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**Meeting Socrates in the United Nations or How to Foster Global Citizenship through
Enhancing the Right to Education**

A New Educational Landscape! Global Citizenship in the 21st Century

Women's Federation for World Peace International



Vienna International Centre, 9 October 2015



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I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think

Socrates (469-399 B.C.)

Think of a defendant. He is accused of treason. His crime is inciting others to violate the constitution. Instead of defending against this charge, he questions the authority of the jurors to try his case, because they were chosen not by merit, that is as qualified lawyers, but by ballot, as laymen. Even though he knows that they could not handle the truth, he eventually recognizes those laymen's mandate asserted by a democratic majority vote, and their sentencing him to death. He neither does appeal the sentence nor tries to escape before his execution.

A question: has he given up all his hope and merely offered his life to these happen-stance non-professional jurors, or did he have something else in mind? Or to put it another way: is there something ultimately rational in his choice of his own life-taking?

The above was, broadly, the case 26 centuries ago with Socrates, a Greek philosopher (469-399 B.C.), known as the first criminal justice educator.

That educator was charged in Athens with heresy. Socrates' heresy was that not only did he question the official doctrine of the limited power of the city-state gods, but he also taught his students that in Athens and elsewhere, gods' power is unlimited, and that there are other gods who rule the world. That teaching earned him also a charge of "corruption" because he taught that heretic opinion to his students. On both counts, he received a capital sentence, regarded by him and his like-minded contemporaries as unjust. But instead of escaping from prison, Socrates succumbed to that unjust verdict, knowing that the jurors could not handle the truth. His self-execution took in prison where he drank the hemlock - a highly poisonous plant, as if it were wine.

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His and our contemporaries both agree that Socrates accepted the death sentence because otherwise he would have committed a wrongdoing against a democratic state – the superior good with its somewhat outdated sense of justice. By meeting his death, Socrates eventually showed a new moral standard for his state and humanity – the independence of social thought that should prompt any state to facilitate its citizens to live in harmony with modern times with new justice standards.

Socrates was a global standard-setter, ahead of his time. What he did is neither “Higher Order Thinking Skills” nor a “rocket science”. But the brightness, simplicity, power and outreach of his logic is very compelling for stimulating reformist positive social thinking and action.

“A new educational landscape! Global Citizenship in the 21st Century” conference gives me the opportunity to thank its organizers - Women's Federation for World Peace International - to bring the above point into its agenda. For its benefit, it now may be added that since almost the inception of the United Nations, it has in one way or another addressed moral education for global citizenship through the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice work. Among its stakeholders, there, of course, are UNESCO, UNICEF and numerous non-governmental organizations and academics. But there also is the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna – the custodian of some 70 global crime prevention and criminal justice standards and norms.

As the UNODC's former staff member, but now a freelance academic, I would like to introduce to this Conference one case, and ask you later a Socratic-type question which you all may answer in your mind.

This case involves Afghanistan where the Talibans killed the British aid worker. She was engaged in that country's community development, education and vocational training².

The question is: “Should Afghani children have the right to education?”

The answer that comes to our mind is obvious: Yes! The same answer would have come for any other country and child, particularly in distressful conditions.

Now, therefore, let's ask another question, prompted by the recent influx of irregular migrants into Western Europe, including Austria:

“Should children who have who come to a country as refugees have the same right to education as children born in that country?”

The answer is rather obvious and already given in the 1960 UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education (art.4, 429 UNTS 93), the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 22, 1577 UNTS 3)³, and the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (art. 30, 220 UNTS 3)⁴. These global treaties stipulate the right to education for such children⁵,

²Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/20/afghanistan-internationalaidanddevelopment>

³ “*State Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties” (emphasis added).*

⁴ “*Each child of a migrant worker shall have the basic right of access to education on the basis of equality of treatment with nationals of the State concerned. Access to public pre-school educational institutions or schools*

although the pre-1990 treaties not so completely. This means that this regulation enjoys a strong global consensus because is treaty-stipulated. Comparable to this level of consensus can only be the United Nations “soft law” standards and norms that further advance such regulations, while others which aspire to be eventually treaty-regulated may not necessarily enjoy the unanimous consensus. However, if in principle this is so specifically and globally⁶, how then about materializing that right in other similar cases? How do we follow this mind-query that reveals how obvious is the action-path without even awaiting the answer from anybody than myself? Finally, and separately, how in line with the above Socratic method we may and can educate for a fuller attainment of that right to education, so the young students - girls and boys, the future generation of decision-makers in the world, will with their inculcated attitudes, values and resolve be independent pro-social thinkers with creative skills?

