Teaching Global Values

Fernando Reimers
Paper presented at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences
May 2004

That a group of young people in Iraq recently beheaded Nick Berg, a young American who was in that country working as an independent contractor rebuilding infrastructure, in front of a video camera while proclaiming 'God is Great' should give pause to all of us interested in global peace and civility. Not too long ago, the world was shocked by pictures of American guards treating Iraqi prisoners in the most degrading imaginable forms, in ways clearly counter to basic American and human norms of civility and counter to international conventions about the treatment of prisoners of war.

So that we do not dismiss the horror of these acts as 'casualties of war' we should remember that a few years ago Daniel Pearl, another young American, a journalist working in Pakistan, was beheaded in front of a video camera, as his captors also claimed 'God is Great'. It was the same claim about God's Greatness that those who hijacked several airplanes made on September 11, 2001, as they slashed the throats of pilots and passengers, and crashed those airplanes against civilian and military targets taking the lives of the largest number of civilians not engaged in combat to die in a single act in recent American history.

These crimes against humanity are not limited to recent acts against Americans or Iraqis, they are the routine form of coercion used by those who choose to pursue their political goals at the margin of national and international legal frameworks, and they are also the forms of coercion used by States against their own citizens, and often against the citizens of other nations. The Rwandan genocide of 1994, the ethnic cleansing in Sudan, the religious wars in Yelwa Nigeria, and fifty years ago the Holocaust are too recent examples, in the scale of human history, of the capacity of humans to lose their humanity in consciously acting to physically take the lives of those whom they perceived as different.

Should we resign ourselves to accept that members of a species that has survived innumerable evolutionary challenges should come from time to time to seek to destroy each other because they came to share norms and values that made this acceptable? Human history offers abundant evidence of the capacity of our species to engage in massive efforts of destruction of human life. Our times are not the first in history in which groups sharing a set of cultural values killed other humans 'in the name of God'.

But I refuse to accept that violence of some humans against others is inevitable. I believe as a species we have the capacity to educate people to understand that what we share in common with others is much greater than what sets us apart, to believe that there are many ways to resolve disputes in peaceful ways that appreciate the legitimate interests of those in conflict. I believe we can educate people in ways that make them appreciate cultural differences, to draw on an understanding of those differences to

inform a framework of global values that includes compassion and caring, concern for others, respect and reciprocity.

These values, dispositions, knowledge and skills can be developed in a range of institutions that societies have available to pass on what they value to the young, and to re-create culture: families, religious institutions, the media, workplaces, political institutions and also schools. While I have no reason to assume that schools can be more effective in this task than any of the other institutions I think they have greater potential to be captured by transnational efforts to promote global civility.

We now know enough, in part as a result of good work in this field in the last several decades, about what it would take to develop those skills and values. There are now successful examples of curricula and programs around the world to develop tolerance and global citizenship. A good example is the curriculum 'Facing History and Ourselves'.

If we know how to educate people to be more tolerant, accepting of different and better global citizens, why isn't more of this happening at present in schools? Why are schools indifferent to the fact that there people still killing others in the name of God?

We could argue that such conflicts have origins in conditions that have a mind of their own, that are independent of but at the same time take charge of the minds of individuals. That it is objective situations of historical conflict, of present real differences in interests, of situations created by national and international politics, by the different interests of states, of corporations or of religions, rather than by the desires and differences between individuals, that cause global conflict, instability or genocide. While I accept the importance of such level of sociological, economic or political analysis, and the need for more effective ways to create the lasting conditions for global peace at those levels, I believe the forces at those levels are still mediated by the minds of individuals. It is individuals who in the final analysis choose to take the life of another person, to degrade them in a prison, to slash another person's throat to partake in the deliberate extermination of a religious or ethnic group.

