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Sarina Chugani Molina
University of San Diego

Heather Lattimer
San José State University

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Molina, Sarina Chugani and Lattimer, Heather, "Defining Global Education" (2013). *School of Leadership and Education Sciences: Faculty Scholarship*. 25.

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Defining Global Education

SARINA MOLINA & HEATHER LATTIMER

*School of Leadership and Education Sciences,
University of San Diego, USA*

ABSTRACT As the world is becoming increasingly flat, it has become important for educators to prepare students to understand global perspectives and engage with people from countries and cultures around the world. Although there is no question as to the importance of global education to meet with the demands of a flat world, what internationalization and globalization mean in the classroom is still an area that is met with some level of uncertainty. However, clarity around language and instructional objectives is essential if educators are to ensure that K-12 students learn what they intend. This study explores some of the ways in which teachers, students and principals define this complex notion of global education.

The concept of internationalizing education has existed for decades. Higher education programs promoted international exchange and semester-abroad programs beginning in the years after the Second World War. International K-12 schools became popular as global commerce expanded and individuals migrated across borders to work and raise families. However, within each individual country, much of the K-12 educational system has remained focused on national concerns. Although comparative educational research has encouraged policies and systems that learn from other countries – Singapore mathematics has been adopted in other nations, for example, and the Japanese lesson study has become popular in many countries as a means of strengthening teacher professional growth – the content focus of much of what happens in K-12 schools has only recently begun to shift toward a greater global emphasis.

This shift is largely in response to increasing global interaction, access to stronger, faster and more distributed global communication, and an increased understanding of our economic, political and environmental interconnectedness. Increasingly, a range of resources and programs have developed that emphasize global learning – the long-standing International Baccalaureate (IB) program has expanded, offering more teacher professional development and certifying more schools in urban centers that primarily serve local, rather than international, populations. In the USA, more schools are offering world language courses at earlier ages and in languages that may not have previously been taught. Mandarin Chinese, for example, is the fastest growing language course currently being offered. Charter schools and independent schools attempt to differentiate themselves and appeal to a savvy parent market by using ‘international’ or ‘global’ in their name and mission statement. Online teacher-to-teacher exchange sites offer to connect classrooms across continents and provide real-time student exchanges. Indeed, there is an entire industry available to upscale families, students and schools offering online and on-site exchange programs to younger and younger groups of students.

To those who have been advocating for internationalizing K-12 education for years, this explosion in interest around globally focused teaching and learning is exciting. Although the impetus for the shift may, at times, come out of fear (see Zakaria, 2011), the shift is, nevertheless, real. However, even as we embrace this change, it is appropriate to stop for a moment to inquire about the vision itself. What does global education mean? How is it being interpreted by those who

are teaching in K-12 classrooms? How do administrators and instructional leaders understand the goals? And, most importantly, what does this mean to the students themselves?

This article will examine the understandings of global education held by teachers, administrators and students in the southern California region. All of the participants in the study taught, led or were enrolled in schools with a global emphasis. All were identified by their peers as effective in their global understanding and vision. And yet, as we will see, these educators and students held a range of interpretations about the meaning of global education.

Literature Review

The world is becoming interconnected in ways that were unimaginable even a decade ago. Countries such as China and India ensure that their students have language skills to participate in the global market. The Chinese government is requiring the study of English from early on in elementary schools. India has always had two national languages – Hindi and English – with most citizens being at least trilingual in their own mother tongues. In the 1950s and 1960s, the British Royal Society coined the term ‘brain drain’ to describe the massive importing of skilled professionals from Asia, particularly in the fields of information technology and science, to industrialized nations (Guellec & Cervantes, 2001). This tendency to monitor the needs of the global market and train their students to meet those demands appears to be a trend in many of these countries, so that they can work with international counterparts and compete in the global marketplace.

The demands and challenges of the future require flexibility, adaptability and innovation – characteristics that are not common to a traditional school. As textbooks go to print, new knowledge is created with immediate access at our students’ fingertips. What this means is that knowledge is accessible anytime and anywhere. However, it is the skills of applying this knowledge in a new context that has become important in the twenty-first century. There have been several organizations, such as the Asia Society and the Longview Foundation, which encourage and support initiatives that prepare youth for participation in the global community. In this review, we will provide a summary of the roles of these two organizations in global teaching and learning, an overview of a framework that defines the skills required of our students in the twenty-first century, and a curriculum that extends these skills into each content area.

