

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LEARNING

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e now find ourselves, as individuals, as states, and as a species, involved in a period of intense and often bewildering change.

The systems of government, production, culture, thought, and perception to which we have become accustomed are not working. Our experience of the world is growing increasingly intertwined, while our perception of the world is becoming fragmented and disjointed. At the same time, our worldview is being constructed by increasingly large gaps in access to knowledge, wealth, and political representation.

The next generation will see the political and economic emergence of a global order. Whether this is a world characterized by crisis, contentious politics, and resource scarcity or coexistence, cultural pluralism, and the exercise of political freedom depends in large part on how we work now to educate the first generation of truly global citizens.

Growing Global Citizens

BY ABDUL AZIZ SAID



EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The role of education is paramount in our world. What knowledge and ways of knowing will create new dimensions of individual and social understanding that are mutually affirming and dedicated to the possibility of a better future for all? The first generation of global citizens will need a model of education that is capable of constantly inventing and creating new solutions to the world's increasingly complex problems. Such a shift will require transcending the limits of present systems of education—be they ideological, cultural, or spiritual—and engaging in a genuine human dialogue based on the equal dignity of each individual.

A globally sensitive educational curriculum has enormous potential as a catalyst for social change, improving the human condition, and serving the whole human community. It would address the structural and relational basis of inequity and social polarization using processes that emphasize constructive criticism and social participation and not the mere accumulation of knowledge. It would also help us develop our capacities for logic, passion, imagination, and intuition; global citizenship depends on the development of thought *and* feeling, head *and* heart. ➔

Educating a truly global citizen creates a space where both teacher and student can ask what it means to be a citizen, a believer, or a member of a changing community. Student-citizens come to experience knowledge through questioning their surroundings and their history, ensuring that societies maintain a national identity grounded in pluralism and open to the reality of constant change. Under such conditions, life itself becomes a path of learning where we are constantly called upon to awaken each other and ourselves to the search for freedom, truth, beauty, creativity, and above all, justice.

PLURALISM AND COEXISTENCE

To shift our understanding of citizenship from a local to a global context requires the movement from a national to a transnational consciousness. A twenty-first-century model of global education will thus liberate us to interact with the magnificent diversity and vibrancy of the many ways of knowing developed by different civilizations, including reason (making tight sequential connections), wonder (making connections of the random kind), and images (making connections of the visual kind). Each of these forms of thought and their expression as knowledge is part of the larger search for meaning that encompasses human existence. Embracing multiple forms of knowledge frees us from our illusions.

Such an education will expand the boundaries of our perspective consciousness. The knowledge gained will help us transform our presumptions about self, society, and our world. This means learning to see and ultimately to accept the many faces of humanity. Acknowledgment of differences is an aspect of appreciation, which gains its wholeness through empathy. Empathy allows us to recognize our shared humanity. Through empathy the new global citizens, living within the context of a multidimensional and dynamic world cultural system, imagine themselves or other nations not singularly but synthesize in their hearts and minds the experience of all nations and all individuals.

Throughout history, wherever a conscious decision was made to integrate the many forms of knowing, a cultural renaissance emerged. In medieval Al-Andalus, the coexistence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians made it the intellectual capital of the world. The Abbassid capital of Baghdad in the ninth century, where Jewish, Muslim, and Christian scholars searched for truth in harmony, comprised one of the most cosmopolitan cities ever known.

NEW PRINCIPLES FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION

A system that trains for global citizenry would be based on the following principles:

1. *Human values have primacy in designing social spaces.*

Accordingly, all education is grounded in a guiding ethical order. This means ensuring that there is no relative deprivation based upon class, gender, ethnicity, or religion in the classroom. It also means honoring what can be learned from past experiences and values.

2. *Solving social problems requires a universal approach.*

We should avoid the arrogance of ideological dogma or the educational methodologies in the East (rote learning) and West (standardized testing) that limit open, process-oriented dialogue.

3. *Tools of technology* enable innovative solutions and facilitate global communication and discourse.

4. *Educational techniques are community- and socially-oriented,* drawing from an individual culture's unique strengths and history.

5. *The elimination of poverty and restoration of dignity are prioritized.* On the micro level, pride and dignity are re-established through social development, recognizing the worth of every individual and his or her perspective in the classroom. On the macro level, poverty is acknowledged as more than just material deprivation; it represents a condition in which dignity has been removed and traditional ways of knowing are viewed as antithetical to modern progress.


6. *Tradition is honored.* Each culture exchanges its customs and richness and inherent knowledge with other cultures to continually expand each other's horizons and evolve civil society. In short, the whole world needs the whole world.

REDISCOVERING OUR WHOLENESS

Essentially, we are living in a world in which our traditional conceptions of borders, space, time, and distance are quickly changing. Cultures and communities are exposed to one another and interact in unprecedented ways. We are discovering that our fates and futures increasingly depend on one another, making mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation essential to realizing the positive aspects of our growing interdependency. Our greater capacity for learning and our broadening familiarity with the foreign represent a powerful growth in knowledge that marks a turning point in human civilization.

In this growing awareness of our diversity lies our unmistakable unity—our humanity and our common values and needs. It is up to us, at this crucial time in our shared history, to ask: How will we know and relate with one another? How will we mutually define and benefit from our relationship? How will we cope together with the teeming diversity of our global community?

In the end, one does not create a global citizen. Rather, we can create, restructure, and develop the realm of education so that each human being can see himself or

herself in a global context. And when we develop the view that being is one, that human consciousness comprises both the analytic and intuitive modes, we begin to see the individual parts of humanity as well as the whole of it. 

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The World is Teaching Me

BY LAURA CARROLL

AS A COLLEGE STUDENT STUDYING ABROAD IN PARIS this year, I've had abundant opportunities to learn new things, both in my classes at the Sorbonne and in my travels around Europe and Africa. I have found, however, that the experiences I've acquired through travel have taught me far more than any of my classes have done. Lectures and readings are all well and good, but knowledge acquired in these ways isn't terribly useful for its own sake. I'm discovering that learning is relevant only to the extent that it affects my being—the way I think, and consequently the way I understand and relate to the world. I am looking for knowledge that I can interact with, that makes my soul come alive, that encompasses both theory and practice and engages both my mind and myself.

And so I have decided for now to abandon the trappings of academic thought instilled in me by years of schooling and to revert to something more natural: knowledge by direct experience. Like Socrates, I have realized that I know nothing, and that the more I learn academically, the more this becomes true. A different kind of learning is needed. In travelling, I've had incredible opportunities to see other cultures and customs firsthand. From singing with the Paris University Choir in France to speaking with a Berber family in the desert of Morocco, I have found that people and cultures can be understood only when

looked at with open eyes and an unfettered mind. By leaving behind the detached observational approach of academia and suspending all expectation and preconceived judgment, I'm learning to enter into the experiences of travel as completely as possible and to see things as they really are. This approach is valuable and necessary when exploring people, places, and cultures; things that cannot be quantified but that need to be understood.

Like Alice through the looking glass, I'm adopting the logic of the place in which I find myself no matter how foreign it may seem at first glance. I truly believe that there is nothing that cannot be understood. But in order to understand new things, I've had to leave behind what I think I know and allow myself to be guided by a different system, where the definitions aren't those that I bring with me from elsewhere but those I find in the places I enter. It takes courage to suspend what you know; it is a risk to experience life and learn directly. But by changing the way I think, I'm changing myself as well, in ways I never would have otherwise dreamed.

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