"To Benefit the World by Whatever Means Possible": Adolescents' Constructions of Global Citizenship

John Myers
‘To benefit the world by whatever means possible’: adolescents’ constructed meanings for global citizenship

This article reports on the ways that 77 students in an international studies programme constructed meanings for global citizenship. The focus was on their personal meanings for the topic and how they articulated a global identity with their national civic beliefs. Data was collected from online discussion boards, written essays and 20 interviews. A key finding was that the students’ political language for global citizenship, examined here in terms of purpose, membership and relationship with national citizenship, was predominantly a moral commitment framed in universal language. A second finding was that the students understood global citizenship as a heterogeneous and complex affiliation shaped by a range of sources. The implication is that citizenship education emphasizing a narrow notion of patriotism may encourage students to disengage from civic life because it does not represent their lived experiences and identities. Insights for making citizenship education practices more inclusive are discussed.

Introduction

Developing patriotic citizens loyal to the nation state has historically been one of the master narratives of US public education (Tyack, 2003; Reuben, 2005). However, this narrative is constantly redefined within schools in relation to broader social changes (Cornbleth, 1998). In an era of globalisation, the meanings of citizenship and civic affiliations have increasingly come under scrutiny. Scholars now argue that national identity is giving way to multiple and transnational civic affiliations as borders become increasingly blurred by migration flows, advancements in information technologies, and growing economic interdependence (Giddens, 2002; Spiro, 2007). Globalisation challenges national citizenship from two directions: from within the nation state, where it has become increasingly plural as diverse social and ethnic groups assert their rights (Kymlicka, 2007), and supranationally, as individuals increasingly take on global affiliations that extend beyond a single nation (Heater, 2002; Kivisto & Faist, 2007).
Although educators have paid considerable attention to the implications of pluralism for citizenship (e.g. Lister et al., 2003; Banks, 2004), the first of these challenges, in this research I focus on adolescents’ thinking about the complexities of global citizenship. This article reports on the ways 77 adolescents constructed meanings for citizenship during their participation in an international studies programme. The setting was the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for International Studies (PGSIS), a 5-week, publicly-funded summer programme for high school students from across the state. The PGSIS is one of the few educational settings in the US in which adolescents study in depth the topics of global citizenship and globalisation. The goal was to provide a rich, interpretive account of their thinking to inform current citizenship education practises. The following two questions guided this research:

1. What patterns of meanings can be identified in the students’ thinking about global citizenship and its complexities?

2. How did the students understand the relationship of national and global citizenship and identify themselves as citizens within a broader global narrative?

Because the PGSIS students were selected for international interest and experiences, I expected that their thinking would generally reflect strong global affiliations and commitments. However, the focus was not on whether they accepted or rejected global citizenship but on their personal meanings for the topic and their articulation of a global identity with their existing beliefs.

A key shift in citizenship studies has been toward the recognition of citizenship as a personal and flexible construction (Held, 2002; Kennedy, 2007). This is especially the case for global citizenship, which in lacking an institutional status does not have a master narrative or ‘scripted’ definition that would give it shape and meaning. However, little scholarship has examined the actual ways that youth make sense of and construct meanings for global citizenship.
(Lister et al., 2003). The emerging literature in this area is based on a largely implicit concept of global citizenship that focuses on adolescents’ multiple identities (Osler & Starkey, 2003; Abu El-Haj, 2007) or on research that documents their growing moral responsibilities to global problems (e.g. Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Myers, 2008). Understanding adolescents’ cognition about global citizenship is significant because it is a fundamentally contested concept that has implications for how they will exercise citizenship in the future. Indeed, making sense of citizenship in a global context is challenging, as Luisa,\(^2\) one of the participants in this research, commented: ‘Global citizenship is probably one of the most complicated ideas that I have ever discussed in class’.

Nor has there been sufficient attention to how adolescents’ thinking about global citizenship articulates with their existing civic beliefs, such as how their global affiliations confront taken-for-granted notions of national identity (Davies, 2006). This lack of understanding has fueled a long-standing fear that global affiliations will replace national loyalties. One explanation for this situation is that citizenship education has remained fixated on national patriotism (Boyte, 2003) and public education in the US remains predominantly inward-looking and dominated by national debates, such as between unitary nationalism or cultural pluralism (Myers, 2006; Nussbaum, 2002).\(^3\) However, global citizenship has entered the school vocabulary and is even becoming a regular topic in the curriculum in some nations, such as England and Canada (Davies et al., 2005).

By studying adolescents’ constructed meanings for global citizenship, this research aimed to address Kennedy’s (1997) concern that ‘The challenge for civics and citizenship education is to somehow meld together civic knowledge, civic megatrends and civic realities in a way that will meet young people where they are’ (p. 3). Meeting adolescents ‘where they are’ requires
careful examination and study of their ‘political language and lore’ (Crick, 1999, 342) as a starting point for such an education.

