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Planetary citizenship and curriculum: Schools from three continents learn through diversity

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Abstract. This paper presents a project developed by NGOs and schools from five different countries—Brazil being one of them—aimed at contributing towards raising global/planetary awareness in children and youngsters. The authors show how it was designed and is being implemented collaboratively, governed by the principle of diversity, with dialogue and cooperation among the participants. They also point out the main challenges it must face until its conclusion in 2012.

Keywords. Cooperation, Curriculum, Global/Planetary Dimension, Diversity, Schools.

1 Global Curriculum Project: Schools opening up to a world that opens up to them

At a time when visions of the future are increasingly bleak, apocalyptic, paralysing will and generating chaos, it is urgent to give publicity to initiatives that are betting on uncertainty against determinism and focus on the power of humanity and of each and every one of us to change what appears to be destiny : “the expected doesn’t occur, and the gods open the door to the unexpected” (Edgar Morin).

This is the case with the Global Curriculum Project—in Brazil called the Global Curriculum for Sustainability—, commenced in January 2010. On the initiative of NGOs in Austria (Südwind), Benin (Nego-Com), Brazil (CECIP), the United Kingdom (Leeds DEC) and the Czech Republic (Arpok), the project is being developed in cooperation with education authorities from each country, and financed by the European Community until 2012.

It is based on the belief that schools, educators and pupils from different cultures and countries can learn from their diversity and cooperate, giving new direction and assigning a new meaning to existing curricula, so that they can be geared towards forming global/planetary citizens. In other words: citizens capable of understanding that as well as belonging to a country, a nation, they are also members of the wider human family, that they have the same rights and depend on the same environment as the other 6 billion humans; that our various different micro-realities—in school, at home, in the city—are connected to the rest of the world ;

that the lives of the men and women on this planet can be affected by events and processes taking place thousands of miles away, and that local micro-decisions and micro-actions affect the macro-reality.

It is vital to raise new generations with a global/planetary conscience in order to assure sustainability of life on Earth. This will enable the creation of a true, solidarity-based interdependence between the northern and southern hemispheres of the planet, between rich and poor countries, by stimulating an understanding of the causes of poverty and the changing of global rules of commerce which favour rich countries to the detriment of the poor, and destroy natural resources.

The 40 schools and around 800 educators involved in the Global Curriculum Project wish to contribute to ensuring that the global/planetary dimension is embedded in the basic education curriculum, via inter-related concepts which express this dimension: human rights, social justice, diversity, conflict resolution, interdependence, sustainability, global citizenship and the values/perceptions associated with each concept.

These key concepts can be understood as following:
Human rights: Universal and indivisible rights which emphasize our common humanity which represent a structure whereby they may be claimed, thereby challenging inequalities and prejudices;

Diversity: Differences between ecosystems, cultures, customs, traditions, the ways in which the societies around the world are organized and governed, which must be acknowledged and respected, identifying similarities in light of

universal human rights, understanding the causes of prejudice and discrimination and fighting against them;

Conflict resolution: Ways of handling conflicts arising from differences in ideas, perceptions, beliefs and interests, or from the competition for resources which are thought to be limited and which involve interdependent individuals, groups or nations. Perception that these conflicts are potentially creative and that dialogue, empathy and negotiation can be employed to prevent them escalating into violence;

Social justice: Fairness, at local and global levels, in access to goods, services and resources, with equal opportunities for all. Understanding that past injustices affect current local and global policies. Recognizing the need to challenge injustices, by understanding the causes and effects of poverty, identifying the appropriate measures to be taken vis-à-vis inequalities, fighting discrimination and stereotypes and making commitments towards a sustainable lifestyle;

Sustainability: Acknowledging that the planet's resources are limited, and that it is therefore vital to rethink, reduce, reuse and recycle in the present, so as not to jeopardize the future. Perceiving that the quality of life extends beyond economic aspects and that injustice and social exclusion must be eradicated;

Interdependence: Interrelation between people, places, economies and environments throughout the world, so that decisions and actions have global repercussions;

Global citizenship: Ability to act in an informed and responsible manner, mobilizing knowledge and skills in order to understand how and where key decisions are taken at local and global levels. Perceiving the global context of local and national themes, and how language, art and religion mould different identities and perspectives on planet-wide issues.

