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Mobilising global citizenship education for alternative futures in challenging times: an introduction

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the Special Issue ‘Mobilising Global Citizenship Education for Alternative Futures in Challenging Times’. Our call for papers was inspired by the 10th anniversary of a 2011 special issue on the political economy of global citizenship education (GCE) edited by Vanessa Andreotti. In this introduction, we review the main aims of this follow-up collection, noting the proliferation of scholarship on the topic of GCE and calls for more critical engagements. We outline the key provocations of the call for papers and review the contributions, setting out an overview of the landscape of the SI through intersecting themes, concerns, and possibilities. The articles in this collection demonstrate ongoing concerns around neoliberalism and how GCE is always implicated in the inequalities it aims to address. They also highlight emerging possibilities and further questions in response to current conditions. This collection contributes and maps new edges of debate within critical approaches, provides practical insights into reflexive approaches in situ, and sheds light on common and specific issues and possibilities across regions and across formal and nonformal educational contexts. We end the introduction by highlighting the contribution from Vanessa Andreotti that concludes the collection and articulates a ‘passing of the torch’ to those entering and continuing work in this dynamic field.

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Our call for papers for this special issue on ‘Mobilising Global Citizenship Education for Alternative Futures in Challenging Times’ was a response to the 10-year anniversary of another special issue in this journal that focused on the political economy of global citizenship education (GCE). Our decision to propose this special issue was, in part, an effort to reflect on how the field has changed over the last decade. Especially since GCE was included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Target 4.7), interest in both the study and practice of GCE has grown. We have noted the proliferation of more critical perspectives on GCE, while also noting the tendency to conflate significant differences both within and across critical perspectives (Pashby et al. 2020). In this special issue in particular, we sought contributions that were not only acutely aware of these differences and their implications within and across contexts, but that also sought to both identify and gesture beyond the edges of existing debates (both critical and otherwise), thereby making space for new possibilities that are still emerging, and in many cases, as yet unimaginable in the field of GCE. This points to the other driving consideration of this special issue, which was to create a generative,

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generous, and agonistic space for thinking alongside each other about the future of this field – including its challenges, complexities, and possibilities.

While many existing theories and practices of GCE continue to have great relevance and impact, we note that many of our contexts are also shifting rapidly. These shifts include economic uncertainty and austerity, social fragmentation, political unrest, increased migration, ecological catastrophes and extreme weather, and global pandemics and mental health crises. It is increasingly difficult for GCE scholars and practitioners to keep up with the speed and direction of change, and to practice and foster discernment given the fragmentation of attention and knowledge authorities, and the unprecedented scope and scale of the ‘wicked problems’ that we face. Thus, there is a need to continually revise and revisit our approaches to GCE so as to ensure that they are rigorous and responsive to today’s global challenges. It was in this spirit that we invited contributions to the special issue that were engaged in one or more of the following efforts to revise and revisit existing approaches to GCE:

- (1) Considering how theories and practices of GCE can be mobilised in ways that enable ethical forms of solidarity, and foster different modes of relating to the planet;
- (2) Extending critical considerations of GCE beyond political economy alone in ways that also address the intellectual, affective, and relational economies that frame, enable, and foreclose different educational possibilities;
- (3) Weaving critiques of systemic, historical, and ongoing colonial and imperialist violence with critiques of an inherently unsustainable economic model that is premised on infinite growth on a finite planet;
- (4) Historicising the approaches that have thus far oriented GCE, assessing what has changed and why, and considering what theories and practices could have impact in the current context, especially given the conditions of dispersed knowledge authorities and fragmented attention; and,
- (5) Engaging responsibly with alternative possibilities for knowing, being, and relating.

