

---

## USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO BUILD CONCEPTS OF TEACHING ABOUT GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Author: Ms Debbie Bradbery  
*Affiliation: University of Newcastle, NSW. Australia*

### Abstract

Children's literature can be used to help teachers to build into their teaching programs ways to examine and change personal lifestyles to secure a sustainable future; to identify, investigate, evaluate and undertake appropriate action to maintain, protect and enhance local and global environments; to challenge preconceived ideas, accept change and acknowledge uncertainty and to work cooperatively and in partnerships with others. Developing an understanding of the importance of being a contributor to a fairer, more peaceful, just and sustainable world is vital in helping children to become "global citizens". Global citizens are those who are willing to take responsibility for their own actions, respect and value diversity and see themselves as contributors to a more peaceful and sustainable world. After reviewing research literature on the topic and noting the divergent opinions and views available, the author examines ways in which some specific examples of children's literature can be used to develop a willingness to actively engage in issues of global citizenship in primary aged children and will consider how the use of children's literature can help to build concepts of teaching about global citizenship in the primary school setting.

### Global Citizenship Education

Global education and global citizenship education are problematic terms to define and as such are often used without clarifying the difference. Research literature on the topic is divided and often divergent. Some researchers in the field argue that global citizenship education is essentially a moral endeavour while others see it as a set of skills, such as ICT competence (Hattler, 2008). Oxfam (1997) for instance defined a global citizen as someone who:

... knows how the world works, is outraged by injustice and who is both willing and enabled to take action to meet this global challenge. (Oxfam, 1997, p. 1),

They propose the teaching of a set of skills, values and attitudes to enable young people to engage critically with global issues and purposely act for change. They assert that the teaching of knowledge, skills and understandings to challenge social injustices and inequity, actively engage in peace building and cooperation to resolve conflict, respect and value diversity, commit to sustainable development and concern for the environment, and acknowledge globalisation and the interdependence of political, social, economic and cultural issues are essential for the development of responsible global citizenship (Oxfam, 2006). While researchers such as Ibrahim (2005) appeared to assume that global education is simply global citizenship education. According to Ibrahim:

effective mainstreaming of global citizenship depends on the balance between citizenship as a specific curriculum area and cross-curricular theme to allow in-depth coverage of issues and coordinated learning. It is important for students to develop skills of communication, critical reflection and active participation in the context of understanding global structures and processes and human rights and responsibilities. This is more likely to facilitate understanding of the complexity of global issues, promote dialogue and discussion between and within different groups and allow opportunities for reflection on values (p. 191).

It was also pointed out by Ibrahim however, that global citizens are also local and national citizens and that many initiatives in civics education such as knowledge of local and national democratic approaches to decision making are crucial for global citizenship. This too is emphasised in the Australian statement on global education, *Global Perspectives: A framework for global education in Australian schools* (2008), which stresses that global education is distinct, although had commonalities with, civics and citizenship, engaging young Australians with Asia, environmental education, language education and values education. It is obvious then that there seems to be some debate as to whether someone educated for global citizenship must also be educated for national and local citizenship. Then it becomes necessary that this form of education not only teach about political procedures and attitudes but also environmental perspectives and knowledge of languages and cultural identities.

Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2002) suggests that there are three capacities that teachers must adopt into their curriculums: a critical examination of one's own identity and traditions; the ability of citizens to see themselves not simply as citizens of one particular local, national or international identity but above all else to see themselves as human beings bound together by ties of recognition and concern; and the ability to think what life would be like if they were in the same position as those they are judging, or the ability to empathise.

Children of today face a society that is increasingly global in focus and are profoundly affected by decisions and events occurring beyond their own shores, whether they are World Trade Organisation agreements, terrorism in Pakistan, deforestation in the world's largest rainforest, genetic engineering innovations, or a simple sneeze in China that evolves into a global influenza epidemic (Bliss, 2010). As the world becomes a "smaller" place it is important that we help our young citizens to understand the interdependence of communities and all life forms and the impact that decisions made in one place can and will have in another place. This interdependence and globalisation can have both positive and negative effects as we are inextricably linked through cultural, economic, environmental, geographical, political, religious, social and technological issues. Selby argues that by giving our children the knowledge, skills and values to make critical choices about these issues they are able to identify and take action to stop the spread of the negative effects of globalisation (Selby, 1999).