The emergence of global citizenship

The effect of globalisation on the nation state has made global citizenship a more concrete status than ever before (Dower & Williams, 2002). One of the key changes in citizenship under globalisation has been the emergence of a broader range of affiliations and practises, which are primarily moral in character rather than tied to a legal status (see Table 1). Citizenship is now understood as a flexible and multiple identity that is exercised in a transnational political community (Ross, 2007). In light of these changes, the notion of citizenship as constructed is particularly salient in a global context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National citizenship</th>
<th>Global citizenship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
<td>Legal/institutional</td>
<td>Moral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td>Restricted</td>
<td>Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic unit</strong></td>
<td>The nation state</td>
<td>The world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Territorial communities</td>
<td>Transnational, imagined communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locus of action</strong></td>
<td>National political system</td>
<td>Global civil society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic identity</strong></td>
<td>Fixed (but contested)</td>
<td>Flexible and multiple</td>
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A substantial body of scholarship asserts that meanings for citizenship are constructed. However, rarely has this concept been operationalized for research. Global citizenship functions primarily as a personally constructed affiliation in contrast to the meta-level process by which political elites produce master narratives of citizenship, including meanings such as its purpose and membership. The latter understanding depends on citizenship as formalized in an exclusive, legal status bestowed by a government and influenced by culture, discourses and social groups,
as a particular feature of modernity (classic texts include Anderson, 1991). A key insight of this position is that ‘national identity is a form of belief construction’ (Mezran, 2007, 18). However, constructed personal meanings play a more central and extensive role for global citizenship due to the absence of a strong narrative. This understanding emphasizes the personal meanings that individuals make for citizenship through their mediation of master narratives (e.g. Kennedy, 2007).

Postmodern and critical globalisation studies have emphasized the extent to which global transformations have altered how we make meaning about the world and our role in it. People across the world increasingly experience the global and local in their daily lives. Giddens (1991, 187) explained:

The transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, radically change what ‘the world’ actually is. This is so both on the level of the ‘phenomenal world’ of the individual and the general universe of social activity within which collective social life is enacted. Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global.

Giddens observed that affiliations are no longer attached to geographic territories. However, this experience is neither uniform nor neutral but depends on the particular geo-political location of the individual (Wallerstein, 2002). A further insight is that the global/local sense relies not only on structural transformations in the world but also represents individuals’ active efforts to understand and influence its meaning (Robertson & Inglis, 2009).

Scholars have also emphasized the role of imagination as a unique feature in the process of making meaning about the globalizing world. The concept of a global imaginary helps to explain the ways that people give meaning to global citizenship. A global imaginary addresses
how globalization alters the context of meaning construction: how it affects people’s sense of identity, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, how it impacts on the shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears that have developed around locally situated life. (Tomlinson, 1999, 20)

From this perspective, a global imaginary is a system of meanings that social actors create to explain their role and experiences in the world in light of systematic transformations. One of the particular ways that globalisation has altered individuals’ sense of their civic role in the world has been through its effect of reducing distances and modifying understandings of self and others, which have heightened the development of moral concern for distant people.

**Researching adolescents’ understandings of citizenship**

Many scholars presume that national civic affiliations encourage a stronger sense of belonging to a political community, and thus is the ‘core’ civic identity (Huntington, 2004). In this regard, national citizenship is at the top of an unwritten hierarchy of citizenship. Global citizenship affiliation is considered to be less significant for education because it is not part of the dominant view that equates citizenship with a legal status. There is also a conservative tradition of anti-globalism in the US that is opposed to international influence in politics, economy, and education (not to be confused with the anti-globalisation movement) (Robertson, 2001). A premise of this research, however, is that this hierarchy of citizenship reflects implicit assumptions about citizenship and that the political wrangling over these affiliations points out the interests and ideologies of dominant groups in society that are fundamentally exclusive.

Furthermore, despite the range of theoretical and empirical scholarship supporting global citizenship, some critics charge that it is at best a weak affiliation. One of the primary critiques is
that the lack of a formal status and the long-distance nature of a global political community render global citizenship deracinated, or rootless, and therefore utopian (e.g. Smith, 1995). These ‘citizens of nowhere’ (MacIntyre, 1988, 388) would lack solidarity and commitments at the scale of the world. This view has led to the characterization of national citizenship as the core (or ‘thick’) affiliation, which includes characteristics such as traditions and heritage, and global citizenship as fragile (or ‘thin’) in terms of lacking a shared sense of belonging and a true moral community (see Dower, 2002). Such a view mistakenly presupposes that national identity is synonymous with citizenship (Lister et al., 2003).

However, there is emerging empirical evidence on adolescents’ and children’s global beliefs and affiliations. First, education research has shown that adolescents increasingly hold multiple affiliations, which suggests that they do not understand citizenship as determined by a singular allegiance or legal status. Much of this literature is focused on the experience of immigrant students who hold dual or transnational civic affiliations to both their countries of origin and their host country. However, research has shown that native-born youth also have multiple and flexible citizenship affiliations (Mitchell & Parker, 2008; Myers & Zaman, 2009). In fact, there is evidence that all youth have to some degree bicultural and global identities due to information and communication technologies (Arnett, 2002). Also, Suárez-Orozco (2004) argued that native-born youth need to develop and strengthen their multiple affiliations and new knowledge related to global changes in order to flourish in the twenty-first century.

