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Review Article

# Toward a new understanding of global citizenship: A proposal from Thailand

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## Article Info

## Abstract

An increasingly interdependent world requires a concept of global citizenship which transcends geographical, cultural, and religious borders. This paper argues that any robust concept of global citizenship needs to imbue students with a sense of social responsibility, as well as the ability to compassionately imagine the lives of others. The author maintains that the objectives of Thailand's Social Studies curriculum provide such a normative model, one which can be emulated and adapted worldwide.

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## Introduction

One of the prime objectives of schooling is the promotion of good citizenship (Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Jarolimek, 1986; Sear, 1994; Sripahol, 2008). Good citizenship is a central aim of Thailand's social studies instruction (Mangkhang, 2011).

Philosophically, the concept of good citizenship is notoriously vexed. After all, what does it mean to be a "good" citizen when the citizen lives under an immoral or illegitimate regime?

Yet if we leave aside such philosophical conundrums, most governments (including that of Thailand) see the aim of citizenship education as relatively straightforward: to have schools socialize children to cultural norms, engender social responsibility, and promote national and cultural priorities. In general, the approach to developing good citizens has been to equip the learners with a knowledge of local conditions, including understanding the laws, culture, and traditions of one's country. Citizenship education then, irrespective of the jurisdiction, has naturally tended to focus on local or national conditions (Mangkhang, 2010; Parker, 2011; Print, 1997). By extension, "good citizenship" has been defined as exhibiting loyalty to one's country and its political system (Maguth, 2014; Mangkhang, 2010; Sripahol, 2008).

However, since the end of World War II, it has become evident that we are living in an increasingly interdependent world. Problems occurring in one part of the world affect not only the local population, but can ripple out into the world at large, as the Brexit vote, or the Syrian migrant crisis attest.

Moreover, technology has changed the world dramatically in recent years. The growth of the Internet and social media, scientific and academic exchanges, affordable tourism and travel, historic levels of trade and commerce, the diasporas of various peoples resulting in diverse and polyglot populations, have all led to a new-found global civilization. The world is now defined by a newly wrought mutuality of interests and interdependence, and nations and their peoples have a greater vested interest in one another than ever before. Our world has become globalized, or to use Thomas Friedman's apt phrase, "The World is Flat" (Friedman, 2007).

Under such conditions, it is crucial that educators formulate a more universal concept of citizenship than has formerly been the case. What is required is an understanding of citizenship that is capable of inculcating in students a wider and broader understanding of citizenship than can be attained by appeals only to local or national priorities. What is required are responsible global citizens.

Moreover, articulating such a concept comes with some urgency, for despite the shrinking of the globe, the world struggles with regional wars, competition for economic markets, the exploitation of children and women, and cultural and religious misunderstandings. More than ever, there is a need for citizens who are not only knowledgeable about their own country, but who know about the larger world, its peoples, and

their aspirations, and who will champion human development. What is required are people who have the abilities, the skills, and the disposition to collaborate across all borders—geographical, cultural and religious.

But acknowledging these new realities is merely a starting point. The challenge in creating a new concept of global citizenship means equipping students with a sympathetic and empathic imagination, one which provides them with the ability to connect with their fellow man, irrespective of the region or race. As the American writer Martha Nussbaum suggests, we need students who can "think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have" (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 96). In other words, we need to cultivate and refine the capacity to see the world empathically through the eyes of another, creating a world where all can live together in peace (Kniep, 1986).

What does it mean to be a "citizen of the world"? Are our first loyalties and attachments not local and national, that is, to our family and friends, our community and nation? This may seem self-evident, yet given modern conditions, most scholars agree that the notion of good citizenship cannot be confined only to the country where one lives.

Interestingly, Thailand was among the very first nations to explicitly recognize the need for global citizenship, and the formation of global citizens is among the objectives of the Thailand Ministry of Education (2008, 2011*).* It is the mission of Thailand's schools in general, and its social studies teachers in particular, to prepare students to adapt to, and provide leadership for, a changing and increasingly diverse world. However, ministry documents fail to specify what qualities and characteristics the global citizen should possess.

In what follows, I wish to begin filling in this missing concept of global citizenship using Thailand as a case study. I want to advance three essential points.

First, I argue that any normative concept of global citizenship can only be based on and proceed from the assumptions of democratic education. That is, the cultivation of global citizenship is logically dependent on a democratic polity, in particular democracy's insistence on the freedom and responsibility of the individual. The promotion of democracy must be counted among the leading goals of global citizenship.

