

Worldmindedness: Taking Off the Blinders

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Abstract

A dynamic web of global interconnectedness has expanded the engagement and political efficacy of citizens in the 21st century. The acceleration of knowledge creation, the dynamics of electronic communication and the resulting availability of global perspectives are changing the nature of public discourse and action. As more and more people gain access to information and interact with individuals and communities across the planet, they acquire new worldminded ways of learning, debating, and creating which in turn expand the scope of civic consciousness and responsibilities beyond national borders. In this article we look at ways in which teachers in Hong Kong, Japan and the United States are preparing young people to become worldminded citizens.

Introduction

Our communities are increasingly enmeshed in a web of global interconnectedness (Appiah, 2006). Events taking place today across the planet may affect tomorrow's energy bill, bring manufacturing jobs into our neighborhoods, hasten the spread of new diseases, or lead to a terrorist attack. Events such as these have created a backlash against globalization as people worry that their nations are losing sovereignty as international and transnational organizations appear to usurp power and wrest decisions away from nation-states (Raskin et al., 2002). Individuals cannot ignore the complexity of globalization and the reality of interconnectedness and interdependence that has emerged in the 21st century.

Globalization encompasses developments which include escalating levels of interdependence and affects us in virtually all dimensions of our daily lives (Osler & Vincent, 2002). In a global society, people should not just consider how the world affects their community. Rather, people should realize that they can have a profound effect on other nations and the state of the planet (Stromquist, 2002). Decisions made by our nations' consumers, companies, workers, governance, and investors affect people's lives and places around the world. When people with strong purchasing power increase demand for biofuels, electronics, inexpensive textiles, seafood or tropical hardwoods, the market responds and somewhere across the planet there are changes

in the use of natural resources, the development of new products, the transfer of capital, and the lives of farmers, miners, service providers and many others. Economists have noted that it is the demand of affluent societies for goods, services, and profits that bring about many profound global changes across time. Possible changes include loss of habitat and biodiversity, technological innovation, exploitation of the poor and uneducated, labor organization, as well as increased profits for people, organizations, and their investors who can meet private and public sector demands (Shiva, 2005; Stiglitz, 2002; Stromquist, 2002).

Worldmindedness often begins as global awareness and grows as individuals begin to appreciate the viewpoints, experiences and worldviews of others, especially those quite different from themselves (Merryfield, 2001; Noddings, 2005). It develops along with intercultural skills in communication and prolonged experiences in cross-cultural interaction (Bennett, 1993; Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Wilson, 1993). We know we are worldminded when we form the habit of thinking about the effects of our decisions on people across the planet, when we care about how others perceive our nation, and when we use "us" to mean people from many places, not just our neighborhood or nation.

Many people across societies wear blinders of ethnocentrism (we are the best, we don't need to learn about anyone else). In some communities xenophobia is pervasive, and young people may grow up learning that anything foreign is bad, bizarre, dangerous, or evil. Lack of interest in other cultures or just ignorance of how the world works may serve as blinders for action when people who are faced with seemingly local issues do not understand the possible global connections (Raskin et al., 2002).

How do these changes affect what young people need to learn in school? As today's students interact within global economic, political, technological and environmental systems, they have the opportunity to participate in societies that are not defined by nations, borders, or even regions (Osler & Starkey, 2003). Global interconnectedness increases opportunities for civic engagement in issues related to peace, fair trade, human rights, and environmental justice (Tan, 2004). Engagement across borders increases knowledge about global inequities, religious conflicts, and the ways in which power is wielded on the planet (Tan). Today's citizens need to be worldminded in order to use their global knowledge and intercultural skills to make informed decisions (Mudimbe-Boyi, 2002).

Are today's students being prepared to understand and become engaged as worldminded citizens? Will they take off the blinders of ethnocentrism or ignorance and see the entire world? Will they learn from other cultures and care about the rest of the planet? In this article we examine the theory and practice of developing worldminded citizens and define worldmindedness according to Lawthong (2003):

1. Acceptance of different cultures: The appreciation and awareness of the values and issues of other cultures and communication with people of different languages and nationalities.

