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How Are Teachers Responding to Globalization?

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“Research and Practice,” established early in 2001, features educational research that is directly relevant to the work of classroom teachers. Here, I invited global education scholar Merry Merryfield to help us understand what “global education” looks like in classrooms today.

—Walter C. Parker, “Research and Practice” Editor,
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GLOBALIZATION is changing our lives. Global economic systems shape our job opportunities, consumer goods, investments, and quality of life. Global media and communication systems allow us to observe events as they happen around the world and discuss them across national boundaries. Americans are working with people around the world to address global issues of biodiversity, acid rain, and disposal of toxic wastes. Immigrants, refugees and guest workers have created an intermingling of diverse languages, religions, and cultures within our nation’s communities and schools. As youth culture absorbs fashions, ideas, and material culture from the global milieu, Korean pop stars borrow from American rap, and American children watch Japanese cartoons. Global interconnectedness is even evident within the backlash against globalization by people across the planet who fear it is usurping national sovereignty, endangering the environment, or corrupting cultural norms.¹ How are educators responding to globalization, its effects on American communities, and its controversies?

The primary goal of global education is to prepare students to be effective and responsible citizens in a global society. Toward this end, students need to practice real-life skills, gain knowledge of the world, and develop expertise in viewing events and issues from diverse global perspectives.

How are social studies teachers preparing young people to understand their globally interconnected world, its issues, histories, and conflicts? Research points to four main strategies: multiple perspectives, global interconnectedness, global issues, and cross-cultural experiences.

Multiple Perspectives: Seeing the World through the Eyes of "The Other"

Many social studies teachers infuse global perspectives into the social studies through the teaching of multiple, often conflicting, perspectives. Teachers select an important event or issue and have students examine it from different peoples' points of view. A classic example is teaching multiple perspectives on early encounters between Europeans and native peoples in Asia, the Americas, or Africa. This is often done by having students examine materials that capture the variety of perspectives and experiences of explorers, settlers, and indigenous people. Analyzing information from conflicting points of view enables students to develop skills in perspective consciousness and critical thinking as they come to appreciate how people's cultural, economic, and political lenses shape their actions and worldviews. Teachers use multiple perspectives to teach important historical events (such as the Crusades, the spread of Islam, the Treaty of Versailles), contemporary events (South Koreans protesting against U.S. bases, suicide bombers in Israel), and concepts, such as democracy.²

The pedagogy of multiple perspec-

tives often involves comparing primary source documents such as letters (to teach about different experiences and points of view during the Vietnam War), literature (stories written by immigrants from different countries across different time periods), oral histories (comparing narratives of former slaves, free blacks, slave owners, and abolitionists), or media (the film "South Africa Belongs to Us," available in video from California Newsreel, takes students into the lives of five South African women from diverse backgrounds during apartheid). In some school districts teachers invite people from the community to share their knowledge and experiences. The reflections of refugees from Bosnia, a feminist from Turkey, a Japanese American whose family was interred during World War II, or a former Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia can open students' eyes to knowledge and ways of thinking that may not be found in the pages of textbooks. Websites, especially online newspapers, are increasingly used to find information on how people in other countries think about historical events, American foreign policy, or global issues.³

Teachers also use role-plays, simulations, or work in the local community to help students experience diverse points of view and events that are historically, politically, or culturally significant within the social studies curriculum. The Model United Nations is perhaps the best-known simulation of a global organization. Students take on roles of various nations' representatives to the UN and participate as, for example, Nigerians, Russians, or Mexicans in debate on issues facing the planet. Teachers also use published simulations such as *BAFA BAFA* (published by Simile II) and *Barnga* (available through Intercultural Press), or create their own

simulations to help their students understand cultural differences and the decisions average people face during extraordinary times.⁴

Interconnectedness over Time and Space: Thinking Globally

Teaching interconnectedness helps students understand how people, ideas, and events are related across different eras and world regions. Teachers who employ this strategy use global resources to teach students how humans in one place and time influence others in another place and time. Global interconnectedness may include cultural, economic, political, military, technological, or environmental content. For example, students study the *ecumene* to understand the roots of globalization and centuries-long development of economic interdependence. First described by the historian William H. McNeill, *ecumene* refers to the interconnectedness of cultures across vast world regions and bodies of water.⁵ Through multi-regional timelines and histories, students learn how the global economic system evolved from more than 2000 years of imperialism, colonialism, changing technologies, and transnational agreements. They identify connections between ancient traders and contemporary multinational corporations.⁶

The pedagogy of interconnectedness includes student inquiry into local/global relationships and the global ramifications of events and issues over time. For example, a teacher encouraged his students to explore how American tax dollars affect people in other parts of the world. After polling students on the question, "Should the U.S. approve \$5 billion in financial aid to the newly formed Russian government?" the teacher had his students practice "dynamics webbing" to illustrate causes



