Global Citizenship Education

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Introduction

What are some of the biggest challenges we face in the 21st century? Near the top of the list would probably be the coronavirus health pandemic, climate change, migration, and perhaps the social and financial effects of new technologies and social media. What do they all have in common? They are arguably all the result of an interconnected world. What happens in one community or country can have a significant effect on everybody else. We all share a responsibility to look after our world and everything in it. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a response to this: an educational initiative to prepare students, not only for the challenges of the modern world, but also the opportunities and responsibilities that being a member of the global community brings.

What is the purpose of Global Citizenship Education?

GCE has been interpreted in different ways:

A focus on the global economy?

One interpretation has been that it should be a programme to prepare students for a global and competitive knowledge economy, giving them the skills to meet both employer needs and the demands of the new digital economy. However, such a programme produces successful global workers and ignores the social and environmental consequences of an interconnected world.

A focus on rights and responsibilities

The citizenship aspect of GCE should be the most important element. Citizenship normally refers to an individual's status as a member of a community, giving the individual certain rights and responsibilities. Global citizenship, in effect, refers to a citizen of the world with an expectation that such citizens actively behave in ways that recognise and respect the rights of all other citizens, prioritise social justice, and contribute in a positive way to the communities and natural world around them. This is why it is often referred to as active global citizenship.

This concept of global citizenship is central to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set in 2015, that the UN describes as a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" (The UN). In SDG Goal 4 (Quality Education), target 4.7 of the UN resolution recognises the need of inclusivity in quality education, which can further lifelong learning. The UN hopes that, by 2030, all students will develop the relevant skills and awareness of Global Citizenship and Sustainable Goals, including areas such as sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promoting and valuing peace and non-violence, and cultural diversity.

Here, the aim of GCE is to make students aware of the world (its structures, cultures and connections), give them the skills and positive attitude they need for succeeding in a global community, and actively engage them in identifying and solving problems that are both local and global. Above all, GCE encourages students, as members of a worldwide community, to listen to their conscience, recognize global injustice, and become motivated to do something to try and make the world a better, more equal, and more sustainable place to live.

How do we implement Global Citizenship Education?

GCE is, in many respects, an educational approach to teaching and learning rather than just a content subject. It can be viewed as an educational philosophy or an educational filter through which we create and manage the learning environment, plan and design teaching materials, deliver and evaluate our lessons, and respond to students' real needs. As such, it is suitable for all ages, from pre-primary upwards, but this inevitably requires

themes and activities to be carefully selected for the age, cognitive abilities, and linguistic skills of the students as well as being respectful of the local teaching environment.

An indirect approach: Creating the right school atmosphere

For GCE to be effective, it ideally needs to be integrated into the school community. This means representing the key values of global citizenship throughout the whole school and in the classroom, so students are encouraged to think and act in a similar way.

i. Modelling appropriate behaviour

As an example, if we want to draw our students' attention to environmental challenges and ask them to identify areas that they could make a positive difference in, no matter how small, in their own lives or those of their families, then we need to be modelling appropriate behaviour in the school. On a simple level, this could be demonstrating the importance of conserving electricity by switching off lights when lessons are finished or operating a recycling programme that students take part in.

ii. Valuing all voices

If we promote the concept of respecting all opinions, then this could be modelled through setting up a student council with representatives from every year group who are regularly consulted on school issues so that students feel their voices are being heard. If we create the right atmosphere in the school of openness, honesty and transparency, then we are going a long way towards fulfilling the key objectives of Global Citizenship.

A direct approach: Explicit teaching in the English classroom

In addition to nudging students in the direction of becoming global citizens through what they see and experience around them, we can also explicitly teach students about Global Citizenship. The English curriculum is ideal for this in many ways.

i. Empowering students through English

Firstly, English itself is the lingua franca of the modern era. It is no longer owned by a few nations, but has become a tool for all speakers, native and non-native, to engage in a shared cross-cultural dialogue. Teaching students to communicate effectively in English about global issues can empower them to participate in this diverse international community of English speakers, giving them the opportunity to both be "in the audience", learning from others, as well as "on the stage", leading the change.

ii. Learning about others through language activities

Secondly, to "put yourself into the shoes of another" is essentially what learning a second language is all about. Many of the goals of GCE (to foster empathy, engender intercultural communication, learn from the cultures of others) are natural elements of the English language lesson. For example, a standard role-play activity gets students to both experience and give voice to the views of others.

iii. Using Global Citizenship for the teaching context

Thirdly, when we teach English, we need a context for the language and Global Citizenship can provide that content. In English classes, it is already common to read or discuss global issues, and many English teachers are well accustomed to, for example, setting up collaborative or creative tasks. Vocabulary lessons can be used to introduce language on environmental themes or cultural practices. Reading texts, including narratives or stories, can expose students to different perspectives and ways of life. Listening texts, videos, and images can depict real-world situations showing the diversity of the world. Speaking and writing practices, individually or collaboratively through projects, are a natural way to elicit students' opinions and ideas for change. Global citizenship topics can be more engaging, thought-provoking, and "real-world" than many of the traditional themes that course books often cover.

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iv. Using Global Citizenship for developing skills

Finally, Global Citizenship topics can also provide an appropriate context for helping students to develop all those personal, socioemotional, and so-called 21st century skills which now form part of a broad-ranging English curriculum. In particular, they lend themselves well to collaborative tasks and projects that allow students to develop, for instance, self-awareness and empathy as well as practise critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy skills.

In effect, GCE can tie together all the elements of a comprehensive English curriculum.

Conclusions

GCE is an educational philosophy, a teaching style, and a learning programme. It provides the educational foundations of knowledge and skills to enable learners of all ages to make informed choices about their community and the world around them. GCE helps students learn that they share similarities with others and, where there are differences, that they can develop respect and appreciation for diversity. It helps students realise that they are part of something larger than themselves as individuals. With the knowledge and skills that they gain, as well as the development of a cooperative but critical attitude enhanced by the experience of putting all they have learned into action, students can not only thrive in a changing world, but also contribute in a positive way to its sustainable development. At its heart, GCE empowers students to become better learners and better people for a better world.

References and Further Reading

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The United Nations – Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/