ARE YOU A GLOBAL CITIZEN?

...wait, what do you mean by that?

BACKGROUND

Global citizenship is central to the “Canadian identity,” necessitating the development of a kind of citizen who “is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen” (Brigham, 2011, p. 16). To address this, the prevalence of international service learning programs (such as “Me to We”), an organization that provides youth the opportunity to travel to a developing country and take part in a service project such as building a school, has increased in secondary schools in recent years. I contend that it is necessary to explore how secondary students understand notions of global citizenship as it relates to structural inequality in the context of international service learning. This understanding will make possible the design of service-learning opportunities in a way that does not reproduce the colonial subject identity of the “helper.”

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(1) What are secondary students’ understandings of global citizenship, particularly in relation to structural inequality, before, during, and after participating in an international service-learning program?

(2) What perspectives of global citizenship are evident in the curriculum and practices of these programs?

(3) How do and how could these programs contribute to the creation of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and the development of critical global citizenship.

METHODOLOGY

Using a case study methodology, I will follow one cohort of 16 students and two teachers through a 3-week experience on a service program building a school in Kenya, facilitated by Me to We. I will undertake three data collection practices:

(1) A discourse analysis of the Me to We curricular material assessing its conceptualization of global citizenship and its orientation to structural inequality;

(2) Four surveys to be completed by students and teachers, disseminated before, during, immediately following, and two months after the program which will explore the students’ and teachers’ feelings, attitudes, beliefs and expectations about their experience; and

(3) Semi-structured interviews with six students and two teachers conducted upon their return to explore any changes in participants’ worldviews or perspectives that have taken place as a result of their experience abroad, and how they see this translating into social action.

HYPOTHESIS

I believe there is great value to high school students engaging in learning internationally; however, I question whether notions of global citizenship as they are put forth in service learning programs do enough to challenge students to deeply understand structural inequality, or give them the tools to take social action beyond the scope of the program they are participating in. This is problematic given the social justice orientation claimed by Me to We.

SIGNIFICANCE

Secondary students have been largely ignored in the scholarship on international service learning to date. Considering the prevalence of these programs at the secondary level, it is necessary to focus research there. I start with conceptions of global citizenship as an opportunity to lay the foundation for my doctoral work which will seek to develop an anti-colonial model for service-learning at the secondary level.

REFERENCES