The challenge facing participating teachers—100 of whom are in Brazil, led by 25 of them—consists of reflecting and (re) constructing these concepts with their students, aged between 10 and 17 years, in order to arrive at their own specific definitions. This is followed by examining the timetable of their subjects, identifying opportunities to coordinate concepts with a global dimension with the contents already established in curricular timetables. From there, the participants produce lesson plans, didactic sequences and interdisciplinary projects which culminate in “glocal” actions (in the local school and community, influencing schools/communities in the other participating countries) geared towards achieving social justice, incentivizing fair trade, conscious consumption, environmental conservation, tolerance, and respect for differences.

With these materials, the international collective of teachers will construct an online multilingual Global Curriculum Model which has begun to be outlined at www.global-curriculum.net.

This Curriculum will serve a Global Education, defined by the Maastricht Declaration (2002) as an “education that opens people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world, and awakens them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity and human rights for all. Global Education is understood to encompass Development Education, Human Rights Education, Education for Sustainability, Education for Peace and Conflict Prevention and Intercultural Education; being the global dimensions of Education for Citizenship”.

Characteristics of lesson plans, didactic sequences and projects pertaining to a Global and Sustainable Curriculum

- Starting from a local problem identified by reading the reality of the school/community, in a way that makes sense to pupils, including their democratic participation;
- Making connections between contents of the Curriculum and one or more concepts of the global dimension, so that pupils understand the local problem in the context of the international reality, and perceive themselves as global/planetary citizens;
- Using interactive, constructivist methodology;
- Enabling interdisciplinarity;
- Resulting in action/product with an impact on the local reality.

In Brazil, where the principles of Ecopedagogy and Planetary Citizenship inspired by the Earth Charter have been disseminated and developed by the Paulo Freire Institute, we can add the adjective Planetary to the term Global Education. To complete the definition of the Maastricht Declaration, we desire a Global-Planetary Education based on a vision that “unites the planet, moving towards the worldwide society of the future, and raises awareness that we are all inhabitants of the same home, of a single nation, that we have a Terrestrial identity, we are earth-dwellers” (GADOTTI, 2006).

2 The implementation of the Project

2.1 Step by step

The project was designed collectively by the representatives of the five NGOs, and its implementation follows a similar step by step path in the each country:

- Identification and commitment of partners in Education Departments, Ministries and other education bodies;
- Formation of Teams in Schools. Each school formed a Global Curriculum Team, working as volunteers, comprising teachers of different subjects (in Brazil, it has three to five members, plus the principal and/or the pedagogical coordinator), with a coordinator elected by the group. The group is responsible for reviewing the Curriculum topics in light of the global dimension, producing and implementing the Lesson Plans and Work Projects with concepts of the global dimension, involving pupils and the school community and interacting with other schools both nationally and internationally via the internet (school websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter);
- Producing materials about the global dimension and its concepts. The National Project Coordinator gathers, translates, produces and distributes support material;

Table 1.

Socioeconomic data	Austria	Benin	Brazil	UK	Czech Rep.
Population in millions of inhabitants	8.393	9.532	190.732	60.975	10.381
GDP in US dollars	330 million	12 billion	2 trillion	2 trillion	236 billion
Income per capita in US dollars	39,000	1,500	10,000	34,000	16,000
Population below the poverty line	5.9%	37.4%	31%	14%	4.9%
Infant mortality for every thousand live births	4.4	98	19.4	4.8	3.8
PISA result	487	(not available)	401	500	490
HDI	0.851	0.435	0.699	0.849	0.841
No. of schools / teachers in the Global Curriculum Project	10 schools 200 teachers	5 schools 100 teachers	5 schools 100 teachers	10 schools 200 teachers	10 schools 200 teachers

Source: wikipedia.org / Inep.gov

- Study Meetings. Each school team meets up at least monthly with the National Project Coordination Department to study and reflect on practising, planning and assessing actions;
- Workshops and Seminars. At least twice a year, the teams from all the Project schools in each country meet up to exchange experiences with their peers, consultants and interested parties. Three workshops were held in Brazil—two with the 25 teachers and their supporters and one with representatives of each Global Curriculum Team;
- Study Trips. Representatives of the 40 schools from the five countries meet up twice during the Project: in 2010 the gathering was in the UK, and in 2011 it will be in Benin;
- Project Website. The schools’ productions and materials are posted by the National Coordination Department on www.globalcurriculum.net. This site is designed by the NGO Südwind (having consulted the other partners). In 2012, the site will contain the Global Curriculum Manual, consolidating the productions from all five countries;
- Project cooperation and communication. The National Coordination Department of each country takes care to strengthen and extend cooperation and partnerships with government and non-government bodies and the media, disseminating the idea of a curriculum geared towards forming global citizens. In Brazil, the CECIP’s partners and initial supporters of the Global Curriculum Project for Sustainability are the São Paulo Education Secretary of State’s Pedagogical Standards and Studies Coordination Committee, the São Paulo Education Municipal Secretariat, the Colégio Bandeirantes

college, the Institute of Democratic Education, the Paulo Freire Institute, the Roberto Marinho Foundation, and the Nextel Institute;

