

Global Citizenship Education as a Framework for Lifelong Learning

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Ministers and faith leaders face an unprecedented set of challenges in the twenty-first century. The rapid pace of globalization has brought with it escalating and oftentimes volatile social, political, financial, and environmental issues that permeate public and private life. From the obvious acceleration of climate change to increasing migration numbers and widening socio-economic inequalities alongside unchecked political polarization, many faith leaders struggle to respond faithfully. While some ministers engage directly with the politics of their local community through social activism, many do not feel adequately equipped to tackle such polarizing issues without specialized training. Ministry in the twenty-first century is a complex amalgamation of interrelated issues and local, real-world impacts, demanding a global model for training effective leadership.

One such model, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), is an innovative, multi-dimensional educational framework designed to promote engaged global citizens. First formalized as an educational framework by UNESCO in 2011, GCED has been adopted by notable organizations, including the United Nations and Oxfam, and is incorporated into the

Sustainable Development Goals. GCED creates active participants in the work of building a more just and generous world.

This chapter presents Global Citizenship Education as a transformative andragogical framework for lifelong learning for ministry, uniquely positioned to equip faith leaders with the necessary knowledge, skills, and perspective to address global realities. I begin with the imperative for a global framework. I then present the pillars of the GCED model, explore critical scholarship around approaches to implementation, examine the core competencies for developing a faith-based global citizen, and discuss how theological education is already embracing GCED-like learning experiences in existing programs. I conclude with recommendations for lifelong learning programs to become GCED-focused.

A Global Educational Framework

Global Citizenship Education is a distinctive educational framework that aims to foster a new type of citizen. GCED differs from conventional educational models and teaching theories. It represents a new form of civic learning, as evidenced by the evolution of more traditional civic and citizenship education to incorporate global perspectives as part of its core competencies (Damiani and Fraillon 2025). Global citizenship is a multi-faceted and inclusive approach to global education that “endeavor[s] [to] comprise moral, political, legal, cultural, economic, spiritual, and environmental dimensions” (Drerup 2019, 32). Learners are asked to do more than just think critically about their global context. Learners in GCED programs are also encouraged to design and participate in community projects that address global social, political, economic, and environmental issues (Ban 2012). The central goal of GCED is to foster respect for all people, the planet, and future generations by building a sense of shared humanity and collective cooperation.

GCED is less about influencing which side a learner may take on a given issue and more about helping them consider their interconnected existence and the impacts of their everyday decisions more thoughtfully. By empowering learners to see themselves as part of a larger whole, GCED creates active participants in the work of local and global transformation. Working together, leaders and communities can more effectively address global injustices and inequities. According to

the United Nations' Global Education First Initiative, education must extend beyond the basics of reading and writing to encompass the perspectives necessary for cultivating peaceful, sustainable, and equitable communities (Ban 2012, 6). This approach sets GCED apart from other education frameworks by implying a moral and ethical imperative as well as a collective responsibility to address the increasing tensions of a fragmented world.

Global Citizenship Education is an educational framework structuring the entire task of education, rather than a single subject within a set curriculum, thereby connecting personal values and civic action to broader social impact. The goal is to move learners beyond simply accepting information at face value to thinking critically about the nature of information and its impact on life. By considering the source and context of information and asking who it benefits, learners can make informed decisions about how to respond in a way that benefits not only themselves and their immediate communities but also others. Not content with simply raising awareness, learners collectively move beyond passive responses to global injustice to active decolonialization practices that benefit those most acutely impacted by systemic injustice and inequality.

GCED emphasizes the learner's ability to think critically, understanding the interconnected ways in which their actions impact the global community, and then to respond in ways that prioritize the well-being of humanity, rather than focusing solely on one class, ethnicity, generation, or nation. This framework for education is built from a lifelong learning perspective that begins with early childhood education and extends through adulthood. It assumes the continuous need to revisit long-held assumptions and even popular interpretations to ensure that, whether formal or informal, the education one receives is timely, relevant, and bigger than a single-story perspective (Global Citizenship Foundation 2022). Learners in this environment are active participants and contributors rather than receivers of established theories and concepts. Learners bring their own unique, contextualized perspectives to the task of education.

