



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

W A S H I N G T O N , D C

Educating for Global Citizenship¹

Abdul Aziz Said

Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace

Director, Center for Global Peace

American University, Washington, DC

It is appropriate at this time to recognize the life and work of Hassan Fathy (1899 – 1989), an Egyptian architect who devoted himself to developing housing projects for the rural poor in Egypt by synthesizing traditional and modern building techniques. Fathy reminds our modern minds that, “The quality and values inherent to the traditional and human response to the environment might be preserved without a loss of the advances of science. Science can be applied to various aspects of our work, while it is at the same time subordinated to philosophy, faith and spirituality.”

The work of Fathy represents the type of fusion between tradition, technology, and development that we should seek in educating for global citizenship.

The Crisis

The modern world faces a crisis. The English poet William Blake captures the essence of crisis as our inhumanity to one another. This is true of both our individual relationship and the social structures we build. I hear his voice reminding me of this pain:

Cruelty has a Human Heart
And Jealousy a Human Face
Terror the Human Form Divine

The world has reached a point of crisis that will require an ever increasing social capacity for creative imagination and reason. We now find ourselves, as individuals, as states, and as a species, involved in a period of intense, and often bewildering change. The systems of government, production, culture, thought, and perception, to which we have become accustomed are not working. Within the growing milieu of crisis, our perception of the world grows increasingly intertwined. At the same time, our experience of the world is fragmented and disjointed, constructed by the increasingly large gaps in access to knowledge, wealth, and political representation.

¹ The paper represents a keynote address presented February 12th 2004 at the “The Principles of the Abrahamic Faiths: Traditions that Advance Education” sponsored by Creative Associates International and The Caux Round Table

Our future depends upon conceiving an all inclusive model of citizenship that reconciles these gaps in access. We need to find a way to synthesize the traditional and the modern to create new educational processes and institutions that will give them the material, intellectual, moral, and emotional skills necessary to transcend the crisis of our world.

One such source of traditional wisdom is of the Abrahamic faiths.

This is especially true in societies emerging from conflict and experiencing systemic social, political and economic change. Take the example of modern Iraq. Iraq is a 'nation of nations', home to multiple ethnic and religious groups whose experience of history has often put them in conflict.

In order to emerge with a unified understanding of citizenship in light of such a diverse and at times contentious history, the new Iraqi should embrace an inclusive model for citizenship. Such a model moves beyond the limited national constructions of identity in order to transcend the hatreds of the past. This global model of citizenship can bind Iraqis together by first looking to their shared traditions in the Abrahamic faiths and how these sources of traditional wisdom find modern articulation through the work and principles of Hassan Fathy.

The world needs a model of education that is capable of conceiving of a global model for citizenship. It must have the flexibility to discover new solutions to the world's increasingly complex and massive problems. Such a model can be reached by expanding the educational process to become more dialogical and open-ended, and less paternalistic and past-oriented. Such a shift will require transcending the ideological, cultural and spiritual caste system of education to engage in a genuine human dialogue based in the equal dignity of each individual.

In educating for global citizenship in the West and the Middle East, we must remember and honor our traditions. Specifically, we should look to the rich and vivid truths shared by the Abrahamic traditions and their conceptualization of the role of knowledge and education as a purposeful, ordered quest for meaning and beauty. These three traditions honor a God that sought to be 'known'.

The path of the Divine is thus a path of knowledge; one that promises redemption, transformation, and salvation. Because God is whole and knowable, human beings should seek to know the Divine as truth and beauty. This divine path to meaning manifests itself socially as the process of education. In line with this guiding moral and epistemological order housed within the Abrahamic traditions, institutions of education should concede that their purpose is to improve the human condition and serve the whole human community, not only understand it.

