

Chapter 18

The Global School in the Local Classroom: ICT for Cross-Cultural Communication

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ABSTRACT

This chapter was written to highlight the value for cross-cultural communication practices in schools with the support of innovative Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A detailed theoretical foundation was provided to justify the inclusion of global perspectives in the classroom through cross-cultural communication, which is made possible with ICT. This chapter details the perceptions of 80 pre-K to 12 teachers via a survey study, which shaped the author's suggestions for practical ICT cross-cultural communication opportunities in the classroom. Implementation strategies include classroom-to-classroom and classroom-to-world cross-cultural communication opportunities. This chapter suggests practical solutions supported by solid theoretical justifications for utilizing ICT to facilitate cross-cultural communication and improving student global awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being the most technologically connected generation, members of Generation Z, those born from the late 1990s to the present, are constantly characterized as being the most *disconnected*. Ironically, the label is a result of their technologically connected world. Generation Z members have a permanent audience to advertise themselves at all times of the day. They literally have the world at their fingertips through their cell phones, computer screens, video games, and more, but

generally speaking, they maintain a global presence of self-interest. Instead of exploring the vast perspectives available through the Internet, most members of Generation Z would rather project their often singular perspectives on everyone else. Although the criticism is easily justified to a degree, perhaps the blame should not be placed on the members of Generation Z but rather on the system that supports these singular perspectives. Maybe these students need to *learn* to embrace multiple perspectives.

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The responsibility then seems to fall on the teachers who facilitate such thinking in their classrooms every day. In fact, the standards movement charges teachers with the responsibility to emphasize and improve higher-order thinking skills, a seemingly difficult task. Unfortunately, in the United States, for example, teachers' burdens are far reaching. Standardized tests, score accountability, prescribed curriculums, and packed class schedules make it difficult for teachers to create lessons that foster these valuable multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, the technological savvy teacher can use those same technological crutches to create a "Web" within the Web of perspectives that not only engage students but also motivate them to celebrate differences. According to Pirie (1997), "...it is the teacher's job to help the Web become as full and intricately articulated as possible, and to help students reflect on the existence of the Web and the principles upon which it is woven" (p. 22). The Web that Pirie (1997) discusses includes all of the experiences that the student can encounter when studying content if given the opportunity. These new cultural perspectives challenge students to break out of this egocentric routine thinking and experience novel contexts thereby improving their critical thinking skill sets. Global education is the link that ties students' lives to the lives of people around the world in meaningful ways (Osler & Vincent, 2002).

Introducing students to global perspectives has never been easier thanks to the ease of cross-cultural communication. Since millennials already possess the technical skills to communicate globally, why not teach them to expose the perspectives that already exist on the other side of their computer screen? This study was conducted to discover the relevance, priority, and potential of global education in the United States. Although theoretical support exists, the current practices to establish cross-cultural connections and employ global strategies are relatively fragmented and underdeveloped. Therefore, this chapter reports on the perspectives and current practices of cross-

cultural communication to foster global perspectives from a survey study involving 80 educators across the United States. Additionally, it provides practical suggestions and solutions for utilizing cross-cultural communication to improve students' global awareness.

BACKGROUND

Global education is just one buzz word in the educational world that refers to an overarching concept called global awareness; other such names include multicultural education, multiethnic education, culturally relevant education, peace education, citizenship education, and international education (Kist, 2013; Cushner & Mahon, 2009; Osler & Vincent, 2002). Following the guide of Kist (2013), the definition of global education in accordance with the National Council of the Social Studies was used for this study:

The term global education is used by the National Council for the Social Studies (n.d.) to described strategies for: gaining knowledge of world cultures; understanding the historical, geographic, economic, political, cultural, and environment relationships among world regions and peoples; examining the nature of cultural differences and national or regional conflicts and problems; and acting to influence public policy and private behavior on behalf of international understanding, tolerance and empathy. (National Council for the Social Studies, n.d.)

Almost 20 years before, Tye and Kniep (1991) defined global education in a similar manner explaining,

Global education involves learning about those problems and issues which cut across national boundaries and about the interconnectedness of systems—cultural, ecological, economic, political, and technological. Global education involves

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