

**Education for an Age of Interdependence**

A series of provocation papers

# The Three A's of Global Education

Prof. Fernando Reimers



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For educators, the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008 raise four questions. First, in what ways did the education of these perpetrators shape such hatred that brought them to take the lives of hundreds of unarmed civilians not engaged in combat? Second, how were the many more individuals who enabled these perpetrators educated? Third, the responses of ordinary citizens to these attacks, both in India and in Pakistan, appeared to constrain the options for their leaders to pursue negotiated avenues of cooperation, and perhaps increased the risk of military conflict between these nations. So, in which ways were those views shaped by teachings of history and geography that fostered limited and intolerant views towards their neighbours? Lastly, to what extent has the education of citizens worldwide prepared them to understand the sources of these attacks, their potential consequences and the likelihood of growing global instability resulting from these attacks, and to think about appropriate courses of action for the international community?

Schools and universities around the world are not adequately preparing ordinary citizens to understand the nature of such global challenges as terrorism, or of other shared planetary challenges including climate change, human environmental interactions, world trade, demographic change or global conflict. Because of growing interdependence among nations, resulting from trade, from increased frequency of communications and from migratory flows, the skills to understand these global challenges are today critical. The failure to develop these skills, the skills that prepare people for global citizenship, will contribute to growing global conflict and will undermine the economic competitiveness of the nations where the global competency deficits are most acute.

Around the world political violence is prevalent. Much of this violence involves deficits in the skills and attitudes of people to tolerate those with different views and interests or to work out their differences in peaceful ways. Most of these conflicts have a global dimension, not least because the absence of appropriate and effective interventions by the international community enables the continuation of these conflicts. During the last decade 98 conflicts have taken the lives of over three and a half million people around the world. Two thirds of these conflicts have extended over a year in duration. The number of people affected by these conflicts is a multiple several

times higher than the number of people who have lost their lives in them.<sup>1</sup>

A recent report of future scenarios prepared by the United States National Intelligence Council forecasts significant global challenges over the next fifteen years, including the transformation of the international system built after World War Two, an unprecedented transfer of wealth from the West to the East, massive pressure in natural resources resulting from ongoing economic growth and increased potential for global conflict, particularly in the greater Middle East.<sup>2</sup>

The central challenge for educators in our times is to develop global competency amongst their students so they can appropriately address the global challenges and opportunities shared with their fellow world citizens: the challenges of collectively improving the living conditions of the global poor and destitute, of achieving sustainable forms of human environmental interaction, of finding fair and sustainable forms of global trade, of addressing health epidemics, and of creating the conditions for lasting peace and security.

Global Competency comprises the knowledge and skills that help people understand the flat world in which they live, the skills to integrate across disciplinary domains to comprehend global affairs and events and to create possibilities to address them. Global competencies are also the attitudinal and ethical dispositions that make it possible to interact peacefully, respectfully and productively with fellow human beings from diverse geographies.

This definition of global competency includes three interdependent dimensions:

1. A positive disposition towards cultural difference and a framework of global values to engage difference. This requires a sense of identity and self-esteem but also empathy towards others with different identities. An interest and understanding of different civilisational streams and the ability to see those differences as opportunities for constructive, respectful and peaceful transactions among people. This ethical dimension of global competency includes also a commitment to basic equality and rights of all persons and a disposition to act to uphold those rights.
2. An ability to speak, understand and think in multiple languages (the skill dimension).
3. Deep knowledge and understanding of world history, geography, the global dimensions of

topics such as health, climate and economics and of the process of globalisation itself (the disciplinary and interdisciplinary dimension) and a capacity to think critically and creatively about the complexity of current global challenges.

These dimensions constitute the three A's of Globalisation: the Affective dimension, the Action dimension and the Academic dimension. Excellence in this domain, and perhaps in many others, is about teaching a specialised body of knowledge about global affairs (academic) and the ability to use that knowledge to solve practical problems (action), but is also about the development of character, of the virtues that would lead people to use their knowledge for ethical global purposes (affect).

### The Importance of Global Values

Globalisation has led to an increase in the frequency and type of interactions among people of different cultural origins. In some countries this results from immigration. In most it results also from the increasing use of telecommunication technologies and from the transformed production and trade of goods and services. Immigration, trade, and communications present unprecedented opportunities and challenges to most people. These enhanced interactions among people with different worldviews and cultural values affect social expectations and notions of identity. Individuals' or groups' responses to the changes around them depend in part on how they are prepared to understand cultural differences, and to think about globalisation and its attendant processes.

