Article

The contribution of empathy-based pedagogy in global citizenship education: Kazakhstani context

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Abstract

This article is based on a research study that implemented an empathy-based pedagogy (EBP) in three schools in Kazakhstan with the aim of understanding how secondary school students can learn about global issues and what challenges the teachers faced. It reflects on findings which provide strong evidence that walking in the shoes of other people encouraged the students to participate in critical discussion, deepen their knowledge and become emotionally engaged with global issues. It also explores some of the challenges created by conceptual confusions related to the cultural features within Kazakhstani society.

Keywords global citizenship education; empathy; pedagogy

Introduction

This article examines the contribution of an empathy-based pedagogical (EBP) approach in global citizenship education (GCE) implemented in Kazakhstani secondary schools. The fast-growing interest in GCE has brought changes, challenges and opportunities to the area of education, particularly within secondary schools. It has encouraged young people to become more engaged with global issues

and to challenge them with practical actions in their local communities. However, there is increasing concern over the implementation of Western ideas of global citizenship in the context of non-Western countries. It is seen as a reinforcement of Western values, norms and ideas in the local society (Andreotti and de Souza, 2012), which could promote the principles of neoliberal ideologies over social justice, human rights, multiculturalism and cultural identities (Tarozzi and Torres, 2016). Therefore, research within a non-Western post-Soviet country such as Kazakhstan could advance theoretical discussion around GCE.

Many of these discussions are focused on how GCE initiatives are implemented, and which pedagogical approaches should be used. Andreotti (2006) argues that a critical approach to GCE pedagogy encourages learners to reflect on the received knowledge and to explore implementation possibilities in their own way, whereas Bourn (2015: 8) highlights that an applied pedagogy needs to incorporate 'not only subject and curriculum knowledge, teaching skills, and styles of learning, but also reviewing and reflecting upon issues, including wider social and cultural factors.'

This article argues that emotions could play an important role in GCE pedagogy. It introduces a pedagogical method based on the principles of empathy – walking in the shoes of other people. This approach was based on my experience of running an educational programme in a development aid organisation in Kazakhstan. The programme raised awareness by bringing the stories of people directly impacted by global issues, and it was initially introduced to address the HIV/AIDs issue. It then expanded to include other local issues, including intercultural relationships, poverty, injustice and disabilities. Secondary school teachers were interested in the pedagogical aspect of the programme, and the idea was theoretically conceptualised as a pedagogical approach and developed into a research study.

The article introduces the Kazakhstani context, and it offers a brief explanation of the historical development and current situation within secondary school education in Kazakhstan. It helps to understand some of the issues that arose during the study. It then discusses the framework and principles of EBP drawn from the literature review on how empathy is practised in education. Finally, it discusses methodology and presents the findings that illustrate the value and relevance of empathy pedagogy towards GCE in a Kazakhstani context.

Kazakhstani context

As part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan shared the Soviet education system designed to meet the political and economic needs of the country (Kanaev and Daun, 2002). Education was centrally controlled to develop a widespread sense of Soviet identity (Kulzhanova, 2012), focusing on creating a common culture and history (Kissane, 2005). Since independence in 1991, there have been major changes in economics, politics and society. Every country within the former Soviet Union was forced to learn how to adjust to the changing globalised world with its own conditions and its own developments. With an isolated Soviet educational system, Kazakhstan faced several obstacles as a post-Soviet country (Heyneman, 2004). First, there was a recognition of the need to produce students who can compete in the global economy and ensure local economic sustainability (Roth, 2007). Government research studies showed that the learning and teaching processes produced relatively strong skills in knowledge and comprehension, but weak skills in analysis, synthesis/creation and evaluation (MoES, 2010). Students had been learning 'facts and figures rather than creative thinking and problem solving' (UNICEF, 1999: 120), which 'did not equip them with the practical skills required by the new global market economy' (Yakavets, 2014: 2).

