

Windows on the World: Global Citizenship in Dutch Education

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Abstract

Children and young people are increasingly part of a globalising world. In order to effectively participate in this world, it is of vital importance that they learn to be aware of and look critically at their own environment and the wider world. Global citizens do not only have knowledge of global systems and processes, they are also actively engaged with the world and its inhabitants.

In January 2009, the official Dutch ‘Canon’ for Global Citizenship was launched. The canon is an initiative of NCDO (National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development) and Utrecht University which offers windows to the world. The canon offers the education sector a way of working with global citizenship in the classroom. In the canon for global citizenship, eight central themes are distinguished: Diversity, Identity, Human Rights, Sustainable Development, Globalisation, (North-South) Division, Peace and Conflict and Global Interconnectedness. Each theme offers three ‘windows to the world’ which form a starting point for working with global citizenship in the classroom. The canon was not meant to be a prescribed set of topics, but offers different views through its windows on the world. It challenges people to look through them, discover the interconnectedness with places, people and events elsewhere in the world.

Global citizenship

Global citizenship; is an often used term, but still hard to define. The many perspectives in which you can look at global citizenship education makes the term hard to interpret. Everybody has their own ideas and concepts about this topic. The question is how global citizenship can be implemented in education, and should geography play a role in this case?

In the Netherlands the Canon¹ of Global Citizenship was launched. This canon offers different ‘windows’ to the world, which form a starting point for teachers to implement global citizenship in their classrooms. How is this canon built up, and how does it contribute to education for global citizenship? We will show which steps were taken to build the canon, so other countries can also benefit from it. The main question in this paper is therefore: “How does the Dutch canon for Global citizenship contribute to education on global citizenship, and how can Geography benefit from this canon?”

The world is getting smaller; other parts of the world are easier to reach and because of digital means of communications, the possibilities for sharing and obtaining information have increased dramatically. As citizens we should adapt to this global reach and be global citizens.

Our network of friends and family is getting more global; people are going to study or work in other countries and the media brings news from all the parts of the world. Also our food,

¹ Canon stems from ancient Greek, and means ‘measuring rod’ or ‘standard’. In this sense it is used as a group of themes which are generally seen as representing the field of global citizenship education.

clothes, transport, computer or cell phone show the global connections; we can't see ourselves apart from the rest of the world. The last argument for creating global citizenship is the fact that 'we' are the 20% of the world population who lives in prosperity. By realizing this you can reflect on your own existence and put your own life in broader perspective. This awareness can lead to a certain contribution to make the world more liveable and fair.

In the Netherlands, the National Commission for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO) has made a description of a global citizen; He or she:

- is aware of the world and his own role as global citizen
- respects diversity in norms and values
- is willing to contribute in making the world more fair
- takes responsibility for his/her own actions
- contributes to the own community
- has a clear vision on international affairs
- recognizes possibilities and challenges to enrich global participation and interaction with the world
- feels involved with humanity

Besides the assumption of a certain base of knowledge and perception about international affairs and trends, global citizenship also demands an active attitude towards global matters. Such a global participation can only be reached by being aware of what is happening in the world and the influence of this on our own personal situation. Citizens of today have access to a lot of sources to stay updated about global issues and the background of these events. They should be able to form a realistic image on these issues. There are some comments though.

Media

Citizens can gather information about global events and processes from the media. However, media sources which offer objective background information about global trends are acquainted with a small amount of readers. For a lot of Dutch citizens the television is the most important source of information. This can cause a distorted image. Information about development, sustainability and human rights which is offered on television is most of the time packed in amusement. Global problems are therefore being simplified. The Internet is an inexhaustible source of information. It struggles with the same problem as television though. Too much information is offered in a light-hearted way.

Social organisations

Research shows that the classic membership of churches, trade unions or political parties declines. Membership of idealistic organisations is increasing. This leads to the so-called "check book-solidarity"; or practical idealism. The threat here is that people have to stay tuned to the changes in the international context and be supportive for the cases which really matter.

Children spend most of their time at school; therefore this is the place to get information on global topics. The Dutch education system has a strong tradition in social oriented courses and development education, but the question rises if schools assign a proper image of the international reality to their students. Images on this topic demand constant adjustment, and should be presented in an objective way. This is not always the case in the Netherlands; different researches show that young children often have stereotyped images on international affairs.

Global Citizenship Education

To get involved with global topics and global citizenship, it is important to start as early as possible. In that case, children will more easily adapt an awareness which reaches beyond local or national boundaries, gather knowledge of international affairs and build up a certain empathy with and respect for other people and their culture. Because of this awareness, they will be able to distinguish subjective images of the world and therefore become global citizens with an objective and proper view on the world.

