

# World Citizenship<sup>1</sup>

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Liberal education seeks to prepare students for a life of fulfillment and effective action. One way to characterize this preparation is to regard it as the development of world citizenship. Effective citizenship connects the intellectual power of the mind with effective action in the contemporary world. I believe it is this connection that can define liberal education for the twenty-first century and make it a powerful force in contemporary life.

The concept of world citizenship is a broad one. First, it includes extensive knowledge of global issues and sophisticated powers for understanding these issues. A world citizen has knowledge of global forces, both physical and social, that affect the lives of all persons, understands culture and cultural difference, can analyze world issues from a variety of perspectives, and can generate new ideas about the world. In short, a world citizen must have a well developed set of cognitive abilities. Second, world citizenship requires a well-developed sense of the self as a *global self*. This sense of self includes a personal identity that must transcend the local details of one's day-to-day existence. The concept of a global self is critical. Without the component of a global self, cognitive ability will not be sufficient to make one a world citizen. Finally, world citizenship includes engagement with the contemporary world in an effective and ethical fashion. This third component is defined by the skill and motivation to turn knowledge and understanding into action. These three major components of world citizenship overlap and complement each other, and all three are necessary features of citizenship. Figure 1 represents the general relationship of these three components.

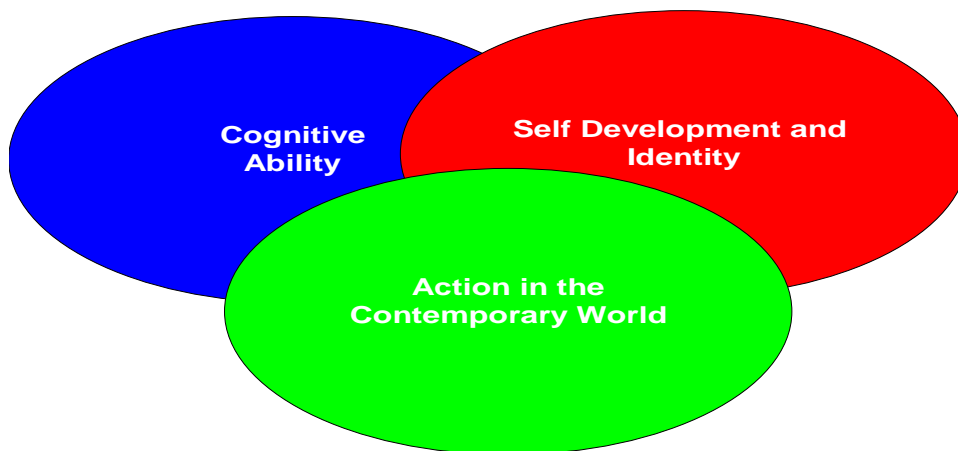


Figure 1. The Relationship between Cognitive Ability, Self Development and Identity, and Action in the Contemporary World in Defining World Citizenship

## Cognitive Ability

The cognitive abilities that are necessary for world citizenship include knowledge about the world and the intellectual skill to work with that knowledge constructively. These abilities combine content and process. A list of these abilities is described below and summarized in figure 2.

- **The ability to understand global forces that affect our lives.** These forces are both physical and social. This understanding should include the historical context of forces that shape the contemporary world
- **Multidisciplinary perspective taking.** This is the ability to use different methods of understanding, taking advantage of the strengths of different disciplines. Most significant world issues cut across areas of human understanding. It is important to combine different disciplinary intellectual tools to address these issues.
- **The ability to understand the diversity of human experience.** This includes some insight into one's own cultural traditions and the capacity to contrast them with other traditions. It also includes an understanding of what is universal about the human experience and what is specific to particular cultures.
- **The Ability to Construct New Ideas.** The ability to create new concepts or plans is critical for anyone who wants to generate effective action in the contemporary world.



