

A Blue-Sky Paper on Global Citizenry

Barbara J. Smith

Often the idea of being a citizen is the focus in schools at a local, state or national level, but rarely does the extent reach to global citizenry in a deep and formal way. The notion of global citizenry should not be viewed as a competing topic, but an overarching goal for many liberal arts disciplines. Students who are prepared to become responsible global citizens, are also prepared to be strong contributors at their own local and national levels. There is no reason to stop short of teaching ideals of citizenry, at political borders. A community or nation can play an important role in supporting the global goodness. To such an end, we need to understand more about the histories, geography, languages, and political structures of different societies, beyond our birthright citizenry.

If the goal is to build capacity as citizens, we need to move beyond studying conventional subjects, to understanding how social sciences support a more vibrant global citizenry. To address this challenge, we need to think about how conventional disciplines such as Social Studies, Geography, History, Civics, and World Languages are the same and different from one another.

Social Studies is often the term used in high schools as the category that houses History, Geography and Civics. In elementary school, Social Studies students focus on various historical eras with a smattering of mapping skills and attention to local communities, states/provinces, coming to almost a full stop at the nation. Students may be exposed to selected countries outside the country border, but such examinations tend to lack any systematized way of approaching global studies. Social Studies at this level is often merged with behavioral management when primary students learn to take turns, listen attentively and work independently on various tasks.

While there are mountains of information one can learn on a local to global continuum, there remains less allotted time in the overall school schedule for these social sciences. More progressive classrooms use the context of Social Studies to teach comprehension and inquiry skills. Some classrooms integrate ELA with Social Studies for more sustained problem-based or project-based learning activities. Some schools initiate Flat Stanley projects or participate in ongoing invitations from other schools around the world. They usually link the experience with reading one the Flat Stanley novels, and then take their large poster of Stanley to interesting local places, where students take pictures with Stanley. Stanley was then flattened and inserted into a large envelope with the collection of photos on postcards written by students about their local community. The package was sent off to another school overseas where students would learn about where Stanley had been; they would in turn take more pictures with Stanley and add these postcards to the Stanley's collection. In some cases, Stanley travelled to many different parts of the world, and when he returned to his home base, the students would learn about the world through the images and messages of other students. "When students open their envelope full of images and stories of Stanley's travels, this can prompt an appreciation and curiosity for cultures around the world (Smith, in press, 2019). Based on my own experience, I added:

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." ~ John Dewey

As a Grade 4 teacher in one school, I received an envelope with a small stuffed eagle from a classroom in the US; her name was Elsa. She had travelled by mail to my class from New York where there were pictures of Elsa at the Statue of Liberty, at a play in the theatre district and dancing with the Rockettes at the Radio City Music Hall. We accepted the challenge of making Elsa feel welcome in Toronto, and so our students took her on a photo shoot to many local destinations, such as the CN Tower, Toronto Island and shopping at Yorkdale. We wrote stories about our community from Elsa's viewpoint and then sent her along to a school in Seoul, Korea where the students could read about her New York and Toronto journey, and make further plans for her Asian tour. Eventually, Elsa visited Paris, Sydney, and Helsinki before returning home to her nest in New York (Smith, in press, 2018).

On the other side of the coin, there are traditionalists who require students to memorize heaps of facts to regurgitate on the history of a state standardized test. Every fact cannot be required learning. We need to determine what is essential, and how such facts lead to deeper understandings, the kind that help us be more than state citizens, but global citizens. When Hirsch (2005) was aghast that Americans did not have a basic knowledge of history facts, there was a mad corrective rush to fix this apparent problem. Before long there were fact books for every grade – what every third grader, fourth grader, fifth grader etc. should know. The sheer volume of expectations was unwieldy and counter to curriculum theory and research. “So much attention in Social Studies courses is focused on memorizing facts about the state, province or country, but it is important to think about how we all inter-relate on this planet” (Smith, in press, 2019).

The idea of focusing on global literacy, global studies or global citizenry should not be viewed as an ‘add on’; rather, it is a more meaningful way to look at local and national issues relative to what’s happening all around the world, past and present. By weaving World Languages into the global citizenry mix, we acknowledge that language is linked directly to culture. The distance between high school Social Studies and Language Departments is too wide. Clearly, these disciplines can complement one another and provide for students a more meaningful context for learning. “Understanding and being able to use other languages help us appreciate other cultures. As the world becomes a place that can appreciate one another more, learning about World Languages makes increasingly good sense” (Smith, in press, 2019).

Given that appreciating cultures is enhanced by understanding language, how do we determine which language(s) and cultures to learn? I met an FBI agent, who had just completed coursework in Arabic, and a Foreign Diplomat who was entrenched in learning how to speak Russian. How can we predict future language needs? A country, like the United States, with a significant Hispanic population would likely provide Spanish as the main second language program. The reasons for learning French in Canada is closely tied to the reality that the country has two official languages. Without evidence of bilingual skill, government careers are rarely possible. The investment in one second language for five or more years, with the option of taking three or more concentrated high school courses, is one approach to learning a new language. For instance, elementary students in Ontario, Canada are required to take French classes for 40 minutes a day beginning in fourth grade.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." ~ John Dewey

Second language learning experiences can vary. Students can engage in similar learning activities that support first language acquisition. They can also participate in immersion, on-line and, drama-infused settings.

The popular AIM (Accelerative Integrated Method) program for teaching French in Canada, for instance, is rooted in the use of dramatic arts. Having students take part in simulations, or emulate how experts, past and present, solve problems, can be augmented by dramatic arts. Even more relevant are role plays that can add much to the depth and breadth of social and emotional learning courses.