The attention to this international dimension in education is not new. For instance, in the United Kingdom schools work with global citizenship education for years already, and also in Germany 'das Globales Lernen' is a well-known term.

Every country which implements citizenship in their educational curriculum has its own way of implementing. While education standards differ in every country this is not a problem, as long as the basic knowledge on spatial issues (environment, resources, economy), the reflection on values and attitude and the development of skills are taken into account.

The Dutch Canon of Global Citizenship

NCDO and Utrecht University launched this Canon and used the following themes:

Diversity

This theme is centred on the rich diversity of the world in all kind of ways (historical, cultural, physical). This diversity makes the world an interesting place for students to learn about others and build respect for them. It is also important that they recognize the influence which these differences have on each other.

Identity

People feel connected to a certain community. This theme emphasizes on social identification; what kind of communities are there, which are the ones people feel connected to?

Human Rights

In this theme the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gets attention. How can countries contribute to these rights, and what happens in case of violation of these rights?

Sustainable development

Because of the increasing climate change this is an important matter. How can we behave more sustainable, and therefore operate in a better way for our world?

Globalisation

The connections between people all over the world are highlighted in this theme. Economic relations, migration movements and cultural exchange; what do these global aspects mean to people, and how do they influence their lives?

(North-South) Division

The unequal division between North and South is stressed here. Why is there difference in access to nutrition, shelter and healthcare in different parts of the world, and how can we decrease these differences?

Peace and Conflict

For the global community it is of vital importance that regional conflicts are solved as soon and as peaceful as possible. How do we organize this, and what are the threats of an international army like the UN-army?

Global participation

How do people cope with the outcomes of global citizenship. How do we get our global information, what is the role of the contemporary media in this case, and what happens to our (global) consumption and lifestyle?

Every theme has 3 'windows', which form examples to use in the classroom. These windows clarify a certain aspect of the theme. When choosing these windows the variety was always kept in mind; there are places, events, organisations and objects; some from the past, some from the present; every part of the world is represented. They are just starting points; teachers can come up with their own ideas.

NCDO and Utrecht University think that with these eight themes all the aspects of being a global citizen are covered. When students work in an active way with these themes they will get acquainted with all aspects of global citizenship.

An example: Globalisation

Let's take globalisation to clarify the Dutch canon. In this classification globalisation stands for the strong bilateral connection and interdependence of areas and people in the world.

The three aspects to exemplify this theme are the following:

1. The shifting economic relations and economic centres of gravity in a world where trade and investments are important. The window for this topic is Shanghai; a global city which can be seen as a symbol of the rising economic significance of China.
2. The major international migration movements which developed as an outcome of the globalisation process. Here the window is Ceuta; the Spanish enclave in Morocco. A lot of African migrants living here have to deal with many political and ethical dilemma's.
3. The cultural exchange where new patterns and mixtures in food, music and fashion arise from. Djembé is highlighted; a west African instrument which stands for native traditions, but also for an international exchange of music styles.

These windows can be shown and used in class; the questions that will arise or the way in which the teacher presents the windows, highly depend on the context. The age of the students, the school type, the social context of the students, the input of the teachers and the amount of available time are all factors which shape this context.

The role of Geography

As already said, global citizenship and also the Dutch Canon are founded on a certain basic knowledge. This knowledge can be found in Geography: spatial differences, developments in time, visions on important global issues, possible directions of solutions and the notion of links between local and global concerns.

Geography offers a wide variety of possibilities to contribute in themes like diversity, sustainability, globalisation and division. The Dutch Canon shows the central task of Geography in education for global citizenship.

Besides gathering basic knowledge, global citizenship also stresses on exploration of different perspectives of value, a reflection on the own values and standards of behaviour.

Students need to learn to cope with stereotypes and prejudices, intercultural notion, empathy and a feeling of alliance; devotion to social justice and equality and respect for the environment. All these matters are imbedded in a social course like Geography. This course has the noble task to prepare adolescents on their awareness to be a global citizen in the society. This concerns the learning of the basic knowledge on processes and issues; a reflection on the thoughts about values and the skills to act like a true global citizen.

The role which Geography can play in global citizenship education is quite clear. The important matter now is that advocates of both geography and global citizenship work together and learn from each other. The Canon is being translated in English, so also other countries can use these windows to work with global citizenship in the classroom.

The Dutch Canon may give rise to a lot of questions; but it also provides possibilities which bring global education, and the role of Geography, in a clearer perspective. An international use of the Canon, isn't that the best example of global cooperation and citizenship?

References

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