Chapter 3
Global Scholars as Ambassadors of Knowledge

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Abstract This chapter discusses the challenges that global scholars face in their interactions with peers, students and the community at their destination cultures. It argues that global scholars can become powerful agents of societal change due to their background and unique position in overseas academic communities. A number of values and attributes empowering them to assume an effective moral leadership role are presented. These include espousing the principle of world citizenship to embrace unity in diversity; acquiring a humble posture of learning to develop intercultural competencies; and becoming involved in social action to achieve universal education. The issue of personally re-examining cultural assumptions of knowledge and teaching and learning is illustrated with examples throughout the chapter.

3.1 Introduction

Global scholars have become a precious international commodity. Their value lies in their capacity to bring fresh perspectives to learning, teaching and research in their disciplines and through their professional expertise and cultural backgrounds. As ambassadors of knowledge, global scholars show peers and students that knowledge transcends frontiers and can unite people, like sports and music. With academic communities all around the world well integrated through online technologies, international events and staff travelling, the increasing flow of global scholars already constitutes a vital life-blood pumping into sites of higher learning all over the world.

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This chapter explores some of the challenges encountered by global scholars from a cultural perspective and from teaching their own discipline. It also suggests some pathways that global scholars traverse as they struggle to function within a local environment. The final section of this chapter discusses three attributes that build a moral leadership profile around them and make their positions unique. This chapter proposes that "global scholar" is a construct that goes beyond other work definitions such as international expert, visiting scholar, expatriate lecturer, overseas academic, and the like. Their transition to a new environment is more than changing oneself to "fit into" or "adapt to" a new culture. As discussed later in this chapter, it is about developing a new mindset that allows global scholars to see anyone as their own neighbour, being open and flexible enough to deal with cultural differences, and contributing to the social advancement of their new communities.

3.2 The Challenges to Global Scholars

The main challenge for a global scholar arriving in a new environment is navigating through the cultural differences that might arise between the home and the destination culture. It is obvious that the direction and magnitude of these differences will guide decision making on instructional issues and social interactions. For example, a global scholar moving from Australia to the United Kingdom will most likely be able to function within the British culture more comfortably than a person from, say, French Cameroon. This also means that scholars from regions sharing the same background, such as among South American nationalities, will find their settlement more comfortable.

Cultural adjustments are also mediated by differences (or similarities) between pedagogical systems and by the nature of the discipline itself. For example there are differences in the pedagogies deployed by American and Chinese university educators as reported by Xiuxia Feng (2008) who argues that the latter ones are more examination-oriented and less inclined to open discussions. In regard to differences in instructional practices between Australian and French university educators, Patron (2009) wrote, "Classroom practices of the French and the Australians are highly contrastive. French students rarely raise their hands to participate in class, for it is simply not part of their academic culture, whereas Australian students are encouraged to be more interactive, as it is usually part of their assessment". In addition, some disciplines such as mathematics or science are more culture-neutral than others, which makes them easier to deliver. However, teaching Australian history in the United Kingdom or Chinese literature in Finland will require more elaboration on the cultural aspects intrinsic to the subject.

These two dimensions, pedagogy and discipline, can be represented on a 2×2 matrix as shown below in Fig. 3.1. This matrix visually represents the type of challenges global scholars encounter as they work within their destination cultures. Each combination as a result of these two variables will require different strategies.

