

# **Adaptive Education for Glocal Citizenship**

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“Where are you from?” A common conversation starter in the United States and other parts of the world, this question quickly confronts newcomers to a state like Mississippi, which appreciates the importance of place and family alike. In such a context, it is often posed in a more localized version:

“Where are your people from?” How one answers this question, in any form, depends upon where one is asked, and by whom.

In downtown Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, I might respond by saying I am from Fondren, a small, older neighborhood within the city limits. When traveling across the state to the Gulf Coast, the Delta, Oxford, or Starkville, I might respond on a higher level of generality and say that I am from Jackson. When traveling to Washington, Boston, or Los Angeles, I would probably say Mississippi. Finally, when traveling internationally, the answer would probably include some reference to the United States, Mississippi, and the South.

Of course, many people from Jackson and from across Mississippi question my responses and say, “No, you’re not.” I provide different visual and verbal clues that indicate an eclectic, cross-cultural, non-regionally defined upbringing and background, regardless of the fact that my maternal grandfather’s family did, in fact, hail from Mississippi. At the same time, I do not readily identify as much with the place I was born – Bangor, Maine – as some people, who think of their birth place as their “home town” and answer most of the questions posed above with reference to this particular place.

So, which answer is correct? Where are you from, and how do you answer the question?

Most people on Earth today can and should offer the same array of answers noted above. Someone in Europe might add a regional dimension, recognizing that the European Union is shaping some people’s experiences and identities in a formative way. Others may have similar regional, continental, or hemispheric ties, poised somewhere between their national identities and their global connections.

Ultimately, all of us identify with multiple places and sustain multiple levels of loyalty to them. We are simultaneously citizens of a locality, a state or province, a country, and the planet we all share. In this sense, we are all “glocal” citizens.<sup>1</sup>

Recent technological advances in communications, transportation, and information processing have deepened and broadened connections on all these levels – local through global – thickening the webs of interactivity that bind us to each other – economically, politically, militarily, socially, culturally, environmentally, and ethically.<sup>2</sup> As with most complex systems, changes in one domain or part of the world affect what happens in others, with small changes often magnified because of the interconnectedness of the system and because of the power of positive feedback loops to reinforce emergent patterns of thought and behavior.<sup>3</sup> More than ever before, our local actions can generate expanding waves of effects, some of which are unintended and unpredictable, while national, regional, and global waves wash up on local shores and must be applied in local contexts.

These two-way causal flows – of local interactions generating global trends and of global trends being adopted and adapted for local contexts – capture the essence of “glocalization.”<sup>4</sup> While sociologist Roland Robertson helped

coin the term in the 1990's with his work on how Japanese businesses were modifying their practices to fit local markets,<sup>5</sup> the mutually constitutive relationship between local agents and global structures sounds much like sociologist Anthony Giddens's notion of "structuration,"<sup>6</sup> as well as like much of the literature in the field of complexity.<sup>7</sup>

With this emergent "glocal" reality as the backdrop, what type of education do our young citizens need? How can and should we prepare them for this type of interconnectedness and dynamism?

Elsewhere I have introduced the notion of "adaptive education" as capturing the process of trying to stay abreast of these changes and argued for an expanding definition of the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that can best serve citizens and communities in the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup> We need to appreciate and build on the past, to grasp and capitalize on the present, and to look ahead and prepare for the future.<sup>9</sup> More accurately, we need to prepare for multiple futures – for while path dependence can exert a powerful pull once decisions are made and actions are taken, much of what we observe and create are historical contingencies, not givens.<sup>10</sup>

Most young people in the United States and the developed world will hold a variety of jobs, encounter unanticipated opportunities, face unknown challenges, and have access to technology that does not yet exist.<sup>11</sup> While the majority of the people on Earth are “locals,” who do not currently share that same trajectory – typically being born, living, working, and dying within steps of where their parents experience these same rites – they do face similar contingencies and could, as “mobals,” take steps to improve their own circumstances and those of their neighbors.<sup>12</sup>

What obligations do we have to our neighbors? Moreover, in this age of increasing awareness, information, and connectedness, who are our neighbors? Kwame Anthony Appiah argues persuasively that recent changes have rendered strangers in distant lands into neighbors, which raises important ethical questions about how people should treat each other.<sup>13</sup> While still physically distant from “others,” that distance can be bridged with rapid transit or instantaneous communication. The “Far East,” for instance, is no longer that far, especially when one considers the deep, real-time economic ties between the United States and countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea.<sup>14</sup> What happens in one country on any given day ripples across the planet and affects the others – again, not necessarily in uniform, anticipated, or controllable ways. Such interconnectedness and

interdependence (which are not the same and which can vary in degrees among actors within relationships) hold as much environmentally as they do economically, again with important moral implications in our shared ecosystem and common home. If what we do affects others in increasingly direct and powerful ways, then we must consider those potential effects. We cannot hide behind the false façade of distance by saying what happens elsewhere has nothing to do with us. In a relatively closed and increasingly connected system like Earth, what we do and what others do are increasingly shared concerns.

