

Global Learning and the Human Capability Approach: Florida International University Case Study

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Abstract: This case study traced the process in which Florida International University engaged to determine what students want and need from their undergraduate education. Using grounded theory, the authors discovered that the process was reflective of the human capability approach in the development of its global learning student learning outcomes.

Florida International University (FIU) is a large, public, urban, research university in the globally connected, diverse city of Miami. The university represents a microcosm of the city, with 83% of student enrollment of over 42,000 from minority groups. FIU is the largest Hispanic serving institution in the United States, granting Bachelor degrees to almost 6,000 Hispanic students per year.

From 2006-2009, FIU engaged in an iterative dialogic process with constituents throughout the university that resulted in a five-year plan that is the university's roadmap for enabling students to act as engaged global citizens. The embodiment of this plan is *Global Learning for Global Citizenship* (GL4GC; Florida International University, 2010). The purpose of GL4GC is to provide every FIU undergraduate with curricular and co-curricular opportunities to achieve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of global citizenship through global learning. The goal of GL4GC is for students to acquire three global learning student learning outcomes (SLOs) through the active, team-based, interdisciplinary inquiry of real-world problems. These three global learning SLOs are: (a) global awareness, or knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems; (b) global perspective, or the ability to develop a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems, and (c) global engagement, or the willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the nature of the process that led to the adoption of FIU's global learning SLOs. The argument will proceed in the following manner. The researchers will first describe the human capabilities approach and its connection to education. They will then define the key concepts of global learning and global citizenship. Next, the process in which the FIU community engaged to determine the focus of GL4GC and the content of its global learning SLOs will be described. After that, the inclusion in the process of two key elements of the human capability approach – participatory dialogue and democratic deliberation - will be discussed. Finally the researchers will draw conclusions.

The Human Capabilities Approach and Education

The human capability approach was first developed by the Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (1987) as a broad paradigm for evaluating the effects of social policies related to human well-being. It provides the outline for the Human Development Index, a comparative measure of the standard of living, life expectancy, literacy, and education for countries throughout the world (Landorf, Doscher, & Rocco, 2008). The human capabilities approach lays out the basic components for analyzing and measuring well-being. The core components of the approach are freedom, functionings, capabilities, and agency. Freedom Landorf, H., & Pineda, F. (2011). Global learning and the human capability approach: Florida International University case study. In M. S. Plakhotnik, S. M. Nielsen, & D. M. Pane (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual College of Education & GSN Research Conference* (pp. 116-122). Miami: Florida International University. http://coeweb.fiu.edu/research_conference/

relates to “the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead” (Drèze & Sen, 1995, p. 10); functionings are achievements, “whereas a capability is the ability to achieve” (Sen, 1987, p. 36). Agency is the power to bring change on a level that is of value to an individual (Landorf et al., 2008, p. 230). Sen and his followers consider education as the foundation for understanding and developing human capabilities and functionings.

Global Learning and Global Citizenship

Similar to the human capability approach (Sen, 1987), global learning requires education for its enactment and presupposes a broad perspective of human development. Global learning is the process by which students are prepared to fulfill their civic responsibilities in a diverse and interconnected world (Hovland, 2006). Global learning developed in response to the ways in which globalization has transformed everyday life. Many of these changes were driven by an unprecedented acceleration in the pace, volume, and scale of information sharing during the 20th century (Castells, 1999; Thompson, 2003). Thick information networks not only opened individuals’ eyes to diverse problems and perspectives, they also enabled a new understanding of the interconnectivity of individuals and societies (Drucker, 1999). Due to the proliferation of interconnected knowledge networks, a traditional liberal education, once deemed global because of the breadth of exposure students received in discrete disciplines, no longer suffices. In order to gain knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate for citizenship in an increasingly globalized world, students need an education that “prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change” (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2007). As an educational process, global learning provides the conditions for students to gain this preparation by explicitly focusing on interconnections between disciplines, perspectives, people, problems, trends, and systems.

In its inclusiveness of global, international, intercultural, and local issues, as well as its focus on diversity, interconnectedness, and problem solving, global learning aligns with FIU’s founding purposes - education of students, service to the community, and greater international understanding (Florida Administrative Code, Rule 6C8-1.001) – as well as its mission – a commitment to “high-quality teaching, state-of-the-art research and creative activity, and collaborative engagement with our local and global communities” (Florida International University, n/d).