Education as an institution should acknowledge its inherent role as a catalyst for social change. More than the accumulation of knowledge, education represents a dialogic guidance mechanism of social development. In this respect, education is not just the system of preparing individuals to become 'citizens'. Rather, it is the space of integrating and creating a national, transnational and individual (essential) consciousness founded in the pursuit of meaning. As such, education shapes social

perception and thought in the construction of the boundaries of our knowledge. Whether these boundaries are elastic and open or inelastic and closed to new horizons of knowing is a function of our perception.

To manifest a dialogic character of social development, the essence of education must be the expansion of our repertoire of behavior. We don't just learn the 'right way' to do things, but teach the many paths to knowing as they reflect unique cultural, historical, and individual experiences. As the seventeenth century German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz writes, "Nothing is more important than to see the sources of invention which are, in my opinion more interesting than the inventions themselves."

Whether we choose to see the invention or the process of inventing as the more critical point of inquiry, there are many ways of knowing. We think with reason, making tight sequential connections. We think with wonder, making connections of the random kind. We think with images, making connections of the visual kind. Each of these forms of thought and their expression as knowledge is part of the larger search for meaning that encompasses human existence in the Abrahamic tradition.

In the Abrahamic faiths, the divine is whole and as such is knowable. Since the divine is knowable, each individual has a responsibility to seek to know its essence through the search for meaning. Thus, in the moral tradition of the Abrahamic faiths and their articulation of this search as a guiding order, the global citizen should access 'knowing' as a mode of perspective consciousness. Education increases the boundaries of this perspective consciousness, thus opening new horizons to the individual in their search for truth, beauty and order. Knowledge liberates us from our presumptions and illusions. This liberation is balanced in dignity.

In line with the belief in a just order guiding the Abrahamic tradition, the acquisition of knowledge should be predicated upon transforming the structural and relational basis of inequity and social polarization. Education is a public good whose effectiveness is predicated upon expanding the perceptual basis of any given society to exist simultaneously and harmoniously in a local and global context.

We should reconcile the process of observation and participation, creating educational institutions and processes that combine the roles of social participation and criticism. This is most readily achieved by liberating our creativity to interact with the magnificent diversity and vibrancy of the many ways of knowing developed by different civilizations.

The Abrahamic tradition of *the oneness of being* expresses itself in this liberation. Because the inelasticity in our traditional ways of seeing the world is precipitating a global crisis of identity, we are unable to conceive of new forms of knowledge, as social perception, and through it, inclusive models of citizenship. The Abrahamic principle of *oneness* can facilitate the conceptual framework for expressing a transnational vs. a limited national consciousness.

In the new Iraq, what is achieved by liberating the population from Saddam if we, in turn, do not free minds to conceive of a global basis for citizenship? The movement from a national consciousness to a transnational consciousness is required to shift their

understanding of citizenship from a local to a global context. To create a basis for global citizenship first entails acknowledging the capacity for social change as transformation at the individual and group level. The process of transformation enables us to take a broader view of our world to integrate reason, feeling, sensing, and intuition.

Pluralism and Coexistence

We experience an enlargement of consciousness in a fundamental sense and thus are able to exist simultaneously with multiple religious, social and national identities. The thirteenth century Islamic poet Rumi reminds us of the human experience of pluralism and coexistence as emerging from the individual:

I am neither a Moslem nor a Hindu;
I am not Christian, Zoroastrian, nor Jew;
I am neither of the West nor the East.

The global citizen lives within the context of a world cultural system. The Abrahamic concept of *unity* implies that the global citizen exists in every polity, cultural, and social network. At the same time, this global citizen balances past and present, preserving the values and accomplishments of the past with the prospects of the future.

In both its spatial (global) and temporal (nonlinear) manifestation, the coexistence that global citizenship strives for is predicated upon pluralism. Cultural diversity creates intellectual possibility. The pluralism necessary to create global citizens should reflect the natural progression of humanistic ethics. Different linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and national entities are all valuable. They flower in unique spaces and manners, whose richness is only understood in juxtaposition with the whole. To embrace differences with a critical eye and an open heart is to increase the variables underlying the mind's quantification of the heavens. The symphony of the spheres is heard when we take the time to listen to each and every voice.

