

GOING GLOBAL



Why is teaching for global citizenship important and how do we foster a sense of global citizenship in our classrooms?

Alex Pentz, Roseville College

“A global world puts unprecedented pressure on our personal conduct and morality. Each of us is ensnared within numerous all-encompassing spider webs, which on the one hand restrict our movements, but at the same time transmit our tiniest jiggle to faraway destinations. Our daily routines influence the lives of people and animals halfway across the world, and some personal gestures can unexpectedly set the entire world ablaze.” – Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*

Global challenges are upon us; climate change, food and water security, terrorism, nuclear warfare, inequality and poverty, the threat of large scale wars and religious conflicts, government accountability and transparency, and the rise of artificial intelligence and automation, all of which require global solutions and cooperation. Our students are going to be facing, and leading, these global challenges as they move through life. With the transition to an interdependent world, conceptualisations of citizenship are shifting to become more global, and it is important that educators realign their focus to prepare students to engage and thrive in this new world, not just as active and informed citizens, but global ones too.

Global issues are examined in Geography classrooms every day, which places our subject at the centre of preparing students to be effective global citizens.

Global citizenship is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as “a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity which emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global” (UNESCO, 2015, p.14). Geography is a subject that is built on looking at issues at a variety of scales, and on building student capacity to understand and positively shape the world around them, and is therefore a natural fit, if not the predominant subject, for building global citizenship capacities in students.

Given that adolescence is the most significant time for civic socialization and identity formation, (Davies, 2005), and that schools are the largest influence on a student’s development as a citizen apart from their families, it is crucial that preparing students as global citizens is a priority (Print, Ørnstrøm & Nielsen, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald & Schulz, 2001).

CITIZENSHIP: GOING GLOBAL

Oxfam (2008, p.5) provides an insightful list of the key characteristics of a global citizen, defined as someone who:

- is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen
- respects and values diversity
- has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially, culturally, technologically and environmentally
- is outraged by social injustice
- participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from the local to the global
- is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place
- takes responsibility for their actions.”

Effectively preparing students as global citizens goes beyond merely teaching them about the world. Students need to be equipped to act on global issues in

tangible and meaningful ways and have the skills to see problems from a multitude of perspectives and ultimately understand the viewpoints of those that are different from theirs. Most importantly, students need to build an identity and sense of belonging that centers on them being part of a ‘global whole’, with the comprehension that their actions are part of a wider international community that they have a responsibility toward.

The charity group Oxfam, who has developed extensive resources on global citizenship, also provides a helpful framework of the knowledge, skills and values that students need to develop in order to become global citizens who can successfully navigate and solve international issues. The NSW Geography Syllabus 7–12 naturally covers all of the key areas of knowledge which students need to develop, however, the way this content is taught is the key to developing the core skills and attitudes that enable students to think and act globally as responsible citizens.

Figure 1 – Oxfam’s Framework on Global Citizenship (2008)

Knowledge & Understanding	Skills	Values and attitudes
Social Justice and equity	Critical & creative thinking	Sense of identity and self-esteem
Identity and diversity	Empathy	Commitment to social justice & equity
Globalisation & Interdependence	Self-awareness & reflection	Respect for people & human rights
Sustainable development	Communication	Value diversity
Peace & conflict	Cooperation & conflict resolution	Concern for the environment & commitment to sustainable development
Human rights	Ability to manage complexity & uncertainty	Commitment to participation & inclusion
Power & governance	Informed & reflective action	Belief that people can bring about change

Four ways to foster global citizenship

Global research points to four key ways in which teachers can effectively foster a sense of global citizenship in their students.

1. Responding to global events

Incorporating current affairs and issues into the curriculum and classroom is an excellent way to foster global citizenship and build students’ awareness of international events and issues. Talking about unfolding events, or the news, can be challenging as a teacher, especially if the issues are complex to understand or rapidly changing, however, modelling to students how to become informed on various global affairs, and to grapple with uncertainty, is just as important.

Myers’ (2006) research on the practice of social science teachers in the U.S. found that teachers who were able to bring current events as they were happening at local, national and global scales into the classroom increased students’ interest in understanding social, political and

environmental issues and enabled them to see possible ways in which to contribute to solving them.

Bringing in current affairs also enabled teachers to model the skill of finding accurate information from multiple perspectives on these events to students, and thereby increased students’ ability to navigate and understand complex global issues independently through interpreting the news, media and other resources (Livingstone & Markham, 2008; Myers, 2006).

An engagement with news and media through exposure to it, and subsequent discussion of it, has been shown to a key indicator in students’ civic engagement in the present and in the future (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005).

Implementing current events into the classroom can be as simple as adding a 5 minute news spot at the start of the lesson, or teaching content through current affairs as much as possible.