Furthermore, the research on adolescents’ beliefs about national citizenship indicates that many understand citizenship as extending beyond the traditional national narrative of legal status and exclusive membership. Adolescents today are likely to feel a strong moral responsibility to address global problems through political participation in social movements that are global and
separate from formal party politics. For example, the IEA Civic Education Study in 28 countries, although focused on institutional structures and functions, found that adolescents are highly interested in participating in social movements, especially concerning global issues like human rights and the environment (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Nearly 80% of the students in all countries did not intend to participate in national politics when adults, such as joining a political party. However, a strong majority believed that participating in human rights (84%) and environmental groups (80%) to be ‘somewhat important’ or ‘very important’.

**Methodology**

I employed an interpretive research perspective because my goal was to collect in depth, rich data of the meanings that the students assigned to global citizenship (Creswell, 2002). This approach is consistent with research on students’ construction of meaning for complex topics that they have learned about in educational programs.

**Research setting**

The PGSIS is a 5-week summer programme for high-achieving secondary students. The majority of its funding is from the Pennsylvania State Department of Education, which initiated the programme in 1984. It is one of eight Pennsylvania Governor’s Schools of Excellence in the state. The mission of the PGSIS is ‘to augment each student’s global perspective along substantive and perceptual dimensions’ (PGSIS, 2006, 1).

The curriculum emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches to current scholarship in international studies and foreign languages and cultures. All students take the following courses for two hours per week: Global Citizenship, Intercultural Communication, Global Issues,
International Political Economy, Negotiation and Diplomacy, and Language and Culture (Brazilian Portuguese or Japanese). Besides this core curriculum, there are also a range of co-curricular activities and a residential setting that support the development of cross-cultural communication and leadership skills. The courses emphasize student-centred learning and critical thinking through classroom discussions.

Participants

The participants in this research were 79 high school students who gave written consent of the 100 enrolled in the PGSIS during the summer of 2005. Two of these students left the programme before its completion and were excluded from the study, leaving a total 77 active participants. 65% of these students were female and 35 percent were male. 25% of the participating students self-identified as ethnic minorities, which included African-American (3%), Latino (8%), and Asian (9%).

The PGSIS selects students proportionally to represent state intermediate units from across Pennsylvania. The selection criteria are based on academic achievement, leadership, study of a second language, and interest in global issues. The students’ academic record, teacher recommendations, and extracurricular involvement, especially related to international topics, are important for demonstrating their qualifications. Another important criterion is two essays on international topics written for the application. For the essays, the students were asked to write about which other country in the world they would like to be from and about an international problem that is important for their community.
Data sources and analysis

This research employed multiple data sources. The data sources used were: 1) postings to online discussion boards, 2) written essays, and 3) semi-structured interviews. I selected these data to provide a picture of the development and content of the participants’ thinking. To answer the first research question, all three of these sources were coded for themes about global citizenship. The discussion board postings identified the initial themes that the students raised. They also showed the extent to which the students collectively constructed new meanings for global citizenship, which primarily addressed the second research question. I then analyzed the essays and interviews for greater detail about the participants’ thinking.

The PGSIS created four discussion boards for the students that were available three weeks before the start the programme. Each student was required to post a message to at least one of the boards by the first week of class and to respond to other participants’ postings, although some participants posted more frequently and on multiple discussion boards. The participants in this research made a total of 123 postings. The discussion boards were entitled: ‘Citizenship and the Nation State’, ‘Dower and Williams’ Conception for Global Citizenship’, ‘Dual Citizenship’, and ‘Kant’s Conception for Global Citizenship’. The topics of the discussion boards were derived from two reading assignments that the students were required to complete in advance: Dower’s (2002) ‘Global citizenship: Yes or no?’ and Friedman’s (2000) The Lexus and the Olive Tree. The former outlines a range of contested issues and positions about global citizenship. Friedman’s text provides a positive overview of the meaning and practises of globalisation.

The second and third data sources were the students’ essays that they submitted during the last week and semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006), also at the end of the programme.
I collected and coded essays from all 77 students. The essay assignment was to ‘articulate how you define global citizenship’ and the relationship of global and national citizenship. Twenty participants were selected for interviews. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and explored in greater depth the students’ beliefs about the meaning of global citizenship. The interview questions asked the students to discuss their definition of global citizenship, their responsibility toward global issues, and their position on human rights issues that present conflicts between national laws and universal human rights (for example the death penalty in the US). The participants were also asked to explain their reaction to the following statement: ‘There are no rights that apply to all people because different societies have different cultures and beliefs’.

