

THE
NATIONAL
YOUTH
WHITE PAPER
ON GLOBAL
CITIZENSHIP



CGE
THE CENTRE FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION



TakingITGlobal
INSPIRE INFORM INVOLVE

PROLOGUE

On March 20, 2015, over 400 students from five high schools across Canada, in partnership with the Centre for Global Citizenship Education, The Centre for Global Education and TakingITGlobal, came together to collaborate, through the use of technology, in a Virtual Town Hall to discuss the youth's vision for Global Citizenship Education. From Alberta to Ontario, downtown Toronto to Yellowknife, the youth of Canada exchanged ideas, debated alternatives, and ultimately created a document that represents their voice on the relationship Canadians should have with the rest of the world. The Virtual Town Hall, an "archetype of grassroots democracy," (Senator Grant Mitchell) was the culmination of over a month of online teamwork, 2000 hours of student collaboration, over 100 hours of teacher facilitation, and the passion of over 1000 youth to engage in a national conversation and have their voices heard.

In the month prior to the Virtual Town Hall, student leaders, systematically chosen from each school to represent Canada's diverse geographic and demographic population, met on a weekly basis to exchange ideas, work with and listen to experts, and create a common framework. Concurrently, the students were trained to use an arsenal of Web 2.0 tools (YouTube, Twitter, cell phone voting, Google Docs, H.323 Video Conference, discussion boards, blogs, etc.) to collaborate, build consensus, and create community regardless of time or location.

Equipped with this knowledge and empowered through online technology, the student leaders facilitated a full-day virtual town hall. In the morning, 400 youth peers engaged in a dialogue with local and international experts. Following this session, the youth participated in breakout groups to address three critical questions:

- 1. What are our obligations as global citizens? What are the rights and responsibilities that we have?**
- 2. To what extent can well-intentioned global citizenship initiatives reinforce or resist power inequities?**
- 3. What types of policies/practices will enable/facilitate global citizenship?**

The National Youth White Paper on Global Citizenship, written collaboratively by Canadian students, is the direct result of this full-day, interactive event. The evolution of the document involved equipping leaders with knowledge and technology, having those leaders facilitate a larger conversation among their peers, taking the data generated to their community at large for feedback and direction, and then synthesizing the results in the student white paper. It represents the voices of over one thousand youth, introduced to the complexities of global citizenship education, unified through the power of 21st century technology, and sharing a passion to contribute to the dialogue taking place on the future of Canada and its relationship to the rest of the world.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP: THE PATH TO GLOBAL EQUITY & RIGHTS

Representing voices of high school students across Canada, we realize not merely the want, but the need for global equity through global citizenship. However, this goal is not easily achieved. The problems we face in the battle against power inequities are far-reaching into our institutions, cultures, and history. When we came together to discuss how to rise above these challenges, there was consensus that not only do the manifestations of these inequities need to be addressed, but a foundational shift in perspective is essential for creating long lasting change. Global citizens should fight power inequities in the following ways:

- 1. Ensure the voices of marginalized and influential citizens are heard equally**
- 2. Question what we know and the information we receive about other people in the world and particularly, critically view media in order to challenge preconceived biases, understand varying contexts, and learn how to create sustainable change**
- 3. Share the collective duty of enforcing cultural, economic, environmental, and social rights, both individual and collective and encourage a diverse and accepting society**

AS GLOBAL CITIZENS, WE MUST EQUALLY VALUE THE PERSPECTIVES OF ALL CITIZENS TO ACHIEVE GLOBAL EQUITY

As global citizens, we, the students, recognize that if a fair and equitable global society is to be attained, all perspectives must be accounted for and considered. People's opinions and beliefs are shaped by their daily lives and experiences, and given the unique and endless combinations of variables that exist -- location, age, race, gender, religion -- wildly differing worldviews are to be expected. Everyone exists in a different context, and the implications these contexts have on individual, national, and global perspectives are foundational.

Today, global power remains concentrated and centralized, leaving many people with very little influence. Countless people, seen as being in the periphery, have ideas and viewpoints that are often ignored or valued less than the ideas of those who are more privileged. For this reason, perspectives of those marginalized should not only be heard but emphasized, preventing those with the "popular" viewpoint from monopolizing important discussions. On a global scale, the perspectives that are generally accepted much too often spring from the minds of those who face few forms of discrimination, if any. Their privilege means that they are blind to the realities of a suffering that is foreign to them, thus skewing their perspective of what is fair and equal. Bearing in mind the struggles that come from being a part of certain groups or ethnic minorities, implementing the framework for greater influence of the different positioned perspectives in schools, communities, and government is an effective way to battle discrimination.