Through the process of global learning, students may acquire global citizenship. Global citizenship is a distinctly different notion than that of national citizenship. Whereas national citizenship is defined as a set of rights and responsibilities granted by the nation-state, global citizenship is a disposition that guides individuals to take on responsibilities within interconnected local, global, intercultural, and international contexts (Steenburgen, 1994). National citizenship is granted by virtue of birth, heritage or naturalization, but according to Nussbaum (2004), global citizenship is an outlook developed through education:

Cultivating our humanity in a complex interlocking world involves understanding the ways in which common needs and aims are differently realized in different circumstances. This requires a great deal of knowledge that American college students rarely got in previous eras... We must become more curious and more humble about our role in the world, and we will do this only if undergraduate education is reformed in this direction. (p. 45)

As a result of their global understanding, global citizens perceive themselves as shaping the conditions of the world rather than merely navigating them. National citizenship carries with it rights and responsibilities, but as global citizens, people are driven to define rights and take on

responsibilities as a result of their attitude of engagement. Understanding that they live in an increasingly interconnected world and that the well-being of others impacts their own well-being, global citizens accept shared responsibility for solving problems (Hanvey, 1982). What's more, global citizens are willing to take action to solve these problems (Falk, 1994). In summary, global citizens view themselves as change agents. They base their actions on an in-depth understanding of interrelated world conditions and a multi-perspective analysis of problems. The GL4GC (2010) initiative defines global citizenship as “the willingness of individuals to apply their knowledge of interrelated issues, trends, and systems and multi-perspective analytical skills to local, international, and intercultural problem solving” (p.14).

Methods

This is a case study of FIU's processes of developing and adopting its global learning SLOs. One of the researchers was an active participant in these processes, and the other was an observer. Using content analysis and grounded theory, the researchers refined the data to unveil the interrelationships (Creswell, 2003) of the processes FIU used in developing and refining its global learning SLOs. Then, with constant comparison of data as they emerged (Creswell, 2003), the researchers compared the global learning SLOs to Nussbaum's (2006) core education capabilities.

Data sources in this case study included FIU documents used to develop GL4GC from 2006 to 2009. These documents included the following:

- Data and results from focus groups the FIU reaccreditation office conducted with undergraduate students in summer 2007 on what students hoped to gain from their FIU degree.
- Transcripts of focus groups the Office of Global Learning Initiatives (OGLI) staff conducted with faculty in fall 2008 on the meaning of and best approaches to implementing global learning across the undergraduate curriculum.
- Transcripts of focus groups the OGLI staff conducted with students in fall 2008 on the meaning of and best approaches to implementing global learning across the undergraduate curriculum.
- Strategic planning documents.
- Academic program self-study reports.
- Summaries of open forum discussions held at the two main FIU campuses in fall 2007 on proposals for plans to improve undergraduate student learning.
- Agendas, transcripts, and minutes of several GL4GC working committees meetings held between 2006 and 2009.
- Agendas, transcripts, and minutes of meetings held in 2008 and 2009 between OGLI staff and all colleges and schools on the development and design of GL4GC.

Data also included results of a branding research study conducted for FIU by the higher education marketing firm, Stamats. This study aimed at determining FIU's image among a variety of stakeholder groups. Over 3,500 students, staff, faculty, alumni, prospective students, parents of prospective students, board members, and community leaders completed surveys for this study.

Results

Through analyses of the documents noted above, the researchers discovered that FIU employed two key elements of the human capability approach in the processes it employed while developing and refining its global learning SLOs. These key elements are participatory dialogue and democratic deliberation. Both of these elements play crucial, regenerative roles in the

human capability approach. According to Sen (1999), the determination of capabilities must always be contextual, fitting the needs of a particular community at a particular time, and arrived at through a constant iterative dialogic process with community stakeholders (Sen, 1999). Nussbaum (2003), who has developed an open-ended list of ten “basic human functional capabilities” that are “part of a minimum account of social justice” (p. 40), also insists on the primacy of active engaged dialogue in coming to a consensus on what it means to be human and to live well.

Dialogue is a “process that involves reflection, respect and a joining of efforts to understand and take joint action” (United Nations, 2007, p. 61). Participatory dialogue is an umbrella term that emphasizes the fact that individuals involved in dialogue “listen to each other, speak to each other, and in particular share the dialogue space with respect and consideration” (p. 65). The researchers found that participatory dialogue was most prevalent in meetings that the OGLI facilitated with academic departments, colleges, and schools to discuss the state of development of GL4GC. These meetings proceeded by an OGLI staff member first presenting the current stage of development of GL4GC in general, followed by open-ended discussion that included the relevance of the global learning SLOs to particular academic disciplines. In each discussion, when faculty members, staff, and/or administrators suggested changes to the global learning SLOs that were substantiated by reference to academic content, pedagogy, goal, or mission, the OGLI staff brought the suggested changes to light in subsequent GL4GC working group meetings.