In accordance with an interpretive approach, analysis of the discussion board posts, essays, and interviews was an inductive process. Drawing on the constant comparative technique (Strauss, 1987), I coded the data by analyzing them for positions, while keeping in mind the major themes and problems from the global citizenship literature to develop the coding categories (see Table 2). For example, one coding category was ‘Membership in Global Citizenship’, for which there were three primary codes: ‘innate human condition and therefore open to all’, ‘innate condition due to globalisation’, and ‘acquired status that has certain prerequisites’. These codes were then compared with the academic literature to help categorize their positions within the broader themes of global citizenship.

Table 2: Coding categories for the meaning of global citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The purpose of global citizenship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Global citizenship is a moral commitment that does not require any special legal status</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Citizenship is a legal status granted by a government to which the responsibilities of citizenship are oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Global citizenship requires active efforts to address world problems</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Membership in global citizenship
1. Innate human condition and therefore open to all
2. Innate condition due to globalization
3. Acquired status that has certain prerequisites

Compatibility with national citizenship
1. Global citizenship is a complementary civic identity that strengthens national citizenship
2. The values of global citizenship inherently conflict with national citizenship
3. Global citizenship represents Western values and thus cannot be truly universal

The discussion boards were analyzed in terms of conversation segments. The goal was to identify initial themes as a basis for the coding scheme rather than to establish representativeness of the responses for the entire sample. Thus, this initial coding of the discussion boards did not weight the responses of the students for each category. The coding categories emerged from a comparison of these themes with the literature on global citizenship, which helped to refine the basic categories of meaning. These basic categories were purpose, membership, and relationship with national citizenship. The essays and interviews were analyzed line-by-line for the coding themes and each instance was recorded as a data segment and quantified. I looked for patterns within the data categories, which included weighting the numbers of responses for each category as a percentage of the entire sample to provide an indication of the strength and representativeness of each view. However, due to the open-ended nature of the essay, students did not necessarily address all three of the elements of global citizenship that were analyzed and therefore the weighted responses for each category only include responses from students that addressed the elements.

Findings

In this section, I outline the findings for two areas. First, I present my analysis of conversation segments from the discussion board data to identify the initial positions that
emerged in the students’ thinking. Second, I analyzed the data from the essays and interviews on the students’ meanings for global citizenship in terms of its purpose, membership, and relationship with national citizenship.

**Constructing meanings for global citizenship**

The discussion board posts provide an initial picture of the students’ positions on the meaning of global citizenship. I selected this segment because it represents some of the main themes the students raised (see Figure A). It also illustrates the range of views on the meaning of global citizenship, in this case the issue of membership. In this segment, from the ‘Dual Citizenship’ discussion board, Cynthia, Karen, Mina and Darshani discussed the implications of Friedman’s (2000) *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. Their conversation examined whether being a global citizen requires exercising civic agency and the responsibility for active participation or if it is a status like national citizenship that is conveyed automatically.

**Figure 1: Who is a global citizen?**

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**Cynthia:** According to Thomas Friedman in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, ‘one of the biggest challenges for political theory in this globalization era is how to give citizens a sense that they can exercise their will, not only over their own governments but over at least some of the global forces shaping their lives’ (p.192). It is hard enough to be a citizen of the United States, and even more difficult to be a citizen of the global community, where everything is driven by the Internet, businesses, and stockbrokers. We simply do not have a say in the way our world is run. For this reason, I find it impossible for one to call themselves *both* a U.S. citizen and a global citizen.

**Karen:** I have to disagree with you, Charlotte, when you say that ‘we simply do not have a say in the way our world is run’. Although we cannot be *in control* of our world, we can each play a vital role in our society, country, and the world as a whole, as ‘super-empowered individuals’. As citizens we are not in charge of the country or the world, but we all work together to improve our society and do our part as both U.S. citizens and as global citizens. What makes us a citizen is fulfilling our responsibility in society and in the world as a whole, and our efforts *will* make a difference if we want them to.

**Mina:** Every person in the United States, however, does not make an effort to improve our world, so therefore by being an American, one is not simultaneously a global citizen. There must be some other
qualification factor other than being a citizen of America or any other country to become a ‘global citizen’.

Darshani: I think that being a global citizen is a birthright. The difference that one must take into consideration is whether or not he/she will be an active global citizen. Like it or not, most people born in America are United States citizens. The difference between many though, is that some choose to be responsible and active, while others sit back and watch apathetically from the couch.

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Quoting Friedman, Cynthia disagrees with earlier posts on the board and makes the point that we cannot be global citizens because we do not influence how ‘our world is run’. In the following posting, Karen contradicts Cynthia’s position but builds on its main idea that we do not have a say in the running of the world by proposing that lack of control does not exclude agency. Karen formulates the idea that the basis of global citizenship is our ability to affect the world through our collective action as ‘super-empowered individuals’. She draws a parallel between national and global citizenship in terms of defining criteria for any citizenship, namely ‘fulfilling our responsibility in society and in the world’. In the next posting, Mina disagrees by pointing out an exception to Karen’s statement, arguing that some people might only fulfill their responsibility to the nation and not to the world. Darshani concludes the sequence by creating a new meaning for global citizenship by synthesizing Karen’s and Mina’s ideas that being active is the primary criteria for global citizenship. She also disagrees with earlier posts (not included in Figure A) that simply being born in the world confers global citizenship in the same sense that being born in the US confers citizenship (i.e. jus sanguinis, or citizenship based on ancestry).

