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Global Tensions and Articulations in the Twenty-First Century Politics, and the Need to Reconceptualise Citizenship Education

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Abstract

It seems, three decades into the twenty-first century, as if the interrelated trends of deglobalization, regressive nationalism, populism, and identity politics are gaining traction worldwide, thereby embodying inclinations that seem to be the opposite of those in preceding decades. Citizenship Education, both as a broad academic discipline and as a school subject, appears to be a suitable vehicle for addressing and even countering these new global trends, if and when required. The first part of this paper surveys and assesses the aforementioned global political trends that are currently unfolding. This is followed by considering whether these trends can be countered by citizenship as a broad academic discipline, and by Citizenship Education as a subject taught in schools. The historical evolution and present state of citizenship education are reconstructed and assessed. The article concludes with arguments aimed at reconceptualising Citizenship Education as a school subject capable of successfully countering current political trends, if required.

Keywords: deglobalisation; globalisation; citizenship education; racism; inequality; populism

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1. Introduction

Optimism was widespread when the twenty-first century dawned. What Fukuyama (1992) had predicted eight years earlier, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, was that the universal embrace of democracy of a Western liberal kind and of neo-liberal, free-market economics brought history to its logical conclusion. Together with the Creed of Human Rights becoming subscribed to the Moral Code of a globalised world (see Prozesky 2018), it seemed reasonable to declare that the proverbial thousand years of peace have arrived. Harari (2017) went so far as to argue that the era of Earth wars had passed. Yet cracks in this wall appeared even very early in these ensuing years. The most marked of these were events such as that of 9/11 in 2001, and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In contrast, from roughly 2015, a definite pattern of departing from this ideal or idealised world can be detected. The pattern encompasses the interrelated trends of deglobalisation, geopolitical tensions (currently visible, inter alia, in Gaza and the broader Middle East, Ukraine, Taiwan, Venezuela, and elsewhere), regression of democracy, regression of Human Rights, regressive nationalism, populism, socio-economic polarisation, and global racialisation. We subsume these interrelated trends as a collective construct referred to as "The denudation of the post-1990 consensus" (Names with greater currency such as the Washington Consensus or the Pax Americana, are eschewed as these are often used in the guise of negative value judgements, and would open a line of discussion which is not in line with the aim of this article). The thesis of this article is that a promising way

to address the emerging trends referred to above is to engage in a reconceptualisation of citizenship education in schools. The article commences with a methodological explanation followed by a discussion of the key aspects of the construct "The denudation of the post-1990 consensus". Citizenship education in its current form in school systems in the world is then discussed. Finally, outlines of a redefined citizenship education as an antidote to the denudation of the post-1990 consensus are then proffered.

2. Methodological Note

This research has been conducted with the methodological instrumentation of the field of scholarship in Comparative and International Education. Comparative and International Education, as a scholarly discipline, investigates education systems rooted in their societal contexts (see Wolhuter 2022). A fundamental theorem in this discipline is that education systems are interrelated with their societal contexts (Bray and Hajar 2024; Brown and Schweisfurth 2024). Education systems are created by societies and shaped by the contexts in which these systems are embedded (Edley et al. 2019; Alshumaimeri 2021; Bhalla et al. 2025). Therefore, the argument for a reconceptualised citizenship education in schools will be based on an analysis of present global societal trends, followed by an explanation of how these trends have rendered conventional, historically developed citizenship education obsolete or unfeasible.

3. Salient Societal Trends of the Present Decade and Their Implications for Citizenship Education

What follows is what the three authors, senior scholars with a total of 140 years of lecturing and research experience in fields at universities on all five continents, have detected in their reading in their fields of scholarship, namely education and education–societal interrelationships, with respect to societal trends in the present decade, and their implications for citizenship education, both as a scholarly discipline and as a school subject. As stated in the introduction, we subsume these trends under the construct that we refer to as the "Denudation of the Post-1990 Consensus". In the past decade, this denudation process of this consensus has been gaining traction. The major tenets of the "Denudation of the Post-1990" consensus are as follows: deglobalisation, geopolitical tension, regression of democracy, regression of Human Rights, regressive nationalism, populism, socio-economic polarisation, and global racialisation. These interrelated trends will now be discussed and clarified.

