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Review of the doctoral dissertation

Learning for Critical Global Citizenship through Participatory Action Research in Urban Central Europe

written by Juliet Golden

under the guidance of Prof. DSW dr hab. Hana Cervinkova

Overview

Golden’s dissertation consists of seven chapters divided into subsections, in addition to an acknowledgements section, a table of contents, a list of tables, a bibliography, and an abstract. The dissertation is 186 pages in length and the bibliography consists of nearly 200 references, including books, monographs, and journal articles. Chapter 1 establishes the scholarly problem and scope of the research project as it pertains to study abroad program pedagogy and to particular educational and anthropological theories, in addition to introducing the central argument and mode of inquiry. In particular, Golden submits that “Urban Labs”—an original
pedagogical method implemented through specific student/teacher collaborative learning and critical analysis activities—is an effective means of fostering “critical global citizenship” as a student learning outcome of study abroad. Chapter 2 explains and justifies Urban Labs as an innovative concept and method of ethnographic inquiry that overcomes the problems of passive student learning (as in detached observation at the expense critical engagement) and “outsider” student orientations (as in learning about the culture and history of “others”), both of which are pedagogical challenges that are inherent to international education—in this case, within the context of American students studying in Central Europe. Chapter 3 establishes the methodological framework for Urban Labs—that is, participatory action research and critical ethnography and pedagogy—and explains the data generated by Golden to analyze critical global citizenship as an outcome of the study abroad experience. Chapters 4-6 provide case studies by examining particular Urban Lab sites within Poland, Germany, and Lithuania, including urban centers and borderlands, and present samples of student writing to demonstrate the trajectory of their learning toward critical global citizenship. Chapter 7, the conclusion of the dissertation, summarizes her central argument and the evolution of her research, while also reflecting on the limitations and implications for future deliberation about international education pedagogy.

In the paragraphs that follow, I offer my critique of the dissertation, which I found to be a unique and valuable contribution to the scholarly literature on international education pedagogy.

**Originality**

Golden’s dissertation demonstrates an original solution to a compelling scholarly problem. There is a paucity of scholarly literature on pedagogy in the context of study abroad and, as the author establishes in Chapter 1, there is a growing need for pedagogical approaches to
study abroad that foster active student engagement and the acquisition of global literacy skills. Indeed, all too frequently study abroad programs are designed as an adapted form of commercial tourism at the expense of academic integrity and rigor. The Urban Labs model theorized and implemented by Golden (in collaboration with her dissertation advisor) fills a major gap in the literature. Beyond establishing a sound theoretical and methodological framework, Golden demonstrates how the model works in practice through the presentation of compelling case examples. Her analysis of data in the form of student-created cultural products and reflective essays (which include accompanying photographs) and the emphasis she places on learning as a participatory, collaborative process makes Urban Labs an especially cogent pedagogical model. The data presented by Golden shows how the students who engaged in participatory action research spanning eight consecutive years—informed by encounters with community stakeholders in addition to dialogue with the teachers—were empowered to apply locally-acquired knowledge in global settings and make a meaningful contribution in the form of tangible cultural products to local communities (while demonstrating respect for local culture and identity). And, while Golden appropriately focuses on case studies of student engagement within cityscapes as they relate to ideals of cosmopolitanism, this model, with its attention to exposing marginalized (or “unofficial”) narratives and critiquing the politics of public identity and memory, could also be applied in other settings such as small villages and rural communities.

Theoretical Foundation & Methodology

Golden provides a thorough review of germinal scholarly literature, which encompasses not only educational and pedagogical theories but also literature about specific study abroad sites and theories of public memory and identity. While she situates her approach to international
education pedagogy in tandem with the ideas of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Martha Nussbaum, it should be recognized that Golden’s expertise is established not only by her command of the scholarly literature but by her own prior research experience and publications. The data she and her dissertation advisor have generated over a span of eight years with over 150 students provide a sound basis for formulating conclusions about the efficacy of the teaching and learning methodology employed in Urban Labs. I found her critique of global citizenship as a rhetorical construct to be especially important to theorizing student learning, in addition to her interpretation of participatory action research as a means of fostering social connectedness (in both a local and global sense) and practical outcomes that extend beyond the study abroad program (including cultural products shared via the Internet). It is a delicate balancing act to design a study abroad pedagogy that embraces cultural difference and global citizenship while at the same time avoids the risks of divisive identity politics and “othering.” Golden manages to achieve this balance through her careful attention to methodology, including the eight stages described in Chapter 3 and her delineation of the roles of students and teachers in the learning process, decentering the teacher (or the “sage on the stage”) and advocating for an interactive, polyvocal, and interdependent community of learners.

Structure and Writing Mechanics

The organization of the dissertation is logical: the introduction provides a coherent plan for the reader and each chapter contains a well-developed introduction and a concise conclusion. Each chapter builds upon the previous one. Golden is also careful in providing internal summaries and transitions, highlighting the relationship of ideas within and across chapters.
Golden's writing style is lucid; the manuscript is free of awkward language and grammatical or spelling errors.

Concluding Remarks

In light of my evaluation detailed above, I strongly encourage Golden to publish her dissertation as a book or set of journal articles. Additionally, I recommend that she consider extending her line of inquiry to build upon the solid foundation established with her dissertation project. For example, she could extend her research by performing a comparison of pre- and post-tests (e.g. comparing student essays written prior to the start of the study program and upon its conclusion) and by surveying alumni to assess the extent to which their global citizen sensibility persisted or not and influenced professional or personal choices that reflect cosmopolitan ideals. Additionally, in light of the limited student population that has the economic resources to study abroad, as Golden notes in the concluding chapter of her dissertation, she could delve further into the use of online tools in other international educational contexts—for example, the accessibility of study abroad students' perspectives on global citizenship to peers who cannot afford to study abroad and the creation of online courses where students from different countries interact and collaborate on a polyvocal cultural project via videoconference and other electronic means. Please understand that these suggestions do not point to deficiencies in Golden's dissertation; rather I mention them here as a way of demonstrating the potential for ongoing study, which is another important feature of high-quality scholarship.

To conclude my review of the doctoral dissertation authored by Juliet Golden entitled

*Learning for Critical Global Citizenship through Participatory Action Research in Urban*
Central Europe, I submit that it meets and exceeds the legal requirements for a doctoral dissertation in substance and form. Therefore, I recommend that Juliet Golden be allowed to proceed to the next stages of doctoral procedures and public defense. Moreover, I strongly recommend that Juliet Golden’s dissertation be recognized for distinction on the basis that it constitutes a significant contribution to the field of pedagogy.

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