

Book Review

International Education and Development and Learning through Sustainable Partnerships – Living Global Citizenship: Steven Coombs, Mark Potts and Jack Whitehead; Palgrave Macmillan 2014. ISBN 978-1-137-34997-2

Peter Mellett

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Bath, UK

The foreword to this book sets out its chief aims in the following words (written by Konai Helu Thaman, UNESCO Chair in Teacher Education and Culture at the University of the South Pacific):

[T]he authors of this book tell us what they think it [global citizenship] means and how one might achieve it through collaborative, participatory and context-specific processes and partnerships, taking into account issues of justice, power relations and diverse contexts ... [challenging] readers to shift their gaze from focusing on themselves or their group to focusing on those with whom they interact ... [which] may mean a shift from a neo-liberal approach that views the partner being assisted as needing development to a position that offers both partners an opportunity for sharing knowledge and experience for mutual benefit.

The reader making an initial skimmed appraisal of the book can see that these aims are broadly addressed by the titles of the seven chapters set out in the contents pages:

1. Transforming International Educational Development through Living Global Citizenship.
2. Pedagogy for Effective Citizenship Education.
3. Living Theory Transformed into Living Global Citizenship.
4. Living Legacies: Living Global Citizenship in Action.

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5. Designing a Living Global Citizenship Project.
6. Propositions for Living Global Citizenship Projects.
7. Living Global Citizenship: Lessons for Humanity.

These seven headings are themselves comprehensively broken down into 42 sub-headings, with a further 59 sub sub-headings, so that the detailed structure of the book can be immediately seen in synopsis form. With an index containing around 450 items, it can be appreciated that the book is readily accessible as a reference work rather than one that has to be trawled through to find the 'nuggets' of specific interest to the individual reader. However, for those prepared to read sequentially through the book from cover to cover, there is a fascinating developmental-trail to be followed.

While there are three main authors, their voices remain individually distinctive throughout a text that makes clear meanings through well-paced and structured writing. The text sets out by establishing the origins of Living Global Citizenship as an antidote to the effects of economic rationalism and its inherent strands of "...de-skilling, de-moralisation and de-valuation". A summary of the current state of cultural/citizenship education in the UK makes clear that the authors are correct when they posit the creation of a new meaning for 'cultural education' through the development of an alternative pedagogy that supports the delivery of effective citizenship-education within any cultural setting.

The academic framework for this initiative rests on practice and principles familiar to readers of this journal: the well-known methodological, conceptual and epistemological underpinnings of living-educational-theory as explanations of educational influence are detailed – as arising from enquiries that ask questions of the sort "How do I improve what I'm doing?" The link between living-educational-theory and living citizenship results from both asking the same basic question, contextualised to their respective fields, with their responses deriving validity from the same methodological, conceptual and epistemological sources. Thus living citizenship (as cultural empathy) becomes Living Global Citizenship. Living legacies result as individuals live out their lives as global citizens who contribute to making a difference to the lives of others – and citizenship education is recast into a complete new form and with a greatly expanded significance.

This compelling argument takes up around half of the text and is thoroughly rigorous, yet at no point loses its sense of connection with individuals and their personal lived realities. The remainder of the text centres on accounts of specific examples of Living Global Citizenship projects together with practical advice about setting up and auditing projects that the reader might wish to undertake. These two aspects of the text interpenetrate to an extent, rather than being distinctly separate.

In conclusion: readable, relevant and satisfying. However, there is one reservation – the notes section at the rear of the book contains material under chapter headings but without cross-referencing to the main text. The repeated use of the 'unsupported this' term severely limits the utility of this section.