The ethical and educational implications of such growing connectedness could hardly be more important. Increased awareness, increased connectedness, and increased capacity to help or hurt others bring increased responsibilities. While we may have a greater obligation to those who are close than to those who are distant, the dividing lines between these two groups are blurred. The problems of others – poverty, pandemics, economic or political instability, environmental degradation, fanatical ideologies, or terrorism, to name but a few pressing issues today – can easily spill over borders and generate transnational challenges, which cannot be ignored nor effectively redressed unilaterally by any one actor. Instead, such borderless challenges, which appear to be among the most pressing and pervasive we

face, must be addressed collaboratively, creatively, and constructively by multiple actors, especially those with the greatest stake and with the greatest capacity to effect positive change.

In this sense, citizens of the United States of America have a particularly large role to play. As the current international hegemon, with much to lose and/or gain and much capacity to catalyze and sustain change, the United States still is uniquely positioned on the proverbial peak of the international landscape. While this role is not likely to last forever, this position brings with it important responsibilities, not the least of which involves educating our young citizens as thoroughly as possible, preparing them for the myriad opportunities and challenges that they will face, and helping them to grasp the ongoing changes in our world and the need to be flexible and adaptive, forward looking and growth oriented, with a healthy respect for themselves and others and for how we must often work together to solve common problems or to realize shared objectives.

Beyond mastering critical subjects areas and “21<sup>st</sup> century skills,”<sup>15</sup> our young citizens must develop an ethical compass that enables them to see beyond themselves, to recognize their connections and obligations to others, and to chart a responsible course of action that will serve themselves, their

families, and their communities – including their schools, their neighborhoods, their towns and cities, their counties, their states, their regions, their countries, and our shared planet. Balancing and fulfilling these numerous and sometimes conflicting demands is one of the challenges associated with glocal citizenship. Difficulty, however, does not obviate responsibility. We do not regularly get to choose whether we are citizens of our towns, state, country, or Earth. We are all of these, and more, simultaneously.

One useful ethical cornerstone in such an interconnected, glocal world is the notion of *ubuntu*, a Bantu term that translates roughly as “I am because we are” and which involves defining ourselves in our interactions with others.<sup>16</sup> Much like Buddhist principles of first doing no harm and then doing as much good as possible, *ubuntu* emphasizes the connectedness we share and how much we help or hurt ourselves as we help or hurt others. Even if one wants to improve his or her own lot in life, this should be done in a way that does not make it harder for someone else to do the same thing; rather, we should seek to capitalize on those positive-sum opportunities that can lift all boats or, at the very least, will not lower some in the process.<sup>17</sup>

With the vast majority of humanity currently living as “locals” in the developing world – the global south – and current population projections

indicating another two billion people inhabiting the planet with us by the year 2050, almost all of whom also will live in the developing world and most of them in poor urban areas, with all of the associated challenges that poses, the challenges ahead are likely to be great. Those people with wealth, power, and access must work with others to integrate these marginalized billions and to provide opportunities for them to improve their circumstances or the challenges are only likely to grow.

To be properly equipped, our young citizens and leaders need to be knowledgeable about the world and how it works – on multiple levels.<sup>18</sup> They need a firm grasp of geography, history, economics, and government, as well as science and mathematics, and an appreciation for literature, philosophy, music, and the arts, which are as generative as they are reflective. Glocal citizens also need to understand system dynamics and be able to wrestle with complex issues. To process the information deluge and to discern what is useful from what is not, they need honed research, reading, and critical-thinking skills. They must be technologically savvy and willing to experiment with new tools for learning, communicating, and information processing. In addition to being proficient in writing and speaking, they also need cross-cultural communication skills. Ideally, they will be able to communicate in a language besides English, like the 60

percent of the population of the planet that already is multilingual. They also will need to be adept problem-solvers and collaborative learners, people who can work together with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures to tackle tough issues and to create new, mutually beneficial opportunities. The more our young citizens can develop these skills before adulthood, the better off we all will be. Providing the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that can best serve our students, neighbors, and communities are responsibilities we all share. Exactly what one includes or how one implements such a preparatory course depends on local circumstances, as even sound and seemingly universal educational principles need to be put into practice in local contexts. Physical, financial, cultural, and human resources help shape what is possible in the near term; but, at the same time, all of these variables can change over time, some of them quickly with purposeful, concerted, and strategic action.