Dower (Dower & Williams, 2002) asserts that global citizenship is based on the claim that we have a certain duty to all humans; that all humans, without exception, are worthy of moral respect; and that we are bound together with all other humans. Being a global citizen goes beyond simply knowing that we are citizens of the globe to an acknowledgement of our responsibilities both to each other and to the Earth itself. Global Citizenship is about understanding the need to tackle injustice and inequality, and having the desire and ability to work actively to do so. Each teacher consciously or unconsciously shapes students' knowledge, skills and attitudes (Fien, 2003). Arneil argues that global citizenship is rooted in two basic principles: "social rights", where we are focussed on improving the rights and lives of the world's poorest and worst off, and "shared fate" where the focus is on illuminating the links between north, south east and west and the interdependence of extreme poverty, civil wars and terrorism (Arneil, 2007).

The events that took place on September 11 2001 in New York and Washington will have repercussions for many years to come, but one of the legacies that have been left is for a greater focus to be put onto educating our students for Global Citizenship. It seems that for some the response has been to "embrace a broader notion of community" so as to try and understand and prevent the feelings of conflict that ultimately led to these acts of violence, while for others it seems to have developed a deeper sense of "nationalistic endeavour" so as to guard against these types of acts of terror in the future (Croucher, 2004). We as educators need to help our students develop a more universal understanding of their rights and responsibilities as world citizens. Using children's literature as a stimulus we can assist our students in becoming more sensitised to the issues that confront them and understand how these events look to different sets of people. Literature can help children to see how their actions and responses to crises and events can have significant and differing impacts on different groups of people across the globe (Hobbs & Chernotsky, 2007).

Using children's literature to assist teachers in teaching about the concepts of global citizenship can be a powerful tool. Children's literature can help "transport" children to other parts of the world, to feel what it is like to "walk in another man's shoes", to develop a sense of shared fate for the globe on which they live and to examine difficult and complex issues of poverty and social injustice through the use of a fictional character.

## **Children's Literature**

There has long been a substantial body of research supporting the many benefits of using children's literature and picture books in classrooms to improve the literacy skills of beginning readers (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2001; Galda & Cullinan, 2006), but there have been far fewer studies elucidating the benefits of using children's literature to teach about global citizenship.

Literature can provide an efficient means of teaching because students' interest is sustained and the story structure helps them to comprehend and draw relationships between the material world and their own personal world. (Butzow & Butzow, 2000, p.4)

There is a wide body of research identifying the many benefits of using children's literature in classrooms. Much of it concludes that children's literature can be used to entertain, elicit a wealth of emotions, stretch the imagination and develop compassion in our children (Pantaleo, 2002). The reading of children's literature is a common feature of primary classrooms. Shared reading promotes community and a love of literacy amongst children and teachers (Kersten, Apol, & Pataray-Ching, 2007). Literature has for many years been used in the classroom to address the teaching of literacy. Teachers who appreciate the use of children's literature are looking beyond the value of picture books in teaching literacy and are using such books to teach many additional concepts across the curriculum. The use of literature to assist students in understanding confronting issues can be a godsend to primary teachers trying to contend with a crowded curriculum and the explicit teaching of the skills needed to achieve in the testing regime currently being administered in Australian primary schools.

Children's literature, particularly that termed as "picture books", can explore themes, concepts and issues that are both complex and contradictory and can lead children into a 'sophisticated and satisfying discussion' (Baddeley & Eddershaw 1994, p.5). While research has shown that children's literature can be used to teach certain moral values (Marriott & Evans, 1998) it also suggests that children's literature can also be used to expose the reader to certain moral dilemmas and give them the opportunity to evaluate and develop an understanding of the concept of citizenship. Some of the problems or issues seen in children's literature range from:

personal problems of family and peer relationships, but also encompasses questions of wider social and political interest such as race and gender, the environment and conservation, social and community conflict, war and peace and even global interdependence. (Marriott, 1998, pp. 6-7).