The Partnership for Global Learning: an Asia Society network

The Partnership for Global Learning is a membership network that promotes globalizing education. Its mission is twofold: (1) to increase the number of schools that integrate international knowledge and skills throughout the curriculum so that students are globally competent and college-ready, and (2) to raise awareness about the importance of global education through policy and provide resources about the world.

The Longview Foundation for Education in World Affairs and International Understanding

The Longview Foundation for Education in World Affairs and International Understanding has been working to support international understanding among youth in the USA. The problems facing the world today, such as environmental issues and global poverty, require cooperation from the larger global community. The Longview Foundation believes that all students need the ‘opportunities to gain broad and deep global knowledge and the language and intercultural skills to engage effectively with people around the corner and around the world’.[1] It supports agencies that promote international education for youth, and programs and research that provide strategies for teachers to integrate global perspectives into their curriculum.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills: a framework for twenty-first-century learning

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills lists the twenty-first-century interdisciplinary themes that should be threaded through the curriculum. These include: global awareness; financial, economic,

business and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health literacy. In order to prepare students for the complexity of life and work in the twenty-first century, core content areas should integrate creativity, critical thinking, and communication and collaboration skills. In addition, because information permeates our world today, it is important for students to be able to assess, evaluate, use and manage information (information literacy); analyze and create media products (media literacy); and apply technology effectively (information, communications and technology literacy). Finally, this framework nurtures life and career skills that will help these students navigate the complexity of life and work in a global world. Specifically, the focus is on the ability to adapt to the changing needs of the workplace and flexibility in understanding other views; to be responsible for one's own learning, management of time and goals; to interact effectively with others; to see projects through from start to finish; and to utilize effective leadership skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010).

International Baccalaureate Program Overview

There are over 3084 IB programs in 139 countries around the world. The purpose of the IB program is to nurture learning for life and promote global citizenry in this increasingly interconnected world. The principle that undergirds the IB program is the notion that 'by educating children, we create a better future'. The key components of the program are contained within its name, where *international* emphasizes a global approach. The focus is on nurturing qualities that mark the characteristics of a globally minded person. These include having students strive to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced and reflective. The *baccalaureate* component of the IB program deals with the curriculum. For the primary years program, the 'program of inquiry' has six transdisciplinary themes that every grade level goes through every year, but more deeply with every subsequent year: who we are; where we are in place and time; how we express ourselves; how the world works; how we organize ourselves; and sharing the planet. Within each of these themes, the goal is for students to learn concepts that have global significance, make connections within and beyond the classroom and across subject areas, and look at how they can take action to resolve or contribute to an issue. In the middle years program, every course is developed with five 'areas of interactions' as a frame: approaches to learning (how students learn and communicate); community and service (having awareness of the world and how students can contribute to society); human ingenuity (understanding the creative process and how innovations have impacted society); the environment (understanding interdependence on the environment and one's responsibilities to the environment); and health and social education (having a sense of responsibility for one's own physical, social and emotional well-being and intelligence) (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2005-2013a, b).

This overview of the agencies, framework and curriculum has merely scratched the surface of the immense complexity of the issues surrounding global education and what this means in the classroom.

Purpose

It has become increasingly clear that as the world is becoming more and more interconnected (Ang et al, 2007; Friedman, 2005), our schools need to prepare students to work effectively in a global society (Asia Society, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Yet, not all schools have the tools to implement some of these ideas in their curriculum. It is with this goal in mind that this article hopes to shed light on some of the ways in which teachers, students and principals conceptualize global education, in order to then understand the ways in which global education manifests within K-12 classrooms. The research question guiding this study was as follows: How do teachers, students and administrators understand global education?

Methodology

This study was conducted as part of a larger global education project undertaken with support from the Longview Foundation. As described above, the Longview Foundation provides small grants to support teacher education programs as they work to increase the global focus in teacher certification courses and fieldwork. This particular grant was used to strengthen field placements for student teachers in schools with a global emphasis. Existing placement schools were reviewed and new schools were identified in order to ensure that the teacher candidates within our program could have access to and experience within a globally focused classroom. In addition, the grant funded the development of a global education website with video case studies, which university faculty, teacher candidates and on-site mentors can view together to analyze, discuss and adapt for application in a range of classroom settings.[2]

The schools and teachers who participated in the grant-funded work were identified using a snowball approach. We initially sought out schools that we knew had a global focus based on their IB affiliation, website information or community reputation. The faculty and school leaders at these initial schools referred us to like-minded colleagues at other schools, who further connected us to other schools and teachers, and so on.

