

## GUEST COLUMN: May 2026

### Globally minded and deeply rooted Sara Ben Ammar

I don't come from one place. And for a long time, I thought that was an answer I needed to have.

I have lived across cultures, worked within different systems, and experienced ways of thinking that do not always align. From a mixed Arabic-Nordic home, through diverse cultural contexts, to international environments - each leaving a mark on how I see education and the world. But over time, something became clear.

What I carry is not a country. It is a way of being, and over time I stopped trying to choose between worlds. I began to understand that I am not defined by one culture but shaped by different ones, and grounded in my own values. What grounds me has never changed my values, my beliefs, and my sense of who I am.

And this is where I believe education needs to pause and reflect.

We speak often about preparing students to be globally competitive. We build systems, frameworks, and pathways that promise access to the world. But we do not always ask what anchors a child in the middle of all of this. Because in many systems, being "global" quietly becomes being the same. Easier to measure. Easier to standardise. Easier to compare. And in that process, something important is often lost.

We are living in a time where being "global" is often celebrated and not always understood. The same brands. The same languages. The same styles. Even the same ways of thinking, liking, scrolling and reacting. What we call "global" can sometimes become a quiet form of sameness. And somewhere in between, uniqueness starts to fade. Authenticity becomes rare, lost between short videos, quick content, and constant scrolling.

We are consuming more than ever but noticing less. The attention to detail, the patience to understand deeply, the ability to stay with complexity - these are slowly disappearing in a world that rewards speed over meaning. Even the way we live reflects this. Everything is fast, fast information, fast food and even fast decisions.

And yet, anything real and important whether it is learning, identity, or even healthy living takes time, intention, and depth.

I have often asked myself what happens in moments of disruption. In times where systems are unstable where access is no longer guaranteed, where people begin to question what they rely on. In those moments, what is local matters again. What is internal matters again. What we can grow, build, and sustain from within suddenly becomes essential.

And perhaps this is not only about systems or access. It is about how we have slowly moved away from trusting what we have already: our culture, our identity, our potential, our "inner seed" within us and our communities.

Living in the UAE, I see something different.

This is a place where cultures meet every day. Where languages, traditions, and beliefs exist side by side, not in theory, but in practice. Every day you see it in classrooms, in conversations, in the way people interact with one another. There is a natural understanding here that identity and openness are not opposites. And yet, even in such a context, the question remains: are we raising young people who can truly navigate this complexity with confidence? Or are we still asking them, directly or indirectly, to fit into one definition of success?

Because being globally minded does not mean becoming the same as everyone else. And being deeply rooted does not mean staying still. Identity is not something we protect by limiting exposure. It is something we strengthen by engaging with the world.

In our school, this is something we are learning to build every day. Through language. Through culture. Through the way students are encouraged to think, question, and express themselves. We are not asking them to choose between who they are and who they can become. We are asking them to hold both.

This is not simple work. There are tensions. Different expectations. Different understandings of what success should look like.

This work matters. Because the future does not belong to those who fit into one system. (I would never be able to fit into one box). It belongs to those who can move across worlds without losing themselves in the process.

Perhaps the question is not how we prepare students for a global world. Rather, whether we are giving them enough grounding to walk into it without losing who they are.

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