For this reason I believe it is necessary, in order to have global peace and stability, to educate people with the skills that would make this state of affairs possible. Furthermore, I will argue that this should become a principal purpose of education around the world, but that this is very difficult to achieve, and that in the short term we should probably concentrate in mobilizing social entrepreneurs and citizens, in the hopes that a strong social movement can then mobilize international institutions and governments.

The development of global values, of tolerance or of alternative views and dispositions takes place in a range of institutions, including schools but not just in them. The reason to focus on schools in this paper is because these are, other than perhaps the media, the institutions most amenable to influence by the international community and global education is a task that can only succeed if undertaken simultaneously in all or

most places around the world. The notion that progress in educating for global civility has to occur simultaneously in different places is central to understanding this challenge.

To commit unilaterally to educating one's children for tolerance and global values, in a context in which some states and groups actively socialize children for hatred is extremely risky, as it would put the most tolerant children at serious disadvantage. Speaking about Nick Berg, the young American recently murdered in Iraq, his mother remarked "I think part of what got him into trouble was that he wasn't afraid to be in with groups that most Americans won't be with…and I don't think he understood the danger of…traveling with non Americans. That's probably what killed him. He was probably in a group of non-Americans and stood out like a sore thumb."[1].

In a context where some institutions educate people to kill others in the name of God, teaching tolerance has the same risks of unilateral disarmament. The issue then is not whether educating for tolerance is desirable, or whether we know how to do it and with what effects, the issue is how to achieve a global commitment to doing this. A related issue is what agreements are possible to achieve at a planetary scale to educate for tolerance. The moral argument for a global commitment to educating for global civility is akin to the argument for investing in the education of one's neighbor. We should all want to help all members of the community to be educated because we will all benefit from this, perhaps beyond the benefits that the individual can capture. Similarly, if I am to educate my children to be trusting, tolerant and acceptant of those who are different, I need the assurance that all parents are making similar commitments to educating their children. It is international institutions that can underwrite this kind of assurance to the communities and nations that agree to make global education a priority.

If educating for tolerance and global citizenship is desirable, and if we know how to do it at least in part in schools, why then isn't it happening on a massive scale around the world? The problem is one of lack of political will on the part of national governments, of failure of international institutions and of implementation.

There is fierce competition to define the purposes of schools, and few of the national and local stakeholders most active in this process have incentives to focus on tolerance. Education for tolerance on a global scale requires strong institutions of global governance committed to this purpose, those that exist have failed at this task. Another important reason why there is not global education on a massive scale is the limited ability of international institutions to influence the implementation of educational change.

Note that I am not suggesting that the reason we have not made more progress is because more research is needed, this may seem unusual coming from a researcher. I believe that while we might wish to advance extant knowledge on how to make children more tolerant or more cosmopolitan, there is already much that is known that is not used at scale.

---

[1] Pa. Man called fearless, selfless science wiz. By Sandy Bauers. The Boston Globe. May 12, 2004. p. A8.

In what follows I will address how to approach an education for global civility, the problem of political will, the failure of international institutions, the implementation problem and will discuss some options for the present.

The idea that international institutions should be charged with promoting global civility is not new. In part UNESCO was created, after World War II, so that the seeds of peace could be planted in the minds of people. Paradoxically, most advances of UNESCO and other development organizations have not been in this area. The Millenium Development Goals, which are meant to provide guidance and focus to the development community and to nations, are still with regard to education about educating more children at higher levels, without reference to educating them for what.

How to build Global Civility in Schools

The definition of what should be taught, by necessity, is one that reflects values. Which values should reflect an education to prepare people for tolerance, for global citizenship? Which values should inform educating for global values?

I believe this is not a question that can be answered from a cultural relativistic point of view. While one could argue that countries could pursue values education each drawing on their own traditions and historical purposes, effective progress in educating for global civility requires more specific guidance than this. Since the particular response each country would adopt to such a broad objective would be mediated by the interpretations of national policy makers, administrators, and eventually teachers, a cultural relativistic orientation could possibly lead to local interpretations that negate the very purpose of preparing students for global civility. As will be discussed later this would not be the first time that states use schools to indoctrinate students in views prejudiced about others, in the name of advancing national interests or historical destinies.

