

The Challenge of Global Citizenship in our Schools

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A substantial percentage of international schools claim through their mission statements that the school will strive to help students become global citizens. While in these turbulent times this is clearly a laudable and appropriate direction for international schools, it is a claim not to be made lightly or because it is 'de rigueur.' It is a critical commitment with powerful long-term implications.

To write the notion of global citizenship into our mission statements was the easy part. Many of our schools have been struggling for well over a decade to understand what it really means to be a global citizen, and how we actually produce such citizens from our schools. Check out the report cards in most of our schools—the same ones with “global citizen” at the heart of the school mission. It is unlikely that you will see a holistic, analytical or any other approach to describing student progress toward this all important goal. Our lack of clarity regarding what it really means to be global citizen, naturally translates into very little when it comes to assessing the same.

That the entire school community is responsible for achieving the mission is now well understood in our schools. And that the school leadership—school heads and principals—must create the culture and provide the tools is also well understood. So what do principals do to provide leadership in the process of developing global citizens?

As elusive as it may be, if it's in your mission, your school **MUST** do three things: define what it means to be a global citizen; determine how students will be taught to be global citizens, and the piece we find the most difficult, decide how to determine the type and extent of progress students are making.

Would you know a global citizen if you saw one walking down the street?

There are now dozens of sources to help us create a vision of a global citizen. Amongst those offering definitions, there is a surprising degree of unanimity on at least the starting point. A majority of those descriptions are based on three premises or principles:

1. Mankind is essentially one family.
2. Unity is essential and it will generate from diversity.
3. There is no place for prejudice of any type.

What the thinkers and researchers in global citizenship are saying is this: to teach the knowledge, skills and attitudes of global citizenship, a school would need to be committed to at least these three principles. Your school will want to consider whether its interpretation of global citizenship relies on promoting these or other similar principles; such premises will have dramatic curricular implications.

As with all curricular goals, we need to be very clear about the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that would need to be taught on the pathway to becoming a global citizen. Some combination of reliance on tradition, endless compromise, reluctance to take a stand or just lack of tenacity has produced an exceptional vagueness in this area in school and after school.

At the risk of oversimplifying, consider the following synopsis from the “think tanks” as a possibility. And note that, naturally, there is a good degree of overlap with skills and attitudes drawn from other parts of our school mission (such as reaching potential). But also take note of those which might not otherwise appear in the curriculum, were global citizenship **NOT** a promise of our missions.

Understanding and Knowledge

A global citizen is someone who understands:

- That the world is interconnected
- How the world works economically, politically, socially, spiritually, environmentally;
- That a global ethic is essential to developing and sustaining equity and justice;
- That humanity is one.

Skills

A global citizen is someone who is skilled in:

- The process of consultation;
- Team problem-solving;
- Service to others;
- The ability to challenge injustice and inequality;
- Mediation and negotiation;
- The ability to innovate;
- The ability to think and plan with complex systems as the backdrop;
- The ability to see an issue from several perspectives.

Attitudes and values:

A global citizen is someone who:

- Is empathetic,
- Acts ethically,
- Is outraged by social injustice,
- Is willing to make some sacrifice for the common good,
- Is willing to ACT to improve the world

Teaching global citizenship

Perhaps the most challenging facet of actually teaching these skills and attitudes is ensuring that teachers and leaders in the school are fully skilled themselves in what this “curriculum” entails. Global citizenship is a relatively new concept, one that emphasizes a set of skills which may be unfamiliar. Many of today’s educators have NOT been taught these skills, and are not practicing them as adults.

Critics who claim that a big part of the failure of our education system is the lack of mature thinking and understanding on the part of educators are very likely all too right here. In addressing how to teach global citizenship, the notion of a community of learners, where students and teachers alike are learners, will be most appropriate. The clear implication is that we need to teach our teachers and leaders these skills and understandings as well, by giving them higher priority in our staff development schemes

Teaching skills and attitudes such as “systems thinking” and multiple perspectives also requires a broader set of learning strategies than we see in many schools. This curricular outcome is challenging our international education community to approach teaching more strategically. Some examples of this are problem-based learning, task-based learning, service learning, and the use of simulation.

Assessing progress

Even more difficult can be the process of assessing whether students are actually progressing. Why? First, because there is still a level of discomfort in our schools with regard to assessing attitudes. Global citizenship is at least as much if not more, about attitudes and resultant behaviors than it is about content knowledge. And we continue to resist holding our students to the same high ethical and values – related standards as we do for academics (even

though our mission statements make equal claims for both).

Second, assessing for global citizenship will prove challenging because these kinds of skills, attitudes and understandings are not easily assessed through our current assessment toolkit. Every valued student learning outcome is assessable in some way; the challenge is to design tools that actually match the desired outcome, not try to make the existing tools fit. This means such things as ensuring that each of the skills and attitudes is actually assessed and not just assigned; designing contextual, real world assessment tasks at least as frequently as classroom made tests; reporting on these skills and attitudes in an equally meaningful way as is done for other areas of the curriculum.

We have set ourselves a demanding, but clearly worthwhile and essential challenge by including global citizenship in our missions. We cannot rely on the fact that we have the word 'international' in our name, that we have X number of cultures and nationalities represented in our schools, or that we hold intercultural events to meet that challenge. These are simply some of the conditions that should make it easier and should allow us, the international schools, to be leading the thinking and practice in this vital undertaking.