Global Competence Education:
Preparing Students to Thrive in an Uncertain Future

As a global collective, we face challenges that demand cooperation and action across national borders. From the COVID-19 pandemic to disruptive technologies to the looming threat of climate change, we are confronting "multiple, overlapping crises" (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 17) that point to an increasingly unpredictable future for all. Societies around the world are shifting as well with, for example, increased migration and an international swell of anti-racism efforts. A new report commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Commission on the Futures of Education stresses the high stakes and underscores the critical role of education in this moment: "We increasingly face an existential choice: continue on an unsustainable path, or radically change course… given the grave risks we face, we must urgently reinvent education to help us address common challenges… [to] help us unite around collective endeavors and provide the knowledge, and innovation needed to shape sustainable and peaceful futures for all" (International Commission on the Futures of Education, p. 16, 21).

Top educational organizations increasingly recognize "global competence" as a key component of a future-orientated education that prepares students to navigate an interconnected and uncertain world (PISA, *Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world,* 2018; Asia Society, 2021). But what does "global competence" actually mean? How can we measure it? And with such high stakes, what strategies can educators use to promote measurable student outcomes? This white paper will describe how leading organizations define "global competence," explain a framework to measure it, and share research-based strategies to develop students' global competence.

What Is Global Competence?

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

PISA is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Programme for International Student Assessment. Since 2000, PISA has administered tests that measure 15-year-olds' abilities in English, mathematics, and science across 80 countries every three years. The 2018 PISA assessment cycle also explored students' global competencies.

PISA (*Global competence - PISA*, n.d.) defines global competence as: "a multi-dimensional construct that requires a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied to global issues or intercultural situations." In particular, global competence encompasses students' ability to "examine local, global and intercultural issues," "understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others," "engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions across cultures," and "take action for collective well-being and sustainable development" (*Global competence - PISA*, n.d.).

PISA (*Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world*, 2018) outlines four reasons to develop students' global competence:

- To live harmoniously in multicultural communities: Education for global competence can deepen students' understanding of differences in diverse contexts -- such as schools, neighborhoods, communities and nations. By appreciating cultural differences and challenging cultural stereotypes, students can learn to live peacefully with people from a wide range of backgrounds.
- To thrive in a changing labour market: Under the influence of globalization, all trades and professions are more connected than before. Education for global competence can provide holistic development for students' abilities, such as team spirit, communication and cooperation skills, which can further help them to thrive in a changing labour market.
- To use media platforms effectively and responsibly: The development of technology and the explosion of information breaks the space and geographical restrictions and connects people from all around the world. Developing global competence can cultivate students' critical thinking skills, media literacy and digital responsibility to become discerning digital citizens.

- To support the Sustainable Development Goals: It is our responsibility and mission to cultivate a new generation of globally competent individuals who can attend to global issues and take the responsibility of promoting sustainable development of the world.

The Asia Society

The Asia Society is a global non-profit dedicated to educating the world about Asia through arts, education, policy, and business outreach. The Asia Society (*Global competence outcomes and rubrics*, n.d) defines global competence as "the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance" and states that globally competent students "investigate the world, consider a variety of perspectives, communicate ideas, and take meaningful action." In particular, the four competencies proposed by the Asia Society (Mansilla and Jackson, 2011) are:

Investigate the world: Students investigate the world beyond their immediate environment.

Students that investigate the world:

- Identify an issue, generate a question, and explain the significance of locally, regionally, and globally focused researchable questions.
- Use a variety of languages and domestic and international sources to identify and weigh relevant evidence in addressing a globally significant researchable question.
- Analyze, integrate, and synthesize evidence to construct coherent responses to globally significant researchable questions.
- Develop an argument based on compelling evidence that considers multiple perspectives and draws defensible conclusions.

Recognize perspectives: Students recognize their own and other's perspectives.
Students that recognize perspectives:

- Recognize and express their own perspective on situations, events, issues, or phenomena and identify the influences on that perspective.

- Examine perspectives of other people, groups, or schools of thought and identify the influences on those perspectives.
- Explain how cultural interactions influence situations, events, issues, or phenomena, including the development of knowledge.
- Articulate how differential access to knowledge, technology, and resources affects quality of life and perspectives.

Communicate ideas: Students communicate their ideas effectively with a diverse audience.

Students that communicate ideas:

- Recognize and express how diverse audiences may perceive different meanings from the same information and how that impacts communication.
- Listen to and communicate effectively with diverse people, using appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior, languages, and strategies.
- Select and use appropriate technology and media to communicate with diverse audiences.
- Reflect on how effective communication impacts understanding and collaboration in an interdependent world.

Take action: Students translate their ideas into appropriate actions to improve conditions.

Students that take action:

- Identify and create opportunities for personal or collaborative action to address situations, events, issues, or phenomena in ways that improve conditions.
- Assess options and plan actions based on evidence and the potential for impact, taking into account previous approaches, varied perspectives, and potential consequences.
- Act, personally or collaboratively, in creative and ethical ways to contribute to improvement locally, regionally, or globally and assess the impact of the actions taken.
- Reflect on their capacity to advocate for and contribute to improvement locally, regionally, or globally.