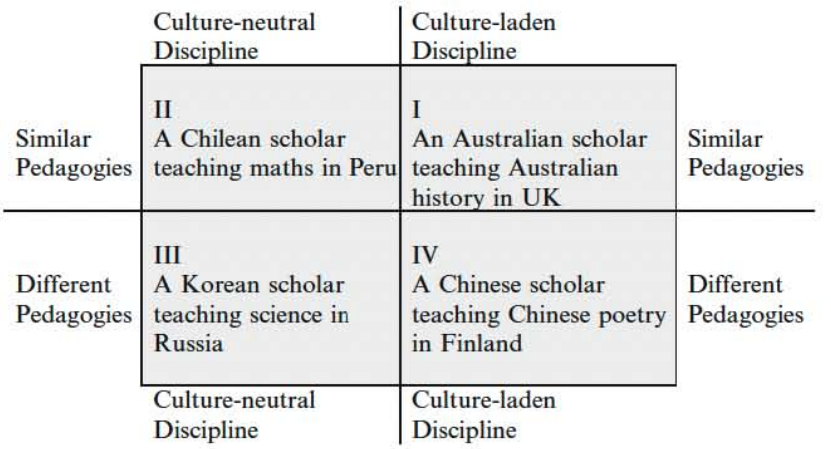

Fig. 3.1 Magnitude and direction of cultural challenges for global scholars

Generally speaking, similar pedagogical traditions correspond to similar cultures, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, or Chile and Peru. It is also probably fair to assert that there are as many pedagogical traditions as there are cultures because both are intertwined. Pedagogies differ: a hypothetical pedagogical tradition might emphasise mastery of learning perspectives, that is, skill acquisition and refinement by drill and repetition – "practice makes you perfect" – over others that value learning through discovery and intellectual discussion.

Having been trained within a single pedagogical style is a crucial challenge for any educator. Very often global scholars are unaware and uncertain of how to operate in an alien environment, thereby experiencing a painful process. Several questions might trouble the global scholar's mind and are part of moving between two cultures. Should the scholar impose his/her home-grown pedagogical views upon learners and colleagues? How much should the global scholar compromise in order to have a mutually satisfactory instructional situation? What are the instructional decision-making criteria when the global scholar faces pedagogical dilemmas?

In the above matrix, pedagogical similarity between the home and the destination culture are represented along the vertical axis. Positions above and below the middle point of the vertical axis – the centre of the matrix – indicate whether the pedagogical difference between two cultures is small or large, respectively. Small differences such as moving from Australia to the United Kingdom or from Chile to Peru are plotted on the upper quadrants I and II, with large differences on the lower quadrants III and IV. An example of the latter would be a Korean educator moving to Russia or a Chinese scholar moving to Finland.

The second dimension of the matrix refers to the cultural ingredients embedded in the discipline itself. It is obvious that teaching mathematics and Chinese poetry in a foreign environment pose different challenges. The former is more universal than the latter. Teaching Chinese poetry certainly requires more elaboration on Chinese themes. This combination becomes more complex as we combine the cultural nature of the subject matter with pedagogical similarities/differences between cultures.

The left and right sides of the matrix serve to indicate whether the discipline holds a mild or strong cultural ingredient. The left side refers to more culture-neutral disciplines such as mathematics and physics, while the right side refers to more culture-intensive subjects such as Australian history and Chinese poetry. When we combine the two dimensions of the model, pedagogy and discipline, the result is the above matrix with the quadrants representing four types of challenges.

The Australian scholar in quadrant I teaching Australian history in the United Kingdom would probably have to spend more time in class elaborating on the meanings behind an Australian historical episode, such as Ned Kelly's story or the Mabo land case. Teaching and learning implications will be minimised because both educational systems share similar pedagogies. Quadrant II is represented by the Chilean scholar teaching maths in Peru, its neighbouring country. Both cultures share the same pedagogical background while mathematics is more culture neutral than many other subjects. A global scholar in this quadrant will probably face fewer challenges than others. Quadrant III is represented by a Korean educator teaching physics in Russia. As both cultures are different, the scholar would focus more on teaching methodologies while less emphasis would be placed on content. Finally, in quadrant IV, the Chinese scholar teaching Chinese poetry in Finland will have to be very careful both about delivering the cultural meanings embedded in Chinese literature as well as keeping an eye on local teaching methods. This global scholar will probably face the greatest challenges.

The above is of course a simplification of reality as with any model. It is, however, useful in explaining the complexity of the so-called "cultural shock" experienced by scholars operating outside their own culture and providing specific cross-cultural competencies (Deardoff 2009). There are many others variables involved. Regardless of the surrounding culture, there are educational establishments or supervisors who advocate alternative approaches to teaching and learning. Also, teaching and professional infrastructure will intertwine with cultural challenges (Auriol 2007). Proficiency in the language of the destination setting is another important variable for obvious communication reasons (Borjas 2000). Add research methodologies, classroom management assessment and curriculum design and a more complex panorama is revealed.