The discussion board posts, however, did not provide an overall picture of the students’ thinking or sufficient details, such as regarding who global citizens are loyal to and what their specific responsibilities include. Next, I outline the findings from the essays and interviews, which gives a more comprehensive picture of the thinking of all 77 students.
Adolescents’ understandings of global citizenship

In this section, I considered the students’ thinking on three fundamental elements of global citizenship: 1) purpose, 2) membership, and 3) relationship with national citizenship⁴ (see Dower, 2002). Because the essays and interviews were open-ended, each student did not necessarily address all of these issues.

The purpose of global citizenship

There were two prominent themes in the students’ thinking about the purpose of global citizenship: a) a moral commitment to improving the world, and b) requiring a legal status. These themes considered the underlying nature of global citizenship. 75 of 77 students addressed this topic in the essays and interviews.

Moral commitment. 79% of the students (59 of 75) believed that global citizenship is predicated on having a moral commitment to improving the world. Anna summed up this view: ‘I personally define global citizenship as an awareness of, an interest in, a commitment to, and an identity with the world as a whole’. Her comment emphasized the development of global consciousness as an aspect of citizenship. Matthew focused on the notion of commitment to the well-being of the entire planet and everyone on it, concluding that ‘This “global” citizen’s responsibility would then have to be to benefit the world by whatever means possible’. He captured the general sentiment by linking global citizenship with duties rather than with rights or a legal status. ‘By whatever means possible’ illustrates an understanding of the world as a unit and the centrality of world problems to citizenship. He further explained in his essay that this responsibility includes knowing about ‘all the evils and turmoil in the world’, such as ‘the genocide in Darfur, the AIDS epidemic, and human trafficking all around the world’.
The complexities of this moral view were apparent when the participants discussed the specifics of such commitments and responsibilities. In this regard, the way they understood the meaning of the terms ‘benefit’, ‘humanity’, and ‘the world as a whole’ was especially important. Like Matthew, many participants focused on this commitment as related to resolving major world problems, such as poverty or the environment. However, he was more specific than some students about the moral content of global citizenship. The students were sometimes conflicted about to whom or what—the earth, the human race, or a world government—they were responsible. In this sense, their beliefs about the moral commitments of global citizenship were personal and depended on their understandings of how ‘to benefit the world’.

In one respect, the moral view can be considered a fragile (or thin) affiliation in the sense that many participants did not assume that global citizens share a common, or universal, morality beyond a general sense of responsibility to the world. Eleven participants spoke of global citizenship as tying together people with different moral beliefs and came to the conclusion that it was ultimately a personal system of beliefs, rather than based on a universal ethic. Robert illustrated this position in his essay:

For there to be a possibility of a global culture, the sentiment of citizenship must be based in a feeling of connection to a ‘human culture’—but beyond that, self defined. A standard citizenship would be impossible, as there are so many different ethical beliefs, local laws, and customs that a general rule of conduct would not only be impossible to enforce, but ignorant and oppressive. Creating a personal definition of citizenship allows for membership to a ‘human’ culture, as well as an individual culture.
A personally-defined understanding of global citizenship suggests a compromise between the concept of universal values inherent in global citizenship with an emphasis on individualism and the ‘ownership’ of citizenship.

The constructed nature of a moral understanding of citizenship is apparent in these participants’ comments describing it as an ‘identity’, a ‘state of mind’, a ‘sentiment’, and other terms. These terms suggest that each person gives citizenship meaning rather than a legal status waiting to be granted. This view is based on the belief that such a moral view of citizenship can lead to real change in the world. Darshani, in referring to global citizenship as ‘figurative’, highlighted its differences from national citizenship yet argued that such a consciousness can lead to real action and a more harmonious world.

*Legal status.* The question of whether global citizenship requires a legal status (see Dower, 2002, 31-32) divided the participants. For 15% of the students (11 of 75), the lack of a legal status made global citizenship an unrealistic concept. Chris explained: ‘There currently exist no institutions to issue global passports, no global embassies to issue global visas, no global bureau to collect global taxes’. For these students, citizenship was a status with entitlements that can only be granted by a government rather than determined by individuals. Ethan, a male participant, elaborated on this view:

National citizenship, to me, means two different things: it is both a legal term and a series of responsibilities. When we translate this into global terms, however, what becomes important is not the legal status but the set of responsibilities. After all, at present there is no global institution that is even close to comparable to the government of a nation-state. So what we are dealing with is simply a descriptive term rather than a legal one.
Ethan distinguished between two types of citizenship. He suggested that global citizenship cannot make a claim to legal status and lacks the rights that such a status would provide although it can make a strong claim to asserting unique responsibilities.