2. Concern with the world's problems: Interest in and awareness of the present and possible future problems of the planet, especially those related to the use of resources and preservation of the environment.
3. Interconnectedness: The realization of interdependence and value of living together in harmony.
4. World citizenship: The understanding that in addition to being a member of one's own society or country, each person is a citizen of the global society who views people of all nations and languages as equal, and respects the value of all fellow human beings.

Five Elements of Global Education

Based on the research that we have carried out within P-12 classrooms in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States over the past five years (e.g. Kasai, 2007; Merryfield, 2007; Po, Lo, & Merryfield, 2007), we focus on five elements of global education that teachers in these countries perceive as the scaffolding that builds worldmindedness: (1) knowledge of global interconnectedness, (2) inquiry into global issues, (3) skills in perspective consciousness, (4) open-mindedness, recognition of bias, stereotyping and exotica, and (5) intercultural experiences and intercultural competence. These are supported in other literature across time and disciplines (Case, 1993; Hanvey, 1976; Marri, 2005; Wilson, 1993). The following sections illustrate ways that teachers are preparing students to become active and informed citizens in a globally connected world.

Knowledge of Global Interconnectedness

Citizenship in a global age revolves around interconnectedness to people, issues, events and changes across time and space (Pike, in press). Teachers of world history, world geography, earth science, art, music, and world literature plan instruction so that students see relationships across world regions and across different time periods. This interconnectedness may include cultural, economic, political, military, technological, or environmental content (Merryfield & Wilson, 2005). For example, students in an American middle school who study the ecumene come to see how today's global economic system evolved from over 2000 years of trading, changing technologies, and efforts to achieve political goals. Students can identify connections between ancient traders and contemporary multinational corporations, as well as issues that workers faced in ancient Greece or India and those of contemporary workers in Germany or Mexico.

The pedagogy of interconnectedness includes student inquiry into relationships and problem-solving. Teachers encourage students to explore how their actions affect people around the world. For example, after completing research on global problems, several students in a Japanese high school participated in a United Nations Association speech contest in Tokyo. Students discussed global food shortages and the role of rice producers in addressing these problems. To improve access to rice and decrease food shortages, the students suggested ideas to the government of Japan, the United

Nations' food programs and individual Japanese citizens. Interacting with others in the audience, these students learned how rice technologies have been transferred to other countries and how private voluntary organizations were experiencing difficulties with distribution of new rice varieties. They began to appreciate how people in other countries perceive Japanese aid, cross-cultural connotations and conflicts over the growing of rice, and the difficulties in changing people's ways of rice farming.

Linking global content to the local community is an element critical to understanding spatial and temporal interconnectedness. Teachers may focus on global influences in the local community or how people and organizations in the community, city or state, affect people in other world regions. For example, during a unit focusing on "Hong Kong Then and Now," fourth grade students in Hong Kong learned about how Hong Kong has been affected by its demographic, economic, and political connections with other parts of the world. The students began the unit by researching and sharing their families' experiences with immigration to or movement within Hong Kong and the New Territories. They contextualized historical movements of people through a field trip to the Hong Kong Museum of History where they learned from exhibits about changing economic opportunities, the effects of colonialism, and the geography of changing ethnic groups and languages in the region. The students then gathered information to make conclusions about how Hong Kong's global connections (through movement of people, finance, trade, war, and politics) have affected the economic development, the environment, and the architectural features of Hong Kong today.

Inquiry into Global Issues

Global issues have several characteristics that appeal to teachers who are concerned with worldmindedness. In general, global issues (1) are significant and enduring challenges that affect the lives of persons in many parts of the world, (2) cannot be adequately understood or addressed solely in a local or national context, and (3) have no immediate solutions and may not have one correct answer (Merryfield & White, 1996). Global issues taught during our studies in Japan, Hong Kong, and American schools included hunger, fair trade, security/terrorism, genocide, human rights, global climate change, pollution, biodiversity, energy, AIDS, and movement of people as displaced persons including migrant workers, immigrants, and refugees.

