

# Excerpts from Rysensteen's book: Paths to Global Citizenship



## Preface

Rysensteen school is an upper secondary school, a 'gymnasium' or 'high school', which students attend for three years between the ages of 16 and 19. Prior to that they have spent 9 or 10 years in lower secondary and primary education.

In 2012, Rysensteen high school started creating a globally oriented Danish high school education. An education that, based on the Danish teaching culture, school culture and democratic educational tradition, should prepare students to both seize the opportunities of globalization and take responsibility for solving the epochal problems that they share with the rest of the earth's population. We called the program the Global Citizenship Program (GCP).

At the time of writing the 9th generation of Rysensteen students have just started participating in the Global Citizenship Programme, the education (which is for all our students regardless of field of study and class) includes a common curriculum and progression plan with 12 interdisciplinary courses, a GCP focus in all subjects, and home-stay based exchanges with 14 partner schools across five different continents.

Within Denmark, there are formalized cooperation agreements with Randersgade primary school and the ToRS (Cross Cultural and Regional Studies) institute at Copenhagen University, the UN City in Copenhagen, volunteer projects and much more.

We have not finished developing the Global Citizenship Programme. We never will, because even though the programme's democratic and altruistic values are firmly established, academic content and pedagogy must constantly evolve with the changing challenges and opportunities of globalization. We have however come a long way since the programme's inception in 2012, in terms of organization, structure, professionalism and pedagogy. So, in 2018, we decided to

document our accomplishments and challenge our practices with this book on the Global Citizenship Programme, called Paths to Global Citizenship.

Paths to Global Citizenship addresses the Global Citizenship Programme's educational ideal: Global Citizenship, its importance to the students and staff of the school, the organization of the programme. It also describes the specific learning situations in which education takes place. It is structured through a combination of descriptions of teaching processes and organization, written by Rysensteen's leaders and teachers with analyses of the programme's significance for students, written by University researchers Steen Beck and Louise Tranekjær who carried out observations of teaching and interviews with students, teachers and managers at Rysensteen.

## List of contributors to Paths to Global Citizenship

*Paths to Global Citizenship* was created in collaboration between external education researchers, Rysensteen's teachers, leaders and students, and representatives from some of our partner schools. Below is a list of contributors to the book.

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## **Introduction by Anders Schultz and Mads Blom**

The need for a global outlook in youth education is obvious: a glance at any news media tells the story of climate challenges, social unrest, migration conflicts, and problems related to identity and inequality issues.

As the world is getting increasingly smaller, global issues are becoming more present for all of us, and there has been call for action from the young generation which recognises the urgency of these issues.. Being able to relate to these requires insight, empathy, and the ability to reflect on global challenges, and this should - ideally - be introduced early in students' schooling as a cornerstone of their education.

If we are to believe that we will be able to solve our common issues in the future across national borders and cultural boundaries, the content of our education is crucial. Obtaining knowledge and analytical skills is obviously important, but not sufficient. There is also a need for school children and young people to work on implementing their ideas for creating a better world not just in the future but in the here and now. That is why in 2012 we decided at Rysensteen Gymnasium to introduce the Global Citizenship Programme, which gives students knowledge about global conditions, develops their intercultural competences and gives them opportunities for taking action on the the basis of their political convictions.

### **Global, democratic general education**

The classic general education ideal has, in Denmark, traditionally been focused on becoming an active Danish citizen, but the influence of globalization on the nation state's design and behaviour, as well as the students' assumptions and conceptions of their life trajectory after graduation have created the need for an international perspective.

Students have travelled farther than previous generations, are to a greater extent consumers of international media and cultural offerings, and have notions of a life of future studies and work outside of their own country. When comparing their experiences and wishes with the global challenges, the global citizen as an educational ideal is both obvious and necessary.

We hold no illusions that students will base their global outlook on a purely altruistic basis. Of course, they also look for their own opportunities in the globalized society. People need to have ambitions for themselves, and the education system has an obligation to prepare students to fulfil them. But at the same time, as educators, we have a responsibility to develop their views on global challenges, and this requires knowledge, analytical skills, and competences to act upon their political convictions. It also requires insight into different cultures and to be able to understand and interact with these cultures with empathy and reflection. We have to help them develop a range of competences to act in intercultural encounters, but also to work with an approach to the world based on positive attitudes to human rights and democracy. They must be able to engage in politics, set up local committees focusing on, for example, the environment and climate, but also to be involved in volunteering in local projects or NGOs with a broader focus. General education must be about developing the students' reflections on the state of the world and about giving them the tools to change it for the better.

