



A proposal for an International Global Citizen's Award

(A modified version of a presentation at the Alliance for International Education Conference, Shanghai - October 2006)

What is a global citizen?

There are many ways of interpreting global citizenship. Here, I am concerned with "citizenship" as indicating responsible membership of society, in general – being aware that one's actions impact on the lives and well-being of others, and on the environment, and acting accordingly, and taking a measure of responsibility for the society of which one is part. Global citizenship simply places this on a global scale.

Barely mentioned at the first Alliance conference four years ago, it formed the topic for the entire 2006 conference. We are not becoming global citizens – we are global citizens – at least in certain parts of the world. What has happened is that we are increasingly recognising this.

Oxfam, which has done much to develop an understanding of global citizenship in relation to schools, sees the global citizen 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
- Is outraged by social injustice
- Participates in 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

(Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools, published Oxfam GB, 2006)

Oxfam therefore places considerable emphasis on the values and attitudes shown, as well as knowledge and skills. It also emphasises involvement and action.

While we may all be global citizens, of course global citizens can be good or bad! But to distil:



Education and global citizenship

Many schools - both national and international - now take seriously the education of their students as global citizens mentioning global citizenship in their mission statements. And there are plenty of initiatives on the ground intended to promote global citizenship.

There are also some excellent curricula in global citizenship, of which that of Oxfam for English schools is an example.

In setting out global citizenship curricula, different elements have been recognised:

- **Knowledge and understanding**
- **Skills**
- **Values and Attitudes.**

Although the knowledge and skills can be taught or learned in the same way as knowledge and skills in traditional subjects like history or physics, values and attitudes are often regarded as being “caught” rather than taught. We learn them by example – good and bad – what to do and what not to do. The ethos of the school is very important, and the role models of adults and peers.

But however well informed, or well intentioned, without action and participation, we are not much of a citizen, global or otherwise.

It is the action and participation that matter, in the end.

In a school context, the different elements of global citizenship call on adults to fulfil different roles:

Aspects of the Global Citizen

KNOWLEDGE SKILLS	ATTITUDES & VALUES	ACTION & PARTICIPATION
Traditional curriculum realm	Ethos Experience Impact	
Teacher Instructor	Role model Mentor	Leader Facilitator

To develop students' attitudes and values and to promote their action and participation, adults need to focus outside the traditional subject realm, and on their roles as mentors, role models, leaders and facilitators. So, focusing on a traditional subject curriculum approach to global citizenship is, to my mind, inappropriate or at best incomplete.

Why do I think the traditional subject curriculum model doesn't fit global citizenship?

Subject Curricula

- Focus on "content" – knowledge and skills
- Form an induction to an established discipline
- Led / taught / assessed by experts
- Prepare for the future

But global citizenship is about much more than "content".

There is no established "discipline", as there is in History or Biology.

The concept of an "expert" in global citizenship is not appropriate. Certainly the adults and teachers in schools – cannot claim to know all the answers. Young people and adults are all global citizens together – with different perspectives and skills. And sometimes the young definitely see more clearly or know best!

In approaching global citizenship in schools we need to recognise that **students are global citizens, no more but certainly no less than the adults. They are not being prepared for some future condition of citizenship. They are real citizens now.**

Global citizenship should...

- emphasise attitudes and values
- emphasise action and participation
- recognise that students, like adults, are co-equal citizens now
- set aside traditional ideas of the teacher as "expert"

Global citizenship really is not so much a subject - a set of knowledge and skills – more a way of life.

Where do we go from here?

I would argue that **our work with young people in schools should be not education FOR, but ENGAGEMENT with them IN global citizenship**

There are many excellent activities going on in schools engaging students in global citizenship matters. Many of these involve group activities – very important and beneficial. But, in the end, we need to know what is happening to **individuals**. Citizenship is exercised as an individual, possibly collaborating with other individuals.

In academic matters, we have elaborate systems to assess individuals. This reflects the importance in which we hold academic skills and attainment. With global citizenship too, we need to indicate that it matters to us what individuals do, on their own, or with others.

Rather than articulating a **curriculum**, I propose that we develop a **programme** which specifically promotes and recognises the development of global citizenship in students – in the whole of their lives - **an international global citizenship award¹ programme** .