Photos by Vince Profy

and effects of decisions or actions. One group of students noted “the U.S. votes down \$5 billion in financial aid to newly formed Russian government” in the left hand side of the chalkboard, while other students wrote the effect: “Russian economic reforms move slowly or less successfully.” Students continued their discussion until the web was well developed, and then the teacher asked, “Would this web cause you to reconsider your earlier vote? Why or why not?”⁷

Worldmindedness rests upon the recognition of commonalities and connections across time and space. Students inquire into how the forced conversions and expulsions of Jews in Spain in the late fifteenth century are connected to the lives of Indians in Peru and Mexico today. Or examine what Zulus in twentieth century South Africa had in common with Cherokees in nineteenth century Oklahoma. Why did SARS spread so quickly from Hong Kong to Toronto? How are the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the 1991 Gulf War related to the attacks on the World Trade

Center and U.S. relations with Pakistan? Teachers may focus on global influences in the local community. For example, when learning about global migrations, elementary students research why people move by comparing their own families’ history with those of new immigrants from Bosnia and Russia. They may also examine how local industries and religious organizations affect people in other countries.⁸

Global Issues: Understanding the Complexity and Conflicts of a Dynamic World

Global educators often integrate global issues within mandated content, organize instruction through global themes, or ask issues-centered questions to encourage student inquiry. Global issues, such as control of the seas or the right of self-determination, can serve to synthesize important lessons of history over hundreds of years and link them to contemporary events. Characterized by conflicting points of view, global issues (1) challenge and concern citizens today and tomorrow, (2)

affect the lives of persons in many parts of the world and (3) cannot be adequately understood or addressed solely in a local or national context. Many of these issues have no immediate solutions, and the questions they raise may not have one “correct” answer. Issues that are significant to the world and of concern to students are often controversial and value-laden. Researchers have found that teachers choose issues that they believe are significant and related to the interests and needs of their students.⁹ Teachers often find that several issues overlap and need to be examined together. For example, in studying an issue such as population growth, teachers bring in content related to environmental impact, implications for human services such as health and education, political agendas of minorities or those who wield power, economic issues such as generation of jobs or housing, and cultural issues such as family planning and religious values.

When the study of slavery in the Americas is taught in the context of human rights, students no longer see the



Students from two Ohio high schools (Worthington Kilbourne and Upper Arlington) participate in a military history study tour across Europe. Here, the students visit Omaha Beach in France (they are also seen on page 354 in Paris) in June 2004.



treatment of Africans in America as isolated events unrelated to the experiences of other American minorities or human trafficking today. Taught as a global issue, religious conflict—from the Crusades to the Reformation to Northern Ireland and Israeli/Arab conflicts today—can be compared, contrasted, and viewed in economic and political contexts.¹⁰

As historical events are linked to contemporary global issues or the news, students are more likely to see them as relevant to their world today. A high school social studies teacher was teaching about Philip II of Spain when the Gulf War broke out in 1991. She asked her students to compare Philip's actions on the world stage with those of Saddam Hussein's. How were their worlds, their goals, and their political and military decisions similar and different? Suddenly an historical event helped students view their country at war in the larger context of imperialism.¹¹

If we are to prepare young people for decision-making as active citizens in a multicultural democracy with economic, political, and military interests that reach across the world, we must teach complex global issues and problem solving. Instruction benefits from interdisciplinary approaches since global issues are complex and cross many fields of study. For example, when teachers provide instruction on deforestation, students need to examine this issue through not only economic and cultural concepts but also by using scientific concepts such as carrying capacity, genetic extinction, and biodiversity. Their learning can be enhanced by infusions of pedagogy from the humanities as well, such as developing creative expressions on the biodiversity of the rainforest by drawing, writing poetry, and making films.¹²

Simulations and role-plays are powerful approaches to teaching about global

issues. When teaching about North-South issues, students in economics classes may play a trading game to experience the inequities of the global system. In the trading game, students form groups that represent real countries and each group is given a paper bag with a different amount of resources and tools (paper, pencil, ruler, scissors) in proportion to their national resources. The goal of the game is to make as much money as possible within a limited time by “manufacturing” a desired shape of paper (product) and marketing it. Students experience some of the inequities of free trade, and the debriefing can lead to increased understanding of economic globalization.¹³

The pedagogy of global issues often involves participation and action. Since the primary goal of global education is to prepare students to be effective and responsible citizens in a global society, students need to practice real-life skill as they gain new knowledge. When teaching about North-South issues, an economics teacher asked students to read an article “Whose Global Village?!” from the *Ghanaian Times* (May 16, 1997). This article critiques the Western concept of global village and maintains that we are not living in a global village but in different worlds, the North and the South. Students tackle questions such as “What would have to change for there to be a truly global village?” “What is fair?” “What responsibility do Americans have?”¹⁴