3.1. Deglobalisation

Globalisation can roughly be defined as the strengthening of worldwide social connections. While Globalisation 3.0 (that is, Globalisation which gained traction after the conclusion of the Second World War and which accelerated after 1990) was typical of the global scene after 1990, since 2015, indications of a growing deglobalisation are difficult to overlook. Each of the societal trends discussed hereafter is indicative of deglobalisation, but the following also seem to be examples thereof: BREXIT (Britain withdrawing from the European Union), the rising tariff walls, and the United States of America withdrawing from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (Azoulay 2025).

3.2. Geopolitical Tension

Recent incidents typical of geopolitical tension include those in the Middle East, Ukraine-Russia, and East Asia. Although less prominent in international media, which are primarily focused on the Global North, there are numerous locations of geopolitical tension

and civil strife in the Global South. These include, for example, Sudan, where, since civil war broke out in 2023, with more than 150,000 people having died in the conflict across the country, and about 12 million having fled their homes in what the United Nations has called the world's largest humanitarian crisis (Booty et al. 2025).

3.3. Regression of Democracy

The regression of democracy in recent times has been well documented by Lührmann and Lindberg (2019). These authors, based on hard data and strong arguments, trace the beginning of the current trend of regression of democracy back to 1993/4. They identified 75 episodes of regression in democracy around the world during the period from 1993/4 to the time of their publication, in 2017. One of their observations, important for the thesis advanced in this article, is the large percentage of instances of regression of democracy which were launched, instigated, and steered by incumbents of power (unlike previous waves of destruction of democracy in history, when the dominant trend was that of democracy being destroyed by groups from outside the government of society).

3.4. Regression of Human Rights

Despite claims that the Creed of Human Rights has become the moral code for a globalised world, closer analysis shows that the past decade has been one of an ebbing tide for Human Rights (see Human Rights Watch 2025). V-Dem (2025) has been calculating its annual Human Rights Index for each of the national jurisdictions in the world and for the world on aggregate. The Human Rights Index can range theoretically from 0 (no rights) to 1 (full rights). For the world aggregate, this index reached its low watermark of 0.34 in 1945, at the time of the conclusion of the Second World War. From the late 1940s till 1983, it hovered in the early to mid-forties band (V-Dem 2025). After 1983, it steadily increased, reaching a high watermark of 0.62 in 2011 and 2012. Since then, a downward trend has been observed. In recent years, the values have been 0.58 in 2016, 0.55 in 2017, 0.56 in 2018, 0.55 in 2019, 0.54 in 2020, 0.54 in 2021, 0.53 in 2022, 0.53 in 2023, and 0.54 in 2024 (V-Dem 2025).

3.5. Regressive Nationalism

In the scholarly discourse on nationalism, Hans Kohn (1891–1971) stands as a significant reference point. In his 1965 publication Nationalism: Its meaning and history, he defines nationalism as "... a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state" (Kohn 1965, p. 9). A voluminous literature on nationalism exists. A review of this literature is beyond the scope of this article, but for a review of this literature, from the vantage point of fields of Education scholarship, including how "nation" and "nation-state" can be understood, the interested reader is referred to the publications of Tröhler (2024) and Maričić and Gotling (forthcoming). For this article, suffice it to state that nationalism appears in an infinite variety of forms and grades. Ichijo and Uzelac's (2005) classification of "primordialism," "modernism," and "ethno-symbolism" as three types of historical stages of nationalist notions can be employed to explain the point of regressive nationalism. In the stage of primordial nationalism, nations are an intrinsic part of human nature and are defined by a complex of cultural features such as a common language, religion, customs, traditions, and history. The "modernist" notion or paradigm sees a connection between modernity and the development of nations. This process first became visible in the political dispensation that commenced with the Peace of Westphalia in Europe in 1648, and gained momentum with the Industrial Revolution. In fact, the technology of the industrial revolution (such as railways and telegraphs) made the nation-state the obvious or rational political dispensation and global order. In contrast to the static, essentialist view of nationalism espoused by the primordial nationalism paradigm, the

modernist notion views nationalism as changing, dynamic, and transformative (that is, a view of a changing society, such as the development of mass democracy).

