

Including Voices from the World Through Global Citizenship Education

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Every educator has a rationale for being in this “noble profession” of teaching. Each of us justifies what we are teaching and why we are teaching it. Global education involves teaching content knowledge, of course, but its justification ultimately has to do with our responsibilities as global citizens. Why should we teach about the world?

Linking to voices from the world is exciting for both students and teachers, but all of us need to understand that global education is a form of citizenship education. The activities of our nation have a great effect on people in the rest of the world, whether in the realm of economics, diplomacy, the media, or the environment. My individual choices—as a citizen and as a consumer—directly or indirectly affect the lives of people everywhere.

Seven Capabilities for Global Citizenship

Based on theories of democratic and global citizenship, I have derived these seven capabilities of a competent global citizen:

1. **Curiosity:** The emotional and intellectual openness to new cultures, ideas, and experiences
2. **Compassion:** The sympathetic awareness of others’ situations, together with a desire to realize universal human rights in today’s world
3. **Criticality:** The intellectual capacity to judge the logic and soundness of policies, arguments, and concepts, along with the capacity to make ethical judgments.

4. **Collaboration:** The ability to work with others in structured ways toward a common goal.
5. **Creativity:** The ability to use one’s unique talents to synthesize ideas and values to make something new that serves the common good.
6. **Courage:** The moral strength to persevere, in the face of danger or difficulty, in an effort to realize democratic principles and universal human rights. This is the capacity of both individuals and institutions to do the right thing under difficult circumstances.
7. **Commitment:** The long-term disposition to monitor and influence a situation or policy that affects human rights and the common good.

Finding Room in the Curriculum

Some states, like Wisconsin, have made global education a strong part of the elementary curriculum. More commonly though, elementary social studies presents a seemingly non-global curriculum featuring history, economics, and geography based on American communities, states, and regions. American literature, poetry and folklore are featured in language

arts. Voices from the world seem hard to fit into such a curriculum. The challenge this presents can meet through two broad approaches: looking for global dimensions across the curriculum, and using global examples and making global comparisons to enrich an otherwise “single-nation curriculum.” Here is how you can do this.

Linking U.S. Communities and Regions to the World

We can teach the global aspects of our families, communities, economies, and the regions of the United States. Read-aloud books such as *Wake Up, World! A Day In The Life Of Children Around The World* and *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* are a great way to start. These books feature photographs and text with rich detail about children’s daily routines, families, homes, school, and culture in different places around the globe. Teachers can provide guided exploration by asking questions such as: What three children seem most similar to you? Why? What three children are the most different? What do these pictures tell you about the transportation around the world? About the types of food eaten? Types of schools? Size of families? Incomes? An excellent teaching guide for *Material World* has useful suggestions for guiding such classroom inquiry.

American regional folktales, commonly taught in third and fourth grade language arts, can be compared with folk tales from other nations and cultures. The geographic regions of the United States can also be taught with

a global connection. Aspects of U.S. economics, culture, and even climate are deeply affected by global issues, yet textbooks say little on these topics. For example, the southeast is facing hurricanes with increasing frequency and also rising shorelines. Are similar changes happening in other places around the globe? How are people responding to these changes?

Mrs. Goble's third grade class in Cannelton, Indiana, works with De Wadden, a primary school in the Netherlands, on a collaborative website that raises some of these issues. Mrs. Goble explains, "We are all researching an endangered animal from our region and posting our findings on this site for all to read about." Students were able to understand that some of the same animals are endangered in different countries with similar ecospheres. They also began to understand that different nations approach endangered animals and environmental change differently. Mrs. Goble listed the joint website with the project registry of Global Schoolhouse and immediately began getting even more participants.

This online project entailed all seven of the capacities for global citizenship. Students creatively used their unique talents to make something new that serves the common good. Understanding how nations are responding to climate change with initiatives such as the Kyoto Protocol also requires a lesson in the institutions and processes of global governance. Both *Time for Kids* and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have web-based resources for children on the issue of global warming, and the United Nations offers a beginners guide to the Framework Convention on Climate Change. (See Resources at the end of this article.)

Linking Economics to World Voices

In order to understand changes in our American communities and regions, children are increasingly learning about

economic concepts such as de-industrialization and deregulation. Teachers can read aloud the new book, *Zapizapu Crosses the Sea: A Story about Being Fair*, which makes economic concepts (fair global market prices and international trade) accessible to even lower elementary students. The book, *Rethinking Globalization*, includes activities such as the "Transnational Capital Auction," a grade 3 or higher lesson plan for teaching the concept of the "race to the bottom"—the pressures on developing nations to lower their wages and environmental standards.

Making Local-Global Connections

In addition to the general concepts, children can learn about regionally specific issues. In Michigan, fourth graders learn about the effects of globalization on the auto industry; in Pennsylvania, students study changes in the global steel industry in Pittsburgh; and in North Carolina, children learn about how regional furniture factories are closing in the face of cheaper imports from China. Through searching on the Internet, sending questions by e-mail to local economists, studying newspaper reporters, and interviewing members of the local chambers of commerce, students can discover what new businesses have started up in their area, which ones have moved away, and which have closed.

For example, Honda built a new manufacturing plant in India, in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, which can produce 100,000 cars per year. Michigan children will be interviewing their neighbors about the effects of the loss of auto manufacturing jobs. As their teacher makes connections with schools and students in India, they will send e-mail messages asking about how the new jobs affect life in Rajasthan. Through activities like these, children might understand not only their community, but also comprehend lives and experiences very different from their own.