As we worked to seek out sites appropriate for student teaching and fieldwork placements, as well as classrooms that would be appropriate for video coverage, we met with teachers and school leaders, listened in on planning sessions and, most tellingly, observed teachers and students at work in classrooms. The results of these early observations were eye-opening. It quickly became apparent that there is a wide range of beliefs about the meaning of global education. We encountered classrooms where teachers who had been held up as leaders in this work struggled to make connections beyond the standard textbook-based curriculum; schools that were working to develop IB designations, within which multiple faculty independently came up to tell us that they did not believe in this ‘global stuff’; and, at the other end of the spectrum, individual teachers who were doing amazing work with global education in schools where this was far from a priority.

As we listened to educators informally discussing the meaning of global education, it became clear that there is a wide range of understandings about what global education is, what the role of K-12 teachers and students is in supporting global education, and why global education matters. Realizing that this is an area that needed further investigation, we began to look more substantively and systematically at this issue.

The specific data for this article was generated through interviews with teachers, school leaders and students at schools and in classrooms which we had tapped for taping for the video case studies for the website. Because all of these classrooms had been tapped for videotaping, all had been recognized as having a relatively strong global education emphasis. Ten teachers, ten students and two principals were asked the question: ‘What does global education mean to you?’ The teachers included two elementary school teachers and eight secondary school teachers. Of the secondary school teachers, three were teachers of English and five were teachers of History. All of the students who were asked to define global education were high school students (see Table I).

Participants	Male	Female	Total
Students	5	5	10
Teachers			
elementary	0	2	2
secondary	3	5	8
Principals	2	0	2
Total	10	12	22

Table I. Participants.

The definitions were transcribed from the website that has been set up for the purpose of helping pre-service teachers understand how global education is conceptualized, and they were analyzed for recurring themes.

Preliminary Findings

Through the analysis of the interviews, several broad themes emerged in terms of how global education was conceptualized by the teachers, students and principals. These included a focus on making connections between the self and the larger human experience; developing concern for living beings and the environment; and fostering skills for membership in the global community through the practical application of twenty-first-century skills.

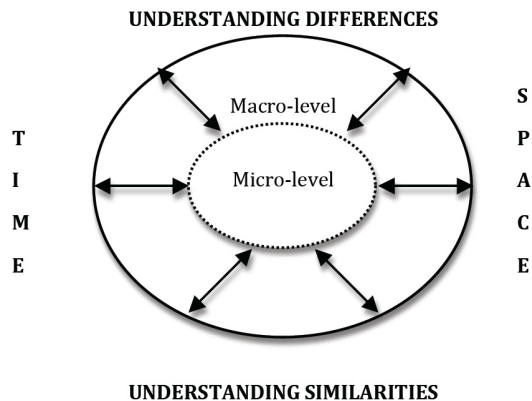


Figure 1. Elements of global education.

Figure 1 is a composite of the various elements of global education that surfaced from the definitions provided by the participants in this study. The most common element of global education was the notion that students should not only be concerned about what is going on in their immediate surroundings, but within their communities, society and the world at large. The world of the students can no longer be 'insular', as one teacher put it. As such, the micro-level world of the students is porous in that it influences and is influenced by the macro-level world. One of the history teachers interviewed explained this in practical terms for the classroom:

The way I would describe global perspective or global education is that in whatever we are teaching, we infuse or integrate global studies into the curriculum. So whether we are looking at history and how connections are made in different parts of the world, or we are looking at biology and how ecological systems are around the world, or just how everything is interconnected, and I think it is an interdisciplinary approach that can apply to any discipline, basically keeping the larger contexts and interconnections between different parts of the world in mind.

This theme of interconnectedness was addressed both in terms of interdisciplinary understanding and global awareness, and when discussing students' interconnectedness to the environment and their responsibilities in sustaining and addressing the issues confronting not only their immediate environment, but also the world.