Therefore, my first claim is that in order to educate globally and for global civility it is imperative to use a common framework that informs the enterprise. This is I realize an axiologically absolutist position. I am aware of the perils of sustaining this position in the current climate of political correctness of many intellectual circles. The best approximation we have to this common framework is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those who drafted the declaration struggled sufficiently with the challenges of drawing from different cultural and philosophical traditions, and while it may be possible to see the Declaration as a work in progress, in the sense that additional rights could be defined or it might be possible to perfect more specific and operational ways to represent each right, the Declaration is a starting point. I will argue that if the work of schools globally could be aligned to teach all children to live these rights (not just to know them), to appreciate that others have the same rights, this would be a sufficient framework for much greater global civility.

The competition to define the purposes of schools and the failure of international institutions

Schools, relatively recent institutions in human history, have been guided at different times by different purposes, from building nation states and national and political identities, to helping the poor, from improving national competitiveness to assimilating immigrants, from educating citizens to educating workers. The proposition that schools should be about educating global citizens needs to account for how this competes with these other alternative purposes. While many nations around the world could see with great moral clarity at the end of World War II the necessity to educating children in order to plant the seeds of peace in their minds, this purpose has been crowded out by the successful of a growing number of actors over the last fifty years. The dominant purposes at present, competing with educating for global citizenship, are: educating for economic competitiveness, educating for the formation of national identity and educating for local relevance.

The justification of education as an economic investment predicated on the contributions to individual and national productivity has become so widespread that few notice that it is a relatively recent construction. The idea took particular force with the development of the concept of Human Capital in the 1950s, and was disseminated by international development institutions. With the increasing globalization of the world economy many groups, particularly those leading firms, have again advanced rationales to get schools to make people more competitive in the world economy. This was the principal theme of the report 'A Nation at Risk' which defined the basic architecture of the reforms of the last two decades in the US. There is little in the claim that schools should be about making people better workers, or more competitive workers, that would lead to the development of skills for global civility. Economic competitiveness is largely about competition while global civility is largely about solidarity and empathy with others. Some argue that in knowledge economies the same skills that make people good knowledge workers are those that make them good global citizens. I do not think there is evidence to support this claim, and furthermore I believe for the foreseeable future most people around the world will not work in knowledge intensive industries. While globalization has increased economic exchanges and integration of national economies into the world economy, this does not mean that all or most workers in developing nations have left agriculture or the more traditional, and least knowledge intensive, industries. There are plenty of sweatshops or just in time factories in free trade zones that use the most traditional forms of organization, with very hierarchical, and alienating, forms of production. While globalization often means that managers from different cultures now interact with workers from a particular nation, the forms of the interaction – often exploitative and abusive-- are not necessarily of the kind that can foster positive dispositions across cultural divides.

A second set of forces competing with the purpose of educating for global civility results from the exacerbation of nationalisms. Perhaps as a result of some of the dislocations caused by globalization, there is a reemergence of nationalist and populist leaders around the world. Many of them are turning to schools to claim the identities of students, as a way to build their own legitimacy and to advance their political agendas.

Schools are particularly apt to doing this, as most national school systems were established as part of projects of consolidation of national States.

