The Craft of Citizenship in a Global Context: Acquiring Knowledge and Acting upon It

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“The citizenship virtues of benevolence, ethical and moral behavior, character, civility, and community are important to learn now. If a student graduates without these understandings, they will most likely never get them (personal communication, September 1, 2012).” – Dr. W. Roger Webb, former university president Northeastern State University (1978-1997) and University of Central Oklahoma (1997-2011)

It is postulated in this paper that citizenship should be perceived and pursued as a craft that can and should be learned within a higher education context. Imperative to understanding learning as a process is recognizing how learners’ beliefs, values, and experiences influence how meanings and perspectives are constructed (Perry, Stoner, and Tarrant, 2012). This particular point seems to be a primary concern of experiential educationalists and practitioners who align with experiential pedagogies that work directly with local communities, and have the greater intention of creating relevance in student learning, addressing a need within a local community, and cultivating a culture of community and civic engagement (Eyler and Giles, 1999). With this, citizenship should be viewed as a craft that equals a whole, which is greater than the sum of its parts. Though it is also imperative to recognize that the craft of citizenship is indeed made of elements, that can be broken down, re-connected through curriculum, and subsequently presented in connection with educative projects, contexts, and experiences. By identifying the state of being a citizen as a skill or craft illuminates its potential to align with educational strategies in order to expose, connect, test, and confirm this body of knowledge with students’ perspectives and personal experiences. This is the premise for recognizing citizenship, particularly in a global context, as a domain of knowledge dependent on experience and learned through reflection.

With this, higher education institutions arguably have a responsibility to develop curricula that foster the craft of “global citizenship”, either as a consequence of their educational mission (Hovland, 2009), in response to political calls for enhanced national security (Durbin, 2006), to align with our ever flattening world, or to provide greater employment opportunities for their graduates (AAC&U, 2007). For universities interested in actively promoting “internationalization”, “engagement” or “citizenship” as key strategies, three constructs must be addressed: (1) what is global citizenship? (2) how do we measure global citizenship?, and (3) how is global citizenship fostered?

Although global citizenship is a highly contested and multifaceted term, three key dimensions are commonly accepted: social responsibility, global awareness, and civic engagement (Morais and Ogden, 2011). There is a consensus that the natural and built environment is the
context in which global citizenship can be best understood (Dobson, 2003). Utilizing this theoretical grounding, Tarrant (2010) developed a Value-Belief-Norm model to assess global citizenship. Overall, the conceptual framework “proposes that values and worldviews act as filters for new information in the development and formation of congruent beliefs and attitudes which in turn predispose behavioral intentions and ultimately proenvironmental behaviors (Tarrant and Cordell, 1997)” (Tarrant, 2010).

This paper will critique Tarrant’s (2010) V-B-N model of global citizenship in accordance with the three key dimensions of global citizenship (Morais and Ogden, 2011), identify and determine the influence this can have on the development of curricula and pedagogy for citizenship education, and illuminate the integral role of critical reflection in this educative process.

References


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