In history, wherever a conscious decision was undertaken to integrate the many forms of knowing, a cultural renaissance has emerged. A dark age for the Western world was ended by a golden age for the Islamic world. In Andalusia, the coexistence of Muslim, Jew, and Christian made it the intellectual capital of the medieval world. The Abbassid capital of Baghdad in the Tenth Century comprised one of the most cosmopolitan cities ever known where Jewish, Muslim and Christian scholars searched for truth in harmony.

The process of education means learning to see the many faces of humanity, the essence unfolded in each person. The oppressor and oppressed are both people, experiencing life in all its vicissitudes. Reason and intuition are the two faces of truth. Planning and spontaneity are activities of one reality. Civilization and barbarism change into culture, propositional knowledge and anecdotal knowledge into the root of knowledge.

Harmony amid great cultural diversity is an exercise in awareness. This awareness reflects the progression of the individual's search to know the wholeness and oneness of

the Divine in the Abrahamic faiths. It comes from acknowledging basic differences in world-view among different peoples.

Acknowledgment of differences is appreciation, honoring the unique experience of each individual, citizen, believer, and civilization. This appreciation gains its wholeness through empathy. Once we are able through education to constantly shift subject and object, agent and structure in our dialogic analysis, we begin to experience the history of the other as our own, without judgment and without regret or hate. In recognizing the authentic individuality of others, we truly begin to understand our own unique contribution to the world, the part our own identity plays in the global mosaic of beliefs.

In addition to empathy, we should be conscious of the dual necessity of creativity and reason. If we do not interject reason in conjunction with creativity into the experience of knowing, we risk remembering only what has happened in our society rather than imagining what society is capable of becoming. The instability and negative social experience of years of protracted social conflict and weight of structural violence in post-conflict environments has a tendency to produce a social anxiety and expectation of perpetual violence. The individual, conditioned by their environment, experiences the world as singularly violent and hence produces all individual and social knowledge in a state of conflict.

The experience of violence becomes epistemic, reproducing ever greater monolithic claims and distancing itself from other forms of knowing in an attempt to isolate itself and the social pain upon which it is predicated. Over time, social and especially national consciousness becomes a function of the experience of pain. You are a citizen to the extent to which you can claim a shared historical experience of exclusive deprivation and violence.

To transcend this embedded cycle of experiencing and living violence will require that in constructing educational models for the global citizen we specifically acknowledge the necessity of a spiritual dimension. By spirituality, the point of reference is not the traditional sense of a set of religious principles or doctrines. Rather the emphasis is placed upon the act of imagining oneself in relation to a larger whole. Self-reflection increases our capacity for synthesis in public dialogue.

The Capacity for Individual and Social Transformation

History is understood not just as a series of relationships or social structures, but within the context of the unfolding spirit and your place within the world. In looking inward, we gather the strength required to meet the many challenges of the world, or in the words of Leibniz, we realize that, "The soul is the mirror of an indestructible universe."

This internal search reflects the just order of the Abrahamic faiths and their emphasis on the necessity of searching for meaning as a way of knowing the Divine. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, a Twelfth Century Andalusian poet and philosopher, helps us to know this sacred search for meaning from the comfort of our human heart:

My heart has become capable of every form:
it is a pasture for gazelles,
and a convent for Christian monks, a temple for idols
and the pilgrim's Ka'ba;
the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.

To forge a transnational consciousness in the Abrahamic tradition of the *oneness of being*, we are acknowledging certain normative goals. Especially in post-conflict and transforming societies, educational institutions should work in their community to raise the issues untouchable by politicians desperate to pander to elite interest groups. Education is one of the key pillars of civil society, where the discourse of social transformation is disseminated. Pragmatically, the education of the global citizen must avoid dictating the terms of good citizenship to individuals as often happens in transitional states.

In educating for global citizenship, we should be wary of the monolithic claims of any set of knowledge, whether religious, scientific, ideological or based upon individual or communal prejudices. Such selectivity in meaning is a function of the need to maintain rigid group boundaries and its exclusivity only serves to impinge upon the true nobility and nature of the mind and heart.