The "ethno-symbolism" stage, for which Ichijo and Uzelac (2005) draw heavily on Smith's (1986) publication, takes issue with modernist notions of nationalism, connecting nationalism with ethnic bases and ethnic communities that predate the existence of nations. Ideas of autonomy, unity, identity, temporal and territorial claims, and the role of conflict in the formation of nations figure strongly in this stage. Variants of this regressive form of nationalism, as Zhou (2022) refers to as neo-nationalisms, include far-right nationalism, evangelical nationalism, separatist nationalism, and (third-world) religious nationalism. These forms of nationalism all represent a return to the essentialist and static notions of primordial nationalism, a yearning to preserve and exclude, in contrast to the modernist idea of change, development, and progress. With the rise of regressive nationalism, we see this third form of nationalism as making headway in the world in the past decade. This rise of regressive nationalism, in contrast to the modernist version of progressive nationalism, has been detailed in publications such as Babayev (2025) and Zhou (2022). This rise in regressive nationalism should be read in conjunction with the surge in populism (which represents regressive nationalism at the level of government or political leadership), as explained in the next sub-section.

3.6. Populism

Populism has (re)surfaced in many regions in the world in recent years (see Biti et al. 2022). It is often stated that "Populism" is easy to recognise, but difficult to encapsulate in one line or single sentence definitions. We use Harari's (2024, pp. 129–34) enumeration of the following key traits of populism as a working definition of populism:

- "Populists claim that they alone truly represent the people. From this, it follows that the populist party should have all the power.
- A fundamental part of the populist credo is the belief that "the people" is a unified body with a single will, the "will of the people".
- Anyone not agreeing with the "will of the people" either suffers from false consciousness or is not part of the people and is even the enemy of the people.
- Populists are suspicious of institutions that, in the name of objective truths, override the supposed will of the people".

Wolhuter et al. (2025) mention the following features of populism: "a predilection of populists for personality and emotional politics and for identity politics rather than politics of principle, rational, considered politics; internal inconsistencies in policy positions (and frequent change or a "flip flop" of policy positions); a propensity to divide people into us ("the people") and the "other"; and disregard for a rule of law".

3.7. Socio-Economic Polarisation

Part of the post-1990 global consensus has been the neo-liberal economic revolution. This entailed the retraction of the state's role in the economy and the granting of free rein to the forces of market freedom. While the run-up to this change had been characterised by the welfare state overextending itself and becoming unsustainable, the rationale behind neoliberalism was that the forces of the free market are more effective and efficient in securing the welfare of all people. Over the past 35 years, global economic output has increased impressively, and although the incidence of poverty has been shrinking, socio-economic inequalities have reached new heights. This has been detailed in a series of publications by Piketty (2014, 2020, 2022) and will not be repeated here. The following statistics are sufficient to substantiate this claim. The magnitude of inequality in the world is starkly depicted on a web-page as follows: "If the world were a village of 100 people, then

for example, only one would have a university degree, only 20 will have access to clean, drinkable water, and 59% of the wealth would be concentrated in six people (all living in the United States of America)" (Meadows 2020). Another measure of global inequality, referring to both regional and gender inequality, is that the 22 wealthiest men in the world have more wealth than all the women in Africa (Herman 2020, p. 328).

These extreme levels of socio-economic inequality appear to stand in contradiction to many of the proclaimed features and beliefs of the post-1990 consensus, such as a belief in human dignity and a dignified existence or level of living for all, or faith in the "invisible hand of the market" to bring justice, fairness, and equity. But even from the vantage point of the enlightened self-interest of the affluent or of those at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy, the explosive potential of this situation should raise concern. It should be pointed out, in alignment with the thesis of this article and the theme of this special issue of *Genealogy*, that, as has become evident from the statistics quoted so far, the Global North–Global South disparity must be seen as a critical feature of this new socio-economic disparity in the world. This brings the discussion to the last feature of the "Denudation of the post-1990 global consensus", namely global racialisation.

