

A Classroom Without Borders

My Personal Philosophy on Global Learning

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A Classroom Without Borders: My Personal Philosophy on Global Learning

Everyday we are faced with the reality of the increasing “interconnectedness” of our world. Due to computer programs, the Internet, international trade, military cooperation, the English language, and the globalization of the economy, places around the globe are more accessible and linked to a greater degree than ever before. The world’s children are growing up in a very different place than that of their parents and as an educator I can play a major role in equipping them with the skills needed to thrive as citizens of a diverse global society. This call to action “to allow students to thrive as citizens of a diverse global society” is very worthy cause, but the reality is that it will take a tremendous amount of learning, planning, and commitment on my part to effectively implement it into a traditional classroom environment. The following is my personal philosophy on global learning in which I’ll outline the current research, theories, and personal experiences that have influenced my approach to teaching with a global focus.

As a teacher, I’ve realized that having an in depth understanding of how students learn is an absolute must. Effective instruction means you are effectively presenting information and experiences to students in a way that maximizes their cognitive potential. In the book, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education reveals some major findings on learning by researchers in the field of cognitive development. These findings report that this new theory of learning can have major implications on curriculum, teaching, and assessment. Throughout the reading, the CBSSE communicate the importance of a learning that incorporates understanding at many levels and in many different contexts (conceptual understanding), versus a learning of memorization or simple

recitation (a perfect fit for a curriculum focused on global learning). In order for learners to achieve this deeper level of understanding, the authors suggest there needs to be a focus on pre-existing knowledge, conceptualized learning, and meta-cognition.

Especially interesting to me in *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, were the findings on people's pre-existing knowledge and how this knowledge has a direct affect on one's learning. Recognizing the importance of pre-existing knowledge and its impact on learning will have huge implications for me as a teacher. According to the CBASSE (1999):

Teachers need to forget the empty vessel model-where the student is seen as an empty vessel that must be filled with knowledge provided by the teacher. Instead, educators must realize that a student's initial conceptions provide the foundation from which a more formal understanding can be built (p19).

All of these concepts (pre-existing knowledge, conceptualized learning, and meta-cognition) are things that I have had some awareness of while teaching, but in learning of their importance given the current research, I definitely want to make sure they are at the core of all my teaching practice. As a student, all too often my classmates and I were seen as the "empty vessels", and as an educator I want to be able to give my student's the opportunity to engage in a deeper, more meaningful learning experience; being aware of current cognitive research, such as that presented by the CBASSE (1999) will allow me to do so.

A classroom that encompasses meaningful learning experiences is a perfect environment to promote a global based curriculum. As I mentioned before, our world is becoming increasingly interconnected, which is causing more and more professional researchers, theorists, educators to call for the implementation of curriculums with a global learning focus. Many researchers such as Clarke (2004), Gibson, K., Rimmington, G., & Landwehr-Brown, M (2008),

and Merryfield (2008) have published articles on the importance of global learning and the cognitive benefits it offers to students. While others such as Appiah (2006), Nussbaum (1996), Harris (2006), and Rizvi (2008) approach the global learning issue through a cosmopolitan view of the world. While I don't agree with pushing the beliefs of a single theory, such as cosmopolitanism, into a school's curriculum, I do think that there are many moral values worth teaching to students that would directly increase the effectiveness of their global learning experiences in my classroom.

I agree with Appiah's (2006) "partial cosmopolitanism" and think that this subdued approach to the concept of cosmopolitanism is much easier to introduce and teach to a classroom full of students from all walks of life. As people we must never forget that each human being has responsibilities to every other. What better way to equip students by allowing them to recognize that as individuals they are not just part of a specific family, gender, or community, but are a part of the human race. The two strands that Appiah notes as part of cosmopolitanism are great concepts to teach in any classroom: we have obligations to others, and that having a value of human life means we need to take an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance (2006, p. xz). These concepts are the justification for a global learning curriculum, which is why not just as a human being, but more specifically an educator, I see them as extremely valuable.

As far as applicable instructional practices go, Merryfield's (2008) findings in "Scaffolding social studies for global awareness" were of particular interest to me because she offered not just a generalized theoretical view of the importance of teaching about globalization, but proposed a "citizen education plan" that I would use as a model in my classroom as well. She outlined a basic approach to global learning, with three scaffolding strategies that would increase

the student's skills over time. These strategies included: reflection on cultural lenses, listening to voices from across the world, and making connections to engage as citizens of the world. I think that using a model like the one in the Merryfield article would be a great first step for any teacher who is initially implementing a global learning curriculum, especially because she assumes you could initiate these scaffolding strategies with students of all abilities. Having worked in an environment like Centennial Campus Middle School, I am sure that my efforts would be encouraged, and that access to resources (technology and university faculty and students) in the Friday Center would be a wonderful addition to a global learning curriculum.

When students are able to see their learning as relevant and meaningful, they are motivated to learn on a much deeper level. What better way to motivate students to learn than through meaningful interconnectedness with people across the planet? From personal experience I know this to be true; from my time spent doing mission work in Thailand, or sponsoring a Burmese refugee family right here in Raleigh, when I was actively connecting with people completely different from myself, I was motivated to learn more about them and their culture. This personal interaction provides learning experiences that no text book or even primary source could begin to match. I want to use global learning as a means to bring this type of experience to the students that I teach by inviting them into a classroom not confined to the lifeless pages of a text book, but rather, through the use of current technologies, into a classroom that is alive with interaction with people from around the world.

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