It can therefore be suggested that children can fill the gaps of their own understandings about issues such as a sustainable future through the use of relevant and engaging literature. While most children globally are influenced more by television, the most pervasive form of media, literature can still provide children with the opportunity to view issues from multiple perspectives (Merryfield & Wilson, 2005) and question the media opinions they are being served. Literature gives children the opportunity to begin to form their own views and opinions and take on a more global stance.

As Stephens (1992) has asserted:

"children's fiction belongs firmly in the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socialising their target audience. Childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it ..." (Stephens, 1992, p.8)

Through experiences with children's literature children can develop socially, personally, intellectually, culturally, and aesthetically. Literature assists children to explore interpersonal relationships and human motives. Children's literature communicates self-acceptance, and models coping strategies for children who are learning to deal with powerful emotions. Literature also supplies information and raises questions, thus contributing to intellectual growth. Through literature, children meet families, settings, and cultures that are in some ways similar and in some ways different from their own. As a result, literature contributes to the child's cultural identity and multicultural awareness. Furthermore, because much of children's literature is both illustrated and written, it simultaneously supports aesthetic development and growth in literacy. For all of these reasons, children's literature has an important role to play in children's learning and lives (Jalongo, 2004).

Authors such as Armin Greder (2007), in his powerful, dark and mesmerising "picture" book *The Island*, provide us with allegories of life as an "outsider" and can be used with children to explore issues of racism, prejudice, intolerance, human rights and social justice. When an outsider is washed up on the beach, the local people are faced with the question of what to do with him. Afraid, but not wanting his death on their consciences, they isolate him at the end of the island, lock him a goat pen and leave him. When he finally escapes and approaches them for food, they realise that "their act of kindness had not been the end but merely a beginning". Fear and intolerance grow and he is finally condemned while they barricade the island against all newcomers.

The sparse prose and compelling illustrations present an overwhelming and chilling picture of the plight of refugees and the way that fear and racial prejudice overwhelm even the voice of reason. Issues such as health and social justice can be addressed using the text when studied in depth. Teachers could ask students to discuss and explore emotions in new situations such as being scared, lonely, frightened rejected and ignored. Children could look at and explore the themes of tolerance and understanding of others and be directed to examine fear of the unknown, punishment and retribution, the building of barriers and the fair or unfair treatment of refugees. Parallels between Australia's treatment of refugees and that of the stranger on *The Island* can be drawn: for example the stranger is placed in an isolated "goat pen", in an uninhabited part of the island, similar to detention camps in remote areas in Australia and on islands off the coast of Australia. Hobbs and Chernotsky, (Hobbs & Chernotsky, 2007) argue that students need help in identifying their personal stakes and interests in these critical concepts.

For many readers of this powerful text one of the most disturbing images is the dark, cruel image of the children mimicking the behaviour of the adults in the story, where some boys are taunting a child with some sticks, indicating that these reactions and intimidating behaviours are learnt early in life. Using these illustrations and the fractured staccato accompanying text teachers can ask children to "walk in another man's shoes" and examine the plight of someone arriving new and different to their class, school or neighbourhood. Researchers such as Malone (Malone, 2007) suggest that children growing up in Australia today are growing up in a changing environment and a climate of fear and mistrust and that some children are being "bubble wrapped" so as not to be exposed to anything disturbing or confronting. Using allegorical tales such as "The Island" in the classroom can help teachers to introduce confronting and thought provoking issues to these children and have them critically examine their own mistrusts and insecurities.

