

Global citizenship education: Definitions and debates

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<https://doi.org/10.18296/cm.0038>

What is global citizenship education?

The idea of global citizenship or world citizenship is the idea that human beings are “citizens of the world” (Dower & Williams, 2002, p. 1). This notion of membership of a wider global, universal, or cosmopolitan citizenship goes back to the Stoics in the time of the ancient world of the Greeks and the Romans (Heater, 1999). In such times, the ideas of virtues, including moderation in the passions and endurance of adversity, was viewed as an ideal—and such people called themselves the “cosmo-polities” or “citizens of the cosmos”. They viewed their role and responsibilities as part of an ordered (global) reasoned life in which acting as a global citizen was a natural response to one’s position in life and the cosmos (Dower & Williams, 2002).

Yet, as an idea it is highly contested. For some, global citizenship represents a desired sense of collective responsibility for the issues that cut across national boundaries—environmental degradation and climate change, terrorism, refugees, and human rights. Yet others reject the idea of a global citizenship completely as people hold little political power in jurisdictions beyond their own (e.g., Parekh, 2003) and neither is there a world government that “governs” beyond the nation-state and therefore it is too abstract a concept to be valuable (Davies, 2006). In addition, as a concept it is subject to varying interpretations according to the ideologies that underpin its understanding and, as a result, has yielded criticism and debates from various quarters (Goren & Yemini, 2017; Oxley & Morris, 2013; Parmenter, 2018).

A key debate is the extent to which global citizenship education (GCED) serves to prop up imperialist, capitalist, and neoliberal approaches in which learning about the “other” perpetuates broad paternalistic stereotypes and furthers the ability for the Global North to dominate in global economic exchanges (Andreotti, 2006; Jefferess, 2007). Andreotti (2006) refers to this type of GCED as “soft”, contrasting it with more “critical” forms that seek

to understand global inequalities as a reflection of deeply unequal power relations associated with colonialism, resource, and labour distribution.

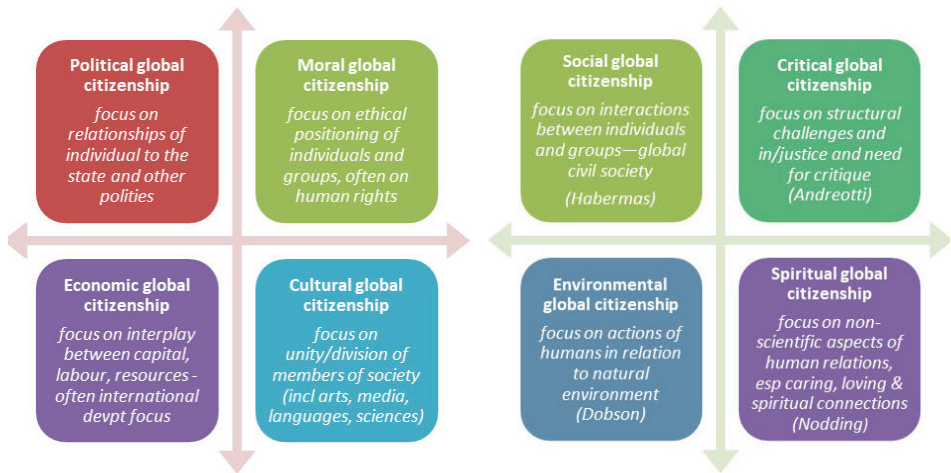
Further debates centre on the spatiality of global citizenship and how this is interpreted within education (Isin & Wood, 1999; Ong, 2006). While the movement of people and mass migration is not a new phenomenon, in recent times the scale and the pace of such movements have challenged the traditionally held notion of the citizen and his/her relationship, identity, and loyalty to the nation-state (as articulated by Marshall (1950)). In response, many citizenship scholars have argued for more global understandings of citizenship that are characterised by flexible and multiple notions of identity and connectedness beyond the nation-state (Isin & Turner, 2007; Kallio & Mitchell, 2016).