Globalisation was another factor which greatly impacted the economic and political situation (Heyneman, 2004; Roth, 2007) and forced a rethink of the place for Kazakhstani citizens in the global market and global economy (Yakavets, 2014). This resulted in a number of educational reforms (Yakavets and Dzhadrina, 2014) intended to educate globally competitive graduates who would 'build the

economic, political and social fabric of the nation and increase Kazakhstan's influence internationally' (NIS, 2013: 3).

Kazakhstan was one of the first Central Asian countries to initiate innovative developments within its secondary school system (Shagdar, 2006). Despite state schools moving from what Fimyar (2014: 190) defined as 'Soviet' to 'Kazakh' and 'world-class' educational traditions, they still faced practical issues which needed to be addressed. A number of research studies suggested that there were growing concerns about aspects of teaching pedagogy, such as the complexities of students' learning, and the limited number of new ideas and materials (Silova, 2015; Fimyar et al., 2014). There was also the lack of global experience, untested educational methods and teacher-centred pedagogies which focused on the average student, at the expense of focusing on individual students across the whole range of abilities (Zhanabayeva and Isataeva, 2004). These and other educational problems drew attention to the generic aspects of pedagogy, such as active and interactive learning, individualised and student-centred teaching, with a stress on critical thinking and the application of knowledge (Fimyar et al., 2014).

Addressing the issues related to teacher pedagogy, this study introduced the EBP approach. It suggests active and interactive teaching methods with a focus on critical thinking and the practical implementation of knowledge. It also raises global issues where students might become an active part of the teaching process by walking a mile in the shoes of other people.

Global citizenship education and its pedagogy

Some of the challenges of how the curriculum responds to globalisation can be addressed by bringing the idea of GCE and GCE pedagogy into the debate. GCE is seen as one of the concepts that aims not only to educate global citizens for the competitive world (Khoo, 2011), but also to help promote global social justice, diversity and sustainable development, as well as developing skills and responsibilities for making the world a better place (Bourn, 2015). A number of scholars believe that global citizenship helps to address global and national issues by building appropriate values, such as tolerance, acceptance, respect and cooperation (Pashby, 2011; Parmenter, 2011), and by creating 'ethical and responsible citizens and human beings in this globalized world' (Leask, 2015: 30).

It is important to recognise that global citizenship is not just one goal, but the space to promote a plurality of perspectives. One area that could be particularly relevant to the Kazakhstani context is the role of empathy. Empathy offers pedagogical principles which not only focus on cognitive and affective approaches, but also help to step in, experience and critically interpret the different understandings of GCE within historical and cultural contexts.

The study aimed to identify how an EBP approach might be used to implement GCE principles within the Kazakhstani context.

Empathy-based pedagogical approach

There are various understandings of the concept of empathy. Batson (2009) distinguishes eight empathy phenomena, identified as cognitive and affective empathy: cognitive, facial, affective, aesthetic, psychological, projective, empathic distress and empathic concern. Cognitive empathy is seen as an ability of people to interpret, take the perspective and step into the perspective of other people, as well as an ability to put themselves in another situation (Ruby and Decety, 2004). Affective empathy refers to the capacity to feel the emotional state of another (Huang and Tettegah, 2015). However, various aspects of cognitive and affective empathy are interrelated and interact with each other throughout development (Hoffman, 1978). This means that demonstrating the emotional dimension of empathy alone in interaction with others is incomplete without the cognitive process (Hoffman, 1978). Therefore, a multidimensional type of empathy (Davis, 1994) was employed in this research, where cognitive empathy is considered as

an ability to create a cognitive understanding of 'the other's mental and emotional states', while affective empathy is 'the basis for cognitive empathic ability' (Dvash and Shamay-Tsoory, 2014: 284).