Each of the articles in this special issue responds to at least one of these invitations from their own contexts and perspectives. Indeed, critical approaches to GCE remind us that it is important to interrupt the common tendency to seek consensus around universal theories and practices, or to assume that they will operate the same way across different institutions; communities; informal, nonformal, and formal education spaces; and geographic regions. Despite these important contextual differences, however, all of the contributions consider the question of how GCE might prepare us to navigate an exponentially more complex, uncertain, and unequal world in more socially and ecologically accountable ways. In this way, this special issue represents a continuity with the original special issue ten years ago – an important reminder that although much has changed and continues changing, some questions and concerns of the field of GCE remain perennial. This includes the ongoing work of ‘mapping the origins, meanings, workings, ethics, politics and implications of initiatives, approaches, knowledge production and conceptual frameworks related to the idea of global citizenship in different educational contexts’ (Andreotti 2011, 308). The articles in this issue, reviewed in detail below, engage this work earnestly and in ways that continue to push the field and those of us within it to honour, question, and extend inherited frameworks, and to make space for otherwise possibilities in theory, practice, and the spaces in between.

In the first article, ‘Interfaces of critical global citizenship education in research about secondary schools in ‘global North’ contexts’, Karen Pashby and Marta da Costa (2021) identify edges of debate within conceptual and empirical scholarship describing and drawing on critical approaches to GCE. Taking up research in and about the ‘global North’, they nuance and unpack a tendency to conflate different ‘types’ of GCE defined as critical and explore ‘what ethical and onto-epistemic relationalities are mobilised or constrained’ (Pashby & Costa 2021, 381). Pashby and Costa provide an in-depth discussion of liberal-critical interfaces of GCE (focused on extending the promises of

existing institutions and the status quo to a broader population) and critical-liberal interfaces (concerned with inequalities inherent to the status quo while relying on answers from within modern/colonial frames). They also distinguish between methodological (tends to be a focus in liberal and neoliberal), epistemological (tends to be a main concern in critical), and ontological (tends to become more visible in discussions of post-critical) enunciative engagements with critical GCE. Applying these conceptual distinctions to empirical work applying critical GCE in research about secondary schools in ‘global North’ contexts, they note that as schools are strongly embedded in the structures of western modernity, research in these settings tends to take on a more methodological and epistemological focus. However, depending on what aspects of critical GCE are highlighted, empirical research itself and the critical policy/practice that it investigates can open or inversely foreclose possibilities for onto-epistemological reflections. Some studies align with and/or find in practice a liberal-critical interface, providing an epistemological level of engagement that emphasises a critique of western dominance while drawing on liberal (e.g. humanistic) or liberal-neoliberal frames (e.g. bringing together global markets and local communities) in practice. Others take a clearer critical stance by maintaining a strong epistemological focus that targets the modern/colonial frame in GCE and providing, to differing extents, critiques of liberal and neoliberal methodological approaches. Pashby and Costa (2021) conclude that while formal education settings are markedly constrained, it is essential that research in the field of critical GCE continues to engage with work in schools through collaborative approaches. In recognising both the possibilities and importance of critical approaches to GCE as well as the tendency for critical approaches to recentre western binaries and pivot into the methodological and epistemological limitations they seek to address, the authors end with a question raised by Pashby et al. (2020): ‘How might we use critical GCE ‘in strategic ways, while remaining conscious of its significant limitations, potential harms, and the partiality of any particular approach?’ (160).

While Pashby and Costa target interfaces with critical GCE approaches in ‘global North’ contexts, in ‘Constructing global citizenship education at the regional level: regionalism and caribbean citizen education’, Tavis Jules and Richard Arnold (2021) explore a neoliberal-liberal interface of GCE evident in regionalist imperatives driving Caribbean citizenship education policy. Their analysis of the Caribbean Community’s (CARICOM) citizenship education policy scape highlights how, in this context, regional level discourses construct and stabilise ideas of global citizenship as twenty-first century skills. Their analysis locates a nexus of neoliberal and liberal-humanist discourses framed directly by shifting imperatives of economic globalisation at the regional level. Caribbean citizenship education, they argue, has been constructed through histories and legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and imperialism framed by liberalism that are now intertwining with economic imperatives of regionalisation. Whereas critical scholarship in GCE has troubled the assumptions underlying the call via Martha Nussbaum to move through concentric circles from local to national to global (Pashby 2011), Jules and Arnold (2021) argue GCE discourses are being applied and adapted to deepen economic regionalism. CARICOM is thus a policy space marked by external neoliberal imperatives contending with regionally constructed conceptions of citizenship and GCE. They map a process whereby regional norms are presented and then consolidated into global attributes. Their analysis contributes a specific consideration of how global citizenship discourses around competencies for a highly interconnected world can work in tandem with strong regional discourses at a neoliberal-liberal humanist intersection (Pashby et al. 2020).