Three Pillars of the GCED Framework

Global Citizenship Education aims to instill a set of core competencies, enabling citizens to navigate the increasingly complex and fractured

nature of global society more effectively. These competencies include critical thinking, problem-solving, empathy, conflict resolution, and self-reflection (UNESCO, n.d.), which are built on three pillars of learning: cognitive knowledge, socio-emotional development, and behavioral change. This three-fold framework empowers learners with the knowledge, perspective, and critical thinking skills necessary to understand systemic, global issues from a local, contextual perspective—ensuring a holistic vision of transformation in context.

The cognitive pillar addresses the need for in-depth, unbiased information regarding the global realities of historical events and current developments related to topics such as human rights, social justice, and sustainable development. Learners must move beyond theoretical abstractions and theological proclamations to develop concrete understandings of how systemic issues of violence, oppression, and climate change impact the lives of community members. The cognitive structure is particularly important when the pursuit of truth, both in historical and current events, is subject to distortion and misinterpretation.

The socio-emotional pillar focuses on the attitudes and core values needed to foster a global citizenship mentality. Values of empathy, respect, and solidarity are instilled through skill development and relationship-building within a specific, local context. Active listening and conflict resolution skills help learners develop a mindset centered on shared values, with compassion and genuine concern for others as paramount.

The third pillar, behavior, is about taking action. After acquiring the proper knowledge and applying the appropriate values and attitudes in context, learners translate their training into practical action. This work includes participating in social movements, engaging in decolonizing practices, and fostering a lifelong commitment to address the global challenges that characterize the twenty-first century. Despite the name “Global Citizenship Education,” GCED-oriented actions acknowledge the interconnected nature of the local and global. A dynamic perspective assumes that local actions have a broader impact than just their immediate context and, if undertaken with a deeper understanding of global implications, local actions can empower the entire society.

Approaches to GCED Implementation

Architects and supporters of Global Citizenship Education believe that education should play a crucial role in helping learners collaborate to build the structures and mindsets necessary for a more just and peaceful society. An ongoing ideological debate within the field of GCED, led by two academic scholars, Martha Nussbaum and Vanessa Andreotti, emphasizes that this framework is not just an intellectual pursuit but also an impassioned call to action. While Nussbaum and Andreotti generally agree on the principles of GCED, they differ significantly in their approach to teaching.

The soft approach is characterized by broader pedagogical strokes that emphasize a shared human existence, a common home planet, and a collective responsibility to provide a livable future for generations to come. It implies that humans everywhere have a moral obligation to help those in need and recognize and respond to how their individual decisions impact others. The “soft” approach to Global Citizenship Education is endorsed by organizations such as the United Nations and Oxfam. Martha Nussbaum argues that a broader understanding of global responsibility is urgently necessary in light of our current global situation. Vasil Gluchman claims that Nussbaum’s support for the soft approach invites learners to explore intercultural sensitivity and critical thinking in a less pressured environment, allowing them the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the world and their place in it (Gluchman 2018). Andreotti disagrees, arguing that this approach is too gentle and borders on raising awareness rather than on organizing calculated, strategic action to address the root causes of injustice and inequity (Andreotti 2006, 41). In Andreotti’s opinion, the soft approach “points to a central issue in global citizenship education: whether and how to address the economic and cultural roots of the inequalities in power and wealth/labour distribution in a global complex and uncertain system” (Andreotti 2006, 41). Andreotti suggests that this approach may inadvertently reinforce existing power structures rather than challenge them, likening the approach to “sanctioned ignorance” (Andreotti 2006, 44).