Other participants suggested that the association with a legal status would weaken the concept of global citizenship. For example, Brent asserted that the strength of global citizenship is its moral quality. He wrote in his essay:

If we insist on a conception of global citizenship that is dependent on some legalized, state-like, federalized world authority, then the concept of global citizenship loses both its immediate significance and its moral characteristics… If all actions that arise from ‘global citizenship’ must be sanctioned by some type of world federalism, then there is no moral imperative for one to work on his own towards development, freedom and prosperity for his fellow man.

Brent viewed global citizenship as a shared moral compass guiding action to make the world better and was critical of the potential role of a legal government.

**Membership**

The participants also contested the question of who can be considered a global citizen. There were two primary themes for this topic: a) an innate condition that includes all human beings, or b) an acquired status that requires certain characteristics and/or actions. 65 students addressed this topic in the essays and interviews.

**Innate condition.** 49 % (32 of 65) of the students thought that global citizenship is an innate condition that includes all human beings, regardless of their interest in and knowledge of being a global citizen. In this respect, it is a universal condition that is linked to being human.
One rationale was that citizenship is fundamentally territorial and parallels different expressions of territory. As Pablo wrote, ‘To me Global Citizenship is anyone who was born in this world, and [national] citizenship is anyone born in a certain part of the world’. His notion of being ‘born in this world’ as a borderless and unlimited space is distinguished from the limited territory of a nation state. He asserted that there is not a conflict between national and global citizenship but that they are expressions of our attachments to different territorial scales.

Although this vision of global citizenship is universally inclusive, it does not make a strong case for specific values. Does including all people as global citizens undermine the moral values of caring about and improving the world? This case would also include individuals who are unaware of world issues. Cecilia raised this point in her essay:

> It simply means someone who is a part of the world, not someone who contributes actively to the world in positive ways. Now, this might seem like a definition that makes the term useless because everyone is a global citizen.

She and others suggested that we all have responsibilities to the world regardless of whether we do anything to fulfill these responsibilities. Cecilia further explained that she was referring to ‘the global community’ as the locus for global responsibilities. Thus, her definition sacrificed activism for inclusiveness.

About a third of these students pointed to globalisation as the rationale for justifying their belief that all people are inherently global citizens. They argued that heightened interdependence created a global community that replaced the primacy of the nation state. Christine described this position:

> In my opinion, there is only one requirement for being a global citizen: if you are affected (whether economically, personally, medically, socially, or anything between) by the
actions of someone somewhere else on the globe, then you are a global citizen… Because
of this, no one can actually choose whether or not they are a global citizen. People are
members of the global community from the moment they are born. We all reside in a
neighborhood called ‘Earth’.

Her comments point to an understanding of citizenship that is essentially post-national,
eschewing a purely political understanding of citizenship as participation in self-government.
Instead, her emphasis is on an expansive notion of ‘us’ and relationships with others within the
global community. From this perspective, nation states no longer determine who is included as a
citizen.

Acquired status. A slight majority (51%; 33 of 65) of the students took the position that
global citizenship was an acquired status that required particular characteristics or effort by
individuals. In contrast to the view that all people are global citizens, this position takes a clearer
stance on the necessary values of global citizenship. According to these participants, global
citizenship requires a commitment to making the world a better place and knowledge about the
world’s people and issues. Julia commented that global citizenship ‘is not something that can be
passed on to someone at birth. It is an acquired means of thinking that requires a certain degree
of knowledge about the world’. For Robin, global citizenship was a right:

I feel that someone who is globally minded and has an interest in being well informed
about the world has the right to call themselves a global citizen because they are taking
the time to think about other issues than what’s going on in their respective countries.

Another key requirement of global citizenship according to the acquired status view was
that one needed to be actively engaged in efforts to improve the world. Sharon commented:
‘Involvement in global society is crucial. It is not enough to claim birth in this world, or to
remain passive when there is so much that is wrong on this earth’. These participants viewed global citizenship as a higher level of citizenship that entailed active participation and in this regard it was justified to exclude some people from global citizenship status. Brent’s comments represented this thinking:

> Every child born in the United States is, of course, a citizen. However, there is a higher level of citizenship than the legal term endowed at birth. This ‘citizenship’ requires a commitment to be active in one’s nation and community. A man who volunteers in his town and votes, for instance, is more of a ‘citizen’ in this sense than one who does neither of these things. Therefore, my conception of global citizenship necessarily makes a more exclusive club.

To Brent, global citizenship is different than national citizenship in the sense that its common ground is social activism at a global scale rather than membership by birth in a particular society.

Deciding who is excluded was a contentious point for many of the participants who understood global citizenship as an acquired status. On the one hand, they strongly believed that global citizenship requires specific beliefs and commitments yet at the same time they were concerned about the barriers to some people. For example, several participants suggested that to be an active global citizen requires resources and access to education and knowledge. Because these resources are unequally distributed in the world, they reasoned, this condition would disproportionately and prejudicially exclude people living in less developed nations. Paola thought that awareness of global issues was the basic qualification for global citizenship. She stated:
To say that a global citizen must be educated is very close-minded and discriminating. Not everyone has the resources to be educated, so a person should not be stripped of the privilege just because he/she lives in an underdeveloped country.

