

# The blind spots in the global citizen's gaze

Published in Sprogforum 62, 2016, 12-20.

Translated from Danish by John Irons.

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to internationalisation, intercultural competence and global citizenship in education and learning contexts in both Denmark and the rest of Europe. World citizenship is, among other things, at the centre of UNESCO's newly launched development work, where the overall aim is to achieve greater social justice at a global and local level through knowledge and education (UNESCO 2014). In this article we focus on the knowledge dimension of the work on global citizenship (Kemp 2005), which is often treated as an abstract and vaguely defined entity. We will carry out a theoretical distinction between three types of knowledge: 'factual knowledge'<sup>1</sup>, epistemology and common sense, as well as an exemplification of these in relation to our work on two different internationalisation measures: Language profile teaching at RUC and the Global Citizenship program at Rysensteen Gymnasium in Copenhagen. In doing so, we illustrate the relevance of the three-dimensional understanding of knowledge in relation to the operationalisation of global citizenship and contribute to making visible and explicit the implicit knowledge ideals and hierarchies – the blind spots – that lie in the work on global citizenship



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and intercultural competence. Our conclusion is that a prerequisite for intercultural competence and global citizenship is a critical knowledge concept that derives from the relation between these three forms of knowledge.

## Global citizenship and knowledge

In UNESCO's work on Global Citizenship the concept is defined as a 'sense of belonging' that arises from a cognitive, emotional and behavioural movement (UNESCO 2014: 14). The work on global citizenship is framed by a wish for greater justice, respect and inclusion at a global level. At the same time, the document remains silent about what this work specifically involves as regards knowledge, and also what it is that makes cognitive movement desirable and necessary. This silence is important, because it says something about the power relations that are at stake in the work on global citizenship, and the challenges these relations involve in practice. This silence is repeated in UNESCO's brief description of knowledge: On the one hand global citizenship means acquiring knowledge about social control systems, rights and global issues, and on the other it means knowledge about differences and multiple identities as regards culture, language, religion, gender and interhumanity. The silence here raises the following questions: 1) What structures, rights and issues are to be learnt; 2) How does one formulate diversity of culture, language, religion, etc.; and 3) Who conceptualises these, for what purposes and in whose interests?

Such a lack of clarity and precision can also be found in many other culture-pedagogical initiatives that work on global citizenship, which makes it necessary for knowledge to be defined and understood in relation to the contexts in which it is used. We propose a three-dimensional division of the concept of knowledge into 'factual knowledge', epistemology and common sense. *Factual knowledge* can be said to be both the specific subject-related knowledge one acquires about, for example, Indian traditions, political ideologies, the history of music or climatic regions. Epistemology and common sense complicate factual knowledge in various ways. *Epistemology*, understood as the conceptual frameworks we use in order to understand the world, often lie implicitly and in an unproblematised way in factual knowledge: There is a general tendency, for example, for present-day school pupils to acquire factual knowledge about world history in which the role of Europe and USA is over-represented, and that of Africa, Latin America and Asia under-represented. This way of presenting world history reflects certain historically

inherited frameworks of understanding that are used in historical subject-related knowledge, where ‘the world’ is confused with Europe and USA, and Africa, Latin America and Asia are understood as local areas and thus not as co-creators of the global (Mignolo 2000; Santos 2014; Suárez-Krabbe 2015). The latter are often also understood as underlying to various degrees and not as contemporary societies. The epistemological dimension of knowledge, then, deals to a great extent with the frameworks that factual knowledge draws on. These frameworks are to be understood context-specifically and include the global power relations that knowledge is included in. The example of historically factual knowledge is thus to be understood in relation to the global power relations of which is it partially a result and which it partially reflects. *Common sense* (Billig 1991 and 1996; Garfinkel 1967; Tranekjær 2007; 2011; 2014 and 2015), like epistemology, deals with conceptual frameworks. While epistemology to a greater extent formulates the conceptual frameworks we acquire via subject-related knowledge, common sense formulates those we acquire through experience and our membership of various social and cultural communities and practices. So common sense formulates that which is taken for granted and considered natural and meaningful within a given cultural and social context, and that forms the point of departure for our attitudes, actions and interpretations of a social reality. This applies in particular to the pupils’ activation and operationalisation of their ‘factual’ knowledge.