3.8. Global Racialisation

What provides the global-scale socio-economic polarisation that has just been discussed, with ever more explosive potential, is that it runs, to a large extent, coterminous with a global racialisation. Ditto for the geopolitical conflict lines and the recessive nationalism also discussed earlier as part of the "Denudation of the post-1990s". To explain the point of global racialisation, it is necessary to return to the first tenet of the "Denudation of the post-1990 consensus", namely, deglobalisation. Despite a perceivable trend of deglobalisation in the form of political rhetoric and the institution of higher tariffs, the demographic and, more so, the technological bases or driving forces of Globalisation 3.0 are difficult, if not impossible, to halt, much less reverse. The technological revolution in communication and transportation over the past thirty years has laid the groundwork for demographic mobility and the development of a globally integrated international economy. Two important vectors in global demographic mobility are the South-North and East-West flows. The South-North flow refers to a movement of people from Africa and Latin America to Europe and North America. The East-West flow refers to a movement of people from Asia to Europe and North America. What is taking place here is a flow of people from the Global South to the Global North.

At this point, the concept "Global South should be clarified. The term was first used by Charles Oglesby in 1969, as a reference to the formation of states whose exact borders are difficult to draw; but which refers broadly to Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia (excluding the high-income Asian countries or jurisdictions, such as Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan) (Oglesby 1969). The term "Global South" has gained currency in social science scholarship, including in fields such as Comparative Education (see Wolhuter 2024). While the term "Global South" certainly has a geographic expression, with its heartland demarcated by Oglesby, it can be argued that this demarcation now has to be expanded to be adapted to current contextual realities (Wolhuter 2024). Lewis et al. (2015, pp. 550–60) have argued, in the field of Comparative and International Education, that the notion of space should be reconceptualised as being described and circumscribed by relations or connections rather than only physical space. This view ties in with a trend in historiography that focuses on relations between geographic regions rather than regions as the focal point of historical writing (e.g., see Frankopan 2015). In the scholarly field of Geography, there has been a trend over the past fifty years to demarcate "regions" and to work with "regions" not as contiguous, uniform territory with fixed borders, but as

functional or nodal regions (Abler et al. 1971). In this article, we use this conceptualisation of space when demarcating the Global South. It is not only physical connections that are important, as Oxford comparativist Brock (2016) argued. The exigencies and realities of the contemporary era require that scholars of Comparative and International Studies adapt their notions of space and geography as shaping forces of education to include cyberspace as an additional attribute of education systems and of the contexts that shape them. Furthermore, acknowledgement should also be given to genealogical connections (in people's self-definition and/or in the ways their identities are constructed by others) (Wilson 1994; see also Otele 2019). Thus, while a Global South heartland can be shown on a world map, it is a rather elastic, unfixed, and non-definite term. The Global North-South divide is therefore no simple, clear-cut binary or dichotomy, but a complex one, complicated by issues of hybridity and fluidity.

This conceptualisation of space and the Global South, in particular, also aligns with the interest in diaspora studies in the social sciences more generally and in the fields of Educational research, such as Comparative and International Education, especially the diaspora of Global South people. This is evident, for example, in the existence of the African Diaspora Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). This SIG aims to cultivate a community of researchers and practitioners from Black communities all over the world. A broader analysis of the educational realities of African descendants within and outside the United States offers the opportunity to review similar and different challenges, lessons, and new possibilities (African Diaspora Special Interest Group (SIG), Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) 2022). Another indication of interest in diaspora studies is the existence of the journal Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education, which has been in existence since 2007 and is a sought-after publication forum for scholars in the field. The journal publishes four issues annually.