In looking for the answer to this last question, such a standard-setting method is followed in the European Union and Northern America, particularly at the primary and secondary levels of education through the programme of teaching moral philosophy for youth. Various moral dilemmas are discussed there with them by the trained teachers in the class room settings, as per the Socratic method just presented, but less often as far as building the kid’s ability for problem-solving. Some such classes are usually reflective, for older kids contemplative, but both rather rarely action-oriented.

However, and again, this is not what this statement focuses on, save one pivotal issue on which the Western kids’ education is “missing the boat”. Namely, that this educationally useful method of teaching kids the elements of global moral philosophy is not a part of the assessments of their educational performance through the PISA exercise - the Programme for International Student Assessment of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Since the year 2000, this has been a recurrent intergovernmental 3-year assessment of reading, mathematics and science performance by 15-year old students from, potentially, almost 80 countries across the world. What PISA measures in the participating countries is the performance in “scientific literacy”, that is the knowledge of science and science-based technology, understood as a pre-eminence to citizenship. In the opinion of PISA framers, for these 15-year old students this constitutes the basis for reflective citizenship, including the risk assessment of lifestyle choices that may be jeopardized by new technologies⁷.

Interestingly, although since “science” emerged from “philosophy”, PISA does not measure lifestyle choices that include moral problem solving, for example by deciding between cooperation or social exclusion in schools (i.e. school bullying (real and virtual) of girls and boys, the treatment of immigrant school children, drug peddling and use that are in the order of the school day. So far PISA has been lacking an indicator or indicators of such uncivil behaviours⁸, while criminologists and educationists alarmingly report on their manifestations among children from all over the world⁹.

shall not be refused or limited by reason of the irregular situation with respect to stay or employment of either parent or by reason of the irregularity of the child's stay in the State of employment.” See also the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (993 UNTS 3). Specific to refugee concerns are in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (189 UNTS 137) and its 1967 Protocol, (arts. 4 and 22, 606 UNTS 267).

⁵ So this means that A is B.

⁶ Because if A is B and B is C, then C is A. In other words, a specific study case is pre-validated by a global regulation which next prompts to implement the standard-setting individually in other similar cases in life.

⁷ PISA 2015, Draft Science Framework, March 2013, https://www.google.at/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=ahYVVqrkEOiH8Qf7gYbACA&gws_rd=ssl#.

⁹ C. Hartjen, S. Priyadarsini, *The Global Victimization of Children: Problems and Solutions*, Springer Verlag: Berlin - Heilderberg 2012.

In conclusion, students' good performance not only involves "problem-solving" by attending to it scientifically, evaluating and designing a scientific enquiry, and interpreting data and evidence scientifically. "Problem-solving" is also a moral issue to which PISA should attend. Practical education is needed how to go about the refugee children, treatment of girls, drugs and alcohol, virtual reality, how to be a good colleague at school, be a life partner later, how to be a good father or mother, how to go about mentally sick people in the family and outside¹⁰. Education in that direction may change social attitudes. Therefore one of the next PISA surveys could also measure whether, and if so, how the Western and Eastern instructional institutions meet such civic moral education needs that improve those attitudes¹¹. Given that PISA has been measuring "Environmental Quality", this will not be such a big challenge to extend it, first, to "Environmental Justice", and, next, to other moral issues, some of which were mentioned above.

Finally, therefore, talking about the new educational landscape for global citizenship it may succeed when and if PISA and other countries deal with what Socrates meant by making a life choice. He pre-eminently highlighted the independence of social thought. It drives modernity as much as scientific taught. Both must be taught for the new educational landscape in the 21st century. "Meeting Socrates in the United Nations" - the topic of this statement – may then be successful, because we could replace in the topic's wording "in" by "at".

¹⁰ R. Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* Penguin: London 2005.

¹¹ Alternatively, such assessments may be supplemented via the recurrent International Self-Report Delinquency surveys which, however, stops short of assessing "problem-solving", and does not cover some of the most recent manifestations of delinquency (I. Marshall, Results of the second round of the International Self-Report Delinquency (ISR2) study: Importance of education and social learning for 12-15 year olds. In H. Kury, S. Redo, E. Shea, *Women and Children as Victims and Offenders: Background – Prevention – Reintegration. Suggestions for Succeeding Generations* (Springer Verlag: Berlin - Heilderberg, 2016, forthcoming).