going local

adaptive education for local and global citizenship

BY CHRIS HARTH

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Many independent schools have come to understand their obligations to their neighbors, but in this age of growing connectedness locally, nationally, and globally, who exactly *are* our neighbors?

Calling for an embrace of what he describes as "cosmopolitanism," Kwame Anthony Appiah, professor of philosophy at Princeton University, argues persuasively that ongoing technological changes in recent years have rendered strangers in distant lands into neighbors — as real to us as those in our local communities. While we remain physically distant from "others," such distances are regularly bridged with rapid transit or instantaneous communication. For better or worse, what happens in one country increasingly ripples across the planet and affects people in other countries. Such interconnectedness and interdependence are now manifest in a host of essential fields — especially in areas related to economics, the environment, and human health — with important moral implications for all residents of our shared planet.

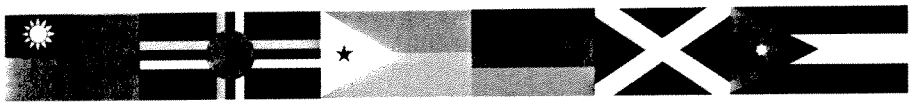
Given this new human landscape, educators have little choice but to consider both the meaning and effects of such changing conditions. Indeed, the ethical and educational implications could hardly be more important.

THE EMERGENT GLOBAL IMPERATIVE

Technological advances in communications, transportation, and information processing have deepened and broadened connections on multiple levels, local through global, thickening the webs of interactivity that bind us to each other economically, politically, militarily, socially, culturally, environmentally, and ethically. As with most complex systems, changes in one domain or part of the world affect what happens in others, with small changes often magnified because of the interconnectedness of the system and because of the power of positive feedback loops to reinforce emergent patterns of thought and behavior. Malcolm Gladwell highlighted some of this in his best seller, *The Tipping Point*, and other researchers have made it crystal clear. More than ever before, our local actions can generate expanding waves of effects, some of which are unintended and unpredictable. At the same time, regional, national, and global waves wash up on local shores and must be reconciled and applied in local contexts.

These two-way causal flows — local interactions generating global trends and global trends being adapted for local contexts — capture the essence of the term, "glocalization," which was coined by British sociologist Roland Robertson (who credits the Japanese word *dochakuka* as his inspiration). Robertson defines "glocalization" as "the simultaneity — the co-presence — of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies." In *The World Is Flat*, Thomas Friedman also used this term, defining it as the process by which a "culture easily absorbs foreign ideas and best practices and melds those with its own traditions." In Friedman's case, however, he captures only the global-to-local dynamic, while missing the other side of the equation.

As the nation with the greatest capacity to catalyze and sustain change, the United States is uniquely positioned on the proverbial peak of the international landscape.



Beyond characterizing the emergent nature of our operating environment, such mutually constitutive relations between local and global levels also influence our identities — a complicated, evolving notion of who we think we are. Consider, for instance, something as simple as how we respond to the question, "Where are you from?" Most of us tend to identify with multiple places and sustain multiple levels of loyalty to them, which are sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting. We are simultaneously citizens of a locality, a state or province, a country, and the planet we all share. In this sense, we are all "glocal" citizens.

Increased awareness, increased connectedness, and increased capacity to help or hurt others, of course, bring increased responsibilities. While we may have a greater obligation to those who are close to us than to those who are distant, the dividing lines between these two groups are now blurred. Many problems in our world — extensive poverty, pandemics, economic or political instability, environmental degradation, fanatical ideologies, or terrorism, to name but a few — easily spill over borders and generate transnational challenges that cannot be ignored nor effectively redressed unilaterally. Instead, such borderless challenges must be addressed collaboratively, creatively, and constructively by multiple actors, especially those with the greatest stake and with the greatest capacity to effect positive change.

In this sense, citizens of the United States have a particularly large role to play, as do independent schools and their leaders. As the nation with the greatest capacity to catalyze and sustain change, the United States is uniquely positioned on the proverbial peak of the international landscape. While unlikely to last forever, this position brings with it important responsibilities, not the least of which involve educating our young citizens as effectively as possible. In a global context, this means preparing them for the myriad opportunities and challenges that they will face in their adult lives and helping them to grasp the ongoing changes in our world; teaching them to be flexible and adaptive, reflective and imaginative, forward-looking and growth-oriented; and instilling in them a healthy respect for themselves and others, given how often they will need to work with others to solve common problems or realize shared objectives.