The term *empathy* became widely used in the nineteenth century in German aesthetics, and it was related to the concept of *Einfühlung*, meaning 'feeling into' (Koss, 2006: 139). Later, empathy became one of the most discussed concepts in social neuroscience (Lamm and Majdandžić, 2015), religious studies (Ross, 1982), psychological studies (Batson, 2009) and education (Hughes-Warrington, 2000). Empathy is viewed as a skill, which is vital in helping people form positive relationships and understand themselves better (Goleman, 1996). It helps students recognise and appreciate other people's ideas and values, contributing to their moral development (Thompson, 1986). Emotions are seen as instruments which play a crucial role in aligning individuals with communities (Ahmed, 2004), and they can bring many potential benefits for learners who seek to address injustice and global inequality in progressive and inspiring ways (Tallon and McGregor, 2014).

The use of emotions in education is still a debatable topic, particularly around development and GCE. Emotions could become 'an attractive option for some teachers who wish to encourage active and caring students' (Tallon and McGregor, 2014: 1409) to take action following lessons. Furthermore, the lack of understanding of certain topics and actions promoted during lessons raises concerns by building stereotypical perspectives around learning issues (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). The research suggests two methods in response to these critics: teach the subject 'through a lens of social justice, solidarity, respect and commitment' (Tallon and McGregor, 2014: 1409), and implement a critical approach in pedagogy (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008). Tallon and McGregor (2014: 1410) believe that emotional engagement can contribute to the passion and emotion of students who seek 'to overcome injustice, global inequality and debilitating stereotypes in progressive and inspiring ways', while the critical approach to GCE pedagogy (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008) helps to avoid a one-off solution and offers the teacher more than 'an easy option of closure for a topic' (Tallon and McGregor, 2014: 1409).

Framework

Empathy has been used as a learning pattern in two educational models. The cognitive role-taking empathy model proposed by Everding and Huffaker (1998) focuses on adult education, helping them to understand the views of other people by taking the different perspectives of each other (as discussed by Loreman, 2011). The thinking–feeling spiral model aims to help participants develop empathy through shared emotional experience, understand the feelings of others and take on others' perspectives (Skolnick et al., 2004). Both these models use different phenomena of empathy, and they have some commonality with the EBP approach. A different setting with three steps, which focused on empathetic engagement was developed, practised and observed in the humanitarian aid organisation for which I worked (Begbie, 2015). The three stages are presented from the underlying principles perspectives: empathetic listening, empathetic participation, empathetic behaviour.

Empathetic listening

Empathetic listening is understood as a process of gathering, proceeding and learning information in order to understand another person's perspective, which is different from the story from one's own perspective. Borek (2003) suggests three practical steps in empathetic listening: stop, look and careful listening. The first step is critical, where the empathetic listener needs to stop doing whatever they do or watching anything other than the person who is speaking. Everding and Huffaker (1998) argue that listening to oneself is also important, as it helps 'uncover one's own biases, misunderstandings, and subtle variations in conceptualisations of ideas as they differ from that of others' (discussed in Loreman, 2011: 26). Furthermore, by perceiving their own cultural baggage, participants may open different possibilities of understanding, not only of the world and society around them, but also of their place within it (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008), which leads to the formation of identity.

Empathetic participation

This stage allows students to investigate global issues from different perspectives. By projecting themselves into another's situation, they may understand what the other person feels and/or thinks. Imagination is used to help students learn what another person might think, going through the emotions, including 'feeling for' those who suffer (Stein, 1970). In psychology, where empathy can help the therapist understand the client's experience (Halpern, 2001), Stein (1970) suggests that the actively listening person who is willing to put themselves in the place of another might undergo an emotional shift; participants may thus experience a deepening of understanding and awareness.

The EBP invites participants to walk a mile in someone's shoes, and by putting themselves in another's psychological and situational frame of reference, students may imagine what a person thinks and feels, and how they might behave within the described story (Suchman et al., 1997). They may understand the attitude of society, family and friends on different global issues. Through building an emotional connection, they may come to know why others think or act as they do, and explain the situation from their perspectives (Skolnick et al., 2004).

