



Isabella Lenihan-Ikin (left) with conference student leader Raven Maeder

An interdependent whole: capturing the thoughts of tomorrow's global citizens

The New Zealand Curriculum supports schools to move away from 'silo' thinking: the treatment of subject areas as rigidly discrete entities, with no application to each other. It's now almost universally accepted that, as life doesn't work like that, education shouldn't either.

A great example of a learning context which touches on many of today's learning goals would be what we call 'global citizenship'. The topic embodies so much of what the modern classroom is all about, from the examination of complex systems, to student inquiry into the world that's forming around them. When studying global citizenship, it is important to leave the data retention to Google, and instead concentrate on developing a critical understanding of the nature of the planet's various cultures and environments. It's not just a matter of nurturing connected and prepared learners: the wellbeing of our species depends heavily on the ability of future generations to see life through an ecological and humanitarian prism.

AN EMERGENT DISCIPLINE

Libby Giles is working hard on the dissemination of ideas like these in her role as project advisor at the New Zealand Centre for Global Studies (NZCGS) – in addition to her roles as head of religious education at St Cuthbert's College, and secretary for the New Zealand Association of Philosophy Teachers. Formed in 2012, the NZCGS is a young organisation tasked with fanning the flames of a conversation that the entire planet needs to have: how do we come to grips with the fact that the world is now an interdependent whole? How can we encourage kids to think beyond their own familial, communal and national surrounds?

An indication that global citizenship is very much on the minds of some of the world's biggest thinkers is the fact that in 2013, the UNESCO Associated Schools Network's 60th anniversary conference was themed as such. As part of the New Zealand delegation, Libby noticed that, though global citizenship was supposedly the framework of the conference, speakers were studiously ignoring it. It struck her then that nobody was prepared to own up to a fuzzy understanding of the notion.

"Of course, it's an emerging thing, but a short definition would be 'the responsibility side of globalisation,'" says Libby, in a beautifully succinct encapsulation of its meaning.

"It's something I believe must be infused right throughout schooling and our communities. What it's not about is being 'international do-gooders'."

The New Zealand Centre for Global Studies is a charitable trust based fittingly on Waiheke Island – a pristine sanctuary in the Hauraki Gulf facing its own very 21st century questions around the encroachment of private ownership on nature. The organisation has opened channels of communication with many universities, research institutes, think tanks and, of course, schools, toward the exploration of "ways in which global problems faced by humanity in the 21st century may be most effectively addressed and resolved. Thematic areas of focus include sustainability, peace and security,

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human rights and international law and organisations. Governance issues include UN-Bretton Woods reform and strengthening in the context of global constitutionalism, political legitimacy, and civil society-government-business interaction.”

REACHING OUT

One of the centre’s first pieces of outreach work was undertaken in August 2013, in partnership with Auckland Girls’ Grammar School. A student conference was organised on the theme, ‘What does it mean to be a global citizen in the 21st century’. The conference explored some of the biggest issues affecting the future of humanity, matters that today’s school-age students will be facing head-on. It’s intended that the event become an annual fixture so that students are able to draw on and expand the work done by groups before them.

Around 30 students from around the country successfully applied to get involved with the inaugural conference. The programme began with talks led by board members of the NZCGS to get juices flowing, which were followed by afternoon discussion group workshops.

Isabella Lenihan-Ikin was one of the students at the 2013 conference. She graduated from Western Springs College in 2014, and is currently studying law, biomedical science and international relations at Victoria University of Wellington. Clearly the student conference made a lasting impression on Isabella, to the point that she felt the initiative important enough to offer her time in helping to organise this year’s events. What is it that she so strongly feels this year’s crop of civically-minded young people need to experience?

“Looking back, what sticks out for me was hearing incredibly inspiring New Zealanders, such as Rod Oram, Adrian Macey and Kennedy Graham, talk about the potential we have as a society to work on a global level. Going to this conference redefined my perception of what international and global relations is about – it is so much more than politics and economics, it is about shaping a sustainable and healthy society that meets the needs and requirements of all inhabitants and aspects of this earth – humans, animals, oceans, flora. Global citizenship is about the connection between humanity, economy, politics and ecology and how we can ensure sustainability.

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One of the topics up for small-group discussion at the conference also left an indelible impression on Isabella, and her response could be seen as emblematic of the shift in thinking that’s going on around us, and in particular among today’s young people: Who would you die for?

“This was the question that took us the longest to answer, and come to a consensus on – I don’t think we quite got there.

“To me, it’s not about ‘who’ I would die for – personally, I am against war, and therefore I would not voluntarily go and fight at war for the UN or for my country. I would, however, sacrifice my life for a cause.”

EVOLUTION

This year, the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO has come to the party with funding for not one, but two student conferences, as Libby explains.

“Because of the generosity of the National Commission, we’ll be able to run two student conferences this year. One will be academic, like the last one, but it’s going to be ramped up a bit: we’re expecting about one hundred students. After the morning presentations this time, the students will work ‘café style’, where they’ll be divided up into topic areas like global justice and human rights, global law, global government, global finance, and common goods. They’ll have experts to mentor them. That will be in Wellington, and the morning presentations will be at the Royal Society, then in the afternoon they will be using the wonderful new facilities at the Ministry of Education for workshopping.