I have been lucky enough to somehow go through the four quadrants myself. Based on my observations I believe a global scholar moves through various stages of development. At the first level, global scholars use their native knowledge as a measure to judge local pedagogies. There is no other frame of reference that provides alternative views due to the lack of local knowledge. This is a survival approach. At the second stage, the global scholar develops a trial-and-error method for adopting pedagogical elements of the local system. This "testing the waters" strategy continues as the global scholar grows in professional confidence and cross-cultural competencies. However, their instructional behaviour still remains guided by home standards because what they are actually doing is appraising the pedagogical worth of the new system in relation to their own. Many will stay at this stage and try to impose their own pedagogies by being unwilling to evolve. I would call this a colonial approach to education.

Those who move forward to the next stage will enter the "exchange rate" approach, where the educator becomes more skilful in trading assumptions and practices between the home and the local pedagogies. It is like the approach of a tourist shopping in an overseas country where they compare sale prices to their own currency. This goes on for a while until, tired of the mental mathematics involved, they begin thinking in terms of the foreign currency only.

That was also my experience. When I was operating in Peru I was a Peruvian scholar. When I decided to move to Australia I knew that I would have to pose as an Australian educator and that saved me from looking further into a more coherent strategy. Then I moved to China and had to pretend I was an Asian educator, because I had to work within their culture. When I was working in Africa, India and the South Pacific I also tried to act as a local educator, but somehow this was not as successful as my previous experiences because, apart from developing a split personality syndrome, this was a fragmentary approach – I was missing the concept of being a global educator. I therefore began questioning the very convenient strategy of fitting my teaching personality to any local context. I embraced the concept of global scholarship because, while acknowledging cultural differences, I understood that there is a core of professional attributes across cultures, nationalities and religions to abide by. This is the stage when I detached myself from my own background and became a universal teacher, an educator for all people and certainly a truly global scholar. That is when a global philosophy of education guided me rather than the local context or my home knowledge. That is the stage when, like an airplane, you feel you can fly and land everywhere with ease.

I propose three moral leadership attributes for becoming a global educator consisting of: (1) espousing the principle of world citizenship to embrace unity in diversity; (2) acquiring a humble posture of learning to develop intercultural competencies; and (3) becoming involved in social action to achieve universal education.

3.3 World Citizenship

The growing process of globalization taking place has made the principle of the unity of humanity an assertion that very few people will deny. The world certainly is becoming a village, uniting peoples from different nationalities. Most people will agree that the advent of new telecommunication technologies such as the internet and the satellite has led to greater understanding of each another and awareness that there is effectively just one big country. Geographical borders and frontiers are becoming meaningless as economic and political barriers are collapsing in a world that for millennia has been divided by imaginary national, religious and social prejudices.

Yuri Usachev, the most experienced Russian cosmonaut, said it plainly: "When you look down to earth from the station you don't see frontiers: there are no political boundaries, just one shared planet. All of us united on one small planet in the vast darkness of space" (Pinsent 2004).

This awareness has grown in parallel to worldwide integrationist processes set in motion particularly in the last century. They include pro-environmental, human rights and world peace movements, the formation of the League of Nations, and the establishment of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, as well as many international institutions based on international cooperation. Names that easily come to mind are: the United Nations Organization and its global agencies, the establishment of the European Community, the Organization of American States, the Pacific Islands Forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and the African Union. In the field of knowledge, cooperation has been brought about by transnational scientific and cultural institutions such as UNESCO and its agencies, and the growing network of universities for research purposes as well as the dramatic rise in the international mobility of global scholars.