Teacher Ann Williams of Murphy Elementary School in Haslett,

Michigan, used a book about a Ugandan girl and her family who received a goat from Heifer Project International. The teacher used *Beatrice's Goat* to introduce microeconomic concepts of opportunity cost, scarcity, supply, and demand, but also to help her students understand broad disparities in global wealth, life style, and opportunity. Linking to voices from Uganda inspired students' compassion, curiosity, and a commitment to action. They watched *The Promise*, featuring two children with different life experiences sharing a dream of a life free from hunger and poverty. The unit of study included "Read to Reed," which empowered these third graders to raise funds to buy livestock for an impoverished family.

This Heifer Project International lesson was especially effective and balanced. Students love the fact that Beatrice Biira in the book is a real person. Ms. Biira is currently studying international politics, human development, and economics at Connecticut College with plans to graduate in 2008. This real story about human needs had a happy ending, especially since Beatrice plans to work as an adult professional to improve the lives of children. Students can write to Beatrice if they wish.

Linking U.S. History to World Voices

Even American state and national history topics can be taught through global comparison. For example, students studying the American Revolution can learn about the struggle for independence of other English colonies like India and Jamaica. American students can interact with children in other nations to collaboratively learn about their countries' experiences with colonization. Students can build virtual communities with students in other nations through a free resource such as the International Education & Resource Network. For example, students from Chengdu, China, and Phoenix, Arizona, are working on "Citizens and

Local Government: A Comparative Study of Phoenix and Chengdu" (www.learn.org.au/fp/). Industrialization, pollution, and working conditions in American history can be compared with current issues in China.

Students can compare the early settlement of America with that of Australia. Rob Ley, a 4th grade teacher at Murphy Elementary in Haslett, Michigan, connected the study of Michigan native peoples to other global indigenous peoples. The First Peoples' Project connects indigenous students from around the world in collaborative project work, allowing them to showcase their work to a global audience. Students can be involved in sharing writing, art, and discussion about issues relating to indigenous students.

As Lawrence Tan, a teacher at The 99th Street Elementary school in San Diego explains, "We have been covering issues of oppression, slavery, capitalism, and exploitation, framing and contextualizing topics through our thematic unit of the Civil War." The unit began with questions like, "Were only Africans slaves during this time?" "What was the cause of slavery?" and "Does slavery still exist today?" (See "TCLA" in the Resources.) Many historical facts and concepts (such as colonialism, labor, women's rights, migration, industrialization, and slavery) can be better understood through such comparisons.

Acting Responsibly

Global citizenship education helps children make ethical judgments using democratic principles and practices. Acting in the public good will call upon future citizens (the children in our classrooms) to critically evaluate ideas with others. We listen and negotiate multiple viewpoints to make choices not in self-interest alone, but with regard to democratic values, human rights, and public interest. Citizens of a democracy live with the conviction that through the open exchange of ideas and opinions, truth will eventually win out over falsehood, the values of others will be better understood, areas of compromise more clearly defined, and the path of progress opened. The greater

the breadth of such exchanges, the better. This means that children in the classroom need to experience open debate and honest investigation; they need access to the ideas of others around the world. Teacher can make use of a range of dialogic and collaborative resources, like those listed below. The UNICEF Voices of Youth Program and People Speak provide online discussion forums for students and teachers on global issues such as poverty, global health, and climate change.

Tough Topics

Global education also entails talking about difficult, tragic, and frightening events. This is a big challenge for teachers of young learners. Issues like war, poverty, and natural disasters are very much present in our world today, and having children keep feelings to themselves and worry in the absence of facts and concepts is damaging, while discussion can be helpful. Children should never be exposed to graphic images and stories. Children need to explore the question, "Why do bad things happen? They need to hear about protection and preparedness, and what individuals and societies do to make the world more just and safe. They need explanation, reassurance, and hope. There are many excellent resources, for example from the National Association of School Psychologists, Teaching Tolerance, and Rethinking Schools, which offer teachers explicit guidance.

Collaborating as Citizens

One of the more effective ways to deal with difficult global issues is to help children take action as young citizens. Their excitement and curiosity, as well as their sadness and moral concerns, can be channeled into opportunities for reaching out to others in a personal way. Taking action requires commitment, creativity, collaboration and criticality. *The Kids Guide to Social Action* provides numerous examples of children working as agents of change.


If they want their voices to be heard, students must learn about how to become active participants in the political process. Students learn to reflect on questions like:

Who has the power to change this situation? If people work together, could they change this situation? How can children influence their elected representatives? What type of democratic action can be taken to improve this situation? Although occasional elections, campaigns, and voting are central to democratic institutions, children learn that many participatory opportunities are open to them every day. It is the duty of all citizens to monitor and influence situations and policies that affect human rights and the common good.

An Inspiring Example

As an 11 year old, Craig Kielberger started an organization with six members called Free the Children. Craig saw a newspaper photo related to the death of 12-year-old Iqbal Masih, who had been bonded into child labor in Pakistan at 5 years old, but escaped and became a child labor activist. Craig's concerns and efforts ultimately helped change laws and policy around the world.

Craig is now 26, and the organization he started, Free the Children, is now the world's largest network of children helping children, with more than one million youth members. The book *A Kids Guide to Social Action* showcases many other children and provides practical tools. The website TakingITGlobal inspires youth to be informed about and involved in global issues.

The possibility for creating a more just world resides in the educated imagination. Globalization presents new challenges, and we must struggle to bring forth a new education that is equal to them. Global citizenship education is democratic education in its deepest sense. Our children's learning must be rooted in the ethical imperatives of global citizenship, which require new ways of finding information, making connections, and listening to diverse voices from the world in response to pressing global challenges. 

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