Another important element that emerged from these definitions is the idea of being 'comfortable with the uncomfortable'. One teacher described the process of global education in this way when he discussed the importance for students to be able to appreciate and understand different perspectives and the uniqueness of every culture, and to learn to engage with those who have different views than their own – not only those from different spaces or geographical locations, but also across both past and present time. In addition to valuing other perspectives, many of the participants pointed to the importance of understanding the 'sameness' of the human experience. This 'sameness' can be understood in terms of needs, such as the need for food, shelter, to love and to be loved. Again, this understanding would help students to be able to interact and dialogue with people who do not 'necessarily look or act the same'. One of the teachers elaborated on this idea further:

Global education is the understanding of cultures, the differences in the cultures and also the way the cultures all blend together. [Global education] is the way in which the students are not only able to understand the components of the culture, but ... understand the way in which they are unique in their perspectives. [W]hen we look at human nature, we'll look at human nature [from the perspective] that we all have the same common ideals and goals.

The goal for ensuring that students understand not only the differences, but also the similarities is to provide them with the tools to engage with the global community.

Discussion

As the results from this investigation – which features a relatively small number of K-12 educators and students – make clear, there exists a range of understandings of global education, its role and its importance. What is perhaps less clear are the factors that account for the differences and the relative importance of the differences.

Accounting for Differences in Understanding

As noted above, the educators and students who were interviewed for this study came from a wide range of schools and grade levels. Public, independent and charter schools were included. Educators in elementary, middle and high schools were interviewed. Some schools were IB-designated and others were not affiliated with a particular global education philosophy. Certainly these differences account for some of the variation among those interviewed. However, a deeper look reveals that it is not as simple as assuming that types of school or grade level alone account for differences in understanding.

Within the interview group, educators at independent and charter schools did note that they have more flexibility in choosing to develop globally focused lessons than they might have in a more traditional public school. However, as our initial survey of globally focused teaching in the region revealed, being independent does not, on its own, lead to a genuine global focus. Indeed, visits to several independent schools, all of which said they were working to internationalize teaching and learning, revealed that many are still stuck in the 'food, flags and festivals' approach. On the other hand, a newer independent school that was established with global education as a core tenet of its approach had a rich curriculum, and teachers and students who were articulate in voicing some of the themes noted above. The difference here was having a clear objective and sustained opportunities for professional growth and curriculum planning around an international emphasis. Where other independent school teachers often viewed this work as an 'add-on', teachers at this school had been hired with the expectation that this would be a core element of their work, had been provided with paid opportunities to plan interdisciplinary curriculum units with a global focus, and met regularly to review student work and assess developing global understanding.

A similar pattern arose in looking at practices and analyzing interviews in schools that were designated as IB schools. Although the vast majority of the teachers in each of the schools had been to IB training sessions and all were aware of the IB principles, there was a range of understandings as to the meaning and application of the IB construct. Schools where the principal or instructional leader focused on IB as a priority and had a rich understanding of global education demonstrated more consistency across faculty and a richer understanding of the curriculum. Some of these schools were long established and others were more recent adopters, but, within each of the stronger schools, teachers were allowed time for grade-level or interdisciplinary planning, opportunities to publicly exhibit and review student work, and time to engage in discussion around the meaning of global education.

Of course, as noted earlier, not all globally focused teachers came to us from globally focused schools. During our investigation, we encountered individual educators doing outstanding work in schools where this was not a priority. In each of these cases, the teachers shared several common characteristics. First, the teachers had managed to carve out space within the school to create globally focused lessons. This work could not have been done in a school that mandated lockstep curriculum coverage based on a textbook or series of state standards. Teachers who were

independently doing the work either worked in a school that encouraged teacher creativity and design or had found ways to work around general school requirements, often because they had demonstrated student learning success and had gained the trust of their administrators. Second, the teachers were connected with formal and informal networks of like-minded educators. Doing this work, especially if bucking the trend in one's home school, can be challenging. Successful globally focused teachers in more traditional school settings had found ways to connect with other educators doing similar work through both formal networks, such as professional associations, grant-making organizations and teacher education programs, as well as informal networks, including online communities, blogs and Twitter feeds. Third, the teachers who chose to do this work on their own had a personal investment in the work. This was not a passing interest gleaned from a professional journal or teacher education website. Teachers who engaged in this work independently consistently described their own international learning experiences, often as teenagers or young adults. They shared the impact that these kinds of experiences had had on their own world views and expressed a desire to build similar learning opportunities for their students.