Andreotti and de Souza (2008) suggest that walking in the others' shoes helps students to develop empathy. Participants may understand that 'different people will have different shoes and will be coming from different experiences, languages and concepts' (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008: 27) from where their own shoes come from, where their own present places are, and where they will be heading in the future. However, it is important to be aware of the dangers of this process, as empathetic participation may mislead with knowledge, if not used carefully (Barton and Levstik, 2013), and using this approach without sufficient background content and process can 'leave students floundering' (Parker et al., 2011: 552).

Based on the discussion above, the research study offers 'pedagogically mediated activities used to reflect the dynamism of real-life events, in which students participate as active agents whose actions are consequential to the outcome of the activity' (Wright-Maley, 2015: 8). Students do not simply play a role, as happens in the role-play approach; rather, they participate in the simulated situation as themselves.

Empathetic behaviour

Empathetic participation may bring positive outcomes to the learning process, by providing a deeper understanding and by encouraging students to learn more about the subject (Rao and Stupans, 2012). Some scholars suggest that participants also experience emotions when they project themselves on to another person's state (Decety and Jackson, 2004). They could feel emotions such as anger, fear, disgust and sorrow (Hirn et al., 2018), and reduce the distance between students and the people they are learning about by shifting from 'you' to 'I' statements (Blatner, 1996: 77). The last stage of the EBP is seen as the most important, as it focuses on the following outcomes: reviewing the material and the activity undertaken, to identify affective empathy; discussing the learning issue, to engage with cognitive empathy; and 'offering the option' (Loreman, 2011: 26), to identify further action which might be possible in the local or global community.

A critical discussion is therefore used for the third stage. It aims to understand how deeply the participants were engaged in the issue through cognitive and affective empathy. The idea of the 'offering the option' (Loreman, 2011: 26) perspective has a lot of similarity with social constructivism (Vygotsky and Kozulin, 1989). Vygotsky argues that the learning process happens when students interact with one another through social and/or collaborative activities, where students' backgrounds and experiences shape their learning (Schreiber and Valle, 2013). The discussion encourages participants to offer their own opinions, which may reveal multiple perspectives that can be used as resolving factors (Everding and Huffaker, 1998). Thus, the process moves from a 'telling-listening relationship between teacher and student' approach to a more complex discussion (Prawat, 1992: 357), where the students' knowledge is developing while they are actively participating in the teaching–learning process (Vygotsky and Kozulin, 1989).

Another part of reflection is personal identification, which might be built through feelings and ideas that are influenced by the place, the people and their cultural background (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Since 'empathy involves the feelings of another … aroused in ourselves, as when we see another person in pain' (Slote, 2010: 15), there are two main outcomes that might be reflected. First, students may question their own position in relation to the topic or issue learnt (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008). Second, cognitive and affective empathy might initiate an action. Walker (2013: 37) has pointed out that 'knowing others' feelings, thoughts, and behavioural reactions in the context of what was happening to them may be crucial in deciding one's course of action'.

Methodology

To obtain a rich source of data, three secondary schools were chosen for the study. Each school was seen as 'elite', providing students with the opportunity to receive an international education within Kazakhstan, and future prospects to study abroad or at any local prestigious university (Kolmakov, 2005). The first was a private school established in the 1990s independently from educational state funding. It followed the national curriculum, with some flexibility to choose different academic areas, including humanities, languages, mathematics and physics (Abenova, 2018). The second was one of the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), launched as one of the important social, political and economic initiatives in 2008. Focusing on both a national and an international curriculum (Shamshidinova et al., 2014), the primary goal was to introduce and implement modern educational programme models by monitoring research and analysis, and approbating them within the education system (NIS, 2013). The third school was an International Baccalaureate school, which had a unique curriculum related to the International Baccalaureate diploma, including the content and methodology specified by the International Baccalaureate organisation.

The field research intervention was implemented in spring 2017. Six teachers and 70 students (Grades 5–10) participated in the research. The GCE programme introduced general lesson plans built around EBP framework principles: empathetic listening, empathetic participation and empathetic behaviour. Each teacher prepared and delivered topics from the GCE programme, adapting them according to the subject they taught: history, world history, and English and Russian languages.