Paola pointed out the conflict between abstract criteria for global citizenship and the realities of an unequal world. What she does not make clear is what the ‘privilege’ of global citizenship is and whether it would be different for people in less developed nations.

**Relationship with national citizenship**

The third issue of global citizenship that the participants raised was its relationship with the nation state. Is global citizenship, as Dower (2002, 38) asked, compatible with national citizenship? Ultimately, these students grappled with whether we should be patriotic to a government or to the ideals and goals of democratic citizenship. 37 students addressed this topic in the essays and interviews.

*Compatible with national citizenship.* 62% of the students (23 of 37) made the argument that there is not a conflict between global and national citizenship because we are capable of having several allegiances. Jason explained:

One would be very correct in saying that global citizenship is connected with standard citizenship. Every person, whether they like it or not, is a citizen of some community, like a state, town, city, or nation. In being a citizen of one of those places, you are obviously in the world, and in most cases, the globalized world, therefore you are in the spectrum of global citizens.

Jason pointed out that for most people global citizenship is a reality that is part of their daily experiences, echoing Giddens’ comments that we experience the global and local in our daily
lives. Jason made the case that global citizenship, then, is dependent on the interconnectedness of people across the world as a result of the world being ‘globalized’. He reasoned that similar to ‘a state, town, city, or nation’, the world has become another territory or ‘spectrum’ that shapes a particular relationship with others. He also suggested that global citizenship is the most elusive and less natural of these allegiances because it is a result of globalisation.

Julia furthered this argument in stating that global and national allegiances do not conflict. She commented:

Whether you act globally by working for an NGO, joining the Peace Corps, or by working locally and having a synergistic relationship between your national and local government and the greater world, I don’t think they come in conflict with each other. I don’t think you’re going to lose culture just by being helpful in other parts of the world. Julia pointed out that these allegiances can be complementary and even ‘synergistic’ in terms of producing a greater positive effect. She also contended that for individuals a global allegiance would not erase other identities.

Conflicts with national citizenship. 35 % (13 of 37) of the students took the position that global and national citizenship are fundamentally in conflict. They believed the greatest barrier to be that people across the world have different values. Anthony summed up this position:

I feel that it is the cultural barriers that exist between large groups of people, countries and ethnic groups for example, that stand in the way ever really being able to become a true global citizen. Until this problem is addressed on a global scale, as a world, our differences will drive us apart and will prevent us from uniting and forming something greater than we are now or could ever be without doing so.
For these students, the notion of global citizenship suggests a need for standard values and agreed-upon rules, which is impossible amidst the cultural diversity in the world. This position understands the concept of global citizenship as producing the homogenization of values, beliefs, and actions.

Furthermore, eight of these students (22 percent) believed that global citizenship was an imposition of Western values on less developed countries. This view corresponds to a criticism of global citizenship as representative of the developed world that has embraced economic globalisation (Bowden, 2003). Debora described her thinking:

It is inescapable that it [global citizenship] can exist only through cultural imperialism – who else but the country with the most power could assert the requisites of global citizenship? Who decides what fits a universal ethical standard? Global citizenship… ultimately poses a threat to non-Western culture.

She explained global citizenship as a legal status that is imposed on people and is unavoidably linked to issues of power. Her position holds that most universal values are in fact based on Western ones. Along these lines, it has also been pointed out that nearly all cultural traditions, including those within the US, believe that globalisation is a threat to its uniqueness (Robertson, 1997).

**Discussion**

The findings point to two important conclusions for researchers and educators in the areas of citizenship education and international education. The first is that the students’ political language for global citizenship, examined here in terms of purpose, membership and relationship with national citizenship, was predominantly a moral commitment framed in universal language.
79% of the students who commented on this topic held this moral understanding compared to only 15% who thought that it requires a legal status. Their meanings for global citizenship were not tied to a particular geographic location; instead, it was rooted in the idea of the ‘world as a whole’. Global citizenship—as an ‘imagined’ construct that reflects a shared sense of place and values—was a very tangible identity for these students. As Anna asserted, ‘If a person identifies with the world at large and sees himself as an integral part of the world, he is a global citizen’.

This finding supports previous international research showing a trend in adolescents’ interest in civic participation away from the formal political system (especially political parties and national political issues) and toward social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with transnational issues, such as the environment and human rights (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, Kennedy et al., 2007). One explanation for this trend suggested by the findings is that formal politics does not capture the universal and moral ideals that meet young people ‘where they are’ in terms of their political language and lore. The findings of the present study indicate that the students closely identified with cosmopolitan themes concerning the well-being of the world and the human race.