We recognize that achieving equality would be a simple task if everyone carried with them the same history and privilege. Equity, the idea of being just and fair, takes into account the differences amongst people within the global community and it is towards that which we should strive. However, that same equity will not be obtained until the voices of people in undermined groups are considered and valued. What is needed is empathy. Individuals are permitted to share their voices, but must also be open to those of others. In essence, this is both an inherent right and responsibility of a global citizen.

“Everyone should be treated equally (well that is the ideal anyways), yet in reality that is not the case. Our society is based on gender, race, belief and economic superiority complex. There will always be people who will believe they are better than others, but we as Global citizens shall strive to make the world a better place no matter how pointless it seems because that is what we believe in and who we are.”

— Tony, Harbord Collegiate Institute, Toronto, Ontario

In the survey of over 1000 students across Canada, conducted as part of the National Virtual Town Hall, students were three times more likely to identify Poverty, Aboriginal Rights, Gender Equality, Homophobia, etc. as significant global concerns as opposed to significant local concerns. As global citizens, we should challenge these preconceived notions.

AS GLOBAL CITIZENS, WE MUST CHALLENGE PRECONCEIVED IDEAS TO PURSUE THOUGHTFUL, EFFECTIVE GLOBAL INITIATIVES TO ACHIEVE GLOBAL EQUITY

We, in the western part of the world, are often guilty of being blinded by the idea of a single story. We need to challenge assumptions put forward by popular culture and media to combat preconceived ideas that prevent us from being effective global citizens. Yet, again and again, people are deceived into thinking that what is shown in the media is the full story, when, in truth, it is merely just a small glance at the larger problem. Even in a country such as Canada, where citizens have faith in the press, we are often presented with narrow viewpoints that emphasize fellow countries' foreign nature. This, in turn, promotes biases and solidifies social, economic, and cultural gaps, exemplified by the stereotype of so-called “third world countries”, and the poverty which is supposedly inherent to them.

One example of how the biases of western countries, such as Canada, impact the developing world can be seen through their foreign aid programs. Often it is found that ignorance dismisses the pleas of others' voices, whether it is intentional or unknowingly done. In our mission to assist developing nations, we are sometimes misguided in our approach. We, in Canada, do have the ability to assist people in developing nations; however, as with many other western nations, we find ourselves prone to the “saviour complex”. This is a fault of our historically eurocentric viewpoint; instead of seeing everyone as equals, we are creating a division between the people who need “help” and the ones providing the “help”. Instead of the idea of one group of people saving another, it should be a collaboration of all involved groups working together, as equals, to address the problem.

“Encouraging people to feel a sense of responsibility for the endless suffering in the world is, as a whole, a good thing. Apologizing through devoting time and effort into rectifying bad situations is certainly not evil, but it raises an important question: Why is it that we encourage high-school students to enter countries of which they have no knowledge, in order to open a school? They, like many others of the western world, are likely unaware as to how these things are planned and implemented—they do not belong to their nation's ministry of education for a reason.”

— Caleigh, Sir John Franklin High School, Yellowknife, NWT

A prime example of this is the trending movement of “voluntourism”. At first glance, voluntourism is beneficial for everyone: the volunteers get a cultural experience and an impressive addition to their résumés, while those they’re “helping” get a new western-style school. However, what is often not realized by many is that by sending (for the most part) untrained and unfamiliar people into an area, the “help” often clashes with community needs, forces outside ideologies upon the community, and denies local jobs which could have allowed for the empowerment of the community. Although it is crucial to represent the diverse contexts of the global community free of preconceived biases, we agree it is essential to evaluate “solutions” in greater depth that may have unintended consequences. To become better global citizens, it is imperative that we stray from our “saviour complex”, and instead realize that what we may consider unimaginably generous, may not be in the best interest of the specific developing nation.