To investigate whether the teachers had an in-depth understanding of the various concepts of the EBP approach in GCE practice, two semi-structured interviews were used. The first interview had an expository character to discover the school's educational system, programmes and pedagogical approaches. The second interview had a more exploratory character, as it gathered consistent and in-depth information after the lessons were delivered. To understand the diversity of opinions and inner ideas on the topics from the students' perspectives (Gibson and Hua, 2016), the study used student focus group interviews, which gathered more in-depth information (Ward and Bertrand, 1991). To investigate the background and context of the main GCE and EBP concepts, document research was conducted, which helped to understand the historical roots of the specific cultural issues affecting the study. Programme, course content and textbook analysis helped generate interview questions which made each case study unique. Thematic differences exposed the nature of the EBP and its contribution to GCE through its practical implementation in a Kazakhstani context.

To analyse the key elements of EBP principles in GCE, the data went through a coding process, which helped to 'segregate, group, regroup and relink data in order to consolidate meaning and explanation' (Grbich, 2007: 21). Table 1 shows the coding scheme, using the most significant codes after the data were filtered. It included 5 categories and 13 subcategories linked to the three EBP principles. I used these categories and subcategories to code the data from three case studies that were reviewed using NVivo software for qualitative data analysis.

Table 1. Coding scheme used to analyse the collected data (Source: Author, 2021).

Themes of EBP	Categories	Subcategories
Empathetic listening	Knowledge	Stereotypes Understanding
Empathetic participation	Affective empathy	Emotions Injustice Unfairness Engagement
	Cognitive empathy	Interpretation Understand themselves Understand others
	Multidimensional empathy	Interrelation Interaction
Empathetic behaviour	Action	Take action Help

Contributions of EBP in GCE within the Kazakhstani context

In this section, I explore the teachers' and students' perspectives on the contribution of the EBP approach in GCE. The outcomes are organised according to the principles of EBP, and they include all three case studies. To present the findings, each school was identified with a number (School 1, School 2, School 3), and each teacher was given a letter (for example, Teacher A). Student focus group interviews are identified by the class grade. If there was more than one class at a particular grade, it was given a suffix (for example, 9th (i), 9th (ii)).

Empathetic listening

The key elements of empathetic listening of EBP from the teachers' and students' perspectives were:

- build a theoretical understanding of the issue
- challenge existing stereotypes.

Teachers introduced this principle in the 'warming up' part of the lesson, using short activities, stories and situations that taught the 'big picture' and raised interest in the topic. The interviews suggested that this part of the lesson helped students to learn about the global issue and face the existing stereotypes or misinformation. The students learned that:

- a person might live with HIV longer if they take treatment (9th (i), School 1)
- HIV is spread through sex, blood and from a mother to her child (7th–10th, School 2)
- students thought that it is true that if they touched the blood from a person with HIV, they might be infected (Teacher E, School 3).

This part of the EBP helped students to absorb the information and be prepared to take part in the empathetic participation experience.

Empathetic participation

Empathetic participation was the favourite part for both teachers and students. The key elements of empathetic participation in EBP were:

- involvement and engagement
- students' active part in the lesson

- development of deep knowledge and understanding
- observation of students' own place
- students putting themselves in the other person's place and understanding their feelings.

The teachers agreed that emotions play an important role in classroom teaching. One said: 'The successful lesson is when children leave the classroom with some emotions … may be joyful, may be sad, but mainly that they have something left inside of them' (Teacher E, School 3). Feedback from the schools indicated a different level of student involvement and engagement, and a deep experience of the situation and feelings of the people living within the global issues. Some views expressed included:

> During this lesson, students became active, everything was interesting for them. They started learning. (Teacher A, School 1)

> One girl said: '[After the lesson] I found the symbol of a red loop [on the internet] … I did not know that this sign meant HIV. I also found that it is a global, international issue, not only in Kazakhstan.' (Teacher C, School 2)