The unity of humankind is not a utopia any longer. It is rather a reality manifest to many people, which is changing the way communities see each other. To live and function efficiently within this new state of things, a new mindset is necessary where we all consider ourselves as citizens of the world. Global scholars will therefore consider their destination country as their own country because in the final analysis we are part of one family. Baha'u'llah's (1817–1892) words more than 100 years ago are very relevant: "Let not man glory in this that he loveth his country, let him rather glory in this that he loveth his kind" (cited in Esslemont 1980).

Such a perspective empowers scholars, particularly global scholars, and gives them the tools to free themselves from blind alliance to their own culture. This implies that some aspects of his/her beliefs systems need to be re-examined. By moving to a new cultural environment, the global scholar is called to recognise, furthermore to appreciate, the rich diversity of the human race and therefore to become a contributing community member. The global scholar becomes a builder of bridges of understanding among geographically distant communities. It is the personal transformation from "Other" to "Brother" or "Sister" which marks the difference from the work of the mere educational expert.

By becoming citizens of the world global scholars will be able to rise above traditional prejudices and misleading stereotypes, cleansing their personal discourses from false clichés such as "third world" or "first world", or diminishing dichotomies such as "developing" versus "developed" countries, "primitive" versus "advanced" societies, and so on.

3.4 Developing a Humble Posture of Learning

To reach the state when the destination culture becomes their own, global scholars must refine their attitude to learning and become culturally competent. The following are thoughts, examples and suggestions to confront productively our assumptions about knowledge and teaching and learning when these appear to interfere with those of the local culture.

Pedagogical knowledge is relative not absolute. It is socially constructed and situated. What works in India may not work in Canada, and vice versa. In dealing with such dissonances global scholars must learn to suspend judgement, detach themselves from learned conceptions and make an effort to examine issues from the other side. In their own intellectual exploration of knowledge as well as with their interactions with their new community of interest, global scholars must be able to identify the cultural ingredients in any problematic situation. The capability to embrace forms of knowledge developed by other cultures becomes crucial in their role.

Cultural interferences are part of the learning and teaching agenda and exist everywhere. I remember how my concerns about high absenteeism among my Indigenous school students in the South American Andes were clarified when, as I newcomer, I realised that parents had to take them out of school to work on their farms during the harvest season. I also found that successful mathematics teachers were those breaking the official rule of teaching only in Spanish because they switched to Aymara – the native language – in the privacy of their classrooms to ensure concepts were better understood. For these students, the term "three-cornered" stood for a triangle, while a "wooden box" had become a cuboid, and yet they were all learning mathematics. I remember them trying to do mathematical operations with examples of elephants and airplanes, things totally alien to them. These students had to walk hours to get to their school while following an urban-centred curriculum with strong European influences and in the foreign "official" language. Working within an indigenous culture taught me as much about education as all my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

Conceptions of learning and teaching vary from country to country. For instance, I will always remember my students in South East Asia telling me at the beginning that the real-life research project I gave them did not seem like real mathematics because they did not see any formulas or formal definitions. It was just that they had never been exposed to that type of learning, but later they loved it. Although I worked hard on getting them to participate orally in class, many of them were not used to ideas being thrown open by the teacher for whole-class discussion but rather to more structured learning formats. I also got a parent complaint because I was not giving them enough homework despite my giving the students plenty of work for their evenings!

Culture also makes a difference to the relationship between teachers and students. I should acknowledge that calling my Australian lecturers by their first name was a test that somehow I managed to overcome when, once a lecturer myself, I was to correspondingly receive the same candid treatment. I found them more outspoken than my previous Asian and Latin American students and more ready to argue and defend their cases. I later learned that had something to do with their Irish background!

Because I publish my research work in both English and Spanish, I have always been amazed as to how much I needed to change my writing to suit each of these two audiences. Recently, I translated one of my books from Spanish to English and due to the concise style of English writing the book reduced to two thirds of the original.

What I thought of as being a relatively easy translation job, virtually ended up being a re-writing of the book because gradually I found that Spanish and English audiences have different readership styles. It seems to me that Spanish has more room for metaphors and analogies and gives the writer more space for more figurative expressions using nouns, while in English you do the same by using verbs more strategically and concisely.

