

Children's Rights: A Foundation for Global Citizenship Education

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For many teachers there can be an uncomfortable mismatch between the ambitious narratives of development education (DE) / global citizenship education (GCE) and classroom realities. When research suggests that students understand GCE in [multiple and contradictory ways](#) and as [a vague construct unrelated to their daily lives](#), the temptation to draw attention to the challenges is strong: [low and marginalised status](#) in schools; insufficient time, dependent on [individual champions](#) rather than a whole-school approach; inadequate teacher preparation/confidence/courage leading towards 'soft' activities such as ['fundraising, fasting and fun'](#) rather than critique and activism including a tendency to [avoid sensitive and controversial issues](#). In my experience as a teacher and a [teacher-educator](#), many feel overwhelmed by the [cultural and structural constraints](#). This in turn can lead to varied responses: defeatism, relative disengagement, lowering of expectations, increased determination to carry on, more intense engagement with issues and resources, and a strengthened motivation to change the culture of the school and even the system.

The key suggestion in this short piece is that a stronger GCE foundation for students in classrooms can be built by closer alignment of DE/GCE with children's rights. If, recalling [John Dewey's](#) contention that education is a process of living *now* and not a preparation for future living as well as [Paulo Freire's](#) focus on education as giving 'a voice to the voiceless', GCE that begins by treating those under 18 years of age as valued citizens and [educating them about their rights](#), can become very relevant, engaging and of practical benefit.

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) offers one framework for such exploration. For example, realising differences between the rights to survival, to protection, to development and to participation can become a valuable schema for interrogating numerous issues. For example, for

many students, Articles 3 (adults making decisions relating to children should do so in the best interests of the child) and 12 (children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them) can be especially empowering. Furthermore, [Laura Lundy's](#) development of Article 12 that links voice, space, audience and agency can become a model for examining the situation of any marginalised, oppressed or under-represented group.

Conceptually, [John Wall](#) asserts that current understandings of global citizenship do not respond adequately to children's age and needs. His case for some re-imagining appears to have validity and could prompt a fresh starting point for GCE. The UNCRC is also a useful lens for schools to [interrogate their policies and practices](#). Teachers sometimes find that a frank engagement with the Convention can become a surprising introduction to 'teaching controversial issues' as students pose questions about specific school practices! Indeed, the [Teaching Council version of GCE](#) as aiming to empower learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies, might be refined by stating that this can begin, using the UNCRC, to support students and teachers construct more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure schools.

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