Do the Differences Matter?

Making connections between the self and the larger human experience; developing concern for living beings and the environment; fostering skills for membership in the global community through the practical application of twenty-first-century skills – all of these are worthwhile goals. All have connections to the frameworks developed by international organizations concerned with global education. And all can serve to support one another in developing conceptual understanding, communication skills, knowledge and dispositions amongst K-12 students. Do the differences that exist matter? Does it matter that teacher and student definitions do not align exactly with the research literature? And what implications does this work have for those of us who work in teacher education?

As we listened to these educators and students, observed them in action and then analyzed the videos, we were consistently impressed with the thoughtful interpretations of the global learning frame. These were not educators who were going through the motions, applying some sort of internationalized formula to their teaching and learning. Indeed, the differences that did exist struck us as very appropriate – the teachers and school leaders were adapting the global education concept to their grade level, content area and school context. These teachers were doing exactly what we want good teachers to do. They were adapting pedagogy to meet the needs of their content and pedagogy (Shulman, 1986). Within the context of this study, variations in understanding should be seen as a strength rather than a weakness.

That said, it is certainly true that during the work which preceded this study, we encountered teachers with understandings that did not demonstrate the richness found in the evidence presented here. Understandings that are formulaic, narrowly focused and not adaptable to content, grade level or school context are unlikely to result in strengthening students' global learning. The professional growth practices of the schools and teachers in this study suggest ways to address underdeveloped understandings.

So what, then, does this work mean for those of us who work in teacher education and wish to strengthen globally focused teaching and learning? Perhaps most importantly, the findings from this investigation suggest that there are teachers doing wonderfully rich work in this area and we need to listen to their voices. Too often, instructional frameworks, curricula and professional growth guides are developed without adequate teacher input. This study suggests that we have plenty to learn from teachers. It also suggests that further research needs to be done in relation to the range of teacher knowledge around global education and the strategies that might be used to spread this work to more schools and classrooms. These voices are at the forefront of this work. More research needs to be done so that we may better understand how these teachers and schools developed their work and how we might apply this learning more broadly. And finally, further study needs to be done to understand the impact of globally focused teaching and learning on K-12 students. Although much of this article has focused on the voices of teachers and school leaders, some of the most interesting voices were those of the students who were interviewed. Their articulate descriptions of global education demonstrated the potential of global education. More

research needs to be done so that we can better understand the long-term impact of global education on students' knowledge, skills, beliefs and dispositions. This information can help to strengthen and shape our learning within both the K-12 and teacher education communities.

Notes

[1] See the Longview Foundation website at: <http://www.longviewfdn.org/>

[2] See the Globalizing Teacher Education website at: <http://sites.sandiego.edu/globaleducation/>

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SARINA MOLINA holds a doctorate degree in Leadership Studies from the University of San Diego. Her undergraduate and graduate degrees are in East Asian Languages & Literature and Linguistics from the University of Hawaii. She has taught English to immigrant and migrant communities and in community college and university language academy settings. She currently serves as a faculty member in the M.Ed. in TESOL, Literacy, and Culture program at the University of San Diego and trains teachers both locally and internationally in a TESOL certificate program. She teaches courses in linguistics, second language acquisition, methods of teaching English to speakers of other languages and a practicum course in TESOL. *Correspondence:* sarina@sandiego.edu

HEATHER LATTIMER is a former middle and high school teacher and is the author of two professional texts for teachers, *Thinking through Genre* (Stenhouse, 2003) and *Reading for Learning* (NCTE, 2012). She has published and presented widely for both professional and academic audiences, and is a nationally recognized consultant. Her areas of expertise include secondary literacy, content area literacy, social studies and history education, project-based learning, curriculum design and evaluation, action research, and international education. Her research focuses on literacy, teacher education, teacher professional learning, and twenty-first-century learning in international contexts. While at SOLES, she founded and directed both the Master's Credential Cohort Program and Education Minor and is currently working with colleagues to create an online Master's in Education program. Dr Lattimer is currently working on a book about

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implementing Common Core Standards, co-editing a text about action research, and exploring the use of project-based learning and digital technology in affordable private schools in Kenya.