#### **Global Citizenship Program**

- Partner schools and countries for all classes
- Work with partner countries in all subjects
- Work on epochal issues in all subjects

#### **GCP Curriculum**

The school curriculum is subject-based and all subjects have their own curriculum aims and contents. This is derived from a national curriculum document, which all teachers in Denmark are obliged to follow.

On top of that, all subjects and teachers at Rysensteen high school are also obliged to follow the GCP curriculum which sets out the academic and educational direction for working with the programme through a description of the overall purpose and the specific academic goals. Integrating the national curriculum and the GCP curriculum is only possible because the aims and contents of the two are formulated in a way that leaves a lot of room for interpretation to the individual teacher.

The GCP curriculum's academic objectives are formulated in three categories.

- Factual knowledge
- Analytical skills
- Skills for taking action

The categories support the general education thinking in GCP. A citizen of the world is not only factually knowledgeable, but also able to analyze and take action. 'Action' is conceived in the GCP as referring to a person who acts not only to promote their own opportunities, but also to make the world of tomorrow a little better than the world of today. In order to strengthen this perspective, the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals were also brought into the curriculum a few years ago and have to be integrated into the planning and practice in most interdisciplinary GCP courses.



Map of Rysensteen's partner schools

### GCP Progression Plan - Interdisciplinary

In order to ensure that students attain the competencies described in the curriculum (see appendix 1), we have developed a progression plan based on approximately 13 interdisciplinary courses. These courses contain among other things a focus on the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals, area studies of the students' destination countries and five consecutive courses in cultural understanding.

Through these interdisciplinary courses, students will work with studies that focus on specific countries as well as global and epochal

challenges. It is also important for us to focus both on the partner countries and on Danish conditions as well. We believe that a comparative view of the world in all its complexity must be rooted in and deepen an understanding of one's own country.

### GCP and the traditional subjects

All teachers in all subjects are obliged to teach with a GCP angle. This is done by integrating the national curricula with the GCP curriculum. This could, for example, be about studying inequality in the USA in mathematics, Canada's integration policy in the social sciences, sustainability in Iceland in physics, or cultural meetings between secular and religious forces in Turkey in history. As stated above, the choice of focus is determined by the locations of partner schools.

Later chapters in this book explain in detail what happens in the traditional subjects and how teachers plan modifications and developments from the traditional curriculum.

Over the past decade, we have established a series of partnerships with schools and organizations throughout most of the world. Study trips are part of the activities of all Danish high schools, but at Rysensteen, homestays are a mandatory part of the trip. We believe that participation in a family's everyday life, insight into the family's relationships, participation in family meals, and understanding the cultural characteristics of different generations provide an intercultural understanding that cannot be achieved either by academic work at home in the classroom or by traditional study trips.

In our selection of partner schools, we have also prioritized cooperation with institutions which are not only able to host our students, but also able to visit Rysensteen and the Danish families. We thereby develop our students' competences both as guests and as hosts, and facilitate the conditions needed for our students to expand their horizons in relation to their own country.

For the students to meaningfully engage in a close relationship with other people from other countries, they need proper preparation. The students therefore have, all through their three years at Rysensteen, a focus on their partner-countries in all subjects. The countries' geography, history, economic conditions, literature, energy production, political system and much more are taught in the respective subjects and courses. This provides thorough prerequisites for engaging in meaningful dialogue with the students of the partner countries and helps them in their analyses of the particularities of the countries they visit.

### **Organization and Management**

The school's organizational structure reflects the international perspective on education. An educational leader is employed with GCP as his primary task, a coordinator with the same focus as well as an associated secretary. One of the central committees is the GCP committee, consisting of four teachers, who are responsible for defining and translating the GCP vision into academic content in interdisciplinary courses. This is to ensure a consistent and continuous dialogue about the project between teachers and management. This GCP committee of teachers is supported by a GCP committee of students, who provide feed-back for the GCP management, but who also generate voluntary GCP initiatives of their own - such as international cafes, organizing collections for NGOs etc.

Management along with the GCP - committee of teachers has formulated the progression plan, defined the overall framework of the study trips and other major projects. On the other hand the academic and pedagogical work with regards to the traditional, existing subjects is done with a very high degree of autonomy. It is, Afterall, the respective subject teachers who know best how to teach their subject.

We have, of course, experienced challenges along the way. This is inevitable when creating a programme with specific academic goals to work with the subjects' own goals, and it has not always been easy, as internal evaluations have made clear. In order to address concerns about the pressure from the GCP curriculum and objectives on core subject knowledge, a number of in-service training courses of different kinds (from short on-site modules to residential courses), have been held, the purpose of which is to prepare teachers for the sometimes demanding task of teaching the GCP focus.

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