The Abrahamic tradition grounds the social function of knowledge as constituting a just order in the sense that the knower is transformed through the search for meaning. In the tradition of the Abrahamic faiths, because God is whole and knowable, knowledge is seen as a virtue, a quality capable of saving the soul. A never-ending process of searching for meaning brings us closer to realizing the value of our individual soul.

All bodies of knowledge are subject to interpretation. In any tradition, this interpretation can be open or closed. We should continually be wary of any monolithic interpretation of the Abrahamic faiths and for that matter, any social ideology.

Monolithic epistemological (and even ontological) systems sustain themselves by decreasing the horizons for substantive questions. They are inelastic, unable to facilitate the social process of thinking (as accessing knowledge) to imagine other forms. They become increasingly rigid, requiring structural manifestations of intellectual discipline. You can not go against the state, you cannot question the church, you cannot question capitalism or communism....the tale of the Twentieth Century is written in the violent consequences of this rigidity.

To transcend this legacy of monolithic knowledge will require engaging the natural diversity of our surroundings. This aspect of educating for global citizenship is especially important in societies emerging from social conflict and violent (whether manifest or structural) political transitions. In these societies, the social institutions and particularly the educational sector are in the process of *becoming*, reflecting the reordering of the social, political and economic infrastructure of society. This means that there always exists a moment of normative determination in constructing the institutions of education in a society undergoing radical change.

This is a distinct window of time in which elite interests are often condensed and shaped into social institutions.

Pedagogy can become a function of reaffirming social stratification or a function of (re)discovering moral and philosophical orders through a spirit of inquiry at the heart of the Abrahamic spiritual traditions and their emphasis upon sacred knowledge. This rediscovery of Abrahamic tradition can be articulated in a modern (secular) space as 'ethical humanism', as a just and ethical guidance underwriting the search for meaning.

Education as Liberation & Transformation

In educating for global citizenship, we are seeking to endow individuals with the capacity to embrace the greater good of all humanity as an ethical goal. This goal must be embedded in every social activity. The Twentieth Century poet and Kabbalah scholar, Gershom Scholem speaks to the transformation of our mortal life.

In Scholem's poem, we find the essence of our quest into the Abrahamic faiths and their ability to provide the conceptual framework in which to educate the global citizen. The goal of education is to awaken each individual, especially those in poverty, to the highest order of existence, human dignity:

You, who caused life itself to forget,
in you, immortal, life now resurrects.
Because you died in poverty and disgrace,
to the Highest order you now awake.

Creating global citizens will require conceiving of educational systems and institutions predicated upon freedom and guided by the Abrahamic traditions and their secular articulation as ethical humanism. To experience the search for truth and meaning unhindered, the global citizen requires freedom. In turn, open polities and democracies require an educated populace, one who is reflective upon their condition and believe in both development and progress.

If knowledge is built as an encounter between human beings, then its capacity for social change (freedom) is liberated as we embrace the cultural qualities of the many communities in which we coexist. Life is a path of learning where we are each constantly called upon to awaken ourselves and each other to search for freedom, truth, beauty, creativity, and above all, justice. In the end, one does not create a global citizen. Rather, we can create, restructure and develop the realm of education so that each human being can see themselves in a global context. In turn, this global context of perception and citizenship is balanced by acknowledging the dignity of each individual and the presence of truth in every language.

Living in a pluralist cultural community, we stand before a thousand revolutions. These revolts are internal to the culture as it finds its essential voice. They also exist externally as the truths in each culture and community emerge to become intertwined. Together they destroy the sources of dehumanization that inhibit human development.

In the process of this social transformation, each global citizen becomes individually aware. In the Abrahamic tradition of *oneness*, each community finds its expression in an inclusive citizenship. Each community in Iraq finds its natural expression in this inclusive, global model of citizenship.