Offering insights from practices of transnational literacy in India, in ‘Global Desi?: possibilities and challenges for global citizenship education in India’, Simantini Dhuru and Nisha Thapliyal map out and reflect on an intervention into a neoliberal GCE policy context by considering how de-colonial concerns and critiques have inspired the Avehi-Abacus (AA) programmes. Locating their reflexive account of AA’s work – which draws on traditions from formal and nonformal education – in historical and contemporary conditions of a colonial-neoliberal matrix of power, they set these initiatives in critical conversation with extant citizenship education approaches in formal education settings. Conceptually, they draw on Andreotti’s (2014) call for transnational literacies as an entry

into discussions about what possible approaches can be centred in GCE in order to counter mainstream neoliberal approaches focused on the ‘global entrepreneurial citizen’. Dhuru and Thapliyal (2021) argue that this neoliberal version of GCE interfaces with a liberal tradition of paternal benevolence so as to sustain existing inequalities. They highlight particular methodologies and pedagogical interventions developed by AA to try to counter and interrupt (as much as possible) the colonised cognitive (epistemological) tradition of citizenship education in India. Trust in teachers and learners is at the centre of these interventions in teacher education and school curricula. AA focuses on opening the possibilities for relating differently from inherited traditions through engaging with critical histories that challenge pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial nation-building narratives sustaining unequal relations through different forms of systemic oppression. For example, the pedagogical work with open-ended stories explored from conflicting perspectives encourages students to recognise the constraints of quick resolutions and to engage with difficult and problematic social issues. Importantly, Dhuru and Thapliyal (2021) suggest deep possibilities for engaging beyond human-centric notions of sustainability and supporting the unlearning of hierarchical and fragmented ways of thinking. In this way, teachers and learners might learn to engage with alternative knowledge traditions in which humans are one part of an interdependent web of life.

David Jefferess offers a regional perspective from Canada but demonstrates wider implications for discourses shaping GCE work more broadly. In ‘On saviours and saviourism: lessons from the #WEscandal’, he reflects on the significance of a Canadian political scandal in the summer of 2020 to examine how global citizenship continues to be informed by performative saviourism and enactments of whiteness. The Canadian federal government awarded (and then retracted) a large contract to WE charity, a significant player in the purveyance of global learning in formal and nonformal contexts in Canada as well as internationally. The scandal itself has had severe consequences for the organisation, yet Jefferess critically explores how the rhetoric in the media avoided a deeper critique of the saviourism embedded in the organisation and thus served to reinforce an ideal of humanitarian care. His analysis, drawing parallels to Andreotti’s (2012) and Cole’s (2012) responses to the KONY 2012 phenomenon, makes it clear that popular discourse in ‘global North’ contexts such as Canada continues to require a strong critique of saviourism. Overlapping with growing momentum in the Black Lives Matter movement in summer 2020 and heightened consequences of inequalities in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic, his analysis of the #WEscandal also reinforces the importance of centring issues of racism in GCE. Drawing theoretically from racial capitalism, neoliberalism, development and critical whiteness studies, Jefferess (2021) contributes a specific critique of liberal humanism’s complicity in misconstruing the world as ‘post-racial’. This fantasy of a ‘post-racial’ world is reinforced when philanthropic approaches are assumed to be just and effective, and saviourist discourses frame marginalised ‘others’ as being responsible for the systemic problems they face. Rather than critically examining these discourses, he argues, the mainstream media tends to naturalise the violence (epistemic and material) that continues to operate within the modern/colonial world system.