One of the greatest satisfactions of my teaching career has been teaching here in Sydney schools and universities with an amazing cultural diversity, as compared to my work in South American and Asia where my classes were more culturally homogenous. It is here that I was exposed to literature and seminars on cross-cultural understanding in the classroom and later called to prepare training resources on the issue. My point is that professional development of global scholars is vital to their success because their international mobility is a booming phenomenon and we cannot assume that these capabilities are held by all.

In all the above situations I could always recognise cultural elements that were different from my home beliefs. However, it was especially gratifying to learn from sound research about being careful in judging different societies. The case of the "Asian learner paradox" described next is an example of being careful about cultural stereotypes.

The 1996 International Study of Science and Mathematics Education revealed, to the surprise of many, that American students scored well below their peers in the so-called Confucian-heritage societies (CHS) which included China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea (Robitaille and Garden 1989). Ironically, for many decades CHS educational systems had been belittled in the literature because of doing what most Western research was advocating against. Yet the aforementioned study found that East Asian students were performing much better than their American counterparts. Researchers had called this phenomenon "the paradox of the East Asian learner" (Mok 2006). The news provoked a national outcry and became the focus of intense public and academic debate. CHS educational systems had long been portrayed as relying on large classes, an apparent vertical communication between teachers and students, rote-learning oriented and so on. However, when more focused research was conducted it was found that rich problem solving and questioning were indeed embedded in those large classes. Also, the assumed authoritarian relationship in class turned out to be a sign of loving respect for elders which enhanced communication. Furthermore, the new body of research found that the so-called rote learning when oriented towards meaningful repetition was actually an instrument for effective learning (Biggs 1994). Needless to say, American educationalists re-evaluated their views on teaching and learning based on these findings, kept away from old cultural stereotypes, and performance consequently began to improve among students based on the new policies. As Hamlet said: "There is nothing either good nor bad but thinking makes it so."

Positions on the nature of knowledge might also constitute potential areas for cultural misunderstanding. Notable among these perspectives is the issue of secularism in society. Many societies rely heavily on religion as a valid system of knowledge.

Science and religion are seen as complementary rather competing systems. In fact, my own observation from working with scholars in Latin America, South East Asia, Africa and India is that being a scientist is not the same as being an atheist. In these places, where I ran classroom management seminars, I was impressed with the amount of time educators wanted to spend on the issue of moral education particularly from a religious perspective. For them, rather than a dichotomy, science and religion were the basis for their conceptions of what ideal education should be. In particular, there was a consensus among the participants that the process of managing students' behaviour cannot be separated from fostering the development of spiritual qualities – sometimes called virtues – such as justice, respect, responsibility, friendliness, trustworthiness, patience, and the like. In those societies, spiritual education based on religious concepts was the norm.

I mention this issue because by becoming a global educator you are not obliged to alter your view of religion or religion in education. Neither are you on an overseas post to change people's beliefs on those topics. It is about respecting other cultures in having their own stance on the nature of knowledge and the human being. It seems to me that in many academic circles the dialogue between religion and science has got stuck on the dilemma between "Darwinism" and "Evolutionism". In many societies this dialogue goes further than that. It is about the spiritual education of the child through the fostering of qualities and virtues. Some countries have made it explicit that religious education is an official educational aim. For example, the first two of the five major purposes of the Sudanese system of education are literally: (1) The consolidation of the religious doctrine, and (2) the establishment of an independent society, and the trust in God and in self-reliance (UNESCO 2000).

Furthermore, conceptions about knowledge and the human being influence teaching and learning in many other aspects. There are societies where intellectual differences may be taken more personally than in other societies where these differences are interpreted only through rational argument. This is important in terms of providing feedback because some students and global scholars might culturally react differently. I know of an overseas student who thought that a blatant tutor's feedback was disrespectful. It was not. It is just that in some particular cultures either positive or negative feedback on academic performance might be a matter of losing face. This student might have come from a culture where competencies are seen within a relationship framework rather than in isolation.

