

# From Global Citizenship to Planetary Belonging Dewey's "organic unity of life," Ikeda's "interconnectedness," and Indigenous wisdom

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## 1. Introduction

We were both very much inspired by the theme of this conference, "Restoring Learning to Daily Living: Global Citizenship and John Dewey," and immediately, we asked each other: what kind of learning, and what kind of global citizenship is this about?

We would like to propose that *Planetary Belonging*, a deep feeling of belonging to the Web of Life, should be at the core of both learning and global citizenship, in order to offer the best responses to the local and global challenges of our chaotic times.

This feeling of belonging to the Web of Life, is a major component in the teachings of Indigenous elders, of Daisaku Ikeda, and of John Dewey.

In a book published a few weeks ago, William Shatner, the *Star Trek* actor, shared how he felt when he saw the Earth from space about a year ago:

I saw a cold, dark, black emptiness. It was unlike any blackness you can see or feel on Earth. It was deep, enveloping, all-encompassing. I turned back toward the light of home. I could see the curvature of Earth, the beige of the desert, the white of the clouds and the blue of the sky. It was life. Nurturing, sustaining, life. (...) The contrast between the vicious coldness of space and the warm nurturing of Earth below filled me with overwhelming sadness (Shatner, 2022).

Let us dwell for a few seconds on this feeling of sadness...

But then later, he seems to address exactly the major themes of our presentation, that is to say learning, global citizenship, and hope, based on his experience in space:

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It can change the way we look at the planet but also other things like countries, ethnicities, religions; it can prompt an instant reevaluation of our shared harmony and a shift in focus to all the wonderful things we have in common instead of what makes us different. (...) [E]ventually, it returned a feeling of hope to my heart.

## 2. Learning

The good news is, we do not need to go up in space to acquire this wisdom. It has been here with us for tens of thousands of years, in the treasure houses of Indigenous traditions.

Take for instance the title of a book published in 2018 by Sherri Mitchell, a well-known indigenous rights activist: *Sacred Instructions; Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change*.

Or this declaration by Chief Seattle: "Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect" (Pearls of Wisdom, 2022).

Brandon Ledward, from Hawai'i, defines 'Āina-based learning as follows (Ledward, 2013, 35):

'Āina refers to the land, sea, and air—all that feeds and sustains us. (...) 'Āina-based learning is teaching and learning through 'āina so that our people, our communities, and our lands thrive. It's an old formula about what matters most and how best to get things done.

He continues, linking learning and living: "As Hawaiians we have a powerful kinship to the 'āina. (...) As such, the 'āina is as much a theater for learning as it is a repository of life" (Ledward, 2013, 38).

In addition to 'āina-based learning, another example of 'āina-based living is found in *Aloha 'Āina*. According to Lezlie Kī'aha, "**Aloha 'Āina** means to care for the land. Hawaiian communities have long used **Aloha 'Āina** activities to help deal with an array of problems (...)" (Kī'aha, 2015, 22).

We must ask ourselves, are there crucial elements that are missing, erased or silenced

in our globalized educational practices? Is there anything that we might learn from indigenous wisdom, in particular how they see their connections with 'āina, the land/the sea/the air, the biosphere, the planet, the cosmos, each other, and our inner world? What can we learn from how they learn?

### 3. Global Citizenship

Global Citizenship comes in many forms. In 2007, Lynette Shultz explained this very well by taking the example of a student who wants to become a global citizen, and taking the World Bank as a point of reference. What kind of global citizen does this student want to become?

- *I want to work for the World Bank: that's a neoliberal global citizen.*
- *To expose the exploitation and injustice caused by the World Bank: a radical global citizen.*
- *To know all the good and the bad, and offer global solutions: a transformative global citizen (Shultz, 2007).*

From these three types, Karen Pashby and her colleagues in 2020 proposed dozens of different types, adding the critical, post-critical, humanistic, neoconservative... and their interfaces (Pashby, 2020). In addition, recently Namrata Sharma has developed the concept of *value-creating* global citizenship (Sharma, 2020).

As a result of this proliferation of types, one can easily get lost in a jungle of global citizenships.

But if we go back to the original idea as it was formulated in the West after the Second World War, the intention was clear, it was to avoid the horrors caused by nationalism when it goes toxic. There is nothing wrong with loving one's country as a part of the world, but toxic nationalism teaches that one group of Homo sapiens is entitled to use massive violence against other groups of Homo sapiens. Toxic nationalism has been used, and is used today, to mobilize entire populations to kill each other in wars.

As an antidote to toxic nationalism, the concept of global citizenship is definitely a great idea.

But what about the horrors caused by our ignorance of the fact that we belong to the Web of Life? This has led us to disrespect nearly all members of the biosphere, to adopt the fiction of separation, and with it our obsession with the domination of non-human beings. This narrative has driven us to destroy the biosphere in irrational ways.

Therefore, a global awareness that is only concerned with the welfare of *Homo sapiens*, will not be sufficient from now on. We need to expand the concept of global citizenship to include all living beings and Earth systems, and this is what we call *planetary belonging*.

A Native American Elder said "Honor all with whom we share the Earth: Four-leggeds, two-leggeds, winged ones, swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock people. Walk in balance and beauty" (Pearls of Wisdom, 2022).

