

Chapter 24

International Schools Must Include Neurodivergent and Disabled Students for Global Citizenship Goals: Elite Global Citizenship Education Is Inclusive

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ABSTRACT

International schools typically promise to provide some form of global citizenship education or internationally minded perspective on the world. There is value added to global citizenship education by including neurodivergent and disabled students—students with brains and bodies that vary from those of their typical peers—well. The goals of global citizenship education imply an ability to interact with all people of the world, neurodivergent and disabled people included. Through a broad-spectrum literature review, the author examines the identities of international schools attempting to become global leaders in including by choice as well as the research basis supporting that goal and opportunities available to those schools.

INTRODUCTION

What if embracing more neurodivergent and disabled students in international schools improves social-emotional learning, improves approaches to teaching and learning for all students, and does not reduce the academic results of students?

The author of this chapter has spent years absorbing and considering the disparate threads of thought about inclusive education globally, the varied philosophical roots of international school education,

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Global Citizenship Education, well-being in schools, and how they weave together in a way that each thread adds support and value to the other.

Exclusion, segregation, integration, inclusion, and congregation have been around as long as humans have had communities (Hehir et al., 2016; Moore, 2019). The tendency of education to rename and re-brand old ideas aside, the idea that learning communities—schools—should be totally inclusive (Aow et al., 2023) should not appear as a new, challenging idea.

The number of international schools has grown exponentially (Wechsler, 2017; Bunnell, 2021), now estimated at over 12,000 schools (ISC Research, 2020b). Most of these schools promise a version of Global Citizenship Education, that their institution will provide the education needed for students to become quality members of global society.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities says 1 in 5 children have some form of learning disability (Horowitz et al., 2017). The World Health Organization specifies “16% of the world’s population” has a “significant disability” (World Health Organization, 2023).

In a world where 15 to 20% of global citizens are neurodivergent or disabled, can international schools truly claim to impart values of Global Citizenship Education while excluding the majority of neurodivergent and disabled students?

This chapter presents a wide-ranging literature review that illustrates how international schools have the opportunity, when including by choice, to be global leaders in genuine inclusion that elevates all students. In lieu of mandates and legal requirements, it is a more powerful values statement to include students by choice. Inclusion by legal mandate gives students access to buildings while not consistently providing the same levels of inclusion services and desire to be inclusive from staff giving the inclusive provisions. Yes, the students are legally mandated to be in the building, and no, that is not an enforcement of equitable services.

This chapter poses that to include by choice shows a grasp of the research, and best practices, that education outcomes for all students are better in inclusive school environments.

International schools should strive to include neurodivergent and disabled students, because intentionally inclusive policies create better Global Citizenship Education outcomes for all students.

BACKGROUND

Clarification of Terms to Frame the Meaning of Inclusion

Exclusion. Segregation. Integration. Inclusion. Congregation. The first four of these terms are important definitions for this chapter. The fifth term gives context and perspective.

Exclusion, in terms of school, refers to students who are directly or indirectly excluded from the school environment (Hehir et al., 2016; United Nations 2016). Students (and their families) who are: not admitted, urged to leave, kicked out, or otherwise not given access are excluded.

Exclusion can also occur when students are not able to participate in certain activities, are frequently pulled out of the classroom for additional support, are not welcomed or informed of what the class is currently doing when returning to the classroom, are allowed to not pay attention (and stare out a window, read a book, et cetera) as long as they are well behaved and not disruptive. To let a child sit in a school classroom, as long as they are not disruptive, while neither educating them well nor developing skills for independent living, is exclusionary.

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