Teachers often integrate global issues into their teaching by linking them to mandated content (e.g. the issue of pollution being linked to the study of industrialization) and by asking issue-centered questions (e.g. should land mines be banned?). Issues that are significant to the world and of concern to students are often controversial and value-laden. Based on our research, we have found that teachers choose issues that they believe are important in order to achieve better global understanding and are also related to the interests and needs of their students. Teachers also find that various global issues overlap and need to be examined together (Gaudelli, 2003).

To understand the global issue of hunger, middle school students in Hong Kong examined case studies in East Africa. They found that in order to understand hunger in that area, they needed to know about economic development, geography and weather, the culture of nomads, and the effects of urbanization and cash crops. They found that hunger was related to political upheaval, ethnic conflict, connections with various outside groups and alliances, and most importantly, the effects of political instability and war. These topics led to connections with the Middle East, Europe, and North America because of the arms trade, food aid, and places where refugees had fled. They learned that hunger was not simply a matter of drought or having too little food available. Instead, it resulted from ethnic and political conflict, the influx of arms, people fleeing war zones, and the influence of people and organizations thousands of miles away. Consideration of global issues is especially helpful as students think about intricate interrelationships involved in human problems and recognize the complex contradictions of real-life problems.

Global issues can also serve as catalysts for synthesizing important lessons of history over hundreds of years and linking them to contemporary events. When a class of American students studied global human rights abuses across the last 300 years, they realized how the treatment of African Americans in the United States was similar in many ways to the abuse of indigenous peoples and minorities in Latin America, Australia, and parts of Asia. They learned to identify underlying assumptions, rationales, and motivations that were used to justify oppression, trafficking, or killing groups of people during past and present times.

If young people are to become skilled decision makers as they face the future economic, political, and environmental problems, they need concentrated experiences with researching issues, interpreting findings, and solving problems effectively. Instruction involving global issues lends itself well to interdisciplinary approaches because these issues have linkages to many fields of study. For example, when teachers explore deforestation with their students, they should examine this issue through not only economic and cultural lenses, but also from a scientific perspective considering concepts such as carrying capacity, genetic extinction, and biodiversity. Their learning can also be enhanced by infusion of pedagogy from the humanities including drawing, writing poetry, and making films about biodiversity.

Skills in Perspective Consciousness

Students must study the outcomes of globalization through both mainstream academic knowledge and the transformative, contrapuntal knowledge that gives voice and agency to people and issues largely ignored by those in power (Marri, 2005; Merryfield & Wilson, 2005; Willinsky, 1998). Young people cannot understand their world without learning from people with differing degrees of power—including children, women, religious or ethnic minorities, refugees, immigrants or guest workers, or those with the least economic wealth (Apple & Buras, 2006; Pike, in press). Whether studying global systems, their own government, or ways that people make environmental

decisions, students need to understand the experiences of people from different walks of life and make sense of the topics under study (Foster & Rosch, 1997).

Understanding the points of view of people different from themselves requires that students develop skills in perspective consciousness. Perspective consciousness is: the recognition or awareness on the part of the individual that he or she has a view of the world that is not universally shared, that this view of the world has been and continues to be shaped by influences that often escape conscious detection, and that others have views of the world that are profoundly different from one's own (Hanvey, 1976, n.p.).

Perspective consciousness creates an appreciation of how one's cultural beliefs, values and norms of behavior shape perception and interpretation of events or issues. Perspective consciousness allows students to understand how and why individuals in their local community or across the planet may perceive events or issues quite differently. Consideration of perspective provokes reflections necessary to examine cultural patterns of thinking and has profound applications in students' analyses of their lived realities and the conflicts that surround them (Dam & Volman, 2004; Knight & Harnish, 2006; Osler & Starkey, 2003; Parmenter, 2006). Studies of the intersections of knowledge creation and perspective consciousness are essential if students are to work across cultures, participate in global discourse, and engage in global issues. Activities in which students explore multiple perspectives about an issue, event, or idea are one of the most frequent approaches to global education employed in many of the schools examined in our studies. The following sections include examples from our research.