2. Providing opportunities for students to express their views and hear the viewpoints of others

Secondly, teachers need to incorporate multiple perspectives, not just mainstream or nationalistic ones, in order to foster a greater intercultural understanding that is a key part of being a global citizen (MacDonald, 2007). Many of these perspectives or topics, upon which there are a multitude of viewpoints, may be controversial, complex or sensitive in nature. Research has shown that teachers who effectively foster global citizenship competencies in their students are able to navigate and facilitate discussions and debates with students around global news, events, issues and conflicts, whilst modelling to them the skills of listening, reasoning and seeing things from multiple perspectives (Davis, Harber & Yamashita, 2004; Mutz 2002; Mutz & Martin, 2001; MacDonald, 2007; Myers, 2006).

Enabling students to consider other perspectives cultivates empathy and critical thinking, and can also importantly foster communication skills. Students not only need to be able to see the variety of viewpoints on different issues that they learn about in the classroom, but also need to practice communicating their own ideas, and communicating with others to reach possible solutions. An effective way to bring in multiple perspectives on geographic issues is through visible thinking routines such as 'Step Inside' or 'Circle of Viewpoints' where students research and adopt a particular stakeholder's perspective and represent this view in role plays or discussions around the issue that seek to find a solution to the problem presented. Additionally, when holding discussions and debates making student provide evidence and data to support their viewpoints in debates, is a simple but important way to help develop their reasoning and enables them to debate the 'ideas' and not simply just each other's opinions. This can be done by allowing students ample time to research and prepare a fact file before holding a discussion, or through the use of tools such as 'opinionnaires' or 'Chalk Talk'.

3. Tackling the 'tricky' issues

A large part of preparing students for global citizenship is helping students to grapple with complex, controversial and often confronting issues. Research shows that this is typically the area which social science teachers find most uncomfortable and difficult to handle within the classroom (Pew Research Centre, 2003). Many are concerned about backlash, things getting out of heated, or of being labelled as being 'politically incorrect'. However, if handled in the correct manner, incorporating 'tricky' issues into the geography curriculum can have immense benefits for students,

particularly in building critical and deep-thinking skills. For many students the geography classroom is the only space where they may be exposed to current affairs, challenging ideas or encouraged to think about and grapple with issues outside of their local vicinity. Our classrooms should therefore be places where students are guided through the process of dealing with controversial topics in a considerate, well-reasoned and thoughtful manner – it might just be the only time students are taught how to navigate complex current issues, uncertainty over the future and conduct themselves in respectful debate.

Teachers have the opportunity to model to students to tackle challenging concepts and ideas, and how to investigate delicate topics in a mature manner by bringing such topics into the classroom. Tricky topics can be presented in a balanced and objective way by getting students to focus on the evidence and facts that exist on both sides of a topic, rather than just focusing on the emotions or opinions present through thinking routines such as 'Tug for Truth'. Additionally, for particularly sensitive topics presenting and engaging with different perspectives through carefully selected videos, media articles and opinion pieces rather than student debate or independent research can allow many different viewpoints, and potentially confronting material, to be included in a measured way that is appropriate for where students are at. When teaching on these topics it is often important to communicate to students that they are not being asked to 'pick a side' or necessarily form their own opinion on the matter, but that the objective is to simply develop in their understanding of the impacts, ramifications, causes and multiple perspectives associated with the topic.

4. Providing opportunities for students to act on global issues

Finally, teachers need to encourage students to act on their learning and give them the opportunity to do so within the classroom, and outside of it. This can be done in a multitude of ways through encouraging students to participate in decision-making and problem-solving processes through projects, simulations and activities in the classroom which has been found to be beneficial in building students' capacity and confidence in navigating their role as global citizens and understanding the political systems and processes (MacDonald, 2007; Peterson & Warwick, 2015). Some examples include hosting model UN sessions or running mock parliamentary sessions based on international affairs, but to can be as simple as helping students to see the link between their own personal actions, and issues on a global scale.

These opportunities also need to allow students to take part in political action that goes beyond the nation state such as writing to the United Nations, petitioning their local politicians to act on international affairs and issues, or fundraising and donating to global non-government organisations (Leduc, 2013; Massey, 2014; Myers, 2006). Additionally, helping students to see how they can take individual or local actions, such as reducing their carbon footprint, to contribute to solving global challenges is also vital.

Conclusion

Geography provides a unique opportunity to effectively equip students for the global futures and problems they face as active global citizens. Greta Thunberg, a young teen climate change activist said that one thing she has learnt this year is that “you are never too small to make a difference”. It is our job to help our students to learn the very same lesson. By guiding students to understand complex global issues, tackle tricky issues and work to take action - we can help them to be prepared as global citizens, leaders and change makers.

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