“Though they say every little thing counts, by emphasizing voluntourism and action through social media, it gives the impression of “go big or go home”, or click “like.” Time could be spent discussing the importance of global citizenship and how you can be one in your everyday life by your power as a consumer and a citizen (voter), but they opt out for a lesson of [regarding their affiliated program, a] good travel agency combined with the inspiration that low-risk low-reward activism (repost if you hate malaria; for every app downloaded we’ll vaccinate a child) will save the world” (sic)

— Jamie, Queen Elizabeth High School, Edmonton, AB

AS GLOBAL CITIZENS, WE MUST ADDRESS ISSUES WE FACE ON A NATIONAL LEVEL AND EMBRACE OUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO CREATE THE UNIVERSAL VIRTUES OF ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING TO ACHIEVE GLOBAL EQUITY

We, the youth of Canada, recognize that **being a global citizen does not mean neglecting the issues we face on our own soil.** We have a responsibility to act on knowledge of inequity and oppression, and often we need to look no further than our own country, where our own citizens can fall prey to stereotypes. However, our country is where these stereotypes have to be ended. We, as global citizens, must be the first to address our own prejudices. We must replace them with a desire to **achieve an acceptance and understanding of people’s differences.** Whether the issues be foreign or local, enforcing the rights of every citizen is a collective duty.

“In Canada, there have been thousands of cases of missing and murdered First Nations women. Until very recently, there hasn’t been very much attention on this issue. Unfortunately, this is the case due to an oppressive and racist society still intact in Canada.”

— Kiera, Harbord Collegiate Institute, Toronto, Ontario

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP COMES WITH THESE KEY AND UNALIENABLE RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES:

- The right and responsibility to be informed. In our increasingly interconnected world, **our decisions can have much greater ramifications by virtue of sharing a planet and global social, political, economic, and environmental systems.** Unless we are provided with sources to acquire unbiased information and take the initiative to seek them out, we are not able to make these decisions as responsible global citizens.
- The right to live in a society that accepts and values our different identities. It is crucial that no one identity be treated as inherently superior or inferior to any other, whether on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender or any other aspect of identity.
- The responsibility to remain open minded and to be accepting of everyone, rather than to continue the intolerant doctrines that plague so many societies to this day.
- The right of everyone to voice different viewpoints, excluding those that are attempting to promote hatred of or violence toward others. We all have a responsibility to respect these opinions, even if we disagree.
- The responsibility to reach out in the most thoughtful and respectful ways possible in an effort to create spaces for voice of the underrepresented to be heard. This would allow direct challenges to current global power inequities. Nonetheless, it is equally important that the actions taken are considerate, appropriate, and meaningful. Those who are supporting aid efforts must not merely be “white saviours”. It must be ensured that constructive help is provided to build change *for* local people, with *their* needs, wishes and best interests in mind, to create meaningful and sustainable change.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

We, the youth of Canada, believe establishing global citizenship is only possible if involved people, knowledgeable of their impact on the world, take action. **The education system is by far the best way to foster global citizenship.** This needs to start in the classroom through more conventional types of education, or expanded to less formal facets of education such as extra-curricular, media, and connecting with the local community. Also, educating youth that being involved in various social movements, understanding the importance of accessing news from multiple perspectives, or simply associating with our diverse community through clubs elevates our individual knowledge to a global context.

We recommend that education leaders encourage the implementation of policies and practices that educate both youth and adults to become more culturally sensitive and globally aware. As such, we recommend that education leaders encourage the following:

- 1. Add to and revise elementary and high school curricula to create a focus on changing the dominant narrative on global issues**
- 2. Support intergenerational discussions to inform and challenge adults while magnifying the youth voice**
- 3. Work to understand other cultures and the experiences of minority groups to diversify perspective, build solidarity, challenge injustices, and promote equity**

TO BECOME GLOBAL CITIZENS, WE MUST EMPOWER YOUTH TO TAKE ACTION THROUGH CURRICULA CHANGES AND GLOBAL-MINDED COURSES

We, the Canadian youth, believe the current elementary and secondary school curricula are lacking in cultural and global studies. Consequently, Canadian students are not being made sufficiently culturally sensitive or globally aware at school. The effects of this show when despite the fact that “Millennials” are currently the largest living generation, Canadian youth believe that they do not, or cannot, have an impact on the world. In a recent survey of 1008 Canadian high school students, conducted by the youth writing this paper, 50% said that they did not feel that they could take any action by contacting politicians, and only 0.05% said that they could create meaningful change. Generation Y, however, collectively acts as the largest generational market and voters, giving them purchasing power to influence businesses, as well as voting power to elect officials with youths’ interests in mind. Canadian youth feel that if we are to initiate change, **it is imperative that youth are made aware of the power they truly have.**

“The legacy of colonialism has left a deep scar that will take centuries to heal. [T]he image of a Westerner going overseas to help “those less fortunate” remains ingrained in our collective societal psyche and perpetuates the notion that Westerners are fundamentally different - or even superior to - people in developing nations. This can only be solved through better education of students here in the West.”