To complicate matters further, not only at the level of countries or communities in countries, but also at the level of individuals, an infinite range of permutations, shades, and hybrids of identities are possible in the contemporary world (see Van der Walt and Wolhuter 2021), making an exact demarcation of Global North-Global South even more difficult. The points which we wish to make, drawing all the above tenets together, are the following:

- Notwithstanding the lack of a clear demarcation and the existence of a range of shades between ideal types, the border between Global North and Global South in the contemporary world runs to a large extent coterminous with the racial divide;
- The global socio-economic socio-political polarisation likewise corresponds strongly to the Global North–Global South divide, and
- Populism and regressive nationalism (and the resultant erosion of democracy and human rights) are mobilised on the tectonic plates of this divide, as is deglobalisation, while much of the geopolitical tension also runs along the fault lines of a Global North–Global South divide with an intense racial hue.

It has been claimed that modern history (at least from a Western perspective) has been characterised by three major axes of conflict (Scholtz 1984, p. 96). The first axis of conflict was centred on religion. This conflict reached its high-water mark with the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) and came to an end, or at least subsided considerably, with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. That was followed by nationalism as a second axis of conflict in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. The third axis of conflict was racism. This axis of conflict was addressed through the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America, the gaining of independence by large parts of Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia, and the adoption of the Creed of Human

Rights. Just when it seemed that this source of conflict was resolved or well on its way to being addressed, the "Denudation of the post-1990 consensus" set in. This "Denudation of the post-1990 consensus", as explained, not only shows dangerous signs of a return of religion and nationalism as sources of conflict, but more so of racism, and this time the proliferation of racism on a global scale.

The global population and global body-politic withdrawing in racial compartments means the very challenges facing humanity at this point, and which requires a global approach, cannot be addressed in this paper, but entail the following: the ecological crisis, global warming, the nuclear threat, global terrorism, and the nascent Fifth Industrial Revolution and new world, and Artificial Intelligence—the opportunities and potential dangers of which also require, as Samuels (2025) argues, for a response by the global community in unison.

Taken together, the identified trends of deglobalisation, regressive nationalism, populism, socio-economic inequality, and global racialisation demonstrate the extent to which the post-1990 consensus has been hollowed out. This denudation not only weakens democratic institutions and the protection of human rights but also obstructs the collective capacity to confront global crises such as climate change, geopolitical conflict, and technological disruption. We are convinced that the most promising way out of this conundrum is Citizenship Education within the world's educational institutions. While it is no panacea, it is arguably the best available approach. However, such a Citizenship Education would require a significant shift from the kind currently offered in schools in many parts of the world. The remainder of the article will belabour this point. The next sections of the article will first clarify the concept of citizenship and Citizenship Education, then reconstruct and assess the kind of Citizenship Education in schools, and finally suggest guidelines for a reformed Citizenship Education that can meet the exigencies of the present global context.

4. Citizenship and Citizenship Education

As a working definition of the concept of "citizenship", we reach back to British sociologist T.H. Marshall in his book *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (1950). In this publication, which has become a central reference point in scholarly discourse on citizenship, Marshall (1950) describes citizenship as a status accorded to full members of a community. That status entails both rights and obligations. Marshall argues that, while there are variations in these rights and obligations depending on time and place, they are usually of a civil, political, and social kind. Civil rights and duties refer to individual freedoms (e.g., freedom of expression and speech) and political rights, such as the right to participate in the exercise of political power. The social aspect refers to living in society as a civilised being in accordance with prevailing standards, from the right to economic welfare and security to the right to fully share in that social heritage.

Historically, a central mission—it can even be argued that this is the central mission—of institutions of formal education has always been the shaping of citizenship. This has been argued, for example, by the anthropologist Cohen (1970) in his theory of why schools emerged first in the ancient world and why mass systems of public education first surfaced in nation-states from the beginning of the nineteenth century. That Citizenship Education has always been present as a central ingredient of school education in the formal, particularly public school systems of the world, either as a stand-alone subject and/or being imbued in the whole spectrum of school subjects and in the entire school organisation culture, has been demonstrated in many studies (for example, see Tröhler 2020; Broeks 2024; Chen 2024; Hsu/Chhi 2025; Karakus-Ozdemirci and Akar 2025).

