

A Global Perspective: Bringing the World Into Classrooms

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First Person



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The need for students to be able to empathize with others, value diverse perspectives and cultures, understand how events around the world are interconnected, and solve problems that transcend borders has never been greater. Just consider the recent attacks inspired by hate and terrorism in Orlando, Fla., San Bernardino, Calif., Brussels, Paris, Tunis, Istanbul, and Yemen, or the unparalleled flow of migrants—many of them children—from war- and violence-stricken regions in the Middle East and Central America. Then there's threat of damaging and deadly viruses such as Zika and Ebola hopping across people and countries.

The quick tick of news headlines exemplifies just how interconnected the world is today. It also points to the intercultural collaboration and problem-solving skills necessary to thwart the hatred that spawns terrorist attacks, successfully integrate culturally and linguistically diverse populations into classrooms and communities, and solve health and environmental crises.

Engaging students with the world is one step toward one day accomplishing such objectives. But what should educators teach to ensure that all students are prepared to successfully engage in the globalized world in which they already live? Furthermore, what steps can educators take to effectively foster globally minded knowledge, skills, and

attitudes in students?

As part of the movement to educate the whole child and ensure students are challenged academically and prepared for participation in a global environment, the organization for which I work, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum, or ASCD, has launched an effort to focus on answering these questions. The place to start, I believe, is with some definitions on what global engagement means in a practical sense.

More Than a '21st-Century Skill'

For students to participate effectively in the global community, they will need to develop global competence: the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to live and work in today's interconnected world and to build a sustainable, peaceful, inclusive world for the future. Global competence is often, and rightly, labeled a "21st century skill" needed for employment in today's global economy. Yet global competence is so much more than a ticket to a competitive job. Students also need global competence to participate as empathetic, engaged, and effective citizens of the world.

What exactly does global competence entail? Many organizations have devised specific frameworks that define the term (see examples from the [Asia Society](#), [the OECD](#), [World Savvy](#), and [the Globally-Competent Teaching Continuum](#)). These frameworks tend to coalesce around the following attitudes, knowledge, and skills:

- *Attitudes*: This includes openness, respect, and appreciation for diversity; valuing of multiple perspectives, including an awareness of the cultural and experiential influences that shape one's own and others' perspectives; empathy; and social responsibility, or a desire to better the human condition on a local and global scale.
- *Knowledge*: This refers to the ability to understand global issues and current events; global interdependence, including the impact of global events on local conditions and vice versa; the processes of globalization and its effects on economic and social inequities locally and globally; world history; culture; and geography.
- *Skills*: These includes the ability to communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries, including the ability to speak, listen, read, and write in more than one language; collaborate with people who have diverse cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds; think critically and analytically; problem-solve; and take action on issues of global importance.

Connecting Educators Across the World

Just as teachers of algebra know how to solve equations and music teachers know how to play scales, educators should also strive to develop these global competencies in themselves so that they can foster them in their students.

Engaging with the world is one way educators can develop global competence. Traditionally in the United States, educators as a whole have experienced limited training around global diversity. For example, very few teacher-preparation programs provide opportunities for preservice teachers to study abroad or require coursework in global topics. Therefore, connecting practicing teachers, principals, and district leaders across communities and continents through summits, conferences, exchanges, and virtual meetings geared towards common professional learning needs can provide experiences that help develop a globally oriented mindset, knowledge base, and skill set. Furthermore, when provided a platform to network, educators can lead the way in changing the broader education system locally and globally to better support the whole child and elevate the teaching profession.

A number of opportunities already exist for teachers to connect with one another across the world. There are an array of exchange programs run by the [U.S. State Department](#) and NGOs (e.g., [American Councils for International Education](#), [EF Tours](#), [Teachers2Teachers-International](#)) that provide educators with opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural interactions. And if travel is not always feasible due to financial or familial obligations, teachers can still engage with the wider world through virtual exchanges that connect classrooms across the globe as partners in learning activities that prepare students to be productive, engaged citizens of the world (for example, [iEARN](#), [Global SchoolNet](#)).

Classroom Strategies

There are plenty of steps that educators can take today to put students on the path towards creating a better world for tomorrow. This doesn't require legislation that mandates a change in the curriculum, the introduction of a global studies course for graduation, or a line item from the state or federal budget. In a [recent study of teachers committed to globally competent teaching](#), researchers found that the educators used the following common strategies to foster global citizenship and competency:

- *Integrating global topics and perspectives across content areas.* Globally competent teaching does not require a separate course or unit of study. Instead, teachers infused global content into the required curriculum, regardless of subject area. For example, math teachers used real-world global challenges as contexts for introducing new concepts (e.g., using word problems on population growth as a way to teach the rules of exponents) and language arts teachers used texts that represent diverse cultural perspectives and that take place in settings around the world to teach literature and informational texts.
- *Providing opportunities for authentic engagement with global issues.* Teachers provided real-world audiences for students to engage with around global issues. This took the form of pen pal and Skype exchanges with schools in other countries, service-learning projects emphasizing issues of global concern (e.g., access to clean water), or working in teams to devise and debate solutions to real-world problems, such as climate change, and sharing those solutions with government leaders. Notably, these activities were student-centered and inquiry-based.
- *Connecting the global experiences of students and teachers to the classroom.* Teachers adopted culturally responsive teaching practices that incorporated the cultures, languages, perspectives, and experiences of diverse students into curriculum and instruction. Teachers also incorporated their own cross-cultural experiences into the classroom through informal conversation, discussions around artifacts and photos, and lesson plans that incorporated knowledge gained and relationships built through their global experiences.

With these strategies in hand, the time is now for teachers to engage themselves, and their students, with the world. The lives of all students, no matter their zip code or their cultural, racial, linguistic, or economic background, are in some way influenced by the wider world. They too have the potential to shape that world. Their future, and the future of our world, depends on it.

What does global engagement mean to you? Why do you think it is important? Join the conversation by posting your reflections in the comments section.

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