

Turning Students Into Global Citizens

By Fernando M. Reimers

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We are living in a world that is increasingly interdependent. Local and global affairs are deeply intertwined, and technology has transformed the ways in which most people interact, access knowledge, work, and participate civically. These changes are part of our ever-increasing globalization—a process that is shrinking our planet and bringing us all into more intense contact with one another, often across lines of social, cultural, and racial differences. Preparing students to live and work in an integrated world and contribute to improving society fulfills public schools' intended purpose.

But many schools fail to provide students with such opportunities at a moment in history when the need has never been greater. Ethnic and religious differences continue to be a source of conflict rather than the basis of productive and creative collaboration. These differences are exacerbated by politicians who capitalize on fear, creating walls that marginalize many groups and contribute to further alienation. Rhetoric in the U.S. presidential race and in the United Kingdom's Brexit vote echo these themes of unease.

Recent tragedies in cities around the world underscore a widespread attitude of bigotry and prejudice. Recent headlines recount a succession of deaths resulting from this attitude, including in Dallas, Baton Rouge, Orlando, and St. Paul in our own country, as well as in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Germany, Iraq, and Turkey.

This educational failure highlights the paradox that even though **children across the world have greater access to education** than they've had at any time in the past century, and globalization is bringing humanity closer together, we have also been pushed further apart. To help students respond to this crisis in a constructive way—rather

than with fear—schools must take responsibility for effective and more deliberate global-citizenship education. Advancing such education requires a well-designed curriculum and built-in support for educators to develop global competency themselves. This effort should embrace professional-development opportunities, along with the guidance of strong school and district leadership.

There is an existing body of effective practices in global education on which educators can build. After reviewing different approaches, a group of current and former colleagues at the Harvard Graduate

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School of Education and I created a framework for a K-12 global competency curriculum that is project-based and interdisciplinary. The curriculum, which is highlighted in our recently published book *Empowering Global Citizens: A World Course*, is influenced by the United Nations' sustainable-development goals—a vision of inclusive progress for all nations that should be required reading for any globally minded educator.

The framework takes academic subjects and emphasizes how to integrate topics with clear global dimensions, such as environmental studies, world history, and public health. In addition to helping students develop knowledge of critical global challenges, educators must also address the range of skills global competency requires, from foreign-language study and religious literacy to a curiosity about the world and an understanding of personal agency, empowerment, and leadership. Using technology, educators can encourage students' project collaboration with peers in other countries to reinforce these learnings.

To better prepare teachers and school leaders, districts should encourage their educators to pursue opportunities to learn about global education practices in other countries, including by researching the field of comparative education to ensure their teaching methods and curricula are effective. Educators around the world, and the children they teach, must take the time to learn from one another.

If we are to help students develop the capacity to make their communities and societies more inclusive and sustainable, school and district leaders must provide the conditions, empowerment, and support for teachers to integrate global education curriculum in the classroom. In so doing, schools can help replace fear of difference with understanding. These lessons will prepare students to collaborate with others beyond the classroom as they work to appreciate a shrinking world.

*Fernando M. Reimers is a professor of international education and the director of the Global Education Innovation Initiative and the International Education Policy Program at Harvard University. He is the co-author of *Empowering Global Citizens: A World Course* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2016).*



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