The “critical” approach to Global Citizenship Education is deeply rooted in postcolonial thought emerging from the Global South and aims to deconstruct the global structures that cause inequality and oppression. It recognizes a global history of Christo-centric, paternalistic charity and argues that the focus should be on mutual accountability

rather than helping others. For Andreotti, the nature of the problem with the critical approach is not a lack of development or education, as the soft approach would imply. Instead, it highlights the complex structures and power dynamics that lead to and reinforce inequities (Andreotti 2006, 46). In contrast, Nussbaum is skeptical as to whether the critical approach is the best way to approach Global Citizenship Education. In her book, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, she emphasizes the importance of developing individual skills, such as critical self-reflection and empathy, to foster a sense of shared citizenship (Nussbaum 1998, 50–55).

The critical approach, like the more widely accepted soft approach, has its challenges. As systemic injustice and destabilizing polarity increase globally, the weight of determining the most effective way to effect change is a worrisome concern. In response, many have resigned themselves to armchair activism, opting for a passive approach to calling out injustice without taking the necessary actions required to move society towards a new reality. The passivity of social media, which disconnects users from the physical consequences experienced by victims of these inequalities, often exacerbates the issues. Advocates of the soft approach are concerned that guilt and criticism—the guilt of not better understanding complex global systems and persistent criticism of how best to impact society through social action—threaten to paralyze potential supporters, who are needed to effect systemic change. These concerned but overwhelmed citizens, in turn, operate passively through social media—or opt not to participate at all—rather than risk participating in a way that might be deemed inappropriate or harmful.

Reorienting Ministerial Education Around GCED

A GCED-based program for ministers and faith leaders would benefit from addressing the concerns of the critical approach with the understanding of the soft approach. The goal is to create a hospitable framework for learning and growth, which involves both critical self-evaluation and evidence-based program evaluation to determine the impact not just on the transformation of ministerial leadership but also on the community at large. Like GCED, theological education aims to move beyond foundational knowledge and basic

skills to teach the advanced skills and abilities needed to facilitate leadership in faith-based organizations and church communities.

GCED-based programs emphasize the intimate connection between local issues and global concerns. GCED helps ministers and faith leaders recognize their local actions and the social standing of their faith communities as part of a larger, global effort focused on the common good. This mindset enables ministers to reframe the definition of ministerial effectiveness, defining it less by church growth and balanced budgets and more by their ability to help parishioners connect, engage, and act in solidarity with their global neighbors. A GCED-based curriculum would empower ministers to view their local actions as part of a larger, global effort, helping them to develop hard skills in critical thinking, project management, and problem-solving (Global Citizen Year Academy 2022). Similarly, in a world marked by culture wars and religious intolerance, the ability to engage in meaningful interreligious dialogue and transformative intercultural engagement is a core competency for peaceful coexistence. Skills such as cultivating respect, empathy, and open-mindedness are foundational concepts in Global Citizenship Education, laying the groundwork for individual and collective transformation (UNESCO n.d.).

Another benefit when reorienting ministerial practice and training around GCED is the focus on social-emotional learning. Burnout and resignation among ministers are heightened due to increased workload, financial constraints, and vocational uncertainty. GCED, with its focus on social-emotional wellness, provides a robust framework for cultivating compassion and understanding of the deep-seated resiliency necessary for justice-driven leadership. Ministers trained within a GCED educational framework, in the words of Martha Nussbaum, understand that “compassion . . . is a central bridge between the individual and the community” (Nussbaum 1996, 28, quoted in Little 2021). This type of cognitive and moral awareness also prevents the paralysis so common among those concerned about the fight for justice. Constant engagement with complex global systems of injustice often leads to fatigue and cynicism, requiring a theological toolkit grounded in GCED understandings. The emotional fortitude afforded to those who are equipped in this way creates room for “emotional imagination,” thereby allowing for the mental clarity necessary to continue the work of decolonizing justice (Cocquyt and Palombo 2023, 60).

Designing GCED-Oriented Lifelong Learning Programs

Global Citizenship Education can be implemented in different ways. Some theological schools offer courses on intercultural competency and interfaith dialogue as part of their regular degree programs. Others introduce study abroad immersion courses that invite students to consider Christian perspectives outside of a Western context. While these approaches are popular, they lack the comprehensiveness to ensure that GCED is not reduced simply to a subject one can opt in or out of but instead becomes a lifestyle that informs the whole of one's ministry.