In contrast to the entrenched tradition of solely nationally circumscribed Citizenship Education in the schools and public education systems of the world, in recent years and

decades, a strong plea for Global Citizenship Education has been made in scholarly discourse on Citizenship Education (see Schugurensky and Wolhuter 2020; Hadjeris 2025). The notion of Global Citizenship Education, as it has been developed in the scholarly community, too, comes in a myriad of varieties (see Pashby et al. 2020; Borgebund and Børhaug 2024). A detailed discussion and interrogation of these is beyond the scope of this article. However, in light of everything stated earlier in this article, it should be noted that, under the principle of citizenship education, developing a global mindset or global consciousness cannot be avoided.

5. Assessment of the Current State of Citizenship Education

In view of the arguments presented so far, the notion of Citizenship Education based exclusively on the nation and the nation-state, more so on the nation and nation-state as unquestionable absolutes, is no longer tenable. On the other hand, the principle of Global Citizenship Education, however welcome as an addition to narrow nation-circumscribed Citizenship Education, cannot be regarded as privileged by the scholarly community as a replacement and full and sole substitute for nation-circumscribed Citizenship Education. Global Citizenship, no matter how much needed, cannot fully satisfy human needs for identity and belonging (see Wolhuter et al. 2025). Human needs for identity and belonging have crystallised in the present world, with identity and citizenship being a complex, multilayered phenomenon, of which the global and the national are but two, although admittedly two very important layers (see Wolhuter et al. 2025).

6. Beacons for a Redesigned Citizenship Education

Four beacons could be provided for a redesigned Citizenship Education, appropriate for the global context, a quarter of a century into the twenty-first century. Firstly, Citizenship Education should acknowledge that identity and citizenship are complex, multilayered phenomena and cannot be restricted to national or global citizenship, or to a combination of the two. Secondly, whatever circles of citizenship are provided for, all these forms and levels of citizenship should fit into a single schema, with the Creed of Human Rights as the outer perimeter that cannot be overstepped. Thirdly, in negotiating the accommodation of the Creed of Human Rights and various levels of citizenship into a single schema, the principles of Interculturalism (that is, valuing diversity, respect for all, appealing to universal conscience, and ethical thinking) should be incorporated into a new scheme of Citizenship Education. Finally, the individual should never be totally subsumed by any number of circles of citizenship. More so in an age when creativity is valued. Therefore, the principles of Capability Theory (which create the maximum space for each human being to decide what they want to be and do) should be incorporated into the equation for a redesigned Citizenship Education as well. Such a redesigned Citizenship Education has the best chance for humanity to negotiate the new future brought by the "Denudation of the post-1990 consensus", and especially the scourge of global racial polarisation and racism.

7. Towards Implementation

The proposed beacons for a redesigned Citizenship Education provide the intellectual scaffolding for reconceptualising the subject in schools. The urgent question, however, remains how such a reconceptualised framework can be operationalised in concrete educational settings so that it responds effectively to the erosion of the post-1990 consensus. To begin with, curricula must move beyond the narrow confines of nation-centric narratives that privilege homogeneity, to instead reflect the complex, multilayered character of citizenship. As Wolhuter et al. (2025) argue, the national and global dimensions of belonging

should be approached not as mutually exclusive but as interdependent layers, with the individual learner situated at the intersection of these circles of identity and responsibility.

Furthermore, embedding the Creed of Human Rights as the outer perimeter of these circles provides an indispensable ethical anchor. Such a reconfiguration ensures that learners are not only aware of their rights but also their obligations within a pluralistic global society. Studies in intercultural education emphasise that fostering respect for diversity and cultivating intercultural competencies are essential to sustaining democratic cultures in contexts characterised by regressive nationalism and populism (Borgebund and Børhaug 2024; Karakus-Ozdemirci and Akar 2025). Therefore, Citizenship Education must instil dispositions of empathy, intercultural dialogue, and solidarity—qualities urgently needed in a time of widening socio-economic inequalities and global racialisation (Piketty 2020; Wolhuter et al. 2025).

