

Making global citizenship international – a call for concerted action

The International School of Z aims to produce responsible, caring citizens of the world / global citizens.

Statements like this appear in the websites of many CIS / ECIS member schools.

In earlier times, international schools sought to develop students who were “globally competent” in international contexts. With an increasingly interdependent world, an ethical dimension seems more important. We see it as our responsibility, in the words of IBO, “*to develop internationally minded people who, recognising their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.*”

But what happens beyond these statements and intentions? How good are we at moving from the rhetoric to reality?

If pressed to choose, most of us would say that good citizenship was more important than academic achievement. But the apocryphal Martian on one of its periodic visits to earth might conclude we thought the opposite, when looking at our schools.

We have very elaborate systems setting out what students should know and the academic skills they should have, and complex mechanisms for assessing and distinguishing their individual intellectual attainment.

But when it comes to global citizenship – indeed to matters relating to character in general - while individual schools do much in these areas, general systems and frameworks to promote, monitor and recognise development are much less well elaborated. There is the International / Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, promoting personal development but without the international dimension. Within international schools, we have the CIS and ECIS student awards, concerned with internationalism. While admirable, awards are to one, or a few students only. What can we do to promote and recognise development more widely?

Some excellent national curricula for global citizenship have been developed - for instance - by Oxfam (www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/index.htm). But delivering a curriculum is not the same as effecting change within individuals. And, in any case, I am not sure that the normal curriculum model is what is required. Global citizenship curricula emphasise knowledge and content. They are also devised by adults from a position of assumed expertise. While this may be appropriate for “normal” subjects, with global citizenship we are dealing with a rather different matter. To begin with, our young people **are** global citizens – at whatever age they might be. Global citizenship is not being prepared for – it is being lived now.

And looking at the state of the world today, developed by our and preceding generations, humility is called for. We do not have all the answers and we need a different approach. Einstein is attributed with saying: “You can never solve a problem on the level on which it was created.” We need students as co-developers of global citizenship thinking and practice to tackle the unprecedented problems we all face.

What I am proposing is an **international** programme to promote development in global citizenship, open widely to students, of different ages – and leading to recognition by an award. Introducing a more formalised system would send out a message that it matters to the school, and to others – and would, hopefully, encourage many students to join. (1)

The programme would

- acknowledge that students are not future citizens but citizens now.
- involve students in all aspects
- promote authentic engagement and personal experience
- concentrate on values, attitudes and action
- promote and recognise **change and development** – the distance travelled – not the “standard” reached.

What form might such a programme take?

Well, it would not be another subject as such. It would be much more concerned with real-life decisions relevant to global citizenship, with the skills and background information to make such decisions well - and with practical action.

We would follow the familiar adage:

Think globally, act locally.

This would not necessitate jetting about all over the planet!

Four elements would be involved – relating to the personal experience and engagement of students.

1. Understanding other cultures and outlooks

Exposure to people of different background can be quite passive and does not necessarily produce mind shift. Something active is required.

Pandit and Alderman (2004) describe a simple example. One student conducted a carefully prepared interview with another student from a different cultural background. At the end, interviewers considered “What did you learn about the international student?” and “How did you reflect on your own culture after the interview?”

There were strong indications that perceptions had been changed beneficially as a result.

2. Personal global footprint

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 which were ethically produced and/or which are not harmful to the environment and society. While not wishing to encourage or condone consumerism, we should recognise that many of our students **are** consumers with clear preferences in food, clothes, trainers, DVDs and other commodities. The programme would highlight ethical issues relating to students’ choices, encourage them to become more informed, and to change their consumer behaviour accordingly.

See, for instance, the UK website <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/> and websites on fair trade.

2.2 Environmental responsibility

Students would become better informed about their environmental impact – direct and indirect - and, again, make some lifestyle changes reflecting what they have learned; for instance reducing use of water, 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 within a school, by writing to a politician or Amnesty International membership
- active participation in decision-making processes, for instance in a student council, or the operation of the global citizens' award itself.

4. Recording and reflecting on change

Keeping a diary, blog or some other appropriate record, reflecting on developing knowledge, awareness and actions as a global citizen.

Although it would be the experience, development, changes and reflection of **individual** students that would be recognised, the programme might involve teachers working with groups of students. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. There are some excellent existing programmes which could be incorporated – for instance, service might already be part of IB programmes.

Within a common international structure, schools and individuals would operate flexibly, responding to local situations and interests (as for the CIS / ECIS awards). Awards, made locally, but using the common framework, would recognise **changes** made. Awards might involve the participation of someone from another school – perhaps another country - giving an additional international perspective. The award could be at bronze, silver or gold levels, for participation, to appropriate extents, over 6, 12 or 18 months. Initially, at least, we would probably start with secondary students.

Where do international schools come in?

Although individual schools may be developing international partnerships, most work and thinking on global citizenship seems to be taking place within separate national systems. It is wryly amusing that within the UK, a single country, separate processes are going on, in England, Wales and Scotland, to elaborate an understanding of **global** citizenship!

Global citizenship calls for an international approach, and international schools are in the best position to provide this. (The recent Alliance for International Education Shanghai conference on global citizenship was therefore very welcome.) International schools form an international network and community, and our student body is international, so we cannot develop citizenship associated with one country only.

Some 40 years ago, the international school community, dissatisfied with separate national systems for upper secondary education, gave rise to the International Baccalaureate diploma. From the same stable, international programmes for primary and middle years also emerged, now embraced within IBO, and increasingly adopted by national schools. Would any international curriculum ever have arisen without the involvement of the international schools?

International schools, set somewhat apart from national systems, enjoy a measure of freedom and independence - one of the principal factors enabling the development of these programmes. Perhaps this freedom we enjoy also imposes a responsibility on us to innovate and experiment.

While the global citizenship programme would focus on individual students and how their actions have changed, we would, of course, expect participating schools themselves to be changed.

As the world faces unprecedented and urgent problems, the time is now right for international schools to take the lead again, and to take coordinated practical action on global citizenship.

Comments? Suggestions? Interested in piloting the project, or finding out more? Please contact me at:
info@globalcitizensaward.org

(1) An award itself is not new: Banksia Park International High School in Australia already offers its own Global Citizens Medal for its high school leavers.

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

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