The International Baccalaureate (IB)

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a non-profit leader in international education, providing curricular frameworks for four programmes educating students aged 3-19 around the globe. Central to all IB programmes is the goal of developing “international-mindedness” (*What is an IB education?*, 2017, p. 2), and particularly "to develop[ing] internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world" (*Education for a better world*, 2015).

The IB international-mindedness framework positions learners as global citizens with the knowledge, skills, agency, and dispositions to be globally engaged and interculturally competent. The knowledge and skills necessary for global competence are embedded in the school’s programmes of study, including opportunities for sustained inquiry into local and global issues; reflection on individuals’ perspective, culture, and identity and those of others; multilingualism as an avenue towards intercultural understanding; and a focus on meaningful community engagement (*What is an IB education?*, 2017) that accounts for “local factors including [the] geographical, political, religious, social and cultural” (Hacking et al., 2016, p. 147).

The IB Learner Profile also reflects the IB’s commitment to developing students’ “social, emotional and physical well-being, and… ensuring that students learn to respect themselves, others, and the world around them” (*What is an IB education?*, 2017, p. 3). The Learner Profile specifies 10 attributes that form the “foundation of developing internationally minded students who can help to build a better world” (*What is an IB education?*, 2017, p. 3). Those attributes are: inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective (*What is an IB education?*, 2017, p. 3), with special emphasis on “open-mindedness” as “the primary attribute that teachers believe underpins the development of responsible members of the global community” (Merryfield et al., 2012). A recent study (Gándara et al., 2021, p. 3) suggests that students in the IB Diploma Programme and Career-Related Programme display higher global-mindedness than young adults in non-IB programmes, with “IB students’ global-mindedness levels… between 3% and 15% higher than the country-level benchmark sample.”

Several IB Diploma Programme (DP) curricular initiatives illustrate the IB's commitment to developing global competence skills. The Global Politics course (*International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme subject brief*, 2015) explores contemporary political issues and core political concepts of power, equality, and sustainability in a variety of contexts. It pushes students to critically engage with a variety of complex and competing political perspectives while developing an understanding of the local, national, international, and global dimensions of political activity. The Information Technology in a Global Society (ITGS) course challenges students to use their understanding of information technologies to evaluate social and ethical issues in specified scenarios (*IT in the DP*, n.d.). The IB has also collaborated with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation to embed a circular economy perspective into the IB curriculum (*Circular economy now included in IB curriculum*, 2016). This approach pushes students to think in different, more circular ways about our interconnected and complex world, moving from a linear understanding of our economy — "we take a material out of the ground, we make something out of it and ultimately that product, in the most part, gets thrown away" — to a circular approach in which students consider "how to design [a product] to fit within a system, and how the materials it contains will be recovered after its use" (*Circular economy now included in IB curriculum*, 2016). These DP curricular initiatives all challenge students to think about the world in new, innovative ways.

The IB's Middle Years Programme (MYP) also identifies six global contexts (*MYP: From Principles into practice*, 2014) that support students in connecting their learning to authentic real-world settings, events, and circumstances. The MYP's global contexts are: identities and relationships, orientation in space and time, personal and cultural expression, scientific and technical innovation, globalization and sustainability, and fairness and development. The global contexts thread through and connect the MYP's eight subject groups, thus reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the programme.

Additional Frameworks

Several other organizations and scholars offer important approaches to defining and developing global competence.

The Global Citizen Diploma, or GCD, is a high school credential established at Yokohama International School in 2011 and adopted by a consortium of international

schools. The GCD (*Global Citizen Diploma*, n.d.) credential recognizes students for the global citizenship work they are already doing, both inside and outside the classroom, and pushes them to share these experiences with authentic audiences. The GCD's framework consists of core values (e.g., community engagement, global understanding), competencies (e.g., academic skills, public communication), and areas of expertise (e.g., multilingualism, leadership). This framework encourages students to become self-directed and metacognitive thinkers who make positive contributions to their communities.

The Council of International Schools (Thompson, 2021) is also developing a model of global citizenship and intercultural understanding (GCIU). The GCIU model presents an intersecting set of core values (e.g., empathy, justice), concepts (e.g., an understanding of global interconnectivity and inclusion via diversity, equity and anti-racism), and competencies (e.g., an ability to understand, appreciate, and adapt to different ideas, perspectives, cultures, languages, and customs), all of which prepare students "to contribute to our societal and global well-being, sustainability, fairness, and peace" (Thompson, 2021).

Fernando Reimers (Reimers et al., 2016) has developed a "World Course," a global citizenship curriculum designed to equip students with the global competence skills necessary for navigating a world of increasing volatility and contributing to sustainable development.

Additionally, Hakan Altinay (2011) has argued for the notion of "global civics," suggesting that we have rights and responsibilities towards each other that are necessary to achieve international cooperation. Altinay suggests universities, with their tools and forums, are key sites for the discussion about global civics.

All of the above models stress the importance of critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills; deep knowledge of local and global issues; and respect for different perspectives and diverse contexts. Importantly, all frameworks propose that students apply this set of knowledge, skills, and values to take meaningful action in order to make the world a better place.