Unless schools effectively develop tolerance, cosmopolitanism, deep knowledge of global affairs, and a commitment to peace, the likelihood of the civilisational clashes predicted by Samuel Huntington will increase (Huntington, 1993, p. 28). There is a strong interdependence between the global and local levels of the tolerance-conflict polarity. At a time when global migratory flows create new demographics in many urban centers, the nature of the interactions between the new immigrants and other demographic groups will shape not only local politics but will also have global repercussions. Tolerance and effective integration of immigrant groups is conducive not only to peaceful forms of local interaction, it also supports positive transnational interactions among the national communities of host and origin countries. In contrast, where immigrants face hostility, discrimination and marginalisation, these

responses may feed back and shape the nature of reciprocal perceptions among host and origin countries. In extreme cases alienated members of marginalised immigrant communities may be recruited by militant extremist groups. Prisons where immigrant groups are overrepresented (because the pathways available to them for successful participation in the host countries are limited) and where there are limited pathways for subsequent positive reintegration into society, are likely breeding grounds for further alienation, increased future criminality and in some cases political extremism.

### How can global competency be developed?

The multidimensional nature of global competency means that providing opportunities to develop it must also be a multifaceted process. Some subjects can help to develop that knowledge: world history, geography, and foreign languages. But global competency can also be developed in learning to read by reading texts that reflect cultural diversity, and in learning science, by conducting projects that help illuminate the transnational nature of the scientific enterprise. Central to developing global skills is to foster student engagement and interest in world affairs. A good factual foundation, and a positive disposition to continue learning throughout life about global affairs can serve students better than many facts taught in boring ways or than a curriculum that caricatures world history or social studies.

The first dimension includes attitudes, values and skills that reflect an openness, interest and positive disposition to the variation of human cultural expression reflected internationally and a global value framework. In their most basic forms they comprise tolerance towards cultural differences. More advanced are the skills to recognise and negotiate differences in cross-cultural contexts, the cultural flexibility and adaptability necessary to develop empathy and trust, and to have effective inter-personal interactions in diverse cultural contexts and a commitment to extending the Golden Rule to the treatment of 'others' from different civilisational streams or cultural backgrounds.

These values and attitudes can be developed in a number of ways: reading books that reflect cosmopolitan views and values, interacting with culturally diverse groups of students, engaging

in school to school international projects, accessing content about comparative topics such as comparative literature or world history or geography, studying artistic creations from different cultures, discussing films focusing on human rights issues, participating in global groups such as the World Scouts Movement, in Global Youth Movements or in international sports competitions.

Cultural awareness can be developed at all levels of the educational ladder and should be developed starting at the early ages, when children's basic values are shaped, and should engage multiple performance domains and ways of knowing, including deliberation, formal study, simulations, project based learning and experiential education. The opportunities to develop these competencies can effectively be integrated across existing subjects in the curriculum. They will not necessarily require separate slots in the timetable and as such may be easier to integrate in the existing curriculum frameworks in many countries.

Experiential learning can be very effective to develop these competencies, providing students the opportunity to interact with students from a different cultural background, either in culturally diverse schools, through study abroad or through student collaborations across schools with culturally diverse student populations using technology.

The second dimension of global competency is foreign language skills. In addition to high quality foreign language instruction in school, study abroad can help develop foreign language skills and technology is an increasingly important resource. Foreign language instruction can also be supported with programmes after school and during the summer, perhaps involving heritage speakers in the communities surrounding each school.

The third dimension covers disciplinary knowledge in comparative fields: comparative history, anthropology, political science, economics and trade, literature, world history – and the ability to integrate across disciplines to think about and solve questions of globalisation. Relevant aspects of globalisation include the nature of global trade treaties, how to balance commitment to human rights with commitment to global trade when the latter involves countries where human rights are violated, or how to balance commitment to global institutions with the desire to achieve national foreign policy objectives in a reasonable timeframe.

These competencies can also be developed at all levels of the educational ladder, although they should probably be emphasised starting in the middle school curriculum, and deepen in high school and at the college level. Examples of this kind of skill would be deep knowledge of world history or geography, cultural history, or comparative literature, knowledge of international trade and development economics. There are also global topics which require drawing on different disciplinary fields. An educated person in the 21st century needs to be conversant with such topics and therefore needs the education to comprehend them.

This set of competencies can be developed by integrating new content and activities within existing curriculum frameworks as well as in new courses. Negotiating the introduction of new curriculum objectives or the creation of new courses will, in most cases, be significantly more difficult.

Global competencies can be developed not only in the formal curriculum of instruction, but also in after school projects, in peer-based projects or in summer programmes. Students need authentic experiences that engage them in learning about the world. What is engaging and motivating no doubt differs at various levels of education. The second grader can be engaged by some well written stories about children growing up in different parts of the world, by good films to support that instruction and by visits and conversations with college or graduate students from different parts of the world. The middle school child may be more engaged by research projects that allow them to explore questions that involve a comparative dimension that interests them, or by electronic exchanges with classmates in distant parts of the world in a sister school as they work on common projects. The high school student might be more engaged by subject matter in world history and geography that develops expertise to interpret current affairs, by conversations via video-conference with high school peers in distant lands, by study tours and by interaction with exchange students or by study abroad opportunities, and by seminars on topical global issues or area studies offered at the college level. Rich library collections of texts and audiovisual material, as well as adequate selections of internet resources are fundamental to develop student independence and engagement in taking responsibility for their own learning in this field.

