Philosophy of Global Learning

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ENG 524, Spring 2013

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Asia Society Partnership for Global Learning provide the following definition for global learning: “Global competence is the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance” (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011, p. xiii). The CCSSO/Asia Society Global Learning Document furthers the discussion of global learning stating that an individual learner should demonstrate an awareness, curiosity, and interest in the world around them (p. xiii). Dr. Kay Gibson (2008) and Hans Schattle (2008) agree with CCSSO/Asia Society’s definition. Nevertheless, Gibson and Schattle equally add to the definition a concept of *global citizenship.* Schattle (2008) states that global citizenship cultivates informed and ethical citizens, “Who will exemplify good behavior as members of humanity, not just as members and participants within a particular town, province or country” (p. 76), while Gibson (2008) explains that “Students should gain functional expertise and intercultural appreciation for their future as world citizens” (p. 5). I agree with the concepts of the CCSSO/Asia Society’s definition -- understanding and action of global issues. However, I also believe that Gibson’s and Schattle’s idea of *global citizenship* must be included when defining global competence. By adding the concept of *citizenship* when defining aspects of global competence, learners are forced to recognize the “interconnectedness and interdependence” of the world (Gibson, 2008, p. 5). Therefore, it is my belief that global competences include not only understanding and action of global issues, but also include authentic, real-world issues that force students to integrate various view points and cultures and to articulate their ideas to diverse audiences. Schattle (2008) explains that “…the objective of a global learning experience should be focused on teaching students to think carefully for themselves as they learn about the world around them” (p.84). Gibson (2008) furthers the idea of world citizenship by stating, “Leaders in a globalized world need skills that allow them to collaborate, communicate, negotiate, think critically, and gain multiple perspectives through dialogic co-construction of meaning with individuals from different cultures” (p. 4). Therefore, my philosophy of global learning includes the following components: significant real world issues, interdisciplinary connections to the issues, collaboration in educating the world about the issues, and ideally a negotiation and communication of solution(s) to such issues.

I also agree with Schattle (2008) in his assessment of Oxfam’s guide for teachers: “That global citizenship can be promoted in the classroom ‘through teaching the existing curriculum in a way that highlights aspects of social justice, the appreciation of diversity and the importance of sustainable development’” (p. 81). Jacqueline C. Reich (2012) supports Schattle’s claim by writing:

There are at least two advantages to merging global learning with general education. First, coherence in the higher education curriculum is promoted since both global learning and general education support achievement of similar aims: the development of critical and creative thinking sills, the disposition toward synthesizing curricular and co-curricular experiences into new and complex understandings (integrative learning) and the active pursuit of citizenship in multidisciplinary framework. Secondly, when it is emplaced in the general education program, global learning can be experienced by all students and not just by a subset of students whose interest naturally incline them to international studies or whose financial circumstances make feasible a study abroad program. (pgs. 464-465)

Reich explains further that global awareness cannot be taught within one lesson, unit, or course. To truly help young people, “eventually blossom as vibrant, actively engaged citizens who can think rigorously for themselves and act appropriately,” global education must occur over the entire scope of a student’s educational career. In other words global awareness has to become “a habit of mind” that emerges over time through practice and opportunities that connect local experiences with global issues (Schattle, 2008, p. 82, Reich, 2012, p. 467). I agree. I find it very difficult to devise a single lesson or unit plan that promotes global learning because a true global citizenship/ global learning experience can only be obtained in a continual curriculum from kindergarten through higher education.

With that said, there are “units” I have traditionally taught that promote the CCSSO/Asia Society’s four competences for global learning. In one such unit I ask my students to choose a real world problem. Some topics chosen by past students have included access to clean water, the effects of overfishing, the closing of textile mills in North Carolina, and the bleaching of the world’s coral reefs. Essentially, my students are asked to investigate an issue that forces them beyond their immediate environment by choosing a real world issue for which they have a passion to solve or an interest to learn more information. Once the topic is chosen students are asked to investigate the problem and more importantly investigate what proposals have been made within the real world to solve their chosen problems. I make a point of having my students focus heavily on counter arguments and drawbacks to their solutions. This aspect of the assignment forces students to recognize various perspectives. To teach my students how to effectively communicate with diverse audiences I require my students to have a primary source accessed through person to person, email, or phone interview. The assignment has forced many of my students to seek out expertise from around the world. For example a scientist from Norway studying the effects of overfishing, a woman that has traveled to educate world citizens about AIDS, or even a mission group that is currently installing water pumps in Africa. Finally, for showcasing their research students are required to either create a promotional website or video documentary. The goal of the promotional website/documentary is to teach my students how to use technology as a persuasive and social advocating tool. The culminating website/video illustrates the power of persuasion and semantic slanting in order to promote or educate the world of a problem.

The above unit is in no way a perfect example of global learning. For one, it does not uphold my argument for integrating global learning throughout a student’s school career; this is only one assignment, completed one time during the 8th grade year, only by my students. For this unit to become an ideal example of global learning according to my above argument, students would begin their research in kindergarten and complete a final showcase their senior year of high school or even more ideally while at the university level. Furthermore, if this unit idea was expanded over the course of one’s education, then opportunities of travel, immersion, and field work to investigate their real world problem becomes plausible. In closing, the formulation of this sample unit demonstrates my belief that global learning opportunities should include real world issues, real world solutions, interdependence and communication, and should promote world citizenship.

References

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