Another author who deals with issues of social justice and refugees in a very different manner to Greber (2007) is Shaun Tan (2007) in his evocative wordless graphic novel *The Arrival* (2007). Tan's mesmerising images tell the story of a man who leaves his homeland and family to build a better life. The only writing is in an invented alphabet, which creates the sensation immigrants must feel when they encounter a strange new language and way of life. A wide variety of ethnicities is represented in Tan's hyper-realistic style, and the sense of warmth and caring for others, regardless of race, age, or background, is present on nearly every page, in direct contrast to Greber's dark, brutal imagery. Tan creates a fascinating strange new world, complete with floating elevators and unusual creatures, and as frightening as this new world may be, the new immigrant finds friends everywhere, from the other immigrants who help the protagonist and tell tales of their own escape from oppression, war and fear

to the magical beast that attaches itself to the immigrant as a kind of pet. As Abdi (Abdi, 2009) suggests, even with migration, there are still billions whose fundamental rights to education, health and a viable standard of living are being denied as they enter countries as refugees. Their basic citizenship rights are being denied or subjugated by those in a position of power. Global citizenship aims to expand inclusion and power whereby citizenship is a product of diversity and is not dependant on membership to any particular group locally, nationally or internationally and is inherent to all individuals and groups in all places and times.

The Vietnam War, or American War as it is known in Vietnam, was an important conflict for Australia due to its geographical proximity and the possible political consequences. It was also politically divisive in Australia in terms of troop deployment. It was seen as the end of colonial endeavour in Asia, and the beginning of the emergence of China as the major global power that we see today. It was also the beginning of the "boat people" era, which is still continuing and making headlines today. Anh Do's (2011) *The Little Refugee* gives students the chance to study this important historical event through the eyes of a child in terms of human relationships and fear. Mainland Australia has been lucky in that it has been spared the horrors of contemporary war within its own borders. Yet students should relate to the experiences of the characters in the picture book on an empathetic and childlike level (Khoo, 2004). To help strengthen this point, the teachers could ask for examples of local families that have been devastated by war. There are a large number of Sudanese refugees now living in Australian communities who could contribute to the discussion, or the class could discuss the ways in which colonial British rule drove aboriginal families from their homelands, causing fear and hardship.

Themes such as refugees and war and dispossession can be explored using Do's story of his amazing journey while teaching about the values of compassion, resilience and hope. In one part of the story, after having her sewing machines stolen from the backyard shed, Anh's mother stoically hugs her son huddling under his bed and says, "You must always have hope" (p.21). Children can learn to empathise with Anh and his family in this situation and understand their struggle to make friends and earn a living in a new and sometimes unwelcoming land. The book can be used to help refugee children to know that they are not unique in their struggle to make friends and integrate into what is sometimes a hostile or at the best indifferent schooling system. The use of the first person narrative in Anh's story can help children understand that refugees are simply ordinary people caught in extraordinary circumstances (Hope, 2008). This story of hope and resilience can help children to understand the importance of the fair and equitable treatment of all people, no matter where they have come from or are now living.

The illustrator's use of different mediums and tonal changes tell a story within the story, the sub story, as being told by Anh. Bruce Whatley's evocative images and changes of colour and choices of dark and light sepia tones enrich the text by asking the reader to view the cartoon, childlike images through the eyes of the child while comprehending the historical context of the story. The darker, sepia images evoke the fear and harsher reality of life as a refugee attempting to flee their homeland to find a better and safer life. Research (Bolloten & Spafford, 1998) has shown that is important for teachers to raise awareness of what it is like to be a refugee before children can understand the needs of refugee children. The use of drama activities with a text such as this could prove to be an emancipating action for both the refugee and the audience in creating empathy and breaking the barriers of discrimination. Researchers such as Laura Day (2002) can show the strengths as well as the limitations of this medium for expression.