Lifelong learning, which falls largely outside the accrediting standards of formal theological education, provides the flexibility to reorient ministerial training and practice around the core competencies of Global Citizenship Education. This framework is a compelling approach for theological education, allowing ministers and community leaders to connect social responsibility to their faith tradition. Furthermore, GCED can become a lifelong pursuit of both knowledge and practical application. As society shifts, faith leaders must continually reevaluate their role in caring for humanity through their own decisions, actions, and ministerial practices.

Lifelong learning in a theological context is well-suited to embrace Global Citizenship Education as an andragogical framework for several reasons. First, lifelong learning has as its mission to address the emerging needs of ministers and faith leaders in the Church and the world. Thus, lifelong learning programs exist to fill knowledge gaps and address emerging programs related to the ministry context. Second, lifelong learning programs are specifically designed to work with seasoned ministerial practitioners. In other words, leaders in lifelong learning focus on the distinct needs of practicing ministers and faith leaders in ways that traditional formal training does not. Third, most lifelong learning programs already embrace a learner-centered, andragogical approach to equipping adult learners. These programs understand the inherent value not only of lived experience but also of collective expertise, which helps enhance and nuance educational offerings. Thus, lifelong learning programs provide the perfect environment to embrace a GCED framework for continuous, relevant, and timely improvement in ministry.

In the most transformative approach, according to leading agencies like UNESCO and Oxfam, GCED becomes the andragogical framework

through which the whole of learning occurs. One of the benefits of this “whole school” approach to GCED for lifelong learning is that there is no need for a new course with a seasoned subject matter expert solely focused on GCED. Instead, the focus lies in revising rather than replacing existing content. Revision enables lifelong learning programs and centers for continuous learning to refine their existing courses by highlighting key aspects such as justice, equity, and sustainability. Recognizing and addressing the three GCED pillars of cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral transformation makes an immediate impact among ministers and faith leaders who need a more relevant approach to today’s problems.

This “whole school” approach embeds GCED principles in everything from preaching to pastoral care, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of global citizenship. And in this context, the role of the educator undergoes a transformational shift, as does the curriculum. Instead of mere subject matter experts, educators are trained to be skilled facilitators who guide and support learners on their academic journey. Educators must learn to embody many of the skills and model GCED behaviors, such as courage, vulnerability, authenticity, critical thinking, compassion, and peaceful resolution. Inherent in this shift is the need for educators to share in the learning experience, allowing adult learners the autonomy to engage with materials in ways that are relevant to their context. This shift requires a level of confidence and flexibility on the part of the educator, not to hold the learning experience hostage but to journey alongside learners as they discover together what is needed to thrive. Most educators will require training for this facilitator role, for which lifelong learning is uniquely suited.

Intentional Pedagogies

Global Citizenship Education requires intentional pedagogies for cultivating the skills necessary for ministerial leadership. The following section analyzes transformative pedagogical strategies, including the development of ‘brave space’ and the decolonization of theological education, through which The School of Global Citizenry embodies the principles of Citizenship Education (GCED).

The School of Global Citizenry’s mission is explicit: “to grow vital global citizenship competencies through high-quality educational opportunities in an intentionally international and socially

responsible online academic ecosystem.” The school is branded as a “CEU-certified, online school” specializing in global citizenship education, specifically targeting postgraduate adult learners. The GCED philosophy is most apparent in The School’s embodied curriculum, in which course content is rooted in the lived experience of the instructors, each learner, and in its global classrooms, highlighting the unique diversity of its faculty and student body. The School intentionally recruits postgraduate learners from around the world, complementing the intentional diversity among the faith-based nonprofit leaders, transitional ministry executives, adjunct religious and civic educators, and seasoned social entrepreneurs who serve as faculty. This intentional diversity fosters global community and facilitates genuine intercultural and interreligious dialogue, promoting diverse theological perspectives and critical thinking for ministry—essential aspects of global citizenship.