> It was an interesting lesson [on intercultural relationship] … it had a creative approach. We sort of walk … and feel ourselves in the places of other people for some time … (8th (i), School 3)

> I imagined that it would happen with my family … I simply put myself in the place of these people and it was very difficult … (7th–10th, School 2)

The research suggested that negative emotions encouraged students to 'think deeply' about the lesson. One of the teachers was worried that a deep negative reaction would not motivate students to learn about global issues (Teacher E, School 3). However, she was surprised by the students, who, although they 'felt sad', were very interested and engaged with the topic (8th (i), School 3). Another teacher said that emotions should be taught in schools to help students go through them and learn through them:

> Students should feel, they should know that it exists, and it is normal … There is time for joy when you can jump and laugh. There is time for feeling, to let it go through the person. (Teacher C, School 2)

Teacher D (School 2) believed that negative emotions can help some students to learn about the issues emerging within the existing situations, and the ways they can be addressed. Teacher D (School 2) said: 'It helped them understand that … it would be difficult to overcome the situation without support from others.'

The empathetic emotional experience also brought understanding of social values such as injustice and unfairness. Teacher E (School 3) shared that the students were outraged by the injustice in the coffee-growing industry, where the grower receives the least money in the whole of the supply chain. Students also reflected:

> I felt bad for the growers. They did most of the work but received pennies. (8th (i), School 3)

> I think it is unfair toward these people [who died from HIV]. I think people should have a long enough life to at least do something. (8th (ii), School 3)

By building perspective on what is going on in someone's reality 'over there', and observation of their own lives 'over here' through thoughts, actions and emotions, the empathy experience helped students question their own position in relation to the topic or issue learnt during the lesson (Andreotti and de Souza, 2008: 26). By using phrases such as 'I felt, I was lucky' (7th–10th, School 2), the students expressed an understanding that their situation is better when compared with people who are affected by global issues.

It was difficult to separate cognitive and affective empathy during the interviews. Although cognitive empathy helped the students to be involved in the active part of the lesson through imagining themselves

walking in the shoes of other people, affective empathy helped them to understand the feelings of people living with this issue. It sometimes caused confusion, which encouraged them to face the issues and find a way to embrace them. Both a teacher and a student shared their experience of emotional confusion:

> It was difficult when I took a role of an HIV-infected person. It is difficult to accept for the first time. It was such a psychological trauma for my role. (9th (ii), School 2)

> The students felt confused when … somebody from the imaginary family became infected [HIV/AIDS lesson]. However, they learnt how to accept it in the normal way. (Teacher D, School 2)

The emotional engagement with the topics in empathetic participation, including negative emotions and emotional confusion, results in a number of positive outcomes to the learning process. This principle leads to the next part of EBP, which helps students to review the learnt material and gives them an opportunity to deepen their understanding of global issues though critical discussion.

Empathetic behaviour

Empathetic behaviour was seen as the most important part of EBP. Teacher C (School 2) highlighted that the discussion created a safe space for students to make decisions, agree or disagree, express their opinions, and share their points of view with others. Some students thought that the discussion was valuable in developing their perspectives:

> I liked the discussion … the discussion brought more information, more opinions … more emotions. (9th (ii), School 2)

> During the discussion you talk about the issue, opening its positive and negative sides. You start seeing the part which you ignored before when you put on the clothing of other people. (5th–6th, School 1)

In empathetic behaviour, the students were motivated to think through the issue, and they were encouraged to understand, and to translate the received knowledge into potential action. The action was expressed as moral support, such as 'should not push them away' (7th–10th, School 2). The students also became engaged, and began to feel a responsibility to take action:

> We all are part of something big, because everything is connected, we should not think only about ourselves … We should take care of each other, think about the problems of others, find the actual way of solving them. (9th (ii), School 2)

> Yes, I think we always need to fight for justice and equal rights. It would be great if we had this organisation [Fairtrade] in Kazakhstan. We have so many old people who work in the villages, who earn very little. (8th (ii), School 3)

Finally, the personal emotional experience helped them think about personal behaviour within the same situation. When students experienced 'cultural shock', it encouraged them to talk about how to be tolerant, and to respect and accept other cultures (8th (i), School 3), and how it is important to change their own behaviour to respect the culture according to the circumstances (Teacher E, School 3).