These dimensions of knowledge are mutually interrelated, requiring each other in the various situations in which one finds oneself. Nevertheless, it is often factual knowledge that is emphasised, whereas the other forms of knowledge remain in the background in curricula and actual teaching. In the following we illustrate the relevance of operating with this tripartite understanding of knowledge in relation to the operationalisation of global citizenship via the presentation of two cases: Language profile teaching at RUC and the Global Citizenship program at Rysensteen Gymnasium.

## The language profiles at RUC – the Spanish language profile

The language profiles, which are offered in Spanish, German and French, are central to Roskilde University’s internationalisation strategy, based on the idea that language, culture and an international vision are interrelated. The aim of the language profiles is to strengthen the students’ competences to include and mediate knowledge from several areas of language and culture. The point of

departure for the language profiles is a subject-integrated language didactics inspired by the CLIL approach (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*), which distinguishes between ‘language of learning’, ‘language for learning’ and ‘language through learning’ (Watson, Prag & Daryai-Hansen 2014: 4). This division is in keeping with our three-dimensional understanding of knowledge, where ‘language of learning’ is linked to factual knowledge, ‘language for learning’ to epistemology, and ‘language through learning’ to common sense. In the general guidelines for the language profiles it is as yet unclear what the relation is between language, knowledge and intercultural competence. The Spanish language profile, however, actively operates with these reflections, since it is based on the fundamental understanding that there is a close interrelationship between language, epistemology, theory, interaction and action. This view of language means that language and language learning are not neutral, but must be seen as being closely related to how we create meaning in the world and how this formation of meaning both enables and limits practice and change, including language practice and learning. Within this framework, Spanish is seen as a means to critical research and learning in practice.

Together with Nanna Kirstine Leets Hansen, Julia Suárez-Krabbe has worked on developing the Spanish language profile since it was implemented in spring 2014. A central consideration in its preparation has to do with knowledge-related hierarchies, where it can often be seen that the students’ knowledge of Latin America is anchored in an epistemological conceptual framework which, for example, placed Latin America in a supposed background position in relation to time (under-developed), and where knowledge of Latin American thinking – including the formation of Indian and Afro-Latin-American theory is generally absent. The cultural-pedagogical challenge is thus to stimulate an *unlearning* of the normative and hierarchical springboard in the students’ own epistemological points of departure (Santos 2014; Suárez-Krabbe 2015). This can involve a challenging of the epistemological frameworks they have acquired during their course of study. In the operationalisation of the Spanish language profile the main point of departure is thus in Latin-American theoretical perspectives as a way of providing subject-related input to promote this unlearning process. These perspectives provide a springboard for making visible and enhancing reflection about how the understanding of specific texts can be strongly limited by being read on the basis of certain epistemological frameworks of understanding. So-called epistemologies of the South therefore generally have top priority – it is in concrete, subject-relevant situations that

include reading, discussion and reflection that the interconnection between language and epistemological hierarchies are elucidated.