Brave space is premised on the belief that human growth requires an environment where people are willing to take risks and be courageous with the truth. First introduced by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013), the term “brave space” refers to a reframed conversation space that centers honesty and vulnerability (brave space) over comfort (safe space). Arao and Clemens argued that discomfort is inevitable, so focusing on creating a space devoid of discomfort is counterproductive. In a brave space, the principles of dialogue are used to build trust and foster cooperation, rather than to avoid disagreement or discomfort on topics such as cultural or religious diversity. Brave space is cultivated using regional reflection cohorts and seasoned teaching assistants in Faith Matters Network’s Movement Chaplaincy training course, which has been hosted at The School of Global Citizenry since 2019.

Another approach to cultivating the skills necessary for ministerial leadership in hostile times is to decolonize theological education. Rather than adding GCED-oriented components to a pre-existing curriculum, decolonization calls for a reexamination of the historical development of theological education. Three authors in the *Theological Education Between the Times* series, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (2021), Keri Day (2021), and Chloe Sun (2020), offer distinct theological perspectives (Latinx, womanist, and Asian, respectively) on decolonizing theology. Considered together, they identify three key movements necessary for the decolonization of theological education. First, GCED focuses on social justice with an appreciation for difference and sustainable development. This intellectual environment

presents an opportunity for inquiry into the historical development of theological education, the European-centric ideologies embedded in its current manifestation, and the dominant influence it has on the environments in which ministers are currently trained to lead. This inquiry opens the door to a serious consideration of more inclusive educational frameworks that recognize the historical power of white, European histories over modern theological perspectives. This approach decentralizes these perspectives and ensures that a broader diversity of histories, perspectives, and worldviews are represented. For example, The School of Global Citizenry prioritizes courses taught by LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and women faculty, thereby elevating more diverse and contextual perspectives, such as indigenous, womanist, and queer spiritualities.

Second, by challenging the Eurocentric development of theological education, GCED introduces postcolonial theology as a primary lens through which to approach biblical interpretation. Moving beyond Western perspectives, postcolonial theology liberates hermeneutical studies by introducing a more culturally sensitive focus on liberation as a valid approach to biblical study (Drerup 2019, 31–32). A decolonial approach affords marginalized and underrepresented communities more ownership over their histories and invites dominant communities to consider the importance of interpretation from the margins. For example, The School of Global Citizenry trains instructors to curate the diverse perspectives in their courses, thereby giving voice to less dominant understandings and promoting collective knowledge exchange.

The third strategy for decolonizing theological education involves valuing divergent perspectives through the use of online learning modalities. Increasingly common due to the pedagogical shifts necessary to accommodate learning needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, theological schools are using online learning more than ever before. This leveraging of technology caters to non-traditional students and those who are otherwise excluded from theological education, affording them access across time zones, continents, and languages, and often for less money than traditional face-to-face learning experiences. For example, The School of Global Citizenry hosts learners from 34 different countries, and through intentional educational design training, teaches online educators to decentralize their own perspective in order to create a safe digital space for the unique perspectives of global learners.

Recommendations

Global Citizenship Education as an andragogical framework offers a strategic vision for forming ministerial leaders for the public square. Its three-pillar approach provides a robust framework for ministerial training in the twenty-first century, moving beyond simple knowledge transmission or abstract biblical application to offering ministers and other faith leaders the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral skills needed to navigate unprecedented times with compassion.

By making the necessary adjustments to adopt this framework, lifelong learning is positioned to provide profoundly relevant training that addresses not only the needs of the Church but also those of the world. A successful program transition to GCED should include: 1) a formal commitment to GCED, 2) buy-in from and training for faculty and administration, 3) a plan for the comprehensive revision of all courses, 4) leveraging technology to widen access to educational opportunities, and 5) a commitment to continuous improvement, collaboration, examination, and evaluation. This transition necessitates a bold departure from traditional forms of theological education. Understanding the local as intimately connected to the global and ourselves as part of a bigger whole, Global Citizenship Education provides a new language for twenty-first-century ministry and a new hope for equipping everyday saints for active engagement in God's compassionate justice.

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