Equally crucial is safeguarding space for individual agency by incorporating Capability Theory, which emphasises human flourishing and self-determination (Wolhuter et al. 2025). In an educational setting, this translates into pedagogical practices that empower students to envision the lives they value, while equipping them with the critical capacities to question populist simplifications and resist authoritarian impulses (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Such an approach recognises learners not as passive recipients of civic norms, but as active agents in shaping just and inclusive societies.

From a systemic perspective, teacher preparation emerges as a key lever for reform. As Schugurensky and Wolhuter (2020) note, global citizenship education cannot take root without teachers who are themselves critically engaged with interculturalism, diversity, and human rights frameworks. Teacher education programmes should therefore prioritise experiential learning, critical pedagogy, and comparative perspectives that prepare educators to guide learners through the complexities of multilayered identities in a globalising yet fragmenting world (Hadjeris 2025; Van der Walt and Wolhuter 2021).

Finally, the role of schooling as a public institution must be reaffirmed. Historically, as Cohen (1970) and Tröhler (2020) have shown, schools were designed to shape citizenship. In the current context, where populist discourses often erode trust in institutions, and such adverse discourses can even be detected in scholarly discourse and publications, schools remain one of the last robust venues for cultivating a civic ethos rooted in rational dialogue, intercultural respect, and universal human dignity. By aligning Citizenship Education with these broader societal imperatives, education systems may serve not only as sites of knowledge transmission but as crucibles for democratic resilience.

It should be mentioned that the development of a pedagogy as advocated in this article is facing its quota of formidable challenges. A substantial social media discourse, adverse to what is proposed in this article, is extant. Not only is this to be countered by a pedagogy of Citizenship Education, but even some parts of the scholarly discourse on Citizenship Education run counter to what this article suggests. The development of a pedagogy as proposed in this article will likely meet opposition from considerable vested interests in the historically developed status quo, particularly those interested in maintaining the nation-state as the main or sole precinct of social organisation. For example, the recent spate of publications demonstrating the detrimental effect that Brexit has had on the internationalisation of universities in the United Kingdom (see Papatsiba and Marginson 2025; Wakeling et al. 2025). Another challenge is that there is no jurisdiction-designed or developed curriculum or methods of learning and teaching for such a programme of Citizenship Education. Whilst the mandate for citizenship education is clear, the difficulty of educating for inclusive citizenship within contexts driven by performativity agendas should also be acknowledged. Furthermore, despite the widely held belief in education as an instrument that can intentionally be used to change society or to change individuals,

education is no panacea for all problems of society. The impact of any education programme on the lives of individuals and on society is mediated not only by the fact that education is an act involving two parties (educator and educand) with free volition, but also by the entire, complex societal context in which education takes place (see Edley et al. 2019, pp. 41–50). But these challenges should be faced and negotiated as Citizenship Education appears to be the best antidote to the ominous signs of a denudation of the post-1990 consensus, including the spectre of rising global racism.

8. Concluding Remarks

The erosion of the post-1990 consensus has exposed societies to renewed currents of exclusion, division, and instability. In this context, Citizenship Education stands out as a vital means of preparing learners not only to understand their civic rights and duties but also to engage critically with the multilayered realities of belonging in the twenty-first century. Reconceptualised in this way, it can nurture dispositions of empathy, intercultural understanding, and ethical responsibility, offering a constructive response to regressive nationalism, populism, and socio-economic polarisation.

Such an approach affirms that Citizenship Education is more than a curriculum subject; it is an essential cultural and moral project for sustaining democratic life. By cultivating learners who can think critically, act responsibly, and uphold the values of justice and human dignity, schools can become incubators of civic resilience. In this way, a redesigned Citizenship Education provides societies with their best opportunity to counter fragmentation and to work toward inclusive, democratic, and humane futures. Collaboration between educational theorists, curriculum developers and practitioners should take place to make this essential mandate a reality.

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