Accordingly, citizenship education that emphasizes a narrow notion of patriotism may encourage students to disengage from civic life because it does not represent their lived experiences and identities. This finding also supports other research on the dangers of a social studies curriculum that is incongruent with students’ understandings of the topics and their lived experiences (Cornbleth, 2002; Epstein, 2000; Barton & Mccully, 2005). The present study extends this body of research from a national context to a global scale. It addresses the disjuncture between a national-oriented formal curriculum with students’ transnational experiences as part of the “logic of representation” in teachers’ pedagogical decision making.
(Epstein, 2000, 205). Ignoring this global dimension in citizenship educational practices is likely to lead to student resistance and disengagement, especially in multicultural democracies in which many youth have international backgrounds and experiences.

A second important finding was that the students understood global citizenship as a heterogeneous and complex affiliation shaped by a range of personal and contextual sources. Despite their international experiences and enrollment in the same program, these students held diverse and contradicting constructions of meaning for its purpose, membership and relationship with national citizenship. For example, the most contested element was over who can be considered a global citizen (membership). The students were almost evenly split between it as an innate condition (49%) and as an acquired status (51%). That some adolescents interpreted global citizenship in multiple ways will hardly come as a surprise for many educators. However, their thinking challenges broad generalizations about adolescents’ civic affiliations in the 21st century and the critique that it is an excessively weak and divisive affiliation. Furthermore, the results did not entirely match my expectation that such students would overwhelmingly favor global over national affiliations. Nearly all of the students were sympathetic to global citizenship yet some clearly privileged their loyalties to the nation state and were pessimistic about its possibility in the world today.

The findings also provide insights for the strength and stability of global citizenship identities. Unmistakably, for many participants global citizenship was a core identity that pervaded and shaped their thinking about their role in the world. Describing it as a ‘birthright’ and developing the notion that active engagement is a fundamental characteristic, as Darshani did, revealed the strength of global citizenship as an identity. Furthermore, the research showed that the students did not see global citizenship as a bundled ‘package’ but as a flexible
identification with multiple elements. Rather than assuming global citizenship to be a weak or fragile affiliation and such individuals as ‘citizens of nowhere’, it seems more appropriate in light of these findings to focus on the diverse ways that adolescents combine different scales of citizenship and to consider their thinking about specific elements of citizenship. In short, global citizenship is not a monolithic or natural affiliation that can be easily classified.

At one level, the differences in the students’ thinking precisely capture the state of flux of our political systems and patterns of communication driven by globalisation. In this context, it is unsurprising that adolescents across societies have diverse and unpredictable understandings of citizenship, which Kennedy and his colleagues (2007) found. The present study of students’ thinking in the PGSIS programme examined the ways that youth have internalized such macro level changes in terms of their own cognition. Based on this account, citizenship education research should not isolate national and global scales of affiliation but should help students to connect and articulate them as aspects of their political language and identities. Such an approach would help to align citizenship education with students’ life experiences.

Conclusion

More fully understanding adolescents’ thinking about global citizenship can help to align citizenship education programmes with current transformations in the world. The implication is that students are not being served by the existing curriculum, which does not address the complex realities of citizenship in a global age. Students lacking such a curriculum may have difficulty harmonizing global and national ‘pulls’ on their loyalties. These findings indicate that if citizenship educators intend to help students to make sense of citizenship in light of current world conditions, they should pay attention to adolescents’ thinking about their own multiple
Part of the significance of these findings, then, is that they can inform educators about where to set the bar for realistic learning goals for global education that will prepare all students to participate in our interconnected world. To this end, findings from this research provide indications for the types of concerns and issues that adolescents may confront in learning to articulate their global experiences and to develop their global identities.

Although the findings pertain specifically to the US, they also provide insights for citizenship education practices in other contexts. Preparing adolescents for citizenship in the 21st century has become an imperative for educators across the world. One lesson is that educators making curriculum choices should take into consideration that students will demonstrate divergent thinking about citizenship and that not affirming and representing a range of beliefs in the classroom will likely lead to unintended learning outcomes such as civic disengagement and low achievement. For citizenship education, meeting students where they are means including their sense of ethical responsibility. In all countries, educators can help students to consider the interrelationships of levels of citizenship by ensuring the inclusiveness of the curriculum. For example, how do students who are immigrants or second generation reconcile levels of citizenship in different national contexts? Furthermore, insights from the empirical study of adolescents’ thinking can help to guide the range of issues and problematic areas that students are likely to present regarding the complexity of citizenship in a global age. The specific nature of these beliefs, however, is likely to vary from country to country. Nevertheless, the broader insights into engaging adolescents’ moral and political language for citizenship education remain relevant.
References


Notes

1 It should be noted that there is not a singular meaning for education for global citizenship; the term is used to support a variety of ideological purposes (Shultz, 2007).

2 All names of the students have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

3 The National Standards for Civics and Government and many state standards are essentially studies of US government. For example, the state of Pennsylvania’s Academic Standards for Civics and Government does not make any mention of a global dimension to citizenship, globalisation, or to changes in citizenship (Gonzales et al., 2001).

4 Dower outlined other problematic issues concerning global citizenship, including whether it requires a world government and if it presupposes an objective ethical basis.