The mix of these three types of competencies and the level at which they should be developed will vary in different professions, and also at the graduate, undergraduate and school levels.

Schools can develop, in partnership with other institutions such as universities, museums, public libraries, publishing companies and the media, knowledge of other countries and cultures and about the processes of interdependency that link countries together at present. Schools can shape engagement in learning about global affairs throughout life, dispositions to value cultural differences, and the ability to draw on understanding of differences as a source to inform a framework of global values that includes compassion and caring, concern for others, respect and reciprocity, commitment to universal human rights and international covenants, including the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities, recognition of the basic equality of all people, and commitment to protecting the environment and of addressing global challenges collaboratively. Knowledge, engagement and values are the cognitive and attitudinal domains that global education should target.

### **Global Citizenship Education and Human Rights Education**

The development of global values (the first, ethical, dimension of global competency) can be achieved by drawing on the well established knowledge base in human rights education, teaching students not just knowledge of the rights and their history, but to appreciate and value these rights, to discern how they are upheld in the various communities of which students are a part, and to act towards the work in progress which is the achievement of these rights. Teaching to understand the importance of human rights and to act on this understanding is the cornerstone of global civility and of peace.

To educate for global civility it is imperative to use a common framework that informs the enterprise. This notion has been well developed by philosopher Sissela Bok in her book *Common Values* (1995). Bok explains that common values are essential to the survival of every society and that they are recognisable across societies. She further explains that these values are essential to human coexistence at all levels of interaction, from personal, to national and international relations. These common values are necessary to support cross-cultural dialogue and to address military, environmental, and other common challenges of humanity (Bok, 1995, p. 13).

The best approximation we have at present to this common framework of values is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those who drafted the declaration struggled mightily with the challenges of drawing from different cultural and philosophical traditions. Though it may be possible to see the Declaration as a work in progress, in the sense that additional rights could be defined or operationalised, the Declaration is a starting point. The work of schools globally could be aligned to teach all children to honor and uphold these rights (not just to know them), and to appreciate that others have the same rights. This would be a sufficient framework for much greater global civility than many schools promote at present.

Beyond direct instruction, the context of education is a fundamental component of global citizenship education. This context includes the opportunities students have to get to know and collaborate with others of diverse cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds; the climate in the school surrounding relationships among school staff and students as well as among school staff and parents and other members of the community; and the social norms that govern those interactions. These multiple opportunities to develop citizenship competencies are embedded in a community and larger cultural and social context that influences how students interpret what they experience in school, and the choices they make about the roles they want to play outside the school. Students have to live their human rights, their schools have to provide authentic experiences in the practice of tolerance. Students need to experience in schools respect for human dignity, equal rights, and appreciation of difference. In addition to helping develop knowledge about human rights it is necessary that students develop the intra-personal and interpersonal competences to resolve conflicts peacefully, to confront violence.

More is needed than direct instruction about human rights and respectful and tolerant education. It is important to gain knowledge and the capacity to act in ways that engage the students' moral reasoning skills and in ways that motivate them to act and to assume personal responsibility for their actions in the global realm. Opportunities to help students to develop and practice skills in real-life settings and to connect abstract knowledge to action are potentially important. Global service learning projects are examples of activities which can bridge the acquisition of knowledge with a disposition to assume personal responsibility for community needs.

## Conclusions

Globalisation presents a new and very important context for all of us. This is of course a process, a space of possibility, rather than a destination. Preparing students with the skills and the ethical dispositions to invent a future that enhances human well being in this space of possibility is the most critical challenge for schools in our time. Global education is the new purpose for schools. To do this we need to focus on three objectives and on three avenues for action. The objectives are to develop global values, foreign language skills and foreign area and globalisation expertise. The avenues are to make the development of global competence a policy priority for mass education systems, to develop a scientific knowledge base that helps discern what works well, with what effects and at what costs, and to continue developing rigorous curricula, instructional materials and opportunities for teacher education. The path is clear and within reach, and the potential rewards much greater than some of the costly and complicated approaches we still use to try achieve global peace and security.

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, M. G. (2008). Major episodes of political violence, 1946-2007. Retrieved September 30, 2008, from <http://www.systemicpeace.org/warlist.htm>

<sup>2</sup> National Intelligence Council. "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World" US Government Printing Office (ISBN 978-0-16-081834-9)

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