Figure 2. Summary of Cognitive Abilities

## Self Development and Identity

A world citizen must have a sense of self that goes beyond absorption by the concerns of the immediate environment. In a way, this sense of self includes the ability for abstract

thinking, since it requires consideration of people, events and forces that are not directly experienced. A list of characteristics is summarized below and in figure 3.

- **Development of a global identity.** The world citizen is connected to issues of global concern. This does not replace individual identity but enables us to transcend individual identity. A global identity includes a sense of the self as both unique and integrated into local, regional, and global systems.
- **Development of concern for global issues.** This includes both caring about world problems and having confidence that we can address them effectively.
- **Developing a respect for human difference.** Many world problems result from our inability to interact with persons who are different from us. Developing a respect for difference is a necessary part of effective citizenship.



Figure 3. Self Development and Identity

#### Action in the contemporary world

Cognitive ability makes it possible for us to understand the world, and a global self-identity makes us consider world issues. The drive to use these qualities as the basis for action requires both the successful application of knowledge and the motivation to make a difference. These characteristics are summarized below and in figure 4.

- **Cross-cultural competence.** This is the ability to function effectively in a culture other than one's own, including the ability to adapt to new persons and new situations.
- **Capacity for critical judgment of persons, cultures and situations.** Effective action requires the ability to make informed judgments about strengths and

weaknesses in evaluating specific individuals, cultural practices, and specific problems or situations.

- **Engaged action.** Engaged action includes the motivation to act on global issues and the ability to act with effectiveness and ethical concern.



Figure 4. Action in the Contemporary World

#### Curricular Implications

What are the curricular implications a world citizenship approach? First, I believe that we need to make certain we are *intentional* about integrating ideas about citizenship into our teaching. For example, if we make the claim that learning about geology is important for world citizenship because we can benefit from a geological perspective on global issues such as water availability and use, then we need to make this connection explicit. Second, I believe that world citizenship should be *infused* throughout the curriculum. We do not want to have courses dedicated to citizenship and designated with such terms as “WC 101, Introduction to World Citizenship”. Rather, we should attempt to intentionally include connections to the theme of citizenship wherever appropriate. As a colleague of mine has pointed out, the concept is one of citizenship-across-the-curriculum. Third, there is an obvious and important *action* component to citizenship as it is described above. We need to make this a strong part of liberal education. Part of what we need to do is emphasize the connections between thought and action. In addition, we need to motivate action that engages everyone in world related issues. This engagement should include a strong ethical dimension. Finally, we need to *integrate* ideas about citizenship across different disciplines. World themes and world issues are complex. To engage them, we need to bring together ideas from many disciplines. In fact, the very idea of a community of learner-scholars implies that everyone has something to contribute. We need to consider how these contributions become integrated.

#### World Citizenship, Liberal Education, International Education and Study Abroad

The concept of world citizenship has important implications for how we conceive of liberal education, particularly its relationship to international education and study abroad.

These are complex issues that go beyond the scope of this paper. Let me make some assertions about these relationships:

- **Liberal education must include international education.** If liberal education is education for world citizenship, then some form of international education is necessary. Every definition of liberal education includes some concept of having a life of contact with the world outside the individual. As the forces in our lives become increasingly globalized, the contact between liberal and international education increases.
- **International education is not simply equated with study abroad.** The number of students able to study abroad is a small fraction of the population. We must find ways to infuse international education into on-campus programs.
- **The relationship between liberal education, international education and study abroad must be defined and understood.** I propose that we need to consider the goals of each of these three activities, and that we must consider them in relationship to each other. This is not unrelated to the need to assess each of these enterprises.

World Citizenship is a broad and rich idea. It is also a very old idea. It has existed as long as the concept of liberal education, and is closely related to it. Liberal education is, literally, liberating education. It frees us from narrow cognitive constraints by developing intellectual powers and intellectual agility. It is this freedom that both enables us to be effective world citizens and makes us aware of the obligation to be world citizens. I urge all who care about the future of liberal education to think of the urgency and necessity to educate world citizens.

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