While participatory dialogue guided the proceedings during academic meetings in the development and refinement of the global learning SLOs, democratic deliberation was the key communicative process in meetings with GL4GC working groups. Deliberation is “talk about shared problems and disagreement over what to do about them in the presence of different perspectives” (Parker, 2007, p. 26). The purpose of deliberation is deciding what to do. Forging a decision in a group in which all members have equal rights and are respected as equals, and generating and weighing alternatives together, is the essence of democratic deliberation (Parker, 2003). Each time that the GL4GC working groups received input from university stakeholders regarding the global learning SLOs, they met as a team to deliberate on whether and how to best incorporate the input into a working draft of the SLOs. Sometimes the input resulted in changes to an existing global learning SLO; sometimes a global learning SLO was added or eliminated. From January 2008, when the GL4GC Development Team drafted the first set of global learning SLOs, to June 2010, when FIU’s Faculty Senate approved the global learning SLOs that are now being implemented in all global learning designated courses throughout the undergraduate curriculum, groups of FIU stakeholders considered drafts of the global learning SLOs. Consideration included discussion on the relevance, theoretical validity, observability, measurability, and practicality of the SLOs. Those consulted included faculty and student focus groups, faculty assemblies of the 11 colleges and schools that enroll undergraduates, the Student Government Association, Student Affairs directors, members of the President’s Council and the FIU Foundation, the Board of Trustees, the GL4GC Development Team, and the GL4GC Design Team. Using participatory dialogue and democratic deliberation, the global learning SLOS were continuously refined and revised.

Discussion

For three years, FIU engaged in participatory dialogue and democratic deliberation about what students want and need from their education at FIU. The GL4GC student learning outcomes resulted from this process of engagement. There are striking parallels in the essential

processes of human capabilities approach and those used in the development and design of the FIU global learning for global citizenship initiative. The human capability approach depends on participatory dialogue and democratic deliberation to identify the doings and beings that are essential to human well-being. Evaluation is always contextual in the human capability approach. These same elements were found to be requisite in the process the FIU community used to arrive at its global learning SLOs. Participatory dialogue was a hallmark of the prolonged engagement of the university community in the development of many of the components of GL4GC. Democratic dialogue allowed for the evolution of what became quite robust global learning student learning outcomes. One could say that the very nature of GL4GC is parallel in key respects to the human capability approach.

Furthermore, the GL SLOs themselves – global awareness, global perspective, and global engagement – can be considered as functioning capabilities– personal and professional achievements (Flores-Crespo, 2004). FIU’s three global learning student learning outcomes are constitutive of Nussbaum’s (2006) core education capabilities –critical thinking, global citizenship, and imaginative understanding. Nussbaum (2006) defines critical thinking as “the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one one’s traditions, for living what, following Socrates, we may call ‘the examined life’” (p. 388). For Nussbaum, and for FIU, critical thinking is crucial for global citizenship. As stated above, FIU defines global citizenship as an attitude that results from a combination of global awareness and a global perspective, or “the willingness of individuals to apply their knowledge of interrelated issues, trends, and systems and multi-perspective analytical skills to local, international, and intercultural problem solving” (Florida International University, 2010, p.14). For Nussbaum (2006), also, young citizens can only become global citizens if “they learn how to examine themselves and think about the reasons why they are inclined to support one thing rather than another” (p. 388).

Nussbaum’s (2006) definition of global citizenship is an amalgamation of FIU’s global awareness and global perspective:

Citizens who cultivate their capacity for effective democratic citizenship need, further, an ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group, but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern. They have to understand the differences that make understanding difficult between groups and nations and the shared human needs and interests that make understanding essential, if common problems are to be solved. (p. 389)

Her third education capability, narrative imagination, is the epitome of global perspective. As Nussbaum (2006) defines it, narrative imagination is “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from one, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes that someone so placed might have” (p. 390). Because FIU’s global learning outcomes are constituted within Nussbaum’s core education capabilities, it is not at all surprising that FIU used key elements of the human capability approach to develop these outcomes. What remains to be seen is to what extent FIU can garner the will, the resources, and commitment to sustain *Global Learning for Global Citizenship* for the long-term.

Conclusions

From 2006 to 2009, FIU engaged in a broad-based process to develop and design the components of *Global Learning for Global Citizenship* (Florida International University, 2010). Part of this process resulted in the creation of three global learning student learning outcomes

(GLSLOs): global awareness, global perspective, and global awareness. In this paper the authors argued that the processes FIU used to develop these global learning SLOs included two key elements of the human capabilities approach, participatory dialogue, and democratic deliberation, and that the global learning SLOs themselves are illustrative of functioning capabilities. The human capabilities approach is a promising conceptual framework for global learning in higher education.

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