Second, I want to suggest that the objectives articulated in Thailand's Social Studies curriculum, in particular its emphasis on moral development, point the way to a humane and robust understanding of global citizenship, whereby students come to see themselves as responsible citizens of the world. As such, these Thai objectives might well serve as a template for global citizenship.

Third, I maintain that educating for global citizenship demands that teachers embrace pedagogy consistent with the aims of fostering democratic, global citizens.

## The democratic foundation of global citizenship

In 1932 in Thailand, the People's Party urged the monarchy to submit to Siam's constitution to assure the progress of the country. The King agreed to this request, and on June 27, 1932, *His Majesty King Prachathipok* signed the *Contemporary 1932 Constitution of Siam,* Article 1 of which states *"The country's supreme power belongs to the people."*

This marked a historic occasion, and the beginning of modern democracy in Thailand. Sovereignty now resided in the people with the king as the head of state (Sripahol, 2008). Henceforward, Thailand's civil society would be based on a democratically constructed government chosen by its citizens. Consequently, education for democratic citizenship has become a significant goal of Thai education.

Citizens in a democratic society are defined differently from citizens under other political systems. Perhaps the easiest way to summarize this difference is to note that for democratic citizens, freedom and autonomy are non-negotiable goods. In non-democratic political systems, citizens are denied universal freedoms by those who rule over them. In a democracy, on the other hand, political power resides in the people, and it is axiomatic that individuals should be autonomous, that is, self-legislating and free to lawfully determine their own way of life. In practice, this results in a great diversity of choices such that if we are to assure a peaceful co-existence, then all must respect one another, agree to certain rules, and ensure that our choices do not impinge on the lawful rights of our fellow citizens. One of the consequences of this diversity is the need for moral development.

## A template for global citizenship: Thailand's social studies curriculum

Thailand is explicit in the need for the creation of morally good and upright citizens. In the early years of schooling, moral development is a central goal of education. The aims of the early years, as stated in the Thai Ministry Education Document from 1960, are: *"To foster learners to have good habits and train them to be persons of good mental health who put themselves in the right position, to be honest in doing things, to be polite in using words, and comply with the adult order, all of which to train the learners to become good children who will grow up to be adults who pursue life in the right way and as a good servant of the King and the Land (1960)."*

The Basic Education Core Curriculum under the national education plans were viewed to lack flexibility and decentralization. In 1999, the National Education Act was enacted, as mandated by the Thai Constitution of 1997, to provide greater decentralization of educational provisions. This Act led to various major reforms including curriculum, teaching and learning, teaching materials, educational evaluation, educational administration, and teacher education (Office of the Prime Minister, 1999). The basic core curriculum under the 1999 National Education Act was significantly reformed. The curriculum sets the issue of global citizenship as one of the primary educational provisions. However, the curricular reform in Thailand has always retained one constant—an emphasis on moral development. For example, the 2008 *Basic Education Core Curriculum* states "*the education provision have to develop Thai people to become complete human beings in physical, mental, intellectual, and cultural aspects, have morality, and culture and happily co-exist with others*."

Civic education in Thailand is no longer a separate subject, but is integrated into various strands of the social studies curriculum (Office of the Prime Minister, 2010; Thailand Ministry of Education, 2011). Mangkhang (2016) and Sripahol (2008) proposed that the social studies curriculum aims at inculcating in students the following desirable characteristics: a) enabling learners to enjoy life; b) enabling learners to live in harmony among others, both as Thai citizens and global citizens; c) love of nation, religion, and King; d) honesty and integrity; e) self-discipline and an avidity for learning; f) observance of principles of economic self-sufficiency in one's way of life; g) dedication and commitment to work; and h) cherishing Thai-ness and public-mindedness, while acknowledging the rights of other nations in the world community. These objectives, while obviously articulated within the context of Thailand's unique history and educational experience (for example, an emphasis on "Thai-ness", or the "love of nation, religion, and King"), nonetheless provide a helpful starting place for fostering world citizenship. Taken together, these aims seek to foster the opposite of parochialism, selfishness, and narrowness of spirit. Instead, they point the way to creating active, critical, reflective members of a community of equals, capable of empathically sharing information and living harmoniously together (Nawarat, Mangkhang, Maneekul, & Tappawan, 2012). In short, they have the potential to create an ideal sort of educated global citizen, one who has an avidity for learning, who possesses a firm moral core, is devoted to public-mindedness, and cherishes his fellow humans.

