic citizenship focused on participatory (political) representation, inclusive (cultural) recognition of diverse and non-dominant identities and ideologies, and redistribution (social-structural) of resources and power, as advocated by Bickmore and Barrero Jaramillo in this text. Moreover, we argue that the migration of peoples and circulation of ideas worldwide necessitate attention to citizenship identity hybridity(-ies). The chapter by Harris et al. reported how young people who adhere to diasporic identities have formed productive transnational networks of connection and belonging, signaling movement beyond traditional models of political and cultural identity transmission. Formal citizenship education continues to be embroiled, however, in structures and policies of
Youth interconnectedness and mobilization around concerns of a global nature reveal a moral impetus to address social ills from new spaces and places and citizen diasporic identities encompassing race, ethnicity, class, gender, and migration. While current approaches to global citizenship education have taken many forms (e.g., character education, global education, peace education, diversity education, and education for sustainable development, the latter due in large part to the United Nation’s sustainable development goals), there is an urgent need for a critical democratic global citizenship education that challenges the singular nature of such approaches. What is needed is scholarly engagement in the merits, faults, and possibilities of such a citizenship that reimagines a new conceptual landscape for the study of citizenship and global change that centers youth experience and voice. Toward that end, we support Andreotti’s (2021) call for a global citizenship education “otherwise,”—to face humanity’s wrongs by interrupting the usual citizenship discourses (e.g., ideologies, stories, politics, and desires) embedded in modernity and walking the “tightrope between naive hope and desperate hopelessness” with humility and self-reflexivity (p. 506). What is desired is a democratic future for all, everywhere.

**Key concepts for a critical democratic global citizenship and education**

From the major contestations of citizenship identified—locale, liberalism, and longevity—arise key conceptual categories that serve as an emergent agenda for a critical democratic global citizenship and education. The following terms provide a new grammar to guide studies of youth, citizenship, and education in the field of comparative and international education:

- Fluidity and hybridity
- Interconnectedness and belonging
- Identities and identifications
- Diverse theoretical and philosophical traditions
- Empowerment and engagement
- Agency and activism
- Globals (plural)
- Contestations
- Value convergences and divergences
- Justice-oriented ideologies and pedagogies

In their discussion of the participants’ actions and locals, authors pointed out the importance of fluidity and hybridity as indicators of the new ways that youth are defining citizenship and negotiating difference. The actions taken by youth were not restricted to a particular segment of society (e.g., political
sphere or educational sphere), but rather spanned a range of spaces within society in which individuals attempted to create change or, at the very least, highlighted differences or addressed injustices. When labels or barriers are removed from participation and action, youth help paint a broader picture of what citizen engagement means when we are able to include them in a broader range of civic activities.

There is no doubt that the most crucial aspect of these fluid actions was the emphasis placed on creating inclusive environments. Diverse contexts include the locale of the activity such as homes, workplaces, and educational institutions, and are supported and shaped by people with varying perspectives and ideologies. These spaces have been developed as a result of deliberate and unintentional efforts to create a landscape that embraces and includes a diversity of ideological perspectives, technologies, and geographical places. By focusing on creating inclusive environments among the actors, feelings of belonging and trust were bolstered, and connections were strengthened. The development of inclusive environments also necessitated a commitment to honoring and respecting individual identities. This was done by ensuring that their narratives were front and center when developing these environments.

Other tenets that were prevalent in these global landscapes of democratic citizenship were resistance to the status quo and a push for normative change, usually spearheaded by young people along with supportive stakeholders.

In the vast majority of cases, the large number of young people who chose to participate in their communities, schools, or other public spaces view their participation as a positive experience that makes them feel proud of themselves. Additionally, many youth also see their participation as an opportunity to develop a greater sense of responsibility towards society as a whole. As a result of this empowerment, many of their actions were influenced by their voice, as well as their participation in the process. As a result of their deep commitment to the cause, their actions were given a whole new meaning because of their dedication. Additionally, the youth were aware that they had assets that served as a platform for community creation, an asset that is too often undervalued or underutilized. A common theme noted in all the chapters is that young people pursue and create change when they are involved in projects dealing locally with global problems, when they work collectively and collaboratively with other people, and when they are part of organizations that enable youth voices to be heard in their communities and know their efforts are regarded and valued.

Youth contestations of the terms of citizenship show us that it is not enough to merely include “diverse” communities and experiences within the frame of belonging. They challenge us to engage decolonial perspectives, which unsettle the category of the “citizen” itself and the desirability of “global citizenship” if it is formed within the global power regimes that continue to center Western epistemologies and knowledges and imperil indigenous and marginalized knowledge systems. Tan’s exploration of a Daoist interpretation of global citizenship offers one tangible example of the theoretical and philosophical
terrain of global citizenship that must continue to expand. We are not saying that Western knowledge is not to be valued, but rather that there must be room for other theoretical positions to challenge and inform citizenship discourses at large.

