

# Global Citizenship in the Classroom

Noah Zeichner



**Noah Zeichner** is a National Board-certified social studies teacher at Chief Sealth International School in Seattle, Washington. He works in a hybrid role, spending part of his day supporting international education in Seattle Public Schools. From 2011-2014, Noah coordinated a student-led, school-wide festival called World Water Week and in 2015, he and his students organized the inaugural Washington State Global Issues Network Conference. For the past two years, he has co-facilitated the weeklong Global Leadership Summer Institute. Noah was honored with the 2013-14 World Affairs Council World Educator Award and was among 50 finalists for the 2015 Global Teacher Prize.

**T**he spark for my career in education came when I was a junior in college studying abroad in Quito, Ecuador. Three days a week, I volunteered as a history teacher in a school in the outskirts of Quito. My class had twelve students, ages twelve to eighteen. The students mostly came from single-parent households and ate their only meals at the school. What struck me most was that all of the teachers in that school shared the belief that the future of their country was in the hands of their children. The teachers' and students' positive energy, despite their tremendously difficult conditions, was contagious. Those twelve kids taught me a lot that year. They taught me the power of education, and they convinced me that I was going to be a teacher.

For two years after college, I worked as a bilingual instructional assistant in an elementary school. I worked with 30 Spanish-speaking students and their families. Many of the students spoke no English before enrolling in the school. I taught them the alphabet, translated parent-teacher conferences, and visited families' homes. Those two years demonstrated to me the importance of building relationships with students and their families.

I carried this wisdom with me when I returned to school to earn a master's degree in secondary education. I was then hired at the school where I continue to teach today. This is my twelfth year working hard to provide a quality education for every student who walks into my

classroom. I believe that teaching is the most critical profession in the world and I am committed to doing everything I can to strengthen it so that all children receive the quality education that they deserve.

For the past eight years, I have taught a class called Global Leadership in a Seattle high school. Global Leadership is a course designed to empower and engage high school students. The class was originally developed by Global Visionaries, a Seattle-based non-profit whose mission is to empower young people to be global leaders in creating a just and sustainable future. In the class, students develop leadership skills through service learning, a problem-based curriculum, and community involvement.

# Strategies for creating a more democratic classroom

## Building community

Establishing the learning community is the first step to creating a classroom environment where leadership can thrive. Start with the basics. Everyone must know everyone else's name. Then move on to learning about each other's lives and passions.

## Class meetings

Take 20 minutes a week for students to make decisions about how their class operates and to discuss topics of their choice. In class meetings, students develop ownership for their learning and take responsibility for their actions in the classroom.

## Class jobs

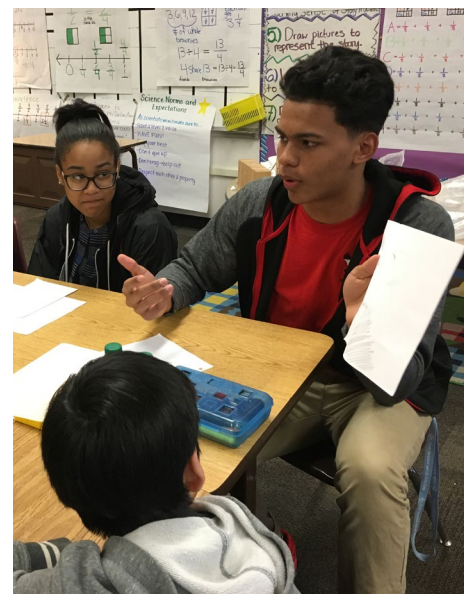
Every student has a class job with the goal of making the class work better for all students. Educator and psychologist Rudolf Dreikurs said, "you can't teach responsibility, you can only share it." Jobs can include making seating charts, creating class meeting agendas, organizing celebrations for birthdays and holidays, making thank-you cards for guest speakers, among others.

## Group grades

Students in a democratic classroom learn to be accountable and take responsibility for the successes of their classroom community. Using group grades can motivate students to make sure everyone understands what is going on. For example, periodically two students might be selected to take a quiz, and that score is given to everyone. The students come to see the broader impact of their efforts and their sense of responsibility to their classmates and community is reinforced.

**Partner with another classroom** where your students can teach younger students. In Global Leadership, we call this Adopt-A-Class. Teaching is the most powerful form of learning. Your students will realize their leadership potential and will perhaps even consider teaching as an exciting career option.

See the [Resource Packet](#) from the 2015 Global Leadership Summer Institute for more teaching ideas and resources.



A high school student shares what he's learning in the Global Leadership class with elementary students, as part of the Adopt-A-Class Project.

The Global Leadership curriculum explores the social and environmental impacts of complex, interconnected global issues such as water scarcity, climate change, access to education, and food security. Throughout the semester, students engage in research, discussions, debates, role-plays, and collaborative action projects. A key component of the course is the Adopt-A-Class Project, which entails monthly visits to a partner elementary school during which the high school students teach lessons to fourth grade students based on what they learn in our class.

I use a student-centered approach that focuses on the development of students' leadership skills. The curriculum includes activities and pedagogical techniques that give



A key component of the Global Leadership curriculum is the Adopt-A-Class Project: high school students make monthly visits to a partner elementary school to teach what they're currently learning to fourth grade students.

students the opportunity to take ownership of the class as well as take responsibility for the group's learning. Weekly class meetings are held for students to discuss and amend class policies, resolve conflict, and address other issues that affect the group. An emphasis is placed on team building early in the semester to help students develop their communication and collaboration skills.