In 2005, a Hong Kong middle school teacher was teaching about the early unification of China when tensions broke out between Beijing and Taiwan over the possibility of a Taiwanese independence movement. Her students were asked to compare the outcomes of unification of China in 221 BC under the First Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (the beginning of Imperial China) with the implications of the current Taiwanese situation. They considered the following question: "What does Chinese unity mean today to people in Beijing, Hong Kong, and Taipei?" Suddenly an historical event took on new meaning as the students viewed the ancient history of Chinese unification within the current context of Taiwanese independence and collected information about conflicting perspectives of Taiwan's status and future. From this discussion, students also explored the changing meanings of "Chineseness" in an increasingly globalized world.

Simulations and role-play activities serve as powerful strategies for teaching perspective consciousness about global issues. As an example, Japanese high school students experienced the global issue of displaced persons and refugees by being assigned refugee status. Some were told that they had to decide quickly what they would take with them in the event of a bombing if they had three minutes to leave their neighborhood. As the simulation progressed, students were given new facts (e.g. one person in your family is dead) and choices (e.g. should you flee to refugee camps in the neighboring country or try to obtain refugee status and resettle in another world

region?). Students completed forms in another language, and some students were singled out to be examined for symptoms of disease or due to suspicion of criminal or terrorist involvement. Through a variety of unexpected events, students recognized that although refugees may experience different obstacles, most shared feelings of anxiety, fear and insecurity even though they had done nothing wrong.

Habits of the Mind: Open-mindedness, Recognition of Bias, Stereotypes and Exotica

Particular habits of the mind align with civic responsibilities in a global age. When students enter school they usually bring with them powerful images of other cultures from films, television, and additional influences in their environment. Exotic images and cultural myths are barriers to developing worldmindedness because they distort reality and support prejudice and ethnocentrism (Brislin, 1993). Students must be taught to approach judgments and decisions with open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, and resistance to stereotyping (Case, 1993).

Researchers have found that students individualize the characteristics of people in their in-group and perceive their behavior as “normal,” but they view out-groups in terms of generalized traits and other stereotypical characteristics (Garner & Gillingham, 1996). Often stereotypes result from media depictions or develop as avoidance mechanisms so that people do not have to deal with cultural complexity and can justify their status and behavior (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994). One way to identify stereotypes and other misinformation among students is to have them describe what comes to mind when they think of individuals who are Vietnamese, Pakistani, Italian, Jewish, Muslim, or other people under study. For example, American scholars have found that white students typically recognize the traits and behaviors of other white persons, but often perceive African Americans or Arabs in terms of generalized characteristics (Garner & Gillingham, 1996). This tendency to stereotype people different from oneself has several outcomes, such as justifying prejudice as exemplified in the following quote, “I don’t have to listen to Abdi because he’s Muslim and all Muslims are...” Often the effect of stereotypes is to obfuscate learning as demonstrated in one American student’s statement during a lesson on Christian Arabs, “I know Arabs are Muslim. Don’t confuse me with that Christian stuff!”

Teachers spend instructional time providing students with information and activities to help them overcome stereotypes (Merryfield & Wilson, 2005). The following examples offer strategies teachers might use to move students beyond stereotypes. When beginning a unit about cultural differences in an American middle school, a teacher displayed student-selected photos representing a country or culture. In addition to selecting the photos, the students communicated with people from chosen cultures via email. Prior to the unit of study, the students conceptualized Japanese women only as geishas; afterwards they recognized that Japanese women were workers in offices, industries and a variety of other roles. (See photos one and two.)



Geisha (photo one) and Japanese office workers (photo two).

Additionally, students thought Kenyans dressed in hides or wrapped cloth around their bodies and only thought of them as living in the jungle with lions and other wild animals. Afterward they recognized that many Kenyans live in modern cities and most wear clothes similar to fashions in the United States. (See photos three and four.)



Photo of Masai, a small ethnic group in Kenya similar in their uniqueness to the Amish of the United States (photo three).