#### 4. Dewey's "organic unity of life" and Ikeda's "interconnectedness"

This deep feeling that we belong to the Web of Life, can be found in both Dewey and Ikeda. In *Living as Learning* (2014), a dialogue between Jim Garrison, Larry Hickman and Daisaku Ikeda, we hear about Dewey's profound awareness of our place in the Web of Life (pp. 5-6).

**Hickman said:** "Long before environmentalism existed as a movement, Dewey was already contributing to what we today would call environmental philosophy. (...) He argued that we as human beings should not be in conflict with the natural order, since we are an important part of it."

**Garrison said:** "As a young student, Dewey read a book on physiology by Huxley, *The Elements of Physiology and Hygiene*, in which he found an expression of organic, living unity that was tremendously appealing to him. (...) It was that dynamic, homeostatic sense of unity—the **organic unity of life**—that he found in Huxley."

**Ikeda:** (...) "His idea that all things are connected and interdependent, integrated with the environment, within which everything lives and develops, is closely related to Buddhist teachings."

Dewey wrote a few beautiful passages in *Art as Experience* that we would like to quote here (Dewey, 1980, 2):

"Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations." He also wrote:

"But if one sets out to *understand* the flowering of plants, [one] is committed to finding out something about the interactions of soil, air, water and sunlight that condition the growth of plants."

Turning to Ikeda, who has been championing a praxis of interconnectedness for more than seven decades, he clarified the three virtues required for global citizenship in his speech at Columbia University in 1996, the first one being: "the wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living" (Ikeda, 1996). This type of *wisdom* that enables us

to see, hear and experience the interconnectedness that links all living things, and not just *Homo sapiens*, is fundamental. And so are the other two virtues mentioned by Ikeda in the same speech, the *courage* to embrace differences and grow from them, and the *compassion* to imagine the pain of all beings who are suffering. We want to propose that these three virtues, *wisdom, courage and compassion*, as they are described in this speech, provide a solid basis for both global citizenship and planetary belonging.

Interconnectedness was also very important for Dewey, as we can read in these two passages from *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1980, 12).

The first great consideration is that life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin (...).

The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.

## 5. Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Peace: 2010 and 2030

The idea of an expansion of the concept of *global citizenship* to *planetary belonging* comes from the revisiting of a book I (Olivier) published in 2010, entitled *Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Peace: Dialogue, Transformation and Global Citizenship* (Urbain, 2010). This work was based on a textual analysis of all of Ikeda's peace proposals, most of the dialogues published in English, as well as the novels *The Human Revolution* and *The New Human Revolution*. The main purpose was to present a synthesis of the thoughts, speeches and actions of Ikeda for peace, and the outcome was a model with three components, Inner Transformation, Dialogue and Global Citizenship.

*Inner Transformation* can be defined as the capacity to enhance one's wisdom, courage and compassion to create the most value when responding to life's challenges.

*Dialogue* is about using verbal exchanges in order to bring out the best in oneself and others.

*Global citizenship* encapsulates the conviction that one belongs to the whole of humanity.

There is a constant flow of energy between these three components, but the basic movement is from self to others to humanity.

In other words, by enhancing one's wisdom, courage and compassion, we can have more engaged dialogues with a wider range of people, we can connect, network and make allies, and tackle serious issues collectively, as global citizens.

As the author of the book, many things have happened to me, and to the world, in the last twelve years. I also came to a more profound understanding of Ikeda's teachings during

that time. So I decided to rewrite it while keeping the basic structure, which seems to be even more valid today.

In this new version of *Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Peace* slated for 2030, two elements will be added to the model, one as a prerequisite for the emergence of courage, wisdom and compassion, and it is *hope*. The other one is an expansion of global citizenship, and it is *planetary belonging*.

As a result, the new model has five components: hope, inner transformation, dialogue, global citizenship, and planetary belonging. Sometimes life will knock us down so hard that there is no space for us to feel any wisdom, courage or compassion. When that happens, Ikeda has the following advice: "When there is no hope, create some." As a result, in this updated model, actions for peace start with hope, the spark of hope. The kind of hope William Shatner was able to bring out after he felt deep sadness in space.

Once the spark of *Hope* is lit, *Inner Transformation* and *Dialogue* can start, leading us to *Global Citizenship*, based on a conviction that we are all part of the same human family. But this expansion from self to others to humanity cannot end there, and must include all living beings and things, towards *Planetary Belonging*. And finally, when we are in a space of planetary belonging, this can become the source of very profound hope, and we can start the whole cycle again.

Remarkably, Dewey has mentioned this type of energetic flow in *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1980, 202-203), where he suggested that a work of art that moves us makes us feel that we belong to a larger whole, that we experience an expansion of ourselves, and that we move beyond ourselves and then back into ourselves:

We are, as it were, introduced into a world **beyond this world**, which is nevertheless the **deeper reality of the world**, in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out **beyond ourselves** to find ourselves. (...)

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of **being a whole** and of **belonging** to the larger, all-inclusive, whole **which is the universe in which we live**.

## 6. Conclusion

We have proposed today a reappraisal of the basis of learning, and of global citizenship, presenting *planetary belonging* as a way to ensure that we are empowered to go beyond global citizenship and include all living beings and the Web of Life in our learning, our living and our sense of belonging.

What kind of life can we achieve if we make this shift? We would like to give the last

word to the Native American Elder White Elk, who said:

“When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced.

Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice” (Pearls of Wisdom, 2022).

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