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Global citizens or good citizens?



Matthew Piscioneri and Fay Patel 10 June 2016 Issue No:417



There has been much hype of late about building 'global citizens' out of our internationally mobile higher education students and academics. But, to what extent is this aspiration for a global citizenry misguided and perhaps even disingenuous?

Is it a fatuous illusion, one that now only serves to bolster the near-extinct normative substance of many higher education institutions and systems that have progressively suffered the hollowing out of their ethical core after decades of corporatisation and commercialisation?

In a recent and subtle revision of the 'global citizen' in the discourse of internationalisation of higher education, [Dr Fay Patel](#) and [Dr Alberto Nicoira](#) suggest an alternative framing of this imaginary that deserves our attention. In place of the 'global' citizen, they posit the 'good' citizen as a more optimal outcome for participants from processes of internationalisation in higher education.

From their perspective, the making of the global citizen via processes of internationalisation in higher education posits the internationalised student, as well as the internationally mobile academic, as one other integer or functionary in the mostly economic processes of globalisation that might actually threaten rather than enhance the individual's agency for empowerment as a 'good' citizen who can undertake a significant, and, yes, even transformational journey, through the international education experience.

So, how does this subtle re-positioning sit within the established discussion of internationalisation in higher education?

## Neoliberalism

Scholarly discussion of internationalisation in higher education, we believe, has undergone three main shifts in emphasis, focus and tone since it first gained prominence in higher education studies in the 1990s.

Thanks to scholars such as Hans de Wit and Jane Knight, the emergent phenomenon was defined, mapped and explained, especially as the cross border flows of undergraduate students, from East to West, South to North, began to increase exponentially.

Perhaps, inevitably, scholarly focus would next be placed on the examination and assessment of what might best be described as 'product quality' issues: for example, how well were international students, typically from non-English speaking backgrounds, adjusting to study in different educational, social, cultural and linguistic contexts?

And, then, as the commodification of higher education and its corporatisation gathered strength in the later 1990s and 2000s, critiques of these trends in contemporary studies of higher education positioned the internationalisation of the academy accordingly as one other thread in the neo-liberal assault on the 'free' university.

Governments in many receiving institution countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, began to enforce a neo-liberal economic agenda over higher education funding. It was an agenda that sought to reduce public sources of funding for higher education, insisting that market income from the international education trade would redress the public funding deficit.

The internationalisation of higher education was cast in a dark light indeed. Critics emphasised the

corrosive impacts of this international 'trade', potential and actual, on the social and intellectual mission of the university: its integrity and independence.

## **Curriculum change**

Alongside the internationalisation-as-marketisation paradigm, as well as critique thereof, we think two other significant trends in the scholarship of the internationalisation of higher education can be discerned.

As the 2000s progressed, a discourse of synthesis began to gain traction. Attention was given to ways in which the curriculum of subject areas in receiving institutions might be internationalised.

In this innovation, international students were positioned not simply as agents of value in a crude economic sense via the marketisation paradigm but more possibly as 'change agents', bringing transformational change to the culture and depth of the curriculum in the receiving institutions, thereby enhancing the educational experience for all participants.

A complementary theme in recent theorising of internationalisation in higher education has been educating for the 'global citizen': a noble, but, now, recently contested imaginary. As the globalisation paradigm *in toto* becomes increasingly archaic, jaded and even discredited in many areas of our lives, the ideal and accordant imaginary of the global citizen has also been drawn into question.

The question now it seems is "how good is the global [international student/academic] citizen?", especially given the surfeit of less than welcome outcomes from the era of globalisation as well as the impacts of its hegemonic 'one world order' ideology on regional stability and prosperity.

The importance of becoming 'global citizens' through higher education study abroad programmes, for example, seems more about participants acquiring effective transnational employment skills, establishing economic networking opportunities or acquiring an advantage in processes of economic migration.

## **Higher goals**

More often than not, this is the 'global citizen' that rolls off the assembly line at the end of an international education.

Its a result that should lead us to question our moral commitment to building a society that will remain firm on ethics, one which will demand diversity, equity and inclusivity in relevant areas and levels of international higher education design and engagement among respective stakeholders.

The awkward question emerges: has international higher education shirked its social responsibility and commitment to ensuring the quality of life of local and international communities, aspects that are paramount in the bigger picture of serving humanity in a moral not just an economic way?

As articulated in Dr Fay Patel and Dr Alberto Nicotras article, there does appear a pertinent issue here in consideration of the pluses and minuses of the global citizen as an expression of the 'official' normative discourse of internationalisation in higher education.

What exactly is the purpose of international mobility programmes and industry engagement through work apprenticeships if our current and future generations of tertiary students have not imbibed ethical values, social responsibility and justice as essential virtues, for example?

Critique of the imaginary of the 'global citizen' as the optimal outcome of processes of internationalisation in higher education appears to have substance. To invoke the hallowed naturalistic fallacy in reasoning offered by Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume: to be global is not necessarily to be good, and, indeed, to be good is not necessarily to be global.

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application of information and communication technology to university learning and teaching. This article is based on the paper by Dr Alberto Nicotra and Dr Fay Patel in the Journal of International and Global Studies Volume 7, Number 2, April 2016 that has been published online. The original paper is accessible [here](#).

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