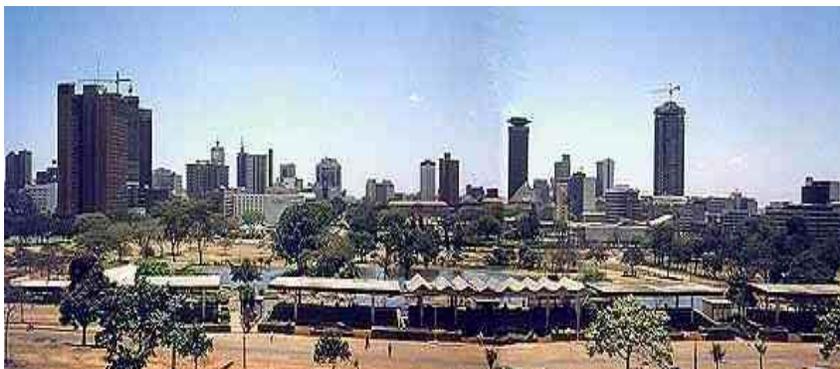


Photo of skyline of Nairobi, Kenya (photo four).

The teacher found that because of their seductive qualities, exotic images of other cultures were more enduring than stereotypes. As though engrained in their consciousness, her students found it difficult to overcome images of “the mysterious Orient” such as the glamorous Madame Butterfly, handsome but dangerous sheiks, racing Arabian horses, beauties of the harem, fearless Samurai warriors, and deadly ninjas. Africa’s exoticism revolved around images of brave white hunters and nearly-naked, painted Africans dancing, holding spears, or running barefoot. Wild animals, safaris, jungles, diamond mines, and danger provide the backdrop for thrilling adventures. This teacher found that the “noble savage” myth was accessorized with pith helmets, khaki pants and mosquito nets. Many global educators target the examination of popular cultural symbols that foster superficiality and misrepresentation and replace them with up-to-date, accurate representations in authentic contexts.

Visuals are far more powerful than words in helping students overcome stereotypes and exotica (Garner & Gillingham, 1996). Researchers have found that visuals are critical for student acceptance of the realities of other people’s lives (Fabos & Young, 1999; Kim & Bonk, 2002). However, many available films and videos are dated or focus on exotic content—temples, ceremonies, traditional clothes, special celebrations— while omitting the realities of everyday life for average people. Websites and webcams can serve as powerful resources in helping students actually view daily happenings in other places. Access to such technology is typically free through online learning and collaboration.

Researchers report that prejudice and stereotyping can be reduced through the integration of cooperative learning and new knowledge (Calderon, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1992). First, students engage in activities with new knowledge that disconfirms specific stereotypes and replaces them with new information. Second, new information is reinforced through meaningful real-life experiences (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994). For example, an American teacher who recognized that her students perceived people in Iran as poor, uneducated or starving asked them to work with maps and statistics on Iranian demographics and showed them a video about a day in the life of a middle class family in Tehran. Once they had more knowledge, the students interacted in small groups with three Iranians (some professionals, some working class) who lived in the local community to reinforce their academic work with first-hand experiences.

Since history began, people have used stereotypes to categorize and demean those whom they view as inferior or the enemy (Said, 1993; Stephan, 1999). Invalidating stereotypes and exotic images goes beyond addressing misinformation. Students need to understand how stereotypes and exotic images have been used as political, cultural, and even military weapons. For example, some governments portray the enemy as a barbarian, savage, devil, or inhuman in order to motivate civilians to take military action.