At one school, we decided to shift the timing of the French education program so it would happen for two hours each day in one semester in addition to offering two full day French workshops. This third semester was designed so students would only focus on three subjects each day: French, France (Social Studies), and Geometry. Such a concentrated approach provided ample time for students to engage in role-playing as well as inquiry into France, the culture at the core of the language. While the focus on France from a Social Studies perspective did not replace an emphasis on Social Studies in the other semesters, it did provide specific attention to more global study. The following year we planned for a focus on French, French colonies (past and present), and Geometry in the third semester. Depending on whether students had achieved an acceptable level of language mastery, some students in their third year would be encouraged to take Spanish and learn about Spain, with the following year adding a focus on learning about Spanish colonies around the world (past and present). After four years, students could then opt to take Mandarin, German, Latin, or other languages to build a World Languages portfolio that included not only a basic exploration and introduction to a variety of languages, but also an opportunity to explore targeted world cultures in depth.

While not all learners of additional languages may become bilingual, it is possible to learn to understand one another, and in such circumstances come to appreciate each other's cultures. It's not enough to simply tack on a traditional Social Studies experiences; to achieve a sense of global citizenry, students need to be engaged in the learning.

So where do we begin? The United Nations is a good place to start. The *Model United Nations* program is a program that simulates how world leaders come together to address global issues. It's a crime such an engaging program is usually offered to a few select students in an afterschool club time frame. I would argue that learning about world crises and having students understand the process of international engagement should be compulsory for all students. Where is it that students can study about refugees in the world, past and present? Simulations allow for students to gain perspective when they become representatives of an assigned country. They "develop an appreciation of differing viewpoints, experience the challenges of negotiation, see the rewards of cooperation, broaden their world view, and discover the human side of international relations and diplomacy" (nmun.org). I was pleased to be part of the International School of Brussels that made the Model UN a compulsory part of our middle school Social Studies program. Schwartz (2018) recounted on *MindShift*:

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." ~ John Dewey

One of the challenges of working with newcomer English language learners who have only basic English skills is keeping content on grade level. At the ENLACE Academy for newcomers at Lawrence High School in Massachusetts, teachers have found that the structures of Model United Nations offer a good way to get students discussing a grade-level topic with materials that support language acquisition.

In a section titled “What’s worth changing for?” in a recent publication, I noted: “In these times, when people have questions about the acceptance of refugees and immigrants, such activities can be very helpful in developing further empathy and understanding” (Smith, in press, 2019). By shining a light on why refugees are leaving their homes, students can experience the ‘social’ in Social Studies. Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Strom (2017) claimed: “too many immigrant children are being made to feel invisible.” Social justice is about ensuring all people are visible and matter; human rights can be global rights. The Sky School, co-founded by Mia Eskelund and Polly Akhurst, works directly with refugee learners.

In 2017, we ran a six-week pilot course on the topic of social entrepreneurship, involving 50 students. The course was delivered in collaboration with partners in Athens (Greece), Amman (Jordan) and Kakuma Camp (Kenya), as well as online. Feedback from the pilot course...was overwhelmingly positive. In 2018, we are building on our initial success by developing the Sky School curriculum framework, as well as convening educators to design courses through hackathons and rolling out a number individual courses. (<https://www.skyschool.world/about-1/>).

One of the most effective ways to entrench learning is to be there. Students, who have opportunities to travel abroad, and work and live with people in other cultures, expand the depths of their education. Some schools arrange exchanges, internships or support class or individual trips abroad through organizations like ME to WE. In 2018, ME to WE offered student leadership experiences to the following destinations:

- Amazon – \$4000 (12 days)
 - India - \$5595 (17 days)
 - Ecuador – \$4295 (14 days)
 - Kenya - \$5595 (16 days)
 - Tanzania – \$5595 (16 days)
 - Ethiopia – \$5395 (13 days)
- (<https://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/>)

The costs of food, accommodation and flights were all factored into each trip price. The organization also provides teachers with curriculum materials about global citizenry, as well as fund-raising tips to help supplement the costs of such trips.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." ~ John Dewey

If, according to the *The Asia Society, Partnership for Global Learning Organization* and the *Council of Chief State School Officers Center for Global Education* (2011), globally competent youth can

- investigate the world beyond their immediate environment;
- recognize perspectives, others and their own;
- communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences;
- take action to improve conditions (Mansilla & Jackson, p. 11),

how do our social science programs contribute to such ambitious goals?

It is fitting to speak of World Languages as a distinct language acquisition subject; but as a liberal art, it can also connect with Social Studies. Following the description of global citizenry, it makes sense to address global cultures in relation to the languages that define them.

References

Hirsch, E.D. (2005). *What Your Fourth Grader Needs to Know*. New York: Bantam Dell

Mansilla, V. B. & Jackson, A. (2011). *Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World*. Council of Chief State School Officers' EdSteps Initiative & Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning. Retrieved from <https://asiasociety.org/files/book-globalcompetence.pdf>.

Model United Nations (<https://www.nmun.org/about-nmun/mission-and-history.html>).

Schwartz, K. (2018). *Model United Nations offers structured practice for English Language Learners*. Minf/Shift. April 9, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/50977/model-united-nations-offers-structured-practice-for-english-language-learners_

Sky School. Retrieved from <https://www.skyschool.world/about-1/>).

Smith, B. (in press, 2019). *How Much Does a Great School Cost?* Brill Publishers.

Suárez-Orozco, M., Suárez-Orozco, C. & Strom, A. (2017). *Backtalk: A Lesson in Civility: The negativity student immigrants hear*. Phi Delta Kappan. November 29, 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.kappanonline.org/suarez-orozco-stroma-lesson-in-civility-immigrant-students-negativity/>.

We. Retrieved from <https://www.metowe.com/volunteer-travel/youth-trips/>.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow." ~ John Dewey