To help the new Iraqi realize the many benefits of global citizenship will require nothing short of a renaissance grounded in the traditions of the Abrahamic faiths and their secular articulation as ethical humanism. A renaissance is a revival, a remembrance of the past to produce new artistic and intellectual forms for the future. It represents a period of expanding horizons in which a vast increase in knowledge of the world and its inhabitants leads to a new understanding of the society and the individual.

The renaissance the modern world needs today is grounded in ethical humanism and its articulation of the social value of truth and knowledge as founded in the Arabamic tradition. In Iraq, this means that the international community should strive to work with local scholars, artists and historians to embrace the lessons of Andalusia and Abbassid Baghdad. Considering the problems posed by the legacy of Saddam's repressive political regime, we should make every effort to establish a memory of coexistence. The way the new Iraqi thinks about their own identity will have a profound impact upon their ability to know and experience peace.

Global citizenship should call upon the traditions of the Abrahamic faiths articulated in a modern context as 'ethical humanism' to reclaim their local identity while living in the modern world. Once again, reflect upon the state of affairs in modern Iraq. To create an inclusive open model of citizenship will require a complete restructuring of the traditional, liberal modernization approach to developing education systems in war-torn countries.

Because of the sacred place of knowledge as the gateway to *oneness* and *wholeness* in the Abrahamic faiths, the educational system in Iraq should enable a reconciliation of tradition and modernity. There is a precedent for such a shift in the life and work of Hassan Fathy. Fathy's work used **six general principles** to preserve the context of local cultural identity as well as their articulation as art and social forms in the environment.

At the most general level, the creation of a global model of citizenship and emergent renaissance will be dependent upon the ability of local Iraqis, international policy makers and aid workers to, at the minimum, embrace these principles to conceive of new education policy in Iraq:

1. **Belief in the primacy of human values in designing social spaces:** ground all education in a guiding ethical order. This means ensuring that there is first and foremost no relative deprivation based upon class, gender, ethnicity or religion in the classroom, and opening up a public space for rediscovering the applicability of past experiences and values to the present.
2. **A universal rather than a limited approach to solving social problems:** avoiding the arrogance of ideological dogma or the educational methodologies in

the East (rote learning) and West (standardized testing) that limit open, process-oriented dialogue in the class room.

3. **Utility of technology in enabling innovative solutions:** Iraq should realize its place in the Islamic world as one of the modern and historical centers of learning. We should work with Iraqis to bring this tradition to the forefront by embracing high standards of excellence in math and science based education. At the same time, we should explore innovative ways to use technology to explore the liberal arts including literature, music, visual arts, and theatrical and traditional performance forms.
4. **The importance of community and socially oriented education techniques:** Helping the new Iraq to coexist in a 'nation of nations' as a country with a diverse ethnic, religious, and historical context means engaging the whole of society, through the educational system, in a dialogic process of searching for truth and meaning. It means acknowledging the many voices and truths of Iraq, including disenfranchised communities like the Marsh Arabs and enabling each community to exchange the best of its values and experiences.
5. **Importance of re-establishing pride and dignity through social development:** In constructing a new educational system for the Iraqi state, every effort should be made to acknowledge the importance of human dignity. This means acknowledging both the worth of every individual and their perspective in the classroom, as well as taking the time to acknowledge that poverty is more than just material deprivation. Poverty represents a condition in which your dignity has been removed, and traditional ways of knowing, like the Marsh Arabs, are viewed as antithetical to modern progress. Instead of defining society in opposition (modern vs. pre-modern), the new educational system should seek to critically engage local as well as global traditions. Within this, an emphasis should be placed upon the function of dignity in creating social cohesion. These educational activities therefore should not simply be targeted at K-12 or university level, but take on a continuing system of liberal as well as science and technical based education programs.
6. **Essential role that tradition plays in social development:** The fact is the whole world needs the whole world. Each culture needs to exchange its richness and traditions with other cultures to continually expand its horizons. Each tradition has an inherent basis of knowledge that can be drawn on to develop society.