Clearly, these objectives are merely formal criteria, and need to be fleshed out with substantive content. Various jurisdictions and nations must adapt these to their own circumstances and specify their particular needs. Nonetheless, I believe that these objectives taken from Thailand's social studies curriculum provide a universalist template which points to a humane vision of education, and against which any nation can measure their educational aspirations.

### The pedagogy of global citizenship

But as noble as such objectives are, and as universal in application as they might be, how might we go about obtaining them in practice?

It should be acknowledged that the teaching of civic education in Thailand has not been revised nor developed to keep up with contemporary events. Moreover, the contents prescribed for citizenship education are frequently too academic and too difficult for the majority of students. Sadly, civic education has become a boring subject, and typically ranks among the least favorite with Thai students. Clearly, we need a more effective approach. Thai students have a positive perception about school education for the cultivation global citizenship. They were aware of how they learned about globalization and the qualities of global citizens and found the classes to be enjoyable. They liked classes with student activities rather than teachers' lectures (Lee, Cho, Park, Kim, & Lee, 2015).

A further impediment to teaching civic education is the instructional methods employed by teachers. Too often, teachers simply lecture their students about respect, rule compliance, social responsibility, and so forth, resulting in boring lessons which are not only uninspiring, but which fail to connect with the daily realities of their students. Unsurprisingly, students fail to relate to such "top-down" instruction. Surely, in seeking to instill an understanding of citizenship—which by definition means living together in community—what is called for are pedagogical exercises and activities which encourage students to think, analyze, critique, and which require them to engage with their fellow students in group processes.

To revitalize citizenship education, I think it would be helpful to consult the teachings of the American pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey. Dewey understood that democracy, although a political system of governance, is also a way of life, one based on co-existence and mutual respect (Dewey, 2012). As such, it cannot be learned solely from texts, but must consist in large part of an attitude and deportment that permeates the classroom. Naturally, the teacher sets the tone for the classroom, and rather than engage in authoritarian, "top-down" instruction, he or she must model respect—to the students, to other adults, and, crucially, to the subject matter at hand. These are the sort of personal qualities that define the democratic classroom, and as such are perhaps better "caught" than taught. In the Deweyean classroom, the emphasis falls on active doing, rather than passive listening (Dewey, 1997).

Furthermore, the concept of global citizenship fits neatly with Dewey's broader pedagogical project. Dewey's pedagogy is predicated on the "expanding horizons" model of development which begins with the assumption that what children know best are those experiences and understandings which arise from their immediate environment. Hence the curriculum begins with teaching children about their family and friends, and then "expands" outward to the community, the province, the nation, and, given the realities of the modern world, the global community.

Dewey is arguably the premier educational theorist of democratic pedagogy. He sought to further the aims of democracy, which for him meant using the schools to socialize children from disparate, immigrant populations, uniting students in a common social world under the banner of a democratic nation. His ideas emphasize the skills in decision making and problem solving required for promoting a democratic way of life, as well as those social and intellectual virtues necessary to furthering democracy: tolerance, open-mindedness, and a willingness to accept those whose culture, ethnicity or religion differ from our own. In sum, Dewey encourages an acceptance of diversity (Cogan, Morris, & Print, 2002). All these goals align with and support the imperatives of educating responsible global citizens.

### Conclusion

Education must evolve to meet changing circumstances, and as I have argued above, the new realities which define our world make it imperative that we arrive at an effective method of teaching global citizenship in Thailand's classrooms.

The current social studies curriculum implemented in Thai schools commits to enhance student participation and engagement in learning to acquire the desired capacities of global citizenship: communication, thinking, problem solving, life skill, and technology. At the same time, teachers have to creatively change their ways of teaching techniques, instructions, classroom environment, and evaluation methods to facilitate and support students to achieve global citizenship characteristics.

The ideas advanced in this brief paper are merely a starting point, but one which, I believe, is rich with potential. The aims of Thailand's social studies curriculum point to an understanding of global citizenship consistent with our current world. Obviously, these objectives are merely formal requirements that need to be fleshed out. Yet collectively, they speak to a humane vision of human flourishing, one which transcends borders, and which acknowledges the inalienable dignity of the individual, the responsibility of the individual to the world-wide community of fellow humans, and the need for continuous, life-long learning. In brief, these objectives speak to a civil, and civilizing understanding of citizenship. In advancing the agenda of global citizenship, Thailand can, I believe, lead the way.

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