Much like the collaborative, forward-looking leadership needed on the international stage, educational leaders need to recognize the changing circumstances, appreciate local constraints and opportunities, and work with others to identify and actualize strategic steps forward.<sup>19</sup> With a view toward maximizing multiplier effects and positive feedback loops, effective leaders rally others to important causes, encourage them to think anew,

empower them to grow, and bring them together as an adaptive community<sup>20</sup> – which, in the context of a school, translates into a thriving professional learning, teaching, and serving community. The more students and faculty can work together in a life-long pursuit of knowledge, virtue, and excellence – Aristotle’s notion of *areté* – and in the service of others, the more meaningful and constructive the educational experience and the more valuable the associated civic preparedness. Ideally, educational leaders model such behavior with and for faculty, faculty model it with and for students, and then students have the opportunity to put into practice, at an early age and in authentic settings, the knowledge, skills, and values that they have been learning and that will serve them and others well in the future.

While it is important for a young citizen to want to make a positive difference in the world, also critical are the requisite knowledge and skills to actually put such a plan into action and the self-confidence to believe that such steps are feasible and can make a difference. Having students not just learn about such matters but experience them personally can be life changing. What better way to develop the skills and self-confidence than by making such a contribution while still in school.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, glocal research, service, and internships can be wonderful complements to

classroom learning and powerful developmental tools that can reinforce the need for and viability of concerted and constructive action on multiple levels – local through global – which is the hallmark of glocal citizenship.

Ultimately, what matters most is that we prepare our students for their increasingly connected futures and provide the tools they will need to succeed and lead in multiple communities and a rapidly changing world.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, and throughout this essay, I use the notion of "citizenship" to capture the multifaceted relationship between people and communities. While potentially cast on multiple levels (e.g., cities, states, countries, regions, etc.), such relationships entail some degree of identification, emotional attachment, and sense of belonging to a particular community, which itself is a largely psychological construct – what Benedict Anderson describes as "imagined" – as well as emergent (i.e., in an ongoing state of becoming). Moreover, like nested dolls, these communities are often situated within larger conceptualizations of socio-political space (e.g., cities within states), which may be compatible with others, but also may compete for an individual's loyalty and attention. By employing this definition of citizenship, I am moving beyond strictly legal or institutional formulations and beyond the traditional focus solely on nation-states, while retaining the emphasis on the relationship between people and communities, with all of the duties and obligations between them. For more on such a conceptualization, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (Verso, 1991); Saskia Sassen, "The Repositioning of Citizenship: Emergent Subjects and Spaces for Politics," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 46 (2002); and Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho, "Constituting Citizenship Through the Emotions: Singaporean Transmigrants in London," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (2009).

<sup>2</sup> For more on this changing geopolitical landscape and how it influences human affairs, see Anthony Christian Harth, *Geopolitics and Grand Strategy: Foundations of American National Security* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2003), with abstract and access available online at <http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3087407/>.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief summary about such complex systems and their nonlinear dynamics, see Chris Harth, "Complexity and Global Affairs" (Global Studies Foundation, 2005), available online at <http://www.globalstudiesfoundation.org/publications.cfm?id=4>. For a readable application of these concepts to the real world, see Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Back Bay Books, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> In his recent works, Thomas Friedman has used this term “glocalization” and defined it as the process by which a “culture easily absorbs foreign ideas and best practices and melds those with its own traditions,” which captures only the global-to-local dynamic, while missing the other side of the equation – the iterative interactivity of the local actors that generates the global context. See Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), pp. 420-426. Patrick Mendis, a GSF advisor who was among the first to introduce the author to the term, offers a similar definition in *Glocalization: The Human Side of Globalization as if the Washington Consensus Mattered* (Lulu Press, 2005); but, Mendis also acknowledges the interplay of globalization and localization and the fact that we are not only “microcosmic reflections of how globalization works on a local community level,” but also “agents of globalization” (p. 2).

<sup>5</sup> Robertson credits the Japanese term of *dochakuka* as the original source of his notion of “glocalization,” which he defines as “the simultaneity – the co-presence – of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.” For a brief introduction, see Roland Robertson, “Comments on the ‘Global Triad’ and ‘Glocalization,’” in Nobutaka Inoue, ed., *Globalization and Indigenous Culture* (Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 1997), available online at <http://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/global/15robertson.html>.