The agency and leadership of children and youth, highlighted in the pages of this book, invite us to adopt a more critical theorization and research practice of youth “empowerment” and “engagement.” As Heggart and Flowers insist in their contribution, attention to youth practices, especially those involving digital tools and organizational forms that youth themselves create, illuminates ways that young people are positioned to educate adults in more active and expansive forms of citizenship. Embedded in their intervention is a “calling in,” which we wish to amplify, that invites the field of comparative and international education to challenge the power dynamics of research that position adult researchers as the authority figures. Instead, we must continue to ask ourselves and each other, how does the recognition of youth agency in the current era of global change require new research models that center collaboration, reciprocity, and the leadership of children and youth? We are not saying that adult views and elder wisdom are not important, but that greater room must be made for youth voice and agency to inform citizenship and citizenship education discourses.

If we are, indeed, in an unprecedented era of global change—in which our material and ecological conditions are reaching a tipping point at the same time as youth have taken their place at the forefront of social movements, which envision radical alternatives for the future—how might our intellectual and pedagogical approaches bend toward these resounding calls for justice? Heggart and Flowers in this book offer concrete implications of digital tools and practice for citizenship education, which center the specificities of how digital platforms are used for social action, how online and offline activism are always already interdependent, and how youth activists must be empowered and supported in educating adults. Moreover, Nafziger reminds us of the significance of historical consciousness development in fostering relations across lines of ethnic, religious, and political conflict. Art and performance, indigenous philosophies, social media, and local histories all offer resources for pedagogical practices that support and extend the justice-oriented ideologies that youth themselves are already developing collectively and worldwide through shared social, cultural, and political practices.

### Diverse actors, theoretical perspectives, and citizenship spaces

In addition to the usual actors studied by citizenship education scholars (e.g., the state, formal education systems, and educators), more studies are needed in relation to the growing role of non-state actors, such as nongovernmental organizations and international development agencies and various stakeholders, in shaping the conditions for youth citizenship and agency. Greater
attention is also needed to institutionalized and creative arenas for citizenship practices, including performance arts, media making, and digital contexts. A host of diverse actors, theoretical traditions, and citizenship spaces must be studied to understand the possibilities of participatory methods and practices in creating contexts for youth to articulate and forge frameworks of belonging. For instance, the online/offline environment is a binary being challenged by youth. Contributors Heggart and Flowers contend that such a division is becoming less useful in understanding how modern social movements operate and engage. While youth-led movements predate digital technologies in addressing global issues, much more comparative research in civic and citizenship education is necessary to ascertain the efficacies and specificities of digital platforms used by youth and the interdependencies of online and offline youth activism. How digital platforms are enmeshed in student social action and how youth deploy digital activism deserve greater attention by comparative educators. Our book suggests that youth are leading the way with social media and digital technologies for social action and may be able to teach educators and community members what active citizenship looks like in the present age.

By attending to varied practices and arenas of citizenship, the geographic and spatial breadth of contributions to this book affirm the continued need to examine (contestations of) citizenship in diverse global contexts, if we are to keep in focus the range of sites in which re-imaginations of citizenship are taking shape. Across the contributions, we see the affordances of different scales of analysis: nations of the Global South and North; large-scale cross-national datasets; post-colonial, post-conflict, and post-military contexts; social media platforms online and on mobile devices; social movements; formal and informal learning environments at all education levels; urban, rural, and suburban or peri-urban settings; and communities where different racial, class, ethnic, religious, social, and political interests are expressed. Future research directions must look for negotiations of citizenship in established arenas, emerging frontiers, and in the margins of everyday life.

The expressions and contexts of citizenship, and the diverse actors enacting citizenship practices, illustrate not only the range of ideas of citizenship but also points of conflict and divergence, ideological and otherwise, even among the chapter contributions themselves. In Villalobos et al., we see how nation, history, culture, generation, and gender converge in, at times, vastly different ways to shape formations of the “good citizen.” Understandings of, and aspirations towards, citizenship adopt different perspectives on the centrality of justice and the need to recognize histories of injustice. For instance, Daoist traditions examined in Tan’s chapter explicitly name liberation from oppression and human-environmental balance as key to shared humanity, as is common within many indigenous cultural traditions. In the contributions of Treviño et al. and Bickmore and Barrero Jaramillo, the threat of local and global sociopolitical and environmental forces expands young people’s perspectives on the knowledge and capacities required for global citizenship today, which challenge norms of citizenship that are taken for granted in other
contexts. The Heggart and Flowers and Harris et al. chapters both powerfully argue that digital citizenship is central to young people’s understandings and practices of citizenship. Their insistence of the centrality of digital tools to contemporary citizenship raises questions about what analyses that do not grapple with digital contexts may be missing about everyday youth experiences and practices. Similarly, contexts that have not traditionally been the focus of studies of citizenship—creative arts programs, out-of-school contexts, and digital platforms, for instance—are important domains for future research.