Interestingly, our most popular educational psychology theories come from the Western tradition that has a strong secular view of the human being. Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning compared human beings to dogs in order to explain stimuli-response processes. Skinner within the behaviourist school used the metaphor of a machine to explain learning behaviours that he considered to be easy to manipulate. Piaget, probably influenced by his training as a biologist, compared human beings to a plant and its digestive system. Information-processing psychologists compared people to a computer and its parts, while cognitive psychologists explained learning as the interaction of chemical and physical neural reactions. In all these paradigms, there is a materialistic assumption of the human being which has influenced research

methodologies and the design of curricula (Handal 2007). Supporters of religious education argue that messengers of God such as Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad proved that these personages, contrary to human logic and lacking scientific training, were able to create new civilizations without the need to reproduce or accommodate an existing system. In arriving in those societies, the global scholar must be aware of such belief systems and work with them rather than belittle them. A humble, that is, an open and flexible, posture of learning is therefore essential.

3.5 Involvement in Social Action

One way to achieve universal education, that is, education for all, is through social action. Global scholars can help, both as observers and participants, in their destination countries to achieve universal education goals such as balance in gender participation in higher education courses and university access to social and economically disadvantaged groups. Inclusion of minorities is also a fundamental human right. There is no secret that nowadays ethnic cleansing or religious-motivated discrimination occurs in the world, such as the Iranian government ban of students of the Bahá'í Faith from pursuing university studies (Ghanea 2002).

I am of the opinion that global scholars, like any other academic, should resist the temptation of Ivory Tower isolation while overseas and immerse themselves in the local society. Many will agree that education is an important factor leading to social and human development – the very purpose of what knowledge is about. No matter how abstract a discipline might be, it is still necessary to keep in focus the intrinsic relationship between social reality and human inquiry, particularly in the cultural context. Pursuing scholarly knowledge should be seen both as a cooperative enterprise as well as our own intellectual endeavour. This might mean getting involved with the broader community in acts of service, using action research methods, participating in local professional associations, and so on.

As part of their obligation to be promoters of universal education, global scholars should commit themselves to raising and empowering local human resources within their communities of interest. Caution is needed in two aspects. Firstly, endeavours in the field of social and economic development must take place in non-patronising terms: both the global scholar and the community of interest are to work together as equal partners forming a commonly owned vision. Secondly, it should be noted that in many societies a scholar does not necessarily mean holding a formal academic qualification. This is an interesting view because it makes the concepts of scholar and scholarship more egalitarian. It makes a lot of sense because the pursuit of knowledge is a natural human attribute that begins at birth and makes itself manifest in different degrees throughout our life regardless of someone's career. Interestingly, the Latin root of the word university implies universalism.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter proposes a model to understand how pedagogies, culture and subject matter interact with one another. As a result, four combinations of challenges are identified and their implications discussed. In order to traverse through these challenges and become sound global educators, it is essential that scholars courageously confront their own culturally-held beliefs about knowledge and education.

Above all, these potentially conflicting assumptions about teaching and learning or knowledge itself are to be taken as opportunities for learning, unlearning and relearning. This process involves *learning* new perspectives but also *relearning* the way we have been approaching some issues. In both cases we need to re-examine what we know and *unlearn* concepts to relearn them again from a different cultural perspective. This is a harder and more painful process because, either rationally or irrationally, we build our personal belief system on assumptions that often are based on one-culture stances. *Unlearn* also implies having the disposition to accept that we must discard some of those beliefs. This is no doubt an uncomfortable process, since we have to challenge our own belief system whose mere purpose is, paradoxically, to keep ourselves comfortable. This ongoing cultural and intellectual confrontation, often an unpleasant one, requires openness and courage. It has been called *reverse engineering*. For lack of a better term, I call it *adopting a humble posture of learning.*

This chapter has also proposed that becoming a global scholar is more than being a mere educational expert. By changing cultural assumptions about culture and education, the scholar has the potential to become a citizen of the world anywhere, a lifelong and flexible learner and a promoter of universal education.

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