<sup>6</sup> For more, see Anthony Giddens, *General Problems in Social Theory* (University of California, 1979) and *The Constitution of Society* (Polity, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> For a readable definition of such systems and their features, see John Holland, *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (Addison-Wesley, 1995). See also Murray Gell-Mann, *The Quark and the Jaguar: Adventures in the Simple and the Complex* (W. H. Freeman, 1994) and John L. Casti, *Complexification: Explaining a Paradoxical World Through the Science of Surprise* (Harper Collins, 1994). For two powerful and sweeping applications of this emergent paradigm, see Per Bak, *How Nature Works: The Science of Self-Organized Criticality* (Copernicus, 1996) and Mark Buchanan, *Ubiquity: The Science of History ... or Why the World is Simpler than We Think* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> For more, see Chris Harth, “Adaptive Education for our Emergent Global Era” (Global Studies Foundation, 2007), available online at <http://www.globalstudiesfoundation.org/ShowContents.cfm?CategoryID=68>.

<sup>9</sup> This view toward the future is particularly important when one considers that students currently applying for pre-school (PK3) are scheduled to graduate from high school in 2025 and, if they are fortunate enough to attend college, to finish their undergraduate studies closer to 2030. What knowledge, skills, and perspectives will serve them best then and in the years to follow when they need to function as adults?

<sup>10</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb makes a similar argument about the importance of contingency, unpredictability, and surprise in *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (Random House, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> For an interesting presentation of some of these ongoing challenges, see the “Shift Happens/Did You Know?” videos, with version 3.0 available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpEnFwigdx8&feature=fvw>.

<sup>12</sup> Geographer Harm de Blij introduces this useful three-tiered framework of globals, locals, and mobals in *The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalization’s Rough Landscape* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (W. W. Norton, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Not only is Asia closer and more connected than most people think, but from the perspective of the United States, it is not located to the East, but to the West – an error

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derived in part from sticky and anachronistic mental maps provided by European explorers, cartographers, and statesmen.

<sup>15</sup> For a widely cited and useful framework for thinking about such knowledge and skills, and specific suggestions as to what they might entail and how we can best promote them, see The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills at <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu offers the following explanation: "In our country we've got something called ubuntu. When I want to praise you, I say this person has ubuntu. Because in our culture there is no such thing as a solitary individual. We say a person is a person through other persons. That we belong in the bundle of life. And I want you to be all you can be, because that's the only way I can be all I can be. I need you! I need you to be you so that I can be me." For more, see his recorded remarks during a Semester at Sea voyage, which are available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftjdDOftzbk>.

<sup>17</sup> Former South African President Nelson Mandela offers a similar definition with this important qualification in a recorded interview, available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbgQBocg0zM&feature=related>.

<sup>18</sup> The following list – which is expounded in Harth, "Adaptive Education for our Emergent Global Era" – derives largely from a GSF survey and conference on "Defining Global Literacy," which was held May 4-5, 2006 at the St. Paul's School in Concord, NH.

For more details about the survey, the conference, and the participants, see <http://www.globalstudiesfoundation.org/ShowContents.cfm?CategoryID=39>.

For a useful collection of lessons and resources designed to help teachers develop such global awareness and perspectives, see Merry M. Merryfield and Angene Wilson, *Social Studies and the World: Teaching Global Perspectives* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> For a more in-depth discussion about the type of international leadership and foreign policies that might be most suitable for such conditions, see A. C. Harth, "Realistic Liberalism: A Middle Way for American Grand Strategy" (Global Studies Foundation, 2005), [http://www.globalstudiesfoundation.org/images/FCKUploads/File/GSF\\_Presentations/GSF\\_Publications/Harth\\_Realistic\\_Liberalism\\_1.03.pdf](http://www.globalstudiesfoundation.org/images/FCKUploads/File/GSF_Presentations/GSF_Publications/Harth_Realistic_Liberalism_1.03.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed listing of some strategic principles based on the paradigm of complexity, which are applicable to various realms, see Chris Harth, "Emergent Strategic Thinking for Our Complex Global Era" (Global Studies Foundation, 2007), available online at <http://www.globalstudiesfoundation.org/ShowContents.cfm?CategoryID=63>.

<sup>21</sup> This is exactly the type of programming being developed and offered at St. Andrew's Episcopal School, a PK-12 independent school in Jackson, Mississippi, which is emphasizing "glocal" competence in an expanding array of travel opportunities, including international exchange programs with reciprocal local service. For more details, explore the Global Studies and Weekly Newsletter sections at [www.gosaints.org](http://www.gosaints.org) or contact the author at [harthc@gosaints.org](mailto:harthc@gosaints.org) or [harth@globalstudiesfoundation.org](mailto:harth@globalstudiesfoundation.org).