This book allows dimensioning the value of diverse methodological perspectives for understanding youth global citizenship. On the one hand, the use of data from large-scale studies enables the identification of broad patterns around normative conceptions of citizenship, as observed by Villalobos et al., or on awareness of global threats, as observed by Treviño et al. Both of these chapters give an account of the predominant profiles on both accounts in a large number of countries. However, the same authors acknowledge the limitation of these approaches; although the approaches detect general patterns, they do not reveal how the relationships between variables can be transformed or deepened. Villalobos et al. assert that a future task for citizenship studies is the investigation of the mechanisms of influence between civic norms to provide understanding of how youth experience them. On the other hand, the use of qualitative approaches allows a depth of understanding of youth experience in relation to negotiation and experiential development of citizenship, as shown in Fahning’s chapter. She discusses how youth from a rural community in the American Midwest relate to structures as they experience belonging to the broader community. She highlights the perspective of rural communities around the construction of citizenship of the local in relation to the global, where the experience of belonging is key. Additionally, the value of theoretical-philosophical reflection as an approach is reflected in the chapter by Tan, which reflects on how Daoist philosophy can illuminate the challenges of global citizenship. In their contribution, Maudonnet and Monção remind us that teaching and learning must be guided by democratic models of collaboration for educational change and reinforce that learning can be gained, even from the very young. Thus, the different methodological and pedagogical approaches across the chapters shed light on various aspects of the ongoing challenge.

Comparative educators must also continue to examine how social media may simultaneously serve to exclude and oppress some, while including and empowering others. There is growing interest in the field of citizenship studies and citizenship education regarding the experiences of marginalized youth (e.g., refugees, indigenous, and the poor) and how youth cope with ambiguous and unstable relationships to national citizenship and discriminatory tensions over what are their rights, their treatment, and participation in communities and politics. The contributions in this book offer a unique perspective that opens up the traditional definitions of citizenship and how young people engage as citizens. Our work suggests that citizenship’s dominant discourses
need to be revisited in light of recent youth social movements and events, and in light of long-standing philosophical orientations and theoretical perspectives outside the Western hegemon that have not received sufficient attention in the larger citizenship and education discourses. Thus, we advocate for comparative educators to become much more aware of how young people define, imagine, and practice citizenship.

Conclusion

The intent of this book has been to consider the complex ways in which global and national change is being understood and negotiated, but also accommodated and resisted, by youth in various countries. The studies herein reveal the ways that contemporary youth in their diversity are trying to unsettle aggressive systems and suggest emergent forms of civic identity and engagement. While we were intentional about including scholars from diverse geographical regions across the globe, we recognize that no one book, including ours, can provide a holistic portrait of geographic diversity. Thus, more research studies on youth and citizenship education are needed from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa, to name just a few. More ethnic diversity of scholars, ontological positions, and geographical locales is also needed in books of citizenship education. We recommend, therefore, that the field of comparative and international education pay more attention to non-Western philosophical traditions and theoretical orientations to inform the discourse on critical democratic global citizenship education. More qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies are needed to confirm or disaffirm that globally aware students adhere to a critical global citizenship as opposed to more traditional forms. If pandemics continue and the crossing of physical borders continues to be challenging for many people, are information and communications technologies enough to share cultural knowledge and foster international understanding?

Future comparative research on citizenship will need to consider what youth-centered approaches to critical democratic global citizenship education look like and to recognize that youth are located in multiple and globally connected spaces of obligation and belonging. Indeed, the global has become local. Unfortunately, most forms of citizenship and civic education have been complicit within geopolitical power relations and reproduced inequalities and global asymmetries. As Harris et al. found, there is a widening gap between policy framed in relation to human rights and global citizenship and school-based programs oriented toward safety, risk management, and social cohesion to guard against youth. A central task for comparative education researchers is to analyze civic norms with other values to understand how citizenship and identity is experienced by youth. Thus, some questions to guide future comparative study include: What would citizenship education models grounded in the everyday citizenship practices of youth look like? How do youth draw upon cultural and other identities in civic and political spheres? Does cooperation
on shared values of global citizenship imply compliance? And, is there room for all to engage in critique of “the global”?

References