Picking up on the need to centre questions of complicity in GCE, in ‘Global citizenship education as a pedagogy of dwelling: re-tracing (mis)steps in practice during challenging times’, Gerardo Blanco reflects on the messiness of GCE work in practice. Recognising uncertainty and disappointment as key affective states that emerge in the practice of internationalisation of higher education in the US, he centres the tensions and contradictions inherent to GCE practice through a critical reflexive account of implementing an ‘internationalisation at home’ initiative. Rather than simply lamenting the chasm between GCE theory and practice in higher education, Blanco ‘dwells’ in the implications, framing the impossibility of GCE and failures in practice as important to learning. He puts to work a ‘pedagogy of dwelling’ to serve as an organising principle for when academics confront the fact that instrumentalist practices are required of those of us who are also contributing to critical theoretical work. He proposes that a pedagogy of dwelling can centre ethical responsibilities, complexities and impossibilities of instrumentalized GCE as they happen while problematising neoliberal constructs of GCE and their ‘crumbling legacies’ tied to colonial relations of power.

He documents his experience of designing and delivering a curriculum to support a living-learning community bringing together 'local'/American and international students at a public research university. Acknowledging the difficulties in moving beyond superficial engagements, Blanco highlights the messiness of cross-national interaction in practice. In attempting to account for inequalities between international and American students in their experiences of being the 'learner' and/or 'subject' of internationalism, he reflects on missed opportunities in his own practice. Through self-reflexivity, he proposes resisting the desire to 'end an encounter on a positive note' and instead to recognisemoments of unexpected learning in relation to what was missed and possibly misaligned (440). Blanco (2021) raises the importance of 'fully inhabiting the possibilities, along with the challenges and contradictions' of GCE in practice, particularly in contexts so strongly driven by utilitarian and market-driven rationales (441). In this sense, he locates his experience in a liberal-critical interface of GCE (Pashby et al. 2020) as a space for movement within the neoliberal context.

Also critically considering GCE theory in practice in context, Andrea Dyrness examines the possibilities and limitations for GCE among transnational youth at the intersection of experiences of global connectedness and national marginalisation in 'Rethinking global citizenship education with/for transnational youth'. Drawing on theories of diasporic citizenship and borderlands third space feminism, Dyrness (2021) critically analyses dominant global and national discourses around GCE in relation to findings emerging from literature on transnational youth and from her own ethnographic research. Conducted in Madrid with two youth-serving NGOs and an association of activist women, Dyrness' research shows how policy at different geo-political levels constructs youth from non-Western backgrounds as a threat to security, and diversity as a problem to be tackled. Consequently, she argues that state funded schooling delivers citizenship education to immigrant youth as a way to 'civilise' and assimilate them into the dominant culture, through an emphasis on personal responsibility and behaviour. It is, therefore, outside formal education that Dyrness finds possibilities and evidence of a different kind of global citizenship education and practice. Her research found immigrant youth and activist women are enacting citizenship informed by their embodied knowledge and experience of transnational communities. Both the youth and the women from the study displayed the attitudes and skills commonly called for in global and national discourses around GC, such as global consciousness, cultural flexibility, empathy, solidarity, and critical awareness, particularly of western liberal dominance. Dyrness (2021) also found the activist women's collective provided a space of 'autoformación' (self-education) that was driven by the participants' needs and experiences (448). As such, she argues that

when compared to state-led GCE programmes, these diasporic educational spaces show that building solidarity with others and a critical engagement with global structures of power are not only necessary, but inseparable components of a global citizenship education that responds to the needs of the marginalised (Dyrness 2021, 452).

She maintains that such spaces must remain autonomous so that they continue to answer to displaced communities and advance their own liberation rather than respond to state ideological agendas.