- Continuous Assessment. The National Coordination Team promotes and stimulates the permanent assessment of all activities;
- External Assessment. An external assessor, identified by the National Coordination Department, monitors all actions and draws up annual reports relating thereto;

International Coordination. The National Project Coordinators—Arpok, CECIP, Leeds DEC, Nego-Com and Südwind—meet up at least once a year to plan and assess actions and they are in permanent communication via e-mail, Facebook and Skype. The NGO Südwind, from Austria, is heading up the process.

2.2 Diversity as a principle

The principle of Diversity, entailing as a central point dialogue and cooperation between different entities in producing learning and changes, governs all actions on the Global Curriculum. The Project proposes a horizontal discussion between representatives of countries which have been great colonial empires, or colonies which enriched empires, countries which in the past both suffered and benefited from slavery, such as Brazil, and countries which supplied slaves, such as Benin. Countries whose income per capita fluctuates between US\$ 540 and US\$ 37,000 and whose infant mortality figures lie between 4 and 98 per thousand live births. Countries where the difference between rich and poor is small (Austria) or immense (Brazil). Where the influx of immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas is intense (the UK in particular, but also Austria and the Czech Republic), low (as in Brazil) or the result of wars in

neighbouring countries (such as Benin). With populations where there is a balance between Christians, Animists and Muslims, or where Christians form the vast majority.

Social and economic differences and differences in cultural and historical training are reflected in the field of education. The five countries have very different education systems. For example, in Austria, schooling content is the same for everyone only up to the age of 9. After that, pupils are differentiated according to their skills, abilities and interests, and they are channelled towards paths leading to vocational or more academic courses. In the Czech Republic, pupils are differentiated from the age of 15, when some go on to vocational courses and others to courses in preparation for university. In the UK this occurs after the age of 16. In Brazil, basic education from the age of 6 to 17 is the same for all, and vocational education is coupled with secondary education, from the second year onwards or after completion of schooling. Benin and Brazil consider education to be a national priority for ensuring economic development and overcoming poverty, but it was only recently (2006) that free education was established in the African country. Salaries, training, teachers' working conditions, levels of pedagogical use of internet and pupils' performance in their assessments are excellent in the European countries and tolerable in Brazil and Benin, particularly in state schools.

The challenge is to avoid these differences and contrasts leading to an imbalanced relationship in the Global Curriculum Project. On the contrary: they should be a source of mutual enrichment, through horizontal dialogue, where everyone has something to teach and everyone has something to learn from others.

2.3 The five schools in Brazil: Diversity in action

In Brazil, CECIP decided for financial and strategic reasons to offer the Global Curriculum for Sustainability Project only to schools in Greater São Paulo—but guaranteeing the principle of Diversity. To this end, the principals of two private schools which are CECIP's partners were contacted, and they agreed to take part after consulting their teams. The São Paulo Education Secretary of State was approached via the Pedagogical Standards and Studies Coordination Committee, and the São Paulo Education Municipal Secretariat was contacted via the Office Management. The government authorities presented the Project to the interested directors, and three state schools were picked for having the most teachers who already infused their lessons with global concepts and were prepared to act on a voluntary basis, rewarded by the challenge of creating something new and contributing towards improving education in Brazil.

The five Brazilian schools have much in common. Firstly, all of them are proud to be considered excellent educational institutions, focusing on the wholesome development of children and adolescents. Several of them welcome foreign pupils, particularly Japanese and Bolivian. Furthermore, the day-to-day practice of their Political-Pedagogical Projects already entailed training for active citizenship and sustainability, as demonstrated in their presentations at the first Project Workshop:

“In harmony with the world of which it is a part, Colégio Bandeirantes demonstrates a growing concern over issues relating to ethics and sustainability. This is proven by courses and projects which are undertaken at the institution. Some examples are: Course in Ethics and Digital Citizenship, the Citizenship Programme, Sociability in Group Process, Clean Classroom Project, Education for Sustainability Project, Science Fair... Added to this is an increasing concern over getting to know the world of the adolescent (our school's target audience), seeking to better understand it, and over establishing healthy relationships between members of the school community, with a view to maintaining an environment where respect is the dominant factor”.

