Global Citizenship Education: How to make it meaningful.

By Ann Straub, International Advisor, Council of International Schools

Global Citizenship and Intercultural Competency are often incorporated into schools’ mission statements. But how often do schools that promise an international education in the hope of developing global citizens define what this really means? What does this imply for the school’s leadership, curriculum, co-curricular activities, service learning, professional development and environmental sustainability? How can a school community develop a shared understanding of what this means and what it looks like in action? Many schools share this goal of encouraging global citizenship in their students, but experience suggests such goals are sometimes daunting in their ambition and all too often frustratingly vague in their structure.

In response to this demonstrated need, the Council of International Schools designed a program to help schools better understand, advance and measure the development of global citizens. The CIS International Certification process is based upon its work evaluating and accrediting over 500 diverse school communities internationally. International Certification addresses key questions that CIS found to be areas of struggle for school leaders as they worked to develop global citizenship in their schools.

- **How do you know you are taking the right steps to provide students with an education that keeps pace with internationally-recognised standards and enables their development as global citizens?**

- **Why is it essential for your school community to develop a shared understanding of global citizenship?**

- **What role does intercultural competence play, and how can it be effectively developed in the school community?**

*International Certification* has been piloted in nine schools around the world, including three NAIS schools in the United States: St. Timothy’s School in Baltimore, the International School Indiana in Indianapolis and Turning Point School in Culver City; three schools in Australia: Mentone Girls’ Grammar School, Ladies Methodist College and Ivanhoe Grammar School and schools in Argentina, China and the United Kingdom. All the schools involved in the pilot phases were unequivocal about the benefits of a deeper exploration of the key themes. After achieving *International Certification* in 2015, the Head of Turning Point School, Deborah James reflected: “The process of working toward *International Certification* has brought opportunities for significant and valuable internal and collective reflection. We were able to take a more objective look at where the school stands, what we have accomplished already, and where we should aim to grow in the future.”

All the schools involved in the pilot phases were unequivocal about the benefits of a deeper exploration of the key themes. After achieving *International Certification* in 2015, Fran Reddan, Principal of Mentone Girls’ Grammar School reflected: “The *International Certification* process gave us strategic impact. There were some very practical outcomes such as changes in practice, accompanied by developing tangible ‘products’ as a result of the IC process: these included a real and accepted definition
of global citizenship, new student reports and assessment tools for global citizenship, enhanced use of technology for curriculum mapping, a more global and accessible library collection, just to name a few. The positive ripple effect was the additional impetus to make global citizenship move visible.”

The focus of International Certification is on developing global citizenship through project-based learning, which focuses on a school-wide framework of Leadership Commitment, Student Growth, and Support and Collaboration. International Certification is a developmental, growth minded, consultative process. Schools are supported on their journeys by experienced and skilled School Support and Evaluation Officers from the Council of International Schools, all of whom have a background in developing internationalism in schools across the world as leaders and facilitators. Many School Support and Evaluation Officers also used their knowledge and expertise to create the International Certification Service to meet the needs of schools who know they can do more in this context. St. Timothy’s School commented: “International Certification opened up conversations among students, teachers, and the administration. It was great to have an external eye to see how we are going and how we can improve.”

Schools who wish to develop strategic impact and authentically live their mission statement of global citizenship would greatly benefit from International Certification. It is an opportunity to explore, identify and evaluate a school community’s fundamental values and beliefs about international education and their impact on the resulting outcomes each school plans for its students.

The project-based learning approach of International Certification measures growth using a developmental continuum. The starting point is the creation of a shared definition of global citizenship followed by an Intercultural Assessment that includes an individual online survey followed by a professional development activity to understand intercultural competence and discuss the collective results. Thereafter, the school completes six school-wide projects. Another school involved in the pilot phase, Methodist Ladies’ College in Australia, stated: “The shared definition of global citizenship was powerful in the creation which involved lots of discussion. We next defined what it looks like in practice.” Turning Point School continued: “A steady focus on global perspectives has focused faculty professional development and has led to significant progress in teaching pedagogy and practice. Additionally, this process informed bridging across grade levels and highlighted cross-curricular integration opportunities. You only have to walk into classrooms and down the hallways of Turning Point to see the impact International Certification has had on student learning.”

International Certification is distinct from the accreditation model that many will associate with the Council of International Schools and will appeal specifically to schools that wish to take a more in-depth look at all aspects of their school through the lens of intercultural competency and global citizenship. With a truly global perspective of education borne of first-hand experience working with a myriad of schools across the globe, the Council of International Schools understands that the notion of intercultural competency is both challenging to understand and to embrace. The intercultural development exercise that is integral to International Certification serves as a stimulus for conversations among the faculty focusing on the typically hidden aspects of internationalism dealing with cultural norms, values, perceptions and assumptions, and placing less emphasis on some of the more visible aspects typified by food, festivals, fashion and flags. This important shift within the six
*International Certification* projects elevates the focus from merely “doing” to strategically taking an in-depth look at which actions and outcomes will truly develop global citizens in the school.

Deborah Richman added: “I did not expect the *International Certification* Projects to take us into so much depth.” This service provides a focused roadmap for schools to better understand and develop global citizens. The magnitude of the investigative process sustained a focus that encouraged the entire school community to take a stake in Turning Point’s process towards achieving CIS *International Certification*. Richman explained: “The faculty and staff and community at large took it very seriously because of how in-depth it was.” Individuals outside of the immediate school community have taken note of Turning Point’s achievement.

As result of *International Certification*, St. Timothy’s School noted: “The most immediate change was the ‘Culture Shock’ sessions changing from just including the international students, to including all the girls at St. Timothy’s School. The International Club that used to be a separate club, now hosts multicultural events for the whole school during the school year. The International students talk about their roots, celebrations, family traditions and beliefs. This used to be an isolated event, but now includes everyone in the community. We have had lots of discussion about a common language policy with sensitivity to cultures being able to express themselves in their mother tongue, yet not isolating themselves or inhibiting learning and communication with the school community. Unit planning has focused on global contexts and threading this through our units. This has really helped our cross-curricular connections and paying attention to using culturally sensitive and accurate materials.”

Dr Graham Ranger, the Director of School Support and Evaluation Services, has been closely involved with the development of *International Certification* and sees this new service as a perfect example of the CIS vision to inspire the development of global citizens through high quality international education. Dr Ranger said: “The enormous interest we have received from educators around the world since we launched *International Certification* is a reflection of the challenges many schools are facing, and a welcome justification of our own efforts to provide them with the tools to meet these challenges for the benefits of their students.”

If your school is interested in *International Certification*, you can learn more by visiting the Council of International Schools website at [www.cois.org](http://www.cois.org).