The key elements of the empathetic behaviour principle of EBP were:

- students became an active part of the critical discussion
- students were motivated to connect 'knowledge' and 'action'
- discussion helped students to discover something new
- students thought about personal behaviour.

Challenges of empathy-based pedagogy in Kazakhstan

Although there is evidence that the EBP contributed to GCE, several challenges were encountered, particularly relating to the specific cultural features of Kazakhstani society.

Sex education was part of the HIV/AIDS topic in relation to the methods of transmission. Although state programmes acknowledge the need and encourage the development of sex education in Kazakhstan, the initiative was not actively implemented in the local schools (Kabatova, 2018). The main question of who should provide this education is still around: Should it be the parents or teachers? Many parents are still influenced by the 'former Soviet ideology, which did not even allow imagining a discussion about safe sex' (Zhusupov, 2000: n.p.). Schools were also not prepared. The tradition to keep silence on the subject had normalised in society. One student shared:

> I asked my parents how old they were when they learnt about it. They said, they were perhaps 20 or 30. Because it was not developed at the Soviet time. (8th (ii), School 3)

HIV/AIDS and diseases such as cancer were hidden, became a stigma and led to social ostracism, where fear, misunderstanding and lack of information created a negative attitude towards people affected by them (Denber et al., 2003). As a result, these diseases became taboo in Soviet and Kazakhstani societies (Mironova, 2017).

Furthermore, a lack of education in sexual literacy among secondary school students (Kabatova, 2018), and a lack of professional competency among teachers who struggled to talk about sex, impacted the way that EBP was implemented in this society. Sex education was only delivered to college students aged 15–19, and it was not part of secondary school education (Kabatova, 2018). Therefore, students aged 11–12 were too embarrassed to talk about one of the means of transmission for HIV/AIDs (Teacher B, School 1):

> They felt shy. They laughed when they heard the word 'sex'. They could not say it. They talked about three ways of how HIV could transfer … talked about two but could not say the first one. All, boys and girls, went red all the time. (Teacher C, School 2)

> 'Sexually active' – I did not want to talk about it. I read quickly but did not put any accent on it. Otherwise, they would ask me about bodily fluid. I read quickly so that they would not have enough time to think about it. (Teacher F, School 3)

Later, the teacher added:

> During the HIV lesson, nobody among the children, even I personally could not mention … you know what I mean. We all finally understood how the boy was infected, but no one could say it out loud. (Teacher F, School 3)

Cultural diversity was another aspect which created tension and affected how critical thinking was implemented within the learning environment where students are culturally constrained from raising questions. An example was given in the tradition of *Uyat Bolady* (translated as 'be ashamed').

> Our [Kazakh] mentality is *Uyat Bolady*, respect the elders. Students would not argue with their teacher. They would accept the explanation because they know the teacher is the adult in the class. While the student is the one who is young and does not have enough knowledge and therefore can be wrong. It is well developed in Kazakh-speaking classes. On the contrary, students from Russian-speaking classes are more open and do not have any limitation. They are not ashamed of anything. They can contradict the teacher, even if they are wrong. (Teacher E, School 3)

The *Uyat Bolady* is seen as 'a near-universal word-motivation for the Kazakhs' (Akynov, 2018: n.p.). It is seen as part of Kazakh family and society tradition, where children are raised with 'a moral understanding of what is right and what is wrong' (Mektepbaeyeva, 2016: n.p.). To explain the cultural features between

two different classes, the teacher brought another example of a different understanding of *vospitanie* (Russian for upbringing or nurture) by highlighting two important principles: cannot and the personal ego:

> In the Kazakh language, we have the phrase *adet guryptar* [customs or tradition relating to the way children are raised, for example, respect the eldest, as the teacher explained later], which means 'cannot'. When the elders or parents say 'cannot', it means you 'cannot' for the Kazakh mentality, which does not apply to the Russians. For example, the youngest need to be silent with respect when adults are speaking … However, I do not want to say that they do not have right *vospitanie*. Of course, they do. However, they express their thoughts bravely. Also, the personal ego is developed very well from the very young age. (Teacher E, School 3)

These cultural differences could be challenging for the teacher delivering the lesson. The teacher explained that students could become very difficult to work with, therefore discouraging them from bringing controversial topics into the classroom. As a result, the teacher chose a Kazakh-speaking class, saying:

> Honestly, I did not want to involve the Russian-speaking classes because of the topic of HIV/AIDS. The Russian-speaking students are developing too fast compared with the Kazakh-speaking classes. Therefore, it would be difficult for me to teach this lesson. (Teacher E, School 3)

These examples demonstrate the complexity that arose from the combination of the historical background, the peculiarity of cultural context (multiculturalism) and how lessons with controversial issues such as sex education were implemented in secondary schools.

Conclusion

This article aims to understand the contribution of the EBP approach in GCE by drawing on the findings of the GCE programme implemented in Kazakhstani secondary schools. Following a literature review of the origin of empathy, its role in education including GCE, examining two different empathetic models and the experience of how an empathetic approach was practised in a Kazakhstani NGO, the EBP was introduced through three main principles: empathetic listening, empathetic participation and empathetic behaviour.

The findings have showed that the empathetic listening principle contributed to building a theoretical understanding of the issues by providing the big picture, helped the students to review their knowledge and question existing stereotypes, and helped to raise their interest in the topic. Empathetic participation contributed to involvement and engagement, where the students became an active part of lessons. Students developed their knowledge about the topic by going through a deep emotional experience, which helped them to think through, observe and understand their position in relation to these global issues. Empathy creates 'emotional confusion', which challenged the students to engage in critical thinking, and helped them to see from different perspectives. As a result, students took an active part in the critical discussion. Empathetic behaviour enabled students to discover more about global issues, engaging with other students' perspectives. It also encouraged them to think about their personal behaviour, and the way that they might implement the knowledge in their lives.

This also highlights the challenges teachers faced during practical implementation of GCE topics containing controversial issues. There were two aspects to the challenge. The first related to the peculiarity of the multicultural context of Kazakhstan, and how different ethnic groups might perceive the implementation of controversial issues in the school curriculum using the critical approach of EBP. The study supports the view of Tarozzi and Torres (2016), who propose to develop new and multi-conceptual ways of constructing knowledge, rather than staying with the simple or noble ideal of global citizenship.

It particularly helps to identify new ways to develop GCE, raising specific values and ideologies in the context of each country, and their culture and interconnection within the global world (Andreotti, 2014). However, the challenge of how to recognise and accept the multiple perspectives on GCE, and how to implement critical EBP with respect to the different religious, traditional cultural practices, needs to be addressed in the future.

The second aspect is linked to former Soviet ideology remaining in secondary education after the end of the Soviet Union. It relates to the issue of how to deliver, for example, sex education using the critical context of GCE pedagogy. Although the critical aspect of EBP might reinforce the changes within existing educational systems, the teachers still struggle with controversial topics and how to deliver them in their classrooms. As a result, they avoid including these topics in their curriculum to minimise the risk of being shamed in the classroom.

Thus, the article has shown the value that an EBP approach might bring in GCE, while revealing some of the challenges of implementing a GCE programme in Kazakhstani secondary schools. Further research is required to come to a final understanding of the complexity of EBP in GCE, implemented within the multicultural and post-Soviet context. It is particularly important to understand how the critical aspects of EBP might be practised and perceived with learners from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. More research on GCE and its pedagogy might help teachers to develop additional skills and competencies to address the challenges related to delivering controversial issues.

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Declarations and conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made.

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Research ethics statement

The author declares that ethics approval for the research discussed in this article was provided by the UCL Institute of Education ethics review for doctoral students.

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