Cross-cultural Experiences and Intercultural Competence

Students need to develop intercultural competence to participate effectively in today's multicultural societies. Culture study must focus on internal culture (norms of behavior, beliefs and values, patterns of thinking, communication styles) and interaction patterns. Experiential pedagogy creates activities in which students apply their knowledge and skills to deal with real-life situations, issues, and problem-solving (Bennett, 1993; Merryfield & Wilson, 2005). Intercultural competence can be authentically assessed by having students apply cross-cultural knowledge and skills. In an American high school students researched Chinese immigration by studying norms of Chinese American life in their community. Students focused on the importance of respect, family obligations, the concept of losing face, and interaction patterns between old and young. Students then applied their knowledge and interviewed first, second, and third generation Chinese Americans. Because students first learned to appreciate Chinese cultural norms, they were prepared to show respect to elders and to be aware of the Chinese preference for modesty and humility. They learned to expect some differences across the generations as they knew how first generation immigrants differed from later ones. The orientation to Chinese culture served as an inoculation against xenophobic thinking and prejudice. Students reported many commonalities and identified ways in which they and their new Chinese American acquaintances shared values and goals. Clearly, citizenship education has the potential to combat cultural and religious prejudices and misinformation. Such changes in skills and dispositions can lead to the establishment of shared visions and global citizen movements (Kriegman, Amalric, & Wood, 2006).

In Japan, Hong Kong, and the United States we found teachers using human resources in their communities to provide cross-cultural learning experiences. From World Vision (a Christian humanitarian organization) guest speakers in Hong Kong to an Australian educator in Japan, teachers brought in people with diverse backgrounds to share their ideas, experiences, and knowledge. Increasingly, teachers use the Internet to facilitate learning experiences among their students, people and organizations in other countries.

One American educator teamed up with a teacher in Russia to facilitate several weeks of discussion about World War II and the Cold War. Friendships developed between the teachers and their students as they explored diaries, letters, and other primary sources about the time period. Intercultural experiences can enhance world study learning by making people and places real and relevant. The skills developed are critical if students are to be engaged citizens who function in an interconnected world.

Conclusion

Global interconnectedness constrains a single society's ability to solve major problems unilaterally. Water crises, air pollution, global warming, weapons of mass destruction, the spread of pandemics, food security, terrorism, international trade of women and children, and many other issues cannot be effectively addressed unless

nations work together (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). In an interconnected world, citizens must work across borders to manage many issues affecting their quality of life and its links to life on the planet. Such work, be it for the purposes of food security, economic gain, political or religious ideals, can empower ordinary citizens (Axtmann, 2002).

As today's students in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States develop the knowledge and skills of worldmindedness, they will have the opportunity to work together with people across their regions and the world. They may join alliances working for fair trade coffee, dolphin-free tuna, AIDS education, or regulations to protect working children and adults in export-oriented industries. Opportunities exist for working with religious groups ranging from evangelical Christians to Islamic fundamentalists to spread religious faith, political ideology or hold onto cherished traditions and ways of living in the face of change. New technologies allow them to develop interactive web-based networks for citizen action (Axford, 2005). Students may also support regional and global organizations to strengthen programs providing small loans to women, countering totalitarian propaganda or creating new political movements. From protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) to global conferences on the rights of women and indigenous peoples, worldminded students can make a difference as they connect across borders in new civil societies (Kriegman et al., 2006; Stromquist, 2002; Tan, 2004).

Through studies with teachers in Japan, Hong Kong and the United States we have identified five elements of global education that contribute to worldmindedness. These include knowledge, skills, dispositions, and experiences that work together to open students' eyes to the world, diverse cultures, and the dynamic changes facing the planet. There is a synergy in teaching knowledge of global interconnectedness and global issues, developing skills in perspective consciousness and dispositions of open-mindedness, recognition of bias, stereotyping and exoticism, and providing students with intercultural experiences. Global perspectives are essential for understanding justice, rights and civil society in our complex world (Held et al., 1999).

If we take the principles of justice or democracy seriously, for example, it is no longer self-evident that the domestic arena is the main site for their pursuit, since domestic and foreign affairs are now deeply and irrevocably intermeshed. In a globalizing world, the lack of democracy or justice in the global setting necessarily impacts deeply on the pursuit of justice or democracy at home. Indeed, it may no longer be possible to achieve our normative ideals at home without undertaking to do so transnationally as well (Scheuerman, 2006, n.p.).

Citizenship education can meet the challenges of our changing world by fostering civic responsibility and engagement without borders (Axtmann, 2002). Global perspectives must be infused into the education of citizens because we cannot isolate our nation's well-being from the well-being of future generations and others across the planet (Dower & Williams, 2002).

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