The institutions of education are well suited to defining national boundaries in the minds of students, to teaching students national symbols, to teach them a particular national identity. The exacerbation of nationalism is problematic in part to build global civility because to teach a person to be a national is in part to do so with reference to 'the other', and national identity is often constructed by opposition to those 'others'. This is worsened by the fact that some states turn to schools to advance views that openly challenge global civility, human rights, international covenants and peace. Schools are more often used to foster intolerance than tolerance and global civility. The textbooks used in the Palestinian Authority, for example, do not accept the State of Israel. The textbooks in use in Syria and Saudi Arabia, do not even recognize the State of Israel in maps of the region[2]. In the year 2000, the government of Venezuela, mandated the use of a textbook of military instruction in all secondary schools which included texts like this:

"Beginning in the seventies, as a result of our oil boom, of populist policies and of State paternalism, and as a result also of negative economic and social situations in many Latin American countries, the country saw an indiscriminate and uncontrolled avalanche of immigrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Dominican Republic, Trinidad, Cuba, and other countries in Central and South America who, in a great majority without formal education, without skills, with traumas, diseases, came in search of the easy Bolivar [the national currency] that Venezuela offered. In addition to their impact in our national identity we should ask: what will the attitude and position of many of these foreigners be in the event of international tensions of conflicts? Specifically, in the event of conflict with Colombia: what will be the attitude of a Colombian when as mandated in their Constitution they do not loose their nationality even if they become naturalized Venezuelan? Will their national identity be with Colombia or with Venezuela? How many of them will become involved in espionage or sabotage to the basic industries, to the oil industry?" (Vásquez, M. 1999. *Instrucción Premilitar*. Editorial Biosfera. Caracas. Venezuela. Textbook approved by the Ministry of Education, resolution No 148 dated July 7 1999, pages 58-59. My translation).

The last twenty years have seen educational governance move towards decentralized levels of government, including communities and schools. There have been several rationales to do this, including increasing efficiency, and local relevancy of what is taught. It is not clear how the localization of education could impact the development of global civility. Some of the most traditional cultural conflicts find expression at the local, subnational level, communities have clear incentives to conserve the values and memories that are at the root of many of these ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts. I see no reason to expect a particular push towards cosmopolitanism from local communities, although I recognize that of the three forces competing with the purpose of global civility this is the one whose effects have been least studied.

---

[2] Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace. 2003. *Jews, Israel and Peace in the Palestinian Authority Textbooks; Jews, Zionism and Israel in Syrian School Textbooks*; *The West, Christians, and Jews in Saudi Arabian Schoolbooks.*

The pressures from the local and national levels, of educating for community, national identity and work, compete with the pressures for global civility, particularly if this is understood as educating out of a common normative framework in all nations. International institutions would seem ideally suited to do this. UNESCO was created to a great extent to undertake this task. However, the task was soon abandoned for one of promoting universal literacy and the expansion of enrollments at all levels. It is not entirely clear why this happened, probably because in the middle of the cold-war attempting to reach agreement on the purposes of schools was almost impossible in a multilateral institution that was often a political arena for ideological battles between the superpowers. The demise of the Soviet Block did not result in an immediate change in the institutional structures that had been shaped during the previous decades –people take a while to change their mind or to retire and organizations are slow to change—and UNESCO continues to be an organization subject to the political pressures and battles among different States, and to the bureaucratic politics of many senior managers, and it has not yet clearly taken a leadership role placing the discussion of the purposes of education at the core of it's mission. In the current circumstances one could expect that if it were to actively take on the promotion of education for global civility, with the same energy it devoted to promoting the expansion of access to education in the 1960s, it would do so tilted towards cultural relativism or depending on semi-obscure declarations resulting from carefully constructed and difficult to negotiate compromises among many groups and ideologies, devoid of the moral clarity I suggest in this paper is necessary to build global civility. To make the same kind of progress UNESCO demonstrated it could make in the 1960s in actively campaigning to increase school enrollments, it would need the same moral and operational clarity in the goal. How to get this clarity with regard to educating for global civility is hard to imagine given the circumstances described and given the fact that the Millennium Development Goal for Education is still counting heads.

The World Bank, which became a leading development institution in the field of education since the early 1980s, has been even less helpful than UNESCO in advancing the development of Global Civility. The main narrative of the Bank to invest in education is as an economic investment and as an instrument to reduce poverty. To the Bank schools are primarily to make people more productive, not to make them tolerant or global citizens. While isolated individuals and small groups in the Bank are interested in other goals for education (building social capital, developing social cohesion) the links between education and the potential for international conflict are not on the agenda of most Bank staff – perhaps with the exception of a Unit devoted to dialogue on religion and development that reports directly to the President and has modest impact in most education sector work.