How Is Global Competence Measured?

In recognition of increasing globalisation and young people's corresponding need to develop more collaborative problem-solving skills informed by appreciation for

diverse perspectives, PISA (*PISA 2018 results*, n.d., p. 5) administered a "first-of-a-kind, ambitious" test in 2018 designed to measure students' global competence. Specifically, PISA (*Global competence - PISA*, n.d.) wanted to measure "students' capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development." The assessment:

> Defines and assesses Global Competence in a multi-dimensional way, recognising students' socio-emotional skills and attitudes as core indicators of global competence, in addition to their cognitive reasoning about global and intercultural issues. As the test focuses only on the knowledge and cognitive skills students need to confront problems related to global and intercultural issues, the student questionnaire collects information on students' skills (both cognitive and socio-emotional) and their attitudes towards global and intercultural issues. (*Global competence - PISA*, n.d.)

Among its questions, the test (*PISA 2018 global competence questionnaire*, 2018) asked students to rate their agreement with statements such as, "I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision," "I am capable of overcoming my difficulties in interacting with people from other cultures," and "I can do something about the problems of the world."

The assessment results (*PISA 2018 results*, n.d., p. 224) highlighted the "multidimensional nature of global competence" and the critical role of schools in promoting global competence, concluding that education "will be key to reconciling the needs and interests of individuals, communities and nations within an equitable framework based on open borders and a sustainable future."

How Can Educators Develop Students' Global Competence?

With such high stakes, how can educators ensure they implement the most effective approaches to develop students' global competence? In 2019, Dr. Christina Hinton and her team of researchers from Research Schools International (RSI) and Harvard Graduate School of Education carried out a study to identify practices that are

effective at supporting students' global competence (Boudreau, 2020; Shanker, Hinton, and Cheung, 2020).

In the study, we collected data from teachers and students in 147 Round Square schools spread across 34 countries on 6 continents. We analyzed this data with a mixed methods approach to explore relationships among learning activities and global competency outcomes. Through our quantitative analyses, we identified five learning activities that were both statistically significantly correlated with multiple PISA global competencies and rated as effective in promoting these competencies by teachers and students. We then used qualitative analysis to explore if and how these learning activities might support the development of global competence. In addition, we used qualitative analyses to glean insights into how to effectively implement these learning activities.

With this research, we identified the following five evidence-based learning activities that support students to develop global competence (Boudreau, 2020; Shanker, Hinton, and Cheung, 2020):

1. Volunteering services to help people in the wider community: Volunteering was significantly correlated with engagement with others regarding global issues, global mindedness, openness to diversity, interest in other cultures, adaptability, awareness of global issues, respect, and self-efficacy.

   Implementation Strategies:

   - Before engaging in volunteer work in a specific community, students need to be aware of specific challenges community members are facing and empathize with them.
   - Service activities should be frequent and allow students to form real bonds with community members.

2. Participating in events celebrating cultural diversity throughout the school year: Cultural diversity events were significantly correlated with building the following competencies: engagement with others regarding global issues, attitude towards immigrants, openness to diversity, interest in other cultures, global mindedness, respect, adaptability, and self-efficacy.

Implementation Strategies:

- Contextualize events so they are part of a larger educational strategy — have a learning goal or objective.
- Events, which can range from conferences to holiday celebrations, should work to spark curiosity in students and promote respect.
- Create other opportunities for students to become curious about other cultures, whether through readings or instructional content, to create intrinsic motivation to participate in events.

3. Learning how people from different cultures can have different perspectives on some issues: Learning about other cultures and perspectives was significantly correlated with openness to diversity, interest in other cultures, attitudes towards immigrants, self-efficacy, engagement with others, and awareness of global issues.

   Implementation Strategies:

   - Provide activities in and out the classroom that focus on other cultures like international exchanges, diversity clubs, and forums.
   - Offer professional development opportunities to teachers to learn about how to support discussions and instruction around diversity and diverse perspectives.

4. Participating in classroom discussions about world events: Discussions about world events was significantly correlated with self-efficacy, awareness of global issues, openness to diversity, adaptability, and global mindedness.

   Implementation Strategies:

   - Set aside significant time for discussion of what is happening in the world today. Read news sources from around the world and discuss current events; talk about bias and trust.

5. Learning to solve conflicts: Conflict solution was significantly correlated with adaptability, perspective taking, openness to diversity, intercultural

communication, respect, global mindedness, attitudes towards immigrants, and awareness of global issues.

Implementation Strategies:

- Activities that promote collaboration lead to opportunities to resolve conflicts. These activities include whole-class discussions, model UN, reading and discussing world literature, group presentations, performances, debates, and exploring global issues in foreign language classes.

Conclusion

The tumultuous events of the past few years highlight the critical need to develop the next generation of globally-competent leaders. From widening social inequities to pandemics, the problems we face as a global collective increasingly transcend national borders and will require new degrees of global awareness, intercultural communication, and collective responsibility as we work together to solve the world's problems. Education is a powerful way to support the next generation to build these competencies. With this, even in the face of unprecedented challenges, "we have reason to be full of hope" (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 10).

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