Language profile teaching is thus organised in relation to specific thematics that act as approaches to the above-mentioned unlearning process. These thematics have dealt with the university as a global institution, its knowledge hierarchies and the problems that are discussed in this connection in Latin America. Another thematic has been music as a channel of social protest and identity-construction in Latin America, in which the students at the same time acquire knowledge about socio-historical processes in the region as well as knowledge about the relevant academic discussions to do with these in Latin American thinking. In this way, the students work with Spanish at several levels: partly in relation to improving their vocabulary as regards attaining a general overview of how thematics are thought of and conceptualised within other knowledge traditions than the Western, and partly as regards the mediation of this knowledge. At the same time, unlearning is thought of as a key intercultural competence that helps to enable the students to enter into intercultural relations with a basic awareness that ‘the understanding of the world exceeds the Western understanding of the world’ (Santos 2014). The competence is specially important if the students are to be able to understand, tackle and constructively reflect on the scepticism many ‘Westerners’ encounter when they enter into certain everyday and professional interactions in Latin America. It can not infrequently be observed that the experience of the Latin American is precisely that people from USA and Europe are unable to see their own blind spots.

## Rysensteen Gymnasium’s Global Citizenship Program

Via their Global Citizenship Program (GCP), Rysensteen Gymnasium place special focus on global citizenship (Kemp 2005) as an ideal and a necessity in a globalised world. Louise Tranekjær has been linked to the programme as a researcher since 2015. The aim of the programme is for global citizenship as a learning target to be framework-defining for all teaching at Rysensteen and for this to be a thread running through all school subjects. GCP manifests itself in particular in connection with a teaching sequence in cultural understanding that all last-year students go through, as well as in connection with an area study sequence that takes place for the first-year students at upper secondary level. This sequence focuses on the specific countries with which the individual classes will do exchanges

in their final year. As part of this exchange, the students work in groups on preparing a film that deals with a problem and a theme that is worked on up to and during the trip.

The various knowledge dimensions that were described above interact in various ways in the work done by the teachers and students on the Global Citizenship Program. The focus, however, is first and foremost on factual knowledge, partly in the ordinary teaching but also in connection with teaching on cultural understanding and the area studies. The knowledge dimensions of epistemology and common sense are mainly dealt with – and relatively implicitly – as part of the teaching in cultural understanding and in the area study teaching. Here various epistemologies – and to a certain extent differences in common sense – are conceived as an aspect of the cultural knowledge about the countries that the classes are specifically working on. The ‘general knowledge’ that is generated by the students’ and teachers’ practice in Denmark and abroad within as well as outside the teaching, and which forms the point of departure for the students’ meeting with the other, is included where relevant and natural, but is not dealt with systematically. To a considerable extent, common sense contributes to clarifying the relevance of these teaching-related forms of knowledge. This can be seen when the students in their work on an actual assignment acquire the factual knowledge to intervene in, challenge and change their common-sense understanding of the reality around them. An example which illustrates this is work done by a final-year class on musical analysis in connection with their forthcoming trip to New York.

The work on the analysis of musical culture has consisted among other things of working on describing and presenting a concert they have been to at the weekend as a musical event. They have been asked to describe all the aspects of the experience, from the music itself to the ticket queue, and asked to reflect on which cultural categories that were represented among the audience and the musicians. The subjects mainly involved in the class’s work on the assignment are history and music, and via this the students have acquired ‘factual knowledge’ to do with musical history. In addition there is the factual cultural knowledge that the students have acquired via the teaching in cultural understanding and that are activated since the groups have to adopt an anthropological attitude to the event and produce culture-analytical accounts. In the student presentations it becomes clear how their subject-related practice, including the use of factual knowledge, as well as their interpretation of the musical event draws on their common-sense knowledge of what it means to attend a concert that has been formed by their specific genre-related