Cross-Cultural Experiences: Interacting with The Other

Global education is more than a world history timeline or the geography of the Pacific Rim. In today's world students need to be able to work effectively with people from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Many social studies teachers in

the U.S. gain knowledge of, and first-hand experience in, different cultures through summer institutes, study tours, personal travel, exchanges, and living in other countries. Cross-cultural experiences overseas can help teachers learn about the world and return to recognize pejorative language, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and other misinformation in their texts and other curriculum materials. Research demonstrates that extensive experience in other cultures often has considerable impact not only on the ways in which teachers perceive those countries but also in how they come to see their own country and their previously unexamined cultural assumptions and biases.¹⁵

Living overseas often provides white educators their first experiences with outsider status and linguistic marginalization, and those lessons can powerfully affect their teaching when they return home. For example, their empathy increases for refugees and immigrants in their classrooms. But Americans do not have to go overseas to experience cultural differences and marginalization.¹⁶ There is considerable literature on intercultural learning and equity issues in America schools written by or about African American teachers and immigrants.¹⁷

Educators eager to teach insider knowledge of other cultures, to reduce prejudice and ethnocentrism, and to develop skills in cross-cultural communication and interaction find many ways to provide their students with face-to-face, cross-cultural experiential learning. Online and video technologies connect students and teachers to knowledge bases in other world regions and create formats for discussion and shared work. However, results are mixed. These interactions do not always reduce prejudice and chauvinism or dissolve stereotypes and misinformation.¹⁸

New frameworks that foster authentic culture learning are becoming popular because they prepare young people for the realities of life in a multicultural democracy. Richard Brislin's *Culture-General Framework* is used by teachers to improve communication skills and interaction across cultures. The framework addresses three dimensions—emotions, knowledge and cultural differences—and helps teachers deal with a number of challenges of intercultural learning, such as students' anxiety over unfamiliar demands, the need to belong but being unable to do so as an outsider, and the ambiguity of not understanding messages being sent in the new culture, yet having to respond. As most educators these days find themselves (and their students) coming into contact with people from cultures that they may know little about, the framework attends to cross-cultural differences related to a number of key concepts: work, time and space, language, roles (based on gender, age, religious beliefs, inherited position, etc), the importance of the group versus importance of the individual, rituals versus superstition, social hierarchies/class/status, and values. The framework provides teachers with strategies to move beyond the superficiality of dress, holidays and food or a focus on the exotic and bizarre.¹⁹

The framework can best be appreciated through an example of how a middle school social studies teacher applied the Culture-General Framework to her teaching of India. Previously, the students had read a section in their cultural geography book, watched a video on Hinduism, mapped different ethnic groups and religions and visited a local Indian grocery store and restaurant. In applying the Framework, the teacher involved her students in researching patterns of belief and behavior. Groups of two or three students selected a concept (such as those listed above) and collected data from the library, the internet, and Indians living in the community to learn how beliefs affect behavior. By the end of the project the students not only understood the diversity of contemporary Indian cultures better than ever before, they also recognized how cultural patterns are transmitted and changed over

generations, yet rarely examined. Interest and motivation were sparked by the focus on beliefs and Indians became more than “school work.” They were real people, key-pals, friends they wanted to visit someday. When fighting broke out in Kashmir later in the school year, the students were eager to find out what was happening because one of their key pals in New Delhi had grown up in Kashmir and had shared with them some photos of his village when explaining his family's place in the social hierarchy. Using the events as a teachable moment, the teacher invited five Indian students from a local university to work with her students and prepare some instructional materials for some other middle school students to learn about cultural conflicts in India. But first she had her students develop cross-cultural handouts on “making our Indian visitors comfortable” based upon their research on beliefs and behaviors.²⁰


Global Education and Its Critics

Global education is not without its critics. Some people see it as another fad; others worry about adding more content to an already crowded social studies curriculum. Many teachers feel unprepared to teach global issues or make global connections, as they did not study such topics in college or in their teacher-education programs.

Terms, such as *global history* and *global connections* have been attacked as promoting a one-world government. In our own state, Ohio, “global connections” was developed as a K-12 strand in the social studies standards in the mid-1990s. However, in order to get the standards accepted by the state school board, “global” was replaced with “world.” Elsewhere, “international” is sometimes used in place of “global.”²¹

Teaching the ideas and perspectives of people in other cultures is controversial in many American communities. The values of open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, and resistance to stereotyping that characterize global education are not appreciated by some parents and some teachers. Those who believe young people should learn a single, mainstream American point of view often perceive the teaching of other perspectives, even other

American perspectives, as anti-American. They believe that global education teaches children disrespect for American ideals, heroes, and institutions.²²

Research shows that local contexts and the backgrounds of individual teachers are extremely important in teaching about diverse points of view and the complexity of cultures.²³ In some communities teaching multiple perspectives is seen as subverting unity and nationalism while in others this pedagogy is taken for granted as part of students' development of critical inquiry skills. Teachers are influenced by their own experiences, knowledge and their comfort level cultural diversity, ambiguity and critical thought. And these contexts often change when the United States goes to war.²³ 

Notes

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Note: See www.teachglobaled.net for more than 5000 resources for teaching world cultures, global issues, and world history.

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