Specifically, I am proposing an **award programme** that:

- works on the basis that students are citizens now. The citizenship they exhibit at 7, or 13, or 17 is different from that of an adult, but it is nevertheless real and authentic. Students should be engaged **as** citizens, rather than being prepared **for** citizenship.
- starts with students' normal lives
- involves students in the design of the programme, and in the recognition scheme
- is concerned with real, authentic engagement in personal experience
- concentrates on values, attitudes and action.
- is not concerned with the "standard" reached, but the **change and development**

¹ The idea of an award in global citizenship in itself is not new.

There are existing awards for projects and activities within schools, for instance from the British Council to British schools. There are also awards for a few outstanding individual students within schools, for instance the student awards of the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the European Council of International Schools (ECIS).

Banksia Park International High School in Australia already offers a Global Citizens Medal for its high school leavers. Perhaps other schools do so too.

The point here is that some students are already better at the global citizen thing than others. This may reflect where they happen to live – some countries are much more environmentally aware than others, for instance. It may reflect the student's home background. It is the development that matters.

- encourages wide participation. There would be no limit to the number of students receiving an award. And it would be available to a reasonably wide age range of students. All who had shown the appropriate development could receive it.

Although there would be a global / international dimension to this, the familiar adage would apply:

Think globally, act locally.

This would not require students to jet off all over the globe, belching out tonnes of carbon dioxide. Indeed, it could all be done without setting a foot outside one's home town.

Although for students, wouldn't it be great for adults in the school to participate in, rather than lead the programme?

Elements of the International Global Citizen's Award programme

I'm proposing the following elements, to give a reasonably comprehensive programme, without it becoming too burdensome.

1. Understanding of other cultures and outlooks

This would seem a key attribute of a "global citizen".

In part, this could be achieved by reading, watching films or television programmes. But some direct personal experience would also be called for. We cannot rely on simple exposure to produce the mind shift and change in understanding we seek. So, being part of a multicultural or international community does not, of itself, produce understanding. We need students to reflect, and some specific actions or interventions may be needed.

Pandit and Alderman (2004)² describe a simple and seemingly effective technique for promoting greater intercultural understanding. In the study, a student from the host country was assigned a student from another country to interview, having ascertained the willingness of students to take part. The interviewer prepared for the interview by researching the foreign student's country, and formulating questions. After the interview, the interviewer gave a written account of the interview, and said what (s)he had learned from it. Interviewers received guiding questions for the reflective concluding element, such as "What did you learn about the international student?" and "How did you reflect on your own culture after the interview?"

The research was largely qualitative, but students' accounts of how they perceived their own culture differently as a result of this limited but structured exercise gave strong indications that perceptions had been changed beneficially as a result.

Opportunities for such an exercise abound within many schools, and could be adapted for a wide age range of students.

Other potential ways to develop understanding include:

- visiting a local mosque, church or community centre to talk to people

² Pandit, K and Alderman, D

2004

Border crossings in the classroom: the international student interview as a strategy for promoting international understanding J. Geography 103: 127 - 136

- interviewing adults within the school
- reflecting on everyday encounters with friends of different backgrounds
- overseas visits, with appropriate reflection
- Model United Nations participation

Key to all of this is reflecting on what knowledge and understanding of other cultures brings to the appreciation of one's own.

2. Personal global footprint

Global footprint is a development of the concept of ecological footprint. It loosely means the impact our activities have upon the environment and others.



Students can make a difference by choices and actions relating to their normal lives. Aspects would include

2.1 Ethical consumerism

This means buying products or services which were ethically produced or delivered, and/or which are not harmful to the environment and society. Without wishing to condone consumerism, we should recognise that many of our students **are** consumers with clear preferences in food, clothes, trainers, DVDs etc. Some older students have bank accounts.

The programme would highlight ethical issues relating to students' choices, encourage them to become more informed, and to review, and possibly change their consumer behaviour accordingly.

2.2 Environmental responsibility

Students would become better informed about their personal environmental impact – direct and indirect - and, again, make some lifestyle changes in response; for instance reducing water use, recycling, assessing environmental implications of transport and reducing the use of cars, or increasing walking, cycling or public transport. Various activities relating to wildlife and conservation could also figure.

3. Influence and involvement with others

This would include

- **personal community service** – with some awareness of its global significance or context
- **advocacy, persuasion or promotion** – taking up an appropriate cause and bringing it to the attention of others, for instance at home, among friends, within a school, by writing to a politician, or Amnesty International membership

(These could involve collaborative and team activities).

and

- **active participation in decision-making processes**, for instance in a student council, or the operation of the global citizen's award itself.