Yet somewhat paradoxically, there are still enduring reasons for why membership of a nation remains one of the most powerful attributes of contemporary citizens. As Turner (2016) states, the “right to mobility” (p. 681) and to cross borders still holds considerable power even in a globalised and transnational world. In response, a number of scholars now argue for more spatially agile, dynamic, and flexible conceptions of citizenship that acknowledge the multi-scaled nature of citizenship and its constitution through a range of social and spatial affinities (Ball, 2012; Wood & Black, 2018). For example, Wood and Black (2018) argue that, as a result of these understandings, we need GCED policies and practices that better understand the multidimensional and multi-spatial nature of citizenship today.

As an attempt to explain these multiple interpretations of GCED, Oxley and Morris (2013) offer a typology for classifying the various forms of GCED. They propose four conceptions and four advocacy types based on prevailing literature (Figure 1).

It is important then to understand that GCE has many diverse expressions and interpretations. Goren and Yemini’s (2017) extensive review of GCED policies (through Oxley and Morris’ (2013) framework) also concluded that GCED is often adapted to fit local needs and is often therefore extremely complex as an idea to unify (Goren & Yemini, 2017). As a result, it is important to undertake careful examination of contextual factors when studying GCED (Goren & Yemini, 2017).

Figure 1. Conceptions of global citizenship (left) and categories of advocacy types of global citizenship (right)



Source: Oxley & Morris, 2013, p. 306

GCED in New Zealand: Opportunities and challenges

While New Zealand does not have a GCED curriculum as such, there are still many opportunities to teach such ideas—and, in particular, within social studies and languages, and through the curriculum’s overarching framework, such as the *future focus* principle. Senior subjects such as geography, history, senior social studies, and economics also have many opportunities to explore global contexts and ideas.

Goren and Yemini’s (2017) analysis of Australia and New Zealand’s GCED (using Oxley and Morris) concluded that the prevailing cosmopolitan outlook was “moral” cosmopolitanism (which focuses on ideas such as human rights and empathy) with advocacy for environmental issues but not others. Peterson, Milligan, and Wood’s (2018) review of New Zealand and Australian GCED similarly concluded that both countries use an “education+citizenship+global” approach (drawing on Davies’ (2006) typology) in which some dimensions of citizenship and international understanding are introduced into the school curriculum, but these ideas are not necessarily connected or cohesive.

One significant challenge for GCED in New Zealand is the open, conceptual nature of the New Zealand curriculum and low levels of prescription (Sinnema, 2015). This means that social-studies teachers can choose to select global or local studies and not necessarily present a range of scales, or engage with GCED with any depth (Parmenter, 2010; Peterson et al., 2018; Wood, 2012, 2013; Wood, Taylor, Atkins, & Johnston, 2017). For example, in a comparison of GCED between Japan and New Zealand, Parmenter (2010) found that New Zealand's less centralised school system meant that it was difficult to know what teachers were teaching for GCED in comparison to Japan with a highly centralised education system and usage of common textbooks. The openness of this approach also means it is difficult to provide resources and support for teachers (Wood, Bolstad, Atkins, Milligan, & Perreau, 2018).

One further significant challenge to GCED in New Zealand is the divide between high and low socioeconomic school communities in their knowledge and experiences of citizenship education (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). This finding has been confirmed in school-based studies in New Zealand which found that students from wealthier communities were receiving a more "globally-oriented" citizenship curriculum than those from poorer communities who were encouraged to focus on their local area (Wood, 2012, 2013; Wood et al., 2017). Teachers' logic for these spatial orientations reflected expectations of their students who they perceived as being destined for a more local or global future. Such patterns needn't always be the case. An exploratory study by Bolstad, Hipkins, and Stevens (2014) found that a low decile, highly multicultural school community in New Zealand had rich insights into global citizenship through drawing on diasporic students' experiences and what this meant in an increasingly transnational world.

To summarise, the coverage of GCED in New Zealand is patchy and, while there is an intention for global dimensions to permeate the curriculum, these lack a unifying definition and cohesion (Peterson et al., 2018). In addition, there is a risk that GCED has become a more common option for more elite schools with "global" aspirations for their students.

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