A similarly adaptive orientation would serve educational leaders well

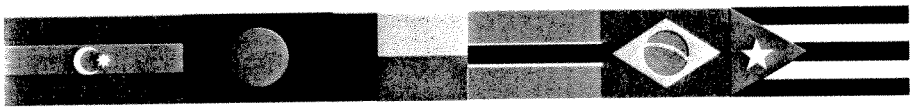
as they strive to keep up with the quickening pace of change. Such adaptive leadership will help them look ahead, assess changing contexts (local through global), and craft suitable strategies, policies, and practices that can best prepare themselves, their students and faculty, and their institutions for the future. Given the inherent autonomy, relative flexibility, and greater potential to enact efficaciously purposeful change, independent schools have a particularly important role to play — both for their own communities and as potential models for other schools that do not have the same capacity to adjust as readily.

Regardless of institution type and the local challenges associated with adaptation to the changing landscape, all educational leaders must recognize that, as the world spins, our contexts, connections, and communities continue to evolve. The world into which our students will enter is not the same world in which today's adults grew up. What was once necessary and sufficient educational preparation may no longer be either. This is not to say that independent schools need to completely reinvent themselves. Much of what independent schools have offered students for decades — educating for both mind and heart, the self and others — still holds sway. But it *does* mean that they need to be ready and willing to adapt to the sea changes in our evolving contexts and communities.

The Glocal Schoolhouse

With this emergent "glocal" reality as the backdrop, what type of education do our young citizens need in order to develop identities and connections to multiple communities? How can we prepare them for this type of interconnectedness and dynamism? More specifically, what knowledge, skills, and perspectives will best enable them to thrive as glocal citizens?

As a starting point, all students should have a base level of knowledge in key subject areas, including mathematics, the sciences, the arts, the humanities, and social studies. As E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and others have argued, this essential background information enables people to be "culturally literate" and, therefore, to interact more effectively with others who share such knowledge. However, given intensifying global interactivity and the expanding context for learning and living, we need to update our definitions of "core knowledge" to include essential elements from non-Western cultures, which currently include roughly 85 percent of the world's population. While knowledge of Western heritage remains necessary, it grows less sufficient daily. Increasingly, all students should have awareness of, and appreciation for, cultures from around the world — near and far. Moreover, they need to understand their global and local contexts and the various levels in between. Toward these ends, they should study world art, literature, and religions, as well



practicing glocal citizenship

Local and global learning opportunities can and should be combined to generate transformational educational outcomes. Local subjects can be explored with international guests; global topics can be collaboratively studied with local partners; and international partners can work together to serve local communities. As part of a larger effort to help connect neighbors, exchange views, broaden perspectives, and prepare glocal citizens, students at St. Andrew's Episcopal School (Mississippi) have role-played with students from six other schools in the area in a geopolitical simulation with Harm de Blij, competed in statewide events such as Model United Nations and the International Economic Summit, and coordinated with other schools to visit local international exhibits and museums.

Student travel progresses from the local and state levels in the lower school, through regional and national travel in the middle school, to international travel in the upper school, with parent-student trips to Mexico and Italy now offered in grades 5–8 and more than a dozen international trips and exchanges to five continents offered for grades 9–12, with a growing emphasis on service, sustainability, and the developing world. In addition to offering student and faculty grants at St. Andrew's to support such layered travel, faculty participate in professional development on local, state, regional, national, and international levels. St. Andrew's students and faculty also have been piloting new models of reciprocal service — with teams of students from St. Andrew's and the Hermann Gmeiner International College in Ghana performing joint service-learning projects in both Mississippi and Ghana. Even more potentially transformative is a new three-tiered exchange program with Camoustie High School in Scotland — with one team hosting and performing joint community service in one locality, followed by reversed roles of hosting/visiting and more joint local service, and concluding with a trip to a third place, unfamiliar to both sets of participants, where they can again live and work side-by-side, experience something new together, and learn about themselves and "others" as they contribute positively to multiple communities.

as world history, geography, economics, and politics — which, of course, include local, national, and regional facets. Multidisciplinary, issue-oriented classes — especially those with real-world, service-learning, and other experiential opportunities — offer one promising vehicle for engaging students, but multiple means can effect such ends.

While core knowledge is indispensable, it is but one of three essential components of glocal literacy and competence. No less important are the various skill sets that can empower young citizens to thrive in multiple contexts and communities. We live in a technology-rich era with an abundance of accessible information. Facts, theories, and other bits of information can be retrieved via any computer or phone connected to the Internet. While digital divides still prevent all people from having equal access to such information, we often find ourselves now wrestling with too much information, trying to discern what is reliable and relevant for a given question and whittling away less germane sources. Increasingly, students need to learn how to ask the right questions and how to sift through various sources of information to find workable answers. They also need to be able to identify and research important issues, to analyze and share the information they process, and to collaborate with people from other parts of the world to solve our shared problems and realize our shared opportunities. In this respect, the premium on cross-cultural communication skills and foreign language proficiency continues to grow, as does the value of technological competence and computer skills.