— Kieran, University of Toronto Schools, Toronto, Ontario

In the survey of over 1000 students across Canada, conducted as part of the National Virtual Town Hall, 75% of students felt connected to others and responsible to uphold their rights in their local, national, and global communities. Introducing global citizenship education in elementary school would increase student engagement.

In the survey of over 1000 students across Canada, conducted as part of the National Virtual Town Hall, 50% of students believed that they could take action to improve their communities through raising awareness of issues of importance to themselves. Encouraging these voices is a vital next step in nurturing a more vocal generation.

As such, we propose that global citizenship education is introduced early in elementary school and later expanded upon in secondary school. Programs like these are already in place across Canada; for example, Civics and Citizenship is a mandatory course in Grade 10 in Ontario, and the Alberta curriculum for Grade 10 Social Studies is centred around globalization. We recommend courses such as these, that encourage students to become more civically and global-minded and active, be introduced in elementary school and made mandatory in high school throughout all of Canada.

TO BECOME GLOBAL CITIZENS WE MUST EMPOWER YOUTH BY FACILITATING EXPLORATIONS INTO VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES AND ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION WITH GLOBAL ENTITIES

As youth, we suggest that these courses on global issues function not merely as lectures, but as meaningful discussions. We propose that teachers are trained to better facilitate discussions and encourage different perspectives to be researched and discussed, ultimately ensuring that the dominant narrative with implications of Western supremacy is not the only perspective to which students are exposed. Educational leaders are also encouraged to collaborate with external organizations such as NGOs to incorporate various perspectives and varieties of ideas into the education system. Such initiatives would allow youth to participate in authentic exploration of global citizenship and provide them with a broader repertoire of perspectives. Facilitating youth conversation and action is important in encouraging youth to speak up about their interests and ideas, thereby nurturing a more vocal generation.

The curriculum of this course would not only provide students with an introduction to discovering new political perspectives and changing the dominant narrative on global issues, but would also empower youth and promote social sciences. Many Canadian youth do not pursue change, (a) because they do not feel empowered to do so, and (b) because society does not equally value humanities alongside the sciences. We as youth, know that promoting the study of global issues and politics to youth through the aforementioned course will generate interest in global issues and eventually spark global change. It would have an emphasis on respecting others' voices when doing international aid work and even in local contexts, i.e. homelessness, and emphasise the importance of looking at multiple perspectives when considering issues.

Although it is the responsibility of good global citizens to support each other on a global scale, as previously mentioned, it is necessary that a better understanding of other cultures must first be established prior to reaching out and helping those abroad. Discussions amongst youth of different cultures should be facilitated; technology can be used for youths in varying geographic areas to communicate with each other, thereby connecting the global community. For example, programs like "Skype Pals" or "Global Encounters" would promote communication among students throughout Canada and abroad. In developing nations, assistance is often assumed to be needed, but communication among individuals about the actual interests of the differing communities would be more efficient before sending assistance.

As Canadian youth, part of a culturally and racially diverse community, we believe that the older generation of Canadians must also be educated to become responsible global citizens in a society of rapid change. We must encourage education leaders and UNESCO to facilitate intergenerational discussions and conferences between youth and adults who have a more trusted and established voice in the community. **These discussions would open more perspectives to the main policy-makers and magnify the youth voice that aims to create policies that are more diversely inclusive.**

CONCLUSION

The need for global citizenship is irrefutable. We, the youth of Canada, stand in solidarity behind the idea of equally valuing the perspectives of all citizens. We recognize the need to challenge preconceived ideas to pursue thoughtful, effective global initiatives. As well, we must address the issues we face on a national level to create the universal virtues of acceptance and understanding which are essential on the path to global equity.

The lack of education around both local and global issues has hindered the success of initiatives to foster global citizenship.

“Engagement is great, but without thinking critically or being taught to think critically about our actions, we fail to reach a broader context and therefore we must make room for educating students about reflection and global consequences to local actions.”

— Janeen, Jasper Place High School, Edmonton, Alberta

We recognize that youth are often ill-equipped to take action on global issues; however, there is a genuine interest to engage in discussions of change. It is fundamental to global citizenship initiatives that the Canadian education system reflect these interests and realign its focus on changing the dominant narrative on global issues. This needs to take place in curricula changes and extend to intergenerational discussions that inform and challenge adults while magnifying the youth voice, as well as working to understand other cultures and the experiences of minority groups to diversify perspective, build solidarity, challenge injustices, and promote equity. We, the youth of Canada, know that when these reforms are made, a new generation of global citizens will make meaningful change towards achieving global equity.