I believe that classes like Global Leadership are an essential part of education today. In Global Leadership, we address the 21st century skills that students must develop in order to participate in a global society: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Students enter Global Leadership

as learners and emerge as communicators, collaborators, and problem solvers.

This course has provided an opportunity for many students who were unsuccessful in previous social studies classes to thrive. Some students needed a more hands-on environment, others just needed an opportunity to activate their leadership skills. Students who never had spoken a word in their other classes because they were learning English or just shy were making speeches in front of large groups of people by the end of Global Leadership.

For the past two summers, I have worked with my colleagues at Global Visionaries to co-facilitate a weeklong Global Leadership

Summer Institute for teachers to learn how to create a more democratic classroom. The methods and structures of the Global Leadership class can be applied to any subject or grade level. It is exciting to see second and third grade teachers holding class meetings and empowering their young students to reach their leadership potential.

Building on the momentum of the Global Leadership course, I decided that I wanted to help my school become more oriented toward developing global citizens. Five years ago, Molly, a former Global Leadership student, and I co-founded a school-wide festival called World Water Week. During the festival, all students and staff attended assemblies, participated in a synchronous all-school lesson, and attended workshops during a student conference at the end of the week. Overall, it was a huge success. For each of the following three years, World Water Week focused on different themes. In 2012 it was food security. In 2013 we looked at sanitation and health. In 2014 the festival focused on plastic pollution.

Following the success of the first World Water Week, I worked with a group of teachers to try to integrate the themes of World Water Week into the core curriculum. We developed and implemented an interdisciplinary project that incorporated water and sustainability issues into world history, language arts, and



Students rally as part of a Migration Stories Film Project last year, a component of the Global Leadership class. Students interviewed fellow students who have immigrated from various parts of the world.

science courses. The project is now in its fourth year, and all 300 ninth-grade students participate. One component, a Field Experience Day, includes ten different research trips to community organizations and sites.

More recently, students and I co-organized an international youth conference that took place in March 2015. The conference was a forum for groups of students from twenty different schools representing four states to present global action projects that they had carried out. For two days, middle and high school students shared their visions for building a more sustainable world. One of the highlights was when Molly, my former student, addressed the participants as one

of the keynote speakers. She spoke now as a college senior about to enter the “real world.” She told the students that they should continue to take action and speak out about the issues they care about. Students left the two-day conference excited to continue learning about global issues and sustainability. The conference will take place again this year at a different high school and it will hopefully continue to bring young leaders together for many years to come.

Very few of the projects that I have carried out in my classroom and in my school would be possible without strong community partnerships. I have enjoyed working with several local organizations over the years, including Global Visionaries,

Facing the Future, FEEST (Food Empowerment Education and Sustainability Team), Bridges to Understanding, Seattle Art Museum, Sustainability Ambassadors, among others. My greatest partners, however, are my students.

At the end of each semester, I ask my Global Leadership students to reflect on the course. I look to them for clues for how to improve the class for the next group of students. I always learn from their critical comments and I always smile when I read how they have grown.

What follows are a small sample of the latter:

*“...this class is like no other.  
This class taught me how to be a  
leader.”*

— VJ

*“Global Leadership is a vital  
component of our school’s aca-  
demic curriculum... It is more  
like a family than a class. It is  
truly a unique way to reach kids  
and raise awareness about the  
dire state of our world.”*

— Kylee

*“...I have grown not only as an  
individual, but as a ‘global citi-  
zen’ as well... I now know I want  
my future to consist of something  
more than an average day job. I  
want to have a greater impact on  
the world as that ‘global citizen.’”*

— Anonymous

Paulo Freire, the great Brazilian educator and philosopher wrote, “Education must begin with the solution of the student-teacher contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.” This vision of teachers and students as equals recreating the world together couldn’t be more important today. We often tell youth that they hold the keys to the future, that they must figure out how to solve the many problems that we and the generations before us have left for them. That’s a lot of pressure. We don’t have the luxury of waiting for youth to lead. We as educators have a responsibility to get out of the way and to encourage our students to be leaders not just of the future, but leaders today.

## RESOURCES

### 2015 Global Leadership Summer Institute [Resource Packet](#)

[www.world-affairs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Exploring-Global-Issues-packet-Updated-7.22.15.pdf](http://www.world-affairs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Exploring-Global-Issues-packet-Updated-7.22.15.pdf)

### Tips for building an interdisciplinary project:

[teachingquality.org/content/blogs/noah-zeichner/making-interdisciplinary-projects-work](http://teachingquality.org/content/blogs/noah-zeichner/making-interdisciplinary-projects-work)

### How to sustain projects:

[teachingquality.org/content/blogs/noah-zeichner/keeping-good-things-going-can-innovative-programs-education-be-sustained](http://teachingquality.org/content/blogs/noah-zeichner/keeping-good-things-going-can-innovative-programs-education-be-sustained)

### Project-based learning opportunities:

[sites.google.com/site/globaledwa/international-project-based-learning-opportunities](http://sites.google.com/site/globaledwa/international-project-based-learning-opportunities)



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