At the same time, we cannot afford to slight more traditional concerns such as reading and writing. Nor are quantitative and scientific skills any less important in our current era. The growing challenge with developing age-appropriate skills,[1] as with suitable background knowledge, is to integrate emergent concerns with key concepts, building on the necessary base to generate a higher and more appropriate level of sufficiency — in terms of both knowledge and skills — for our ever-changing contexts.

Ubuntu

One useful ethical cornerstone in such an interconnected, "glocal" world is the notion of *ubuntu*, a Bantu term that Archbishop Desmond Tutu and others translate roughly as "I am because we are" and that involves defining ourselves in our interactions with others. Much like Buddhist principles of first doing no harm and then doing as much good as possible, *ubuntu* emphasizes the connectedness we share and how much we help or hurt ourselves as we help or hurt others. As Nelson Mandela has noted, even if one wants to improve his or her own lot in life, this should be done in a way that does not make it harder for someone else to do the same thing; rather, we should seek to capitalize on those positive-sum opportunities that can uplift all people or, at the very least, will not lower some in the process.

More important than skills and knowledge are perspectives and attitudes. These help shape our vision, define our character, and influence how we live our lives. They also affect the questions we ask, the knowledge we pursue, the skills we develop, and how we put these qualities and information together to do good work. Given their role as underlying drivers, perspectives and attitudes are pivotal for education and citizenship. Specifically, we need to cultivate glocal perspectives and attitudes in our students, including an awareness of our growing interconnectedness, an appreciation of cultures from all over the world, and a willingness to consider different viewpoints and opinions. As glocal citizens, our students should recognize both similarities and differences, avoiding prejudice and bigotry as they try to learn about themselves and others. Top priorities also include an inquisitive spirit and a lifelong love of learning, as well as an understanding of complexity and an appreciation for nuance. In shifting terrain with multiple actors, inchoate identities, and evolving ends and means, our citizens must be intellectually engaged and agile; open-minded and pragmatic with their selection of appropriate tools and techniques; and ready, willing, and able to adapt to changing conditions.

As part of their attitudinal repertoire, our young citizens must develop an ethical compass that enables them to see beyond themselves, to recognize their connections and obligations to others, and to chart a responsible course of action that will serve them, their families, and their communities — including their schools, their neighborhoods, their towns and cities, their counties, their states, their regions, their countries, and their shared planet (see *Ubuntu* sidebar above). Balancing and fulfilling these numerous and sometimes conflicting demands is one of the challenges associated with glocal citizenship. Difficulty, however, does not obviate responsibility. We do not often get to choose whether we are citizens of our towns, state, nation, or planet. We are all of these, and more, simultaneously. To this end, it is critical that young citizens not only have the requisite knowledge and skills, but also actually put their knowledge and skills into action while still in school. Doing so helps them build the self-confidence they need to believe that such steps are feasible and can make a difference. (See sidebar "Practicing Glocal Citizenship" on page 71.) In this respect, glocal research, collaboration, service,

and internships can be wonderful complements to classroom learning and powerful developmental tools that can reinforce the need for and viability of concerted and constructive action on multiple levels — local through global — which is the hallmark of glocal citizenship.

Ultimately, what matters most is that we prepare our students for their increasingly connected futures and provide the tools they will need to succeed and lead in multiple communities and a rapidly changing world.

The World to Come

The vast majority of humanity currently lives as what Harm de Blij, author of *The Power of Place*, calls "locals" in the developing world. Current population projections indicate that another two billion people may inhabit the planet with us in the next 40 years, almost all of whom also will live in the developing world, and mostly in urban areas. In the same time frame, projections have the population of the U.S. increasing by another third, with half of us as people of color. Without question, the challenges ahead will be great. Those individuals, groups, and institutions with wealth, power, and access must work with their neighbors to integrate the less enfranchised and to provide opportunities for them to improve their circumstances or else the socioeconomic, environmental, and political challenges we face are only likely to grow.

Much like the collaborative, forward-looking leadership needed on the international stage, educational leaders need to recognize these changing circumstances, appreciate local constraints and opportunities, and work with others to identify and actualize strategic steps forward. With a view toward maximizing multiplier effects and positive feedback loops, successful leaders rally others to important causes, encourage them to think anew, empower them to grow, and bring them together as an adaptive community — which, in the context of a school, translates into a thriving learning, teaching, and serving community. The more students and faculty can work together in a lifelong pursuit of knowledge, virtue, and excellence — Aristotle's notion of *areté* — and in the service of others, the more meaningful and constructive the educational experience and the more valuable the associated civic preparedness. Ideally, educational leaders model such behavior with and for faculty, faculty model it with and for students, and then students have the opportunity to put it all into practice, at an early age and in authentic settings. If they do this, the knowledge, skills, and values that they learn will serve them and others well.

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