Taking up the key contradiction of nation/global dualism inherent in GCE in formal education, and positioning it as a productive tension, Darlene Swanson and Mostafa Gamal analyse the shift away from GCE towards Learning for Sustainability (LFS) in the Scottish national curriculum in 'Global Citizenship Education / Learning for Sustainability: tensions, 'flaws', and contradictions as critical moments of possibility and radical hope in educating for alternative futures'. Noting absences and tracing the linguistic strategies of 'inward' (the nation-state) and 'outward' (the global) referencing that produce 'distancing', the authors show how similar discursive strategies are employed in both the previous and the current policies. Their analysis indicates that in the previous policy, discourses around GCE produced 'outward' referencing (to global competition and global issues of poverty and inequity) as a vehicle for 'inward' referencing, constructing Scotland as a global competitor and social-democratic state concerned with issues of social justice. Swanson and

Gamal (2021) note the new emphasis on LfS inherits a tendency to naturalise Scottish citizenship as inherently committed to social justice and human rights with Scotland as a key player in international affairs. They also uncover ‘distancing strategies’ in the Scottish education policy that both separate Scotland from the English history of slavery and empire and move focus toward narratives of civic nationalism. This discursive strategy, they argue, produces Scotland as an autonomous and homogenous nation, committed to ‘liberal values of justice, fairness and equality’ and is thus a missed opportunity for critical reflexivity. Swanson and Gamal (2021) suggest wider implications of this case study by emphasising the possibilities for engaging with tensions and contradictions rather than dismissing GCE altogether because of them. They maintain that taking up the contradictions promotes critical reflexive approaches that might open possibilities for radical futures.

Su-ming Khoo and Nanna Jordt Jørgensen also discuss the intersecting agendas of GCE and education for sustainable development (ESD) in ‘Intersections and collaborative potentials between global citizenship education and education for sustainable development’. Their article, however, explores the commonalities in both fields in relation to transgressive and decolonial approaches. Troubling the question of criticality in GCE and ESD, Khoo and Jørgensen (2021) explore ‘what is ‘critical’ in ‘critical’ GCE and ESD’, and what is meant by “transgressive” education or “transformative” change’. Echoing concerns across the essays in this special issue, they critique the superficial and instrumental agendas in education that have continuously aligned with liberal and neoliberal ‘modernisation’ projects. They call for a praxis of deep questioning that transgresses silences in normative conceptualisations of GCE and ESD, decentering imperial ontologies and epistemologies and dismantling the idea of education as a ‘safe space’. Like Dyrness (2021), Khoo and Jørgensen (2021) recognise the problematic nature of formal education. And, similarly to Pashby and Costa (2021), Dhuru and Thapliyal (2021) and Swanson and Gamal (2021), they maintain that formal contexts are still responsible for addressing issues of unsustainability and social injustice and can do so by centring questions of knowledge production. They call for collaborative and situated methodologies that draw on the concept of border thinking to open spaces for dialogic approaches making visible knowledges and experiences suppressed by the modern/colonial frame. Importantly, they highlight the complex and challenging nature of this praxis which requires a commitment to difficult engagements and transgressions of deeply rooted colonial frames based on separateness, individualism, and binary logics that create hierarchies of racialised Others. In exploring methodological approaches to research in GCE and ESD, they bring to the fore questions of an onto-epistemological nature and call on us to consider ‘how transgressive learning practically extends into a commitment to actively living in transgressive ways’ (Khoo & Jørgensen 2021, 447). As such, Khoo and Jørgensen (2021) contribute to current debates on the question of criticality in the fields of GCE and ESD by gesturing beyond an emphasis on critique toward a transgressive praxis of collaborative and ethical engagements with border thinking.