4. Recording and reflecting on change and development

Keeping a personal, individual diary (written, diagrammatic, or tape-recorded), blog or other record, reflecting on developing knowledge, awareness and actions as a global citizen. Older, more able students would be encouraged or required to look beyond the slogans and headlines in matters such as organic food, child labour, food miles or offsetting carbon emissions. This should be hard-headed! All those essential critical thinking skills developed elsewhere should be fully employed here!

This is not intended to be a fully comprehensive programme. Something of this kind could never be so. We could go on for ever acquiring relevant and interesting knowledge. But it takes as its starting point what it is reasonable for students of school age to do – and what relates to and stems from their everyday lives. By turning the spotlight on what they will do anyway, it raises their awareness of their relationship to others, and their environmental impact – and their place within a global world.

How might the award be implemented?

- The award would embrace appropriate existing activities and initiatives within schools – for instance, service programmes, student councils, environmental action groups.
- Teachers would, inevitably and appropriately, be involved but when working in this area, perhaps we should use another word – like mentor, or adviser. Mentors need not be teachers, of course. Parents or other adults within the community might also be involved. Although the programme might involve teachers working with groups of students, it would be the developments and changes by individual students that would be recognised.

The *international* aspects of the award



The programme would be open to participating schools, youth organisations, and, possibly, to individual young people – and to interested adults.

INTERNATIONAL GLOBAL
CITIZENS AWARD

Awards made locally

**With an international
framework / template
and**

**Involvement of people from
other centres / another country**

Such as system of local awards, using a common model, would mirror what happens with the ECIS (European Council of International Schools) and CIS (Council of International Schools) student awards, or certain ASDAN awards in the UK.

Approval of a school's detailed programme, and the award process itself might involve the participation of people from other participating organisations – perhaps from another country - giving an additional international perspective. The involvement of individuals from different countries would provide a measure of cross-fertilisation of ideas and dissemination of good practice. **The award might be made at bronze, silver or gold levels, for participation over 6, 12 or 18 months.**

Full involvement of students in all aspects of the award would be essential.

I would envisage a group of individuals, adults and students, forming the overseeing group within a school or centre. This group – with the participation of people from another or other participating organisations - would decide the precise format of the programme within the school, within the overall framework.

Practice on the ground would lead to guidelines on what would be necessary to fulfil the award requirements. I've suggested that there should be a stipulated period of participation. There should also be something relating to the extent of activities. Different activities might receive points, and a certain point total might be necessary for the award. A conversation or interview would probably figure.

There could be disqualifying conditions. Racism, antisocial behaviour of certain kinds, for instance, during participation in the programme would be a disqualification.

This should not become too bureaucratic, but it would be necessary to ensure the credibility of an award programme offered and recognised around the world.

The model proposed would mean there could be quite a measure of difference between different schools and countries. As this would essentially be a school award, this would not worry me unduly. University acceptance would not be dependent on it, for instance.

This is an outline, but it gives an idea of how the programme would work.

Initial reactions at the Shanghai conference were positive, and I am grateful to colleagues for their ideas and encouragement. I am now looking for further feedback, suggestions, criticisms and to identify people who might be interested in working to move the project forward - perhaps to pilot an award in their schools (we have a number of schools already on board), or to be involved in other ways. One immediate consideration arising in Shanghai is whether we should try to develop coordinated programmes that cover the entire age range of schools - for primary, middle and high schools.

The Shanghai conference engaged us over several days in wide and deep thinking about a whole raft of issues relating to global citizenship. But the clock is ticking, and some of the problems facing the world need addressing now. Environmental concerns are especially obvious, but there are other issues too, which will become pressing and urgent unless we tackle them more effectively now.

Do we want to be looked back on as the generation that taught the young about these issues while we reached midnight? Or do we want to be the generation that engaged with the young to address them – now?

Thank you for reading this.



Boyd Roberts has been involved in international education for 30 years. He was principal (school head) of the Amman Baccalaureate School until 1991, and of St. Clare's, Oxford from 1998 – 2005. He has been involved with the International Baccalaureate in many capacities, since 1977. He is currently a consultant in international education, devoting time to develop the proposed International Global Citizen's Award.

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