“EMEF Guilherme de Almeida makes a point of involving all pupils and employees in maintaining the cleanliness of all parts of the building, thereby creating an environment conducive to learning and well being; it undertakes educational campaigns, such as the selective collection of recyclable materials and the conscious use of water and the 'Festival of the Nations', encouraging the pupils' contact with and learning about cultural diversity”.

“EE Julia Pantoja stimulates its pupils to participate and act with solidarity in the local, state-wide, nationwide and worldwide community. (...) Our projects, both those developed by the school as a whole and those developed by teachers on an individual basis, broadly contemplate the concept of sustainability. They have been addressing subjects such as the risks of global warming; worldwide conflicts and problems; the rational use of natural resources and electrical appliances; sociability and the environment. Students are fully exercising the acceptance of differences and peaceful conflict resolution strategies”.

“At EE Luiza Hidaka, pupils participate in projects seeking solutions for problems which involve social issues and thus develop citizenship values such as a critical sense, responsibility and respect for others”.

“At Teia/Politeia, using spaces outside the school as places or learning explores the educational potential of the community, by making the classroom extend throughout the city. We undertake activities involving learning through play, focusing on Brazilian culture, where various different artistic expressions, dances and games are presented, stimulating logical reasoning and enabling children to experience the historical ties which go to make up the diversity of our people”.

But the five schools have very different characteristics, which mark their identities. We have free state schools, which take in pupils from poor families, and paid private schools, whose pupils are mostly from the upper classes.

The two private schools are completely different in terms of size and the education on offer. Bandeirantes, with 2,600 pupils, is a school whose technological resources and quality of education are on a par with its European counterparts, and is famous for the success of its students in the most hotly disputed University's entrance exams. Teia/Politeia, with 128 pupils, is an experimental school, a participant in the International Democratic Education Network, where Project Pedagogy organizes the curriculum in an interdisciplinary manner and decisions are taken at

meetings involving pupils of all ages. Its focus on playing as an educational principle is unique and has already won it an award.

The state schools are also different in several aspects. EMEF Guilherme de Almeida, located in Penha, places a great emphasis on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as an educational resource and on including special needs pupils. EE Luiza Hidaka, in Suzano, interacts greatly with Japanese culture in the region and skilfully explores pedagogical resources such as murals and posters. EE Julia Pantoja, in Vila Prudente, has been repeatedly considered in external assessments as one of the best performing schools in the State of São Paulo.

Diversity between Brazilian schools is only not greater than that between them and their partners in Austria, Benin, the UK and the Czech Republic. The first Study Trip had representatives of the 40 participating schools who got together from 11th and 16th October 2010 in Leeds, in the UK, a city where the concepts of Fair Trade and Living With Diversity are already a part of daily life. Five British schools were visited, and the visitors observed educational environments and practices directly connected to implementing a planetary citizenship. The second Study Visit took place in October 2011, in Benin.

The collaboration between teachers from the North and South of the planet, whether through Trips or exploring the project website or through conversations via social networks, may help to break down old stereotypes and prejudices crystallized over centuries of colonialism.

3 Problems: how to learn from them?

3.1 Perspectives from the North and Perspectives from the South

A Global Curriculum Model should include perspectives from the North and from the South of the globe. The Project's concepts and practices need to be reinterpreted and recreated in different historical and cultural contexts. Brazilian educators should connect concepts of Global Education and Education for Development, generated in the North, to those of Education for Planetary Citizenship and Education for Sustainability, produced in the South, putting into practice the African concept of Ubuntu: I am what I am because of who we all are. And they should be capable of presenting their perceptions and interpretations to the Europeans, enriching world visions.

There are conceptual conflicts and problems being explored in Brazil, which may generate much learning on both sides of the Atlantic. Why do eminent writers prefer to talk about planetary dimension rather than global dimension? Why, for major sectors of the Brazilian social movement, does the concept of Development contradict that of Sustainability? Similarly, by inserting the eight concepts of the Global/Planetary dimension in their lessons, Brazilian teachers will do it in their own specific way, differently from their European partners. There is thus a great opportunity to overturn the Eurocentric perspective in Europe ensuring that interdependence occurs in the field of education.