Also considering the importance of engaging with the complexities of GCE, Sharon Stein’s ‘Reimagining global citizenship education for a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world’ asks what kind of GCE could be responsive to the social and global challenges of our time, which she examines through the framework of VUCA: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In doing so, she problematises common efforts to respond to VUCA that seek to describe the ‘wicked problems’ we face in universal ways, and then prescribe a single, simplistic path forward for all humanity. Drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman, she suggests that this approach may no longer be feasible given the unprecedented speed and character of change and the fragmentation of epistemic authorities. Drawing on the work of decolonial theorists, she further suggests that this singular, static, and standard approach may no longer be desirable, as it tends to be rooted in an intention to re-establish hierarchies of knowledge, authority, and culture. Thus, rather than seek to design and transmit static GCE competencies and content, a concern raised by many authors in this special issue, she gestures towards the possibilities offered by educational interventions that seek to foster learners’ capacities for ongoing self-reflexivity, accountability, and

discernment. Specifically, she suggests the need to balance: concrete policy and open-ended pedagogy; critical literacy and affective literacy; and intellectual rigour and relational rigour. This in turn creates the possibility for more contextually-relevant responses to contemporary challenges that also link those challenges to long-standing colonial patterns of knowing, being, sensing, and relating. Stein (2021) concludes with a reminder about the difficulties, complexities, and contradictions that tend to arise within efforts to reimagine GCE, especially toward a decolonial direction. In particular, she encourages us to remain vigilant about the possible repetition of harmful co/lonial patterns that often emerge even when we have ‘good intentions.’ In order to support the work of identifying and interrupting these patterns, she offers two tools: a framework of ‘CIRCULAR Patterns in Reimagining GCE’, and a series of hyper-self-reflexivity questions for asking how we might be taught by the inevitable failures of this work.

On the one hand, the articles in this collection speak to deeply rooted concerns about on-going, perennial issues of inequalities and externally defined agendas inherent to GCE in policy and practice. On the other, they gesture to the deepening application of reflexive approaches attentive to context, including those that push the edges of debate into what work critical GCE can and cannot do. They offer historicised and contextualised accounts of regional and local iterations of critical GCE, provide evidence of on-going conversations around the influence of neoliberal educational policy contexts and perpetual neutral positioning of liberal-humanist approaches, and offer suggestions for working with and amidst the paradoxes and tensions inherent to the wide and contradictory field of GCE. Andreotti (2021) concludes the special issue with ‘Depth education and the possibility of GCE otherwise’, offering a reflection on lessons she learned as a practitioner working in the field of GCE across sectors for the past 20 years. She was the editor of the special issue on GCE published 10 years ago in this journal that highlighted the importance of geo-political economies in this field. She was also the first person to offer a comparative analysis contrasting soft and critical GCE which helped open conversations about normalised patterns of neocolonialism, ethnocentrism, paternalism, and saviourism in GCE. The practitioner stories she offers in her contribution to the special issue invite readers to consider how GCE ‘otherwise’ could support difficult learning and un-learning about the different forms of violence that are constitutive of modernity/coloniality, as well as modernity/coloniality’s unsustainability. The stories gesture toward what she calls ‘depth education’, which is a psycho-affective educational practice that can ‘expand our capacities, dispositions and stamina to hold space for difficult and painful engagements in ways that we do not feel overwhelmed and immobilised or demand to be rescued from discomfort’ (Andreotti 2021, 498). She contrasts depth education with mastery education, the latter of which is focused on the transmission of content and development of skills for optimal functionality within modernity/coloniality. The key lessons of her practitioner stories are brought together in a comparative table that expands her analysis of soft and critical GCE to include GCE otherwise grounded in depth education.

Concluding the special issue, Andreotti ends her contribution with a symbolic act of passing the torch to the next generation of researchers and practitioners. We end this introduction with her provocation as an invitation into the contributions to this special issue:

we are never going to arrive at a universal formula of description/prescription for GCE, which means we will need to keep the conversation alive, open to different perspectives and generations, on an on-going basis – the point is not to arrive anywhere specific, but to learn to dig deeper and relate wider, together (Andreotti 2021, 507).

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