Bilateral Development Agencies are still less well suited to align the work of schools with global civility. Many of them are instruments of cultural diplomacy, expressing the interests of single governments, and for this reason recipient governments hold such assistance at bay in terms of influencing the content of the curriculum.

The implementation problem

In thinking about the civic purposes of schools in preparing students for global citizenship it is important to remember that 'How we teach is what we teach', as John Dewey would say. The curriculum is not only in the publicly stated goals, in the content of official programs of instruction or of textbooks, but it is also in the organization of schools, in the specific interactions of teachers with students, in how students are sorted into schools and in their interactions with each other, in the kind of relationships schools have with local organizations. The recent decentralization reforms in many parts of the world have opened up school governance to local representatives who bring in the agendas of community organizations: religious views, local welfare agencies, community and political groups.

This suggests that changing the poor work schools do at present in preparing students for global civility will be a challenging task, it will require a lot more than including new objectives in the curriculum of instruction. It will require developing capacity among teachers, and in some cases supporting them in changing their minds about the necessity of doing this, it may create conflict as students develop values that may be in conflict with traditional values in their communities. Unless there is attention to the micropolitics of implementing these changes, they will not happen in most schools.

Options for the present

So where does this leave us? One option is to conclude that on a global scale schools are not adequately preparing children to be tolerant and to be global citizens, and that it is unlikely that they will do anything very different in the future. This is in part we still see signs of intolerance, of hatred, and why we have global instability.

To understand some of the current challenges we need not go too far. In the city of Boston, the cradle of the public school in America, inner-city schools are busy teaching students principally language and math in order to respond to the demands of the standards and curriculum frameworks. This State is one of those in the nation lagging in setting up a task force to promote international education in the schools. As a result social studies –the most logical place to develop competencies for global civility--- has taken a back seat in Boston, as has civic education more generally throughout the nation. The dismal state of affairs in teaching for global understanding in American schools has been well documented in the report *Asia in the Schools. Preparing Young Americans for Today's Interconnected World*. There is no evidence that schools in other parts of the world, in Venezuela, in Saudi Arabia, in North Korea or in Nigeria, are doing a better job at educating children to be tolerant of others, to prefer to resolve differences collaboratively and through peaceful means, appreciative of differences and committed to a universal framework of human rights.

Another option is to recognize that in spite of these challenges at a macro level, there are abundant groups doing good work already in individual schools and on a small scale, and that there is already and established body of practice that can be used to scale

up those efforts. The challenge then is one of identifying and codifying good practice, and of using it to build networks, communities of practice that can support each other and grow, with more or less government approval.

There is a rich transnational space, organizations that build transnational social capital, that could stimulate further innovation in this field. In the short term it is perhaps here that we can see more change. The mobilization and empowerment of social entrepreneurs working to educate for global civility is potentially the most effective short-term strategy to scale up some of what is already known in this area. Working with educational innovators, publishers, social movements, it might be possible to expand the number of schools implementing programs that can develop global civility. Examples of this kind include the efforts of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship in Geneva, the Asia Society in the US, or a range of organizations in the US, such as NetAid, a Cisco supported enterprise to facilitate the development of awareness among US students of global development challenges.

As we continue to make progress in the periphery of schools it would make sense to try to get international organizations and citizens and other stakeholder groups more focused on the importance of this goal, for international institutions are the principal instruments that could hold governments accountable for teaching bigotry and intolerance. In some ways this should be easy since the UUNN system was created to establish conditions for global peace and stability. But in many ways it will be most difficult for we are all the product of times and institutions that have produced people who believe it is acceptable to kill others in the name of God.