The event will begin with a reception at Parliament co-hosted across party lines with the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO.

Organiser Isabella Lenihan-Ikin says too that one of the learnings from previous conferences has been to make the whole thing more approachable, and to get students thinking about it prior to the day itself.

“We want students to do research and preparation prior to attending the conference, to increase their understanding of the meaning and scope of global citizenship, and what they think a global society looks like.

“I think that this will mean that students are already engaged in the topic, and are therefore able to get more out of the presentations. We do understand that receiving presentations from academics who are professors in their fields can be daunting, so we have decided to work with university students who have a particular academic interest in the concept of global citizenship to facilitate workshop discussions with students (using key questions that relate back to the presentations) to generate discussion about the topic.”

The second student conference this year will take place on 1 July, and aims to include in the discourse students who can bring a more abstract approach to the conversation on global issues: a painting, interpretive dance routine, or short film, while not necessarily worth more than a thousand words, certainly adds depth and colour to the story that today’s students feel must be told.

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MORE INFORMATION

For more information, and to apply to be at the 2016 NZCGS Student Conferences on Global Citizenship, go to: bit.ly/nzcgconf

Applications are open to students in years 11–13.

Date: 12–13 May 2016. Evening Parliamentary Reception on Thursday 12 May (6–7.30pm)/One day conference Friday 13 May (8.30am–5pm).

Place: Wellington, New Zealand. Parliament/Royal Society of New Zealand/Ministry of Education.

For further information about the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO visit www.unesco.org.nz

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“This will capture a different group of students than the academic conference,” says Libby. “It’s great to get a cross-section of students from a different sphere of talent. The theme is along the lines of ‘how can the human spirit overcome the issues that we face’, and the idea is that the students will communicate their thoughts through performance and art. That means of course that students doing English, drama, media, and that sort of thing will actually be able to get credit for this through their schools.”

A RESEARCH JOURNEY

There were in fact two parts to the grant bestowed by the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO: the student conferences create a forum for the thoughts, dreams, hopes and fears of today’s students – tomorrow’s leaders; the other part will fund Libby Giles on a research journey designed – appropriately enough, given the subject – to observe and assess the ways in which other countries are going about the task of global citizenship education. She’ll be meeting and working with national education administrators, representatives of non-governmental organisations, staff of UNESCO and associated bodies, universities, and a range of others who are bending their shoulder to the job of considering how best to prepare young people for the planet’s looming challenges. And for that matter, how, with a fresh and energetic approach, they can help prepare us in turn.

While she’d like to reserve judgement on how well we’re doing in New Zealand when it comes to global citizenship education, at least until

her research is complete, Libby does believe that we have a great framework on which to hang future work.

“There’s an awful lot of good stuff going on in New Zealand, but I think what would be useful is to name what we’re doing, to be more definite in the way we talk about it. I think that would help to capture and simplify a lot of the other language around things like human rights in education, environment, peace, and cultural diversity. Global citizenship should not become a subject. It’s about cross-curricular education, inside and outside the classroom. The NCEA has the flexibility to allow this kind of work to flourish across subjects really nicely.

“The ‘front end’ of the curriculum, basically the part that says, ‘we must produce creative and critical young people who have principles, values, and competencies,’ is the part that global citizenship education can really help out with I believe. I think we need to get a lot more meaningful in the work we do to realise this part of the curriculum, and global citizenship is well-placed to do that.

“Creating resources is only part of it, and that’s all. I think if you just throw resources at teachers who aren’t prepared for them, that’s wasteful. Perhaps we need to look at recruiting teachers with a broader academic base? *The New Zealand Curriculum* is a fantastic document, with wonderful aspirations. But I think we’re still working out how to transition from a silo-driven system, toward an interdisciplinary and cross-faculty approach.”

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ISABELLA’S THOUGHTS ON GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

“What interests me most about global citizenship is the potential that New Zealand has to become part of a global community. New Zealand has historically been quite isolated from international relations and conflicts, primarily due to our geographical isolation, but as technology, communication, economies and politics become more globalised, New Zealand does not have the ability to hide behind closed doors – we have to and should have a strong desire to be a part of the discussion.”

“Despite our geographical isolation, New Zealand is known as a country that ‘punches above our weight’ and has had a history of leading the way in key social movements and change, like women’s suffrage and being nuclear free. Being part of a global community means that we are able to continue leading the way on these issues.”

“For my generation, the thought of being part of a global society, where we are able to use the power of globalised communication and technology to interact with others from all around the world, is both inspiring and challenging. In order for this immense opportunity to be utilised, we need to equip young people with the knowledge and tools to work effectively in an increasingly global society. I feel that conferences and workshops such as this conference are amazing opportunities for other young New Zealanders to upskill on the concept of global citizenship and become inspired to be a part of the making and implementation of a global society.”

“I think that it is crucial that we integrate global citizenship education into the New Zealand education system. As the role of nation states has become and continues to become less important, it is crucial that we understand how international relations, and increasing globalisation plays a key role in our lives.”