3.2 National/Local citizenship Global citizenship

The idea that in order to be significant the Curriculum must be linked to the pupils' reality has already gained consensus amongst Brazilian educators. Nevertheless, when we think of this reality, the spotlight falls on the local dimension, and the ties between the local and the global dimension are not often made clear. These two dimensions are, today more than ever, inextricably linked. Teaching for understanding requires enabling children and youngsters to understand the complexity—everything is connected, everything is intertwined.

In Brazil, the subjects parallel to the curriculum—Social Justice, Ethics, Cultural Pluralism, the Environment, Health and Gender—are still being developed from a much more local and national perspective than a planetary one. They need to be developed using an approach which “enables pupils to engage in complex global issues and explore the links between their own lives and what happens in the world—and helps pupils to imagine different futures and the role they can play in creating a sustainable world” (The global dimension in action: A Curriculum Planning Guide for Schools, QCA, 2008).

3.3 Pupils as subjects vs Pupils as objects of the project actions

The active involvement of pupils in the Project decisions and actions, as envisaged in its principles, goes against the tide of adults always being in charge. A major challenge will be to demonstrate, at the end of the process, that the children and youngsters acted independently and in a citizenly manner, not only executing actions but also putting forth ideas and implementing them on their own initiative.

3.4 The sound of silence vs the silence of sound

In a project whose basic principle is Diversity, conflicts are welcome and should be handled so as to produce powerful learning. The absence of conflict may indicate insufficient interdependence and dialogue. A major challenge is to invite the professionals and schools involved to trust each other increasingly, identifying and exposing differences in beliefs, values and conceptions in an open and respectful manner, without aggression. Silencing divergences would indicate a deep contradiction between the project's intentions and practice.

Another danger is to replace the legitimate communication of dialogue with a superficial communication, where dialogue becomes a collection of parallel monologues and communiqués, where people make some noise but nobody is listening—and therefore silence reigns.

4 Possible benefits and impacts

The assessment of the Global Curriculum Project, which will be presented in Vienna in November 2012, will possibly highlight a list of benefits produced by it in all the countries involved, as well as problems for future research and questions to be asked.

The first of these benefits will be that of having involved teachers who operate in the classroom in order to produce an online Global Curriculum Manual, in five languages, with materials which will be accessible to all educators on the planet interested in infusing their lessons and projects with a global/planetary dimension. Furthermore, the project will demonstrate the possibility of dialogue and horizontality in the interaction between educators from the most different schools, resulting in effective changes to methods of teaching, learning, recording, systemising and disseminating innovative pedagogical practices. In Brazil, it will stimulate the integration of the internet into educative processes and effective mastery of foreign languages.

In addition, the Project is another demonstration of the fact that John Lennon's dream—of a world without borders, of a mankind united, dreamt up by people of all colours, in all eras—is alive and kicking. It is kicking and disrupts the status quo, in initiatives which provide a counterpoint to greed, prejudice, ethnic conflicts, bombardments in the name of peace and democracy, and the destruction of lives and ecosystems.

Substituting prophecies of the end of the world with the prophecy of the end of one world by giving birth to another possible world, in Brazil these new ways of thinking, feeling and acting have been named Democratic Inventions: creative and solidary ways of developing autonomy and cooperation, resolving problems starting out from a logic which is different from the one which created them (Nupsi-USP, www.psicopatologia.psc.br).

Examples are Solidary Economics, where workers with no supervisors come together in cooperatives to produce goods in a sustainable manner, and sharing the gains and losses equally amongst themselves; Restorative Justice, where external judgements and punitive standards are substituted by the collective search by those involved to understand the causes of violence and the autonomous search to restore the damage it causes; Psychopathology geared towards public health and its social dimension; Spinozian Philosophy as the grounds for autonomous cooperative practices; Democratic Education, based on practising horizontality in relationships in the learning process, and where everyone teaches by learning and learns by teaching, thereby cooperatively building the knowledge it transforms.

We hope that by 2012 the Global Curriculum for Sustainability in Action will become another Democratic Invention in this country.

Note

The CECIP—Centro de Criação de Imagem Popular is an NGO which in 2011 commemorates 25 years of operation in the areas of education and communication, with a view to contributing towards strengthening citizenship, by producing information and methodologies which may influence public policies to promote fundamental rights.

To find out more about the work of the CECIP, go to www.cecip.org.br

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