It would seem important then that children engage with literature about refugees, racism, intolerance and prejudice even if it is at times confronting, so that they can make connections with each other's experiences. The Global Perspectives Framework for Australian schools developed by the Commonwealth of Australia in conjunction with AusAID, the Global Education Project, the Curriculum Corporation and the Asia Education Foundation lists the key five learning emphases reflecting themes in global education as Interdependence and Globalisation, Identity and Cultural Diversity, Social Justice and Human Rights, Peace Building and Conflict Resolution, and Sustainable

Futures. It is imperative then that to teach students about human rights and being socially just we must ensure that they understand what it is to be human and to humanise the situations and events they see unfolding in the media on a daily basis. A powerful and relevant resource available to us as educators is the children's "picture book". It can aid us to teach about global citizenship through the eyes of the refugee and give students the chance "to walk a mile in their shoes". Children need to learn that:

Social justice supports the fair and equitable treatment of all people and aims to protect them from discrimination because of race, gender, age and ability etc. The concepts of social justice are codified in the form of human rights, international commitments to protect civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights. (Global Perspectives Framework, 2008).

and using powerful, compelling even controversial "picture books" in the primary classroom can help teachers build these concepts of global citizenship.

## References

- Abdi, A. A. (2009). *Educating for human rights and global citizenship*: State Univ of New York Press.
- Arneil, B. (2007). Global citizenship and empire. *Citizenship studies*, 11(3), 301-328.
- Bliss, S. (2010). Global Ripples Project. *Geography Bulletin*, 42(3), 60.
- Bolloten, W. & Spafford, T. (1998). Supporting Refugee Children in East London Primary Schools. In Rutter, J. & Jones, C. (Eds.), *Refugee Education: Mapping the Field*. Staffordshire: Trentham.
- Croucher, S. (2004) *Globalisation and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* Roman & Littlefield, Maryland.
- Commonwealth of Australia (2008). *Global Perspectives: A Framework for global education in Australian schools*. Carlton South: Curriculum Corporation.
- Dower, N., & Williams, J. (2002). *Global citizenship: A critical introduction*: Taylor & Francis.
- Fien, J. (2003). Learning to care: Education and compassion. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 19, 1-14.
- Galda, L., Ash, G. E., & Cullinan, B. E. (2001). Research on children's literature. *Reading Online*, 4(9).
- Galda, L., & Cullinan, B. E. (2006). *Literature and the child*: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Hobbs, H. H., & Chernotsky, H. I. (2007). *Preparing students for global citizenship*.
- Hope, J. (2008) "One Day We Had To Run": The Development of the Refugee Identity in Children's Literature and its Function in Education. *Children's Literature in Education*, 39, 295-304.
- Jalongo, M. R. (2004). *Young children and picture books*: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Kersten, J., Apol, L., & Pataray-Ching, J. (2007). Exploring the Role of Children's Literature in the 21st-Century Classroom. *Language Arts*, 84(3), 286.
- Khoo, T. (2004) The Contagion Within *Borderlands e-journal* Retrieved June 12 2012 from [http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no3\\_2004/khoo\\_contagion.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no3_2004/khoo_contagion.htm)
- Malone, K. (2007). The bubble-wrap generation: Children growing up in walled gardens. *Environmental Education Research*, 13(4), 513-527.
- Marriott, S., & Evans, J. (1998). Picture books and the moral imperative. *What's in the Picture*, 1-24
- Merryfield, M. M., & Wilson, A. H. (2005). *Social studies and the world: Teaching global perspectives*: Natl Council for the Social.
- Nussbaum, M. (2002). Education for citizenship in an era of global connection. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 21(4), 289-303.
- Oxfam, G. (2006). Education for global citizenship: A guide for schools Retrieved May 7 2012 (Vol. 10, pp. 2006).
- Pantaleo, S. (2002). Children's Literature across the Curriculum: An Ontario Survey. *Canadian*

*Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'education*, 211-230.

Selby, D. (1999). Global education: Towards a quantum model of environmental education. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education (CJEE)*, 4(1), pp. 125-141.

### **Children's Texts**

Do, A. & Do, S. (2011) *The Little Refugee* Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.

Greder, A. (2007) *The Island* Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Australia.

Tan, S. (2007) *The Arrival* Lothian Books, Melbourne, Australia.