preferences and experiences. Knowledge about and the meeting with 'a classical concert' is thus defined on the basis of their naturalised knowledge of and experiences with other types of concert. Such assignments thus have the potential to challenge and develop both the students' factual knowledge and epistemology, because there is a meshing with the students' common sense that involves adopting a critical attitude to their own naturalised point of departure. This potential is also evident in aspects that initially are not subject-related, as for example in a situation where the class is planning the programme and a number of practical things to do with the trip to New York when a student asks if smoking is allowed in New York. This is a banal and not particularly subject-related question which nevertheless enables a critical-reflexive dialogue to take place about culture which could involve all three knowledge dimensions and which springs from relating to the cultural context he comes from – not only as a Dane but as an upper-secondary student in Vesterbro (the part of Copenhagen in which the Gymnasium is located) where smoking is something that is institutionally controlled in a particular way. The subsequent discussion about smoking in New York has to do with certain dimensions of global citizenship that are not directly included in the work on the factual knowledge dimension (both the subject-related and the cultural). It is nevertheless important because its starting point is the student's common-sense understanding and naturalised practice as opposed to the teaching in cultural and subject-related knowledge that is usually teacher-controlled and not necessarily linked to the students' horizon of experience and motivated reality.

## Conclusion

Throughout the article we have underlined the importance of working in a focused way on the understandings of knowledge one uses in connection with internationalisation, global citizenship and intercultural competence. We have pointed out that haziness in relation to the knowledge dimension can lead to a tendency to overlook how structural power inequalities are bound up with inequalities in relation to knowledge, i.e. that epistemologies, ideologies and matters of course that are taken as given in the ways one works with global citizenship mean that the above-mentioned inequalities become invisible. Nor are they included in the knowledge that is regarded as qualifying in a given teaching situation.

The language profile teaching at RUC and Rysensteen's GCP illustrate similarities and differences in the ways in which one seeks

to give the students a knowledge and horizon of experience that is globally oriented without losing an appreciation of the local and context-specific. Both cases work with geographical and thematically oriented perspectives on subject-related knowledge in their attempt to qualify the students for global citizenship, and in both cases one can see the students' own points of departure being challenged. While Rysensteen in the example about smoking in New York can be said to challenge what we call common-sense knowledge, i.e. the conceptual frameworks at a subjective experiential level, the language profile in Spanish mainly seeks to challenge epistemological knowledge: the conceptual frameworks that lie implicitly in the students' subject-related knowledge. One of the central challenges that the article describes in relation to initiatives that have global citizenship and intercultural competence as their aim is that the subject-related and cultural knowledge acquires a meaning for the individual orientation towards and action in a global world, to the extent that it enables one to formulate, intervene in, challenge and influence the knowledge-related resources the individual has and, in particular, the way in which these are made use of. In both cases it is thus difficult to say anything about the extent to which teaching meshes with the students' factual knowledge, common sense and epistemological frameworks over and above the specific teaching situations.

So the extent to which the students take this knowledge – or unlearning – with them in various further teaching, work and everyday contexts where they meet intercultural situations and challenges remains unanswered. What it is possible to say something about, on the other hand, is that these unanswered questions precisely confirm our argument that a context-specific clarification and operationalisation of the concept of knowledge is necessary in the work on global citizenship and internationalisation. This requires a self-critical and reflective perspective on knowledge hierarchies and power structures that the work on intercultural competence development and global citizenship potentially establishes and strengthens. The description of the two cases illustrates the importance of relating these considerations to the concrete but diverse social and historical relations that are also involved in forming epistemological knowledge and common sense as well as their use in particular dialogue situations. This means that we also argue that to a greater extent it is necessary to make explicit what sort of culture and cultural knowledge one wishes the students to have. In this connection, the ability to critically reflect on inscribed assumptions and power asymmetries linked to this knowledge and this task is in itself crucial. A prerequi-

site for intercultural competence and global citizenship is a critical concept of knowledge that takes into account the relation between factual knowledge, epistemological knowledge and common sense and that works explicitly on this relation in theory as well as in practice.

## Note

1. Factual knowledge has been placed in inverted commas so as to indicate that 'factual' knowledge, which is the basis for subject-related teaching at upper secondary level and elsewhere, naturally also involves a positioned selection and representation of what

constitutes facts and reality within a given subject. Factual knowledge should thus not be understood as true and beyond discussion in an absolute sense, but rather as an expression of an established basis of knowledge.

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