

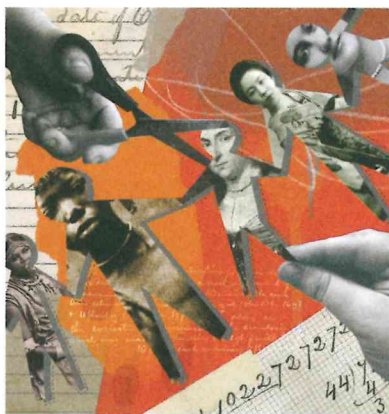
Michael Scott's **Global Connections**

“To teach students about the range of global attitudes and values, we need a wide-reaching programme of learning”

Im a first-time father. My little one is now 10 months old. Like so many new parents, I'm pondering how I might prepare my daughter to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Of course, parents are not the only ones thinking about such things. In the UK it's the job of the education ministry and parliament, alongside the exam boards and curriculum advisory committees and a whole host of subject groups, to keep an eye on what and how schools teach our children.

But a more international 'eye in the sky' group is also looking at the issue. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has evaluated 15-year-olds across 80 different countries in areas such as science, collaborative problem-solving and financial literacy, to help countries compare curricula. For the next assessment in 2018, PISA will also analyse how education and assessment systems prepare students to be 'globally competent'.

On the one hand, children are more aware of the globalised nature of our world than perhaps ever before, thanks to today's diverse and instantaneous international communication, social media and news networks. Yet just being aware of the wider world does not equip young people to engage with it. Indeed, in many cases such awareness may do little more than make them weary of that world. I have taught university students who point-blank refused to contribute their opinions to an online course discussion forum, citing examples of friends being vilified and hounded more generally online.



And what does 'globally competent' actually mean? PISA's definition is more far-reaching than mere awareness of international issues. Countries are challenged to think not just about how we impart knowledge of the world, but also how we prepare students to interact with others from different backgrounds. This is nothing less than a 360-degree approach to 'learning', covering not just knowledge, understanding and abilities, but also values and attitudes. Simply learning a foreign language won't be enough, because it does not – in and of itself – teach those values.

This goal recalls the writings of fifth-century-BC Greek historian Herodotus. He recounted how Persian king Darius summoned Greeks and Indians to compare burial customs; each thought their own to be correct and the other's abhorrent. His story illustrates the power of cultural relativism, and ends by quoting his near contemporary, ancient Greek poet Pindar: "custom is lord of all."

Herodotus did not, however, tell us how Greeks and Indians – on learning this lesson 2,500 years ago – then acted.

Did they learn the lessons of global competency and cultural relativism, or did they just think the Persian king was bonkers for undertaking the comparison?

I was reminded of this recently when I came across the children's book *Timelines of World History*. It's a rare kind of book, comparing the development of societies and civilisations across the world. And it's certainly not how we teach history in our schools. (My own teacher described history lessons as boarding a spaceship to head from one isolated period to another.)

Such books provide a good starting point in teaching children global competency. They ask children to think not just about different paths taken in history by different societies, but also to actively compare and contrast them. But to address attitudes and values, we need to go further: we need a more wide-reaching programme of learning and assessment that crosses all the traditional disciplines, as well as blurring the line between 'academic' learning, and 'social' or 'life' learning, both within schools and in home and social environments.

Such a challenge should be welcomed. It would help to create a generation of students who understand better not only the wider world but also how their own environment fits into that bigger picture – the ways in which communities are joined by common ideas, values and problems, as well as the ways in which they differ. 🌐

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