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The Difference a Global Educator Can Make

Global educators make instructional decisions that profoundly influence students' understanding of other cultures and global issues.

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Every day, teachers make instructional decisions that affect how students perceive their own culture, their nation, the lives of people around the world, and the issues and conflicts facing the planet.

Not surprisingly, these decisions become more important when a community, state, or country is feeling the effects of global economic, sociocultural, environmental, political, or technological change. The arrival of a Honda assembly plant, the resettlement of 17,000 Somali refugees, or the exodus of U.S. manufacturing plants to other countries can influence community thinking and teachers' instructional decisions. National and regional events—such as the Gulf War, protests at World Trade Organization meetings, or the attacks of September 11, 2001—also have considerable effects on teachers' instruction (Merryfield, 1993).

In my work with teachers during the past 20 years, I have found that global educators share certain characteristic instructional strategies: they confront stereotypes and exotica and resist simplification of other cultures and global issues; foster the habit of examining multiple perspectives; teach about power, discrimination, and injustice; and provide cross-cultural experiential learning (Merryfield, 1994, 1998). These K-12 global educators use similar strategies despite differences in their communities, student populations, or curriculum mandates. Here are some examples of the strategies of global educators whom I have observed at work in the classroom.

Address Stereotypes and Exotic Images

In a 9th grade world cultures unit on the Middle East, some teachers may motivate students by presenting exotic images—such as the harem, polygamy, belly dancing, Arab sheiks, and camel races—and may fail to challenge students' comments that stereotype all Arabs as supporters of terrorism or all Arab women as having few rights.

Global educators, however, purposefully address stereotypes and challenge the exotic images and misperceptions that students bring with them into the classroom. These teachers develop



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lessons to replace misinformation with knowledge of the complexity of cultures, cultural conflicts, and global issues. To begin a unit on the Middle East, for example, a global educator asks students to brainstorm what they know about Muslims, Arabs, and the Middle East and then immediately addresses common misperceptions. When students confuse the terms *Arab* and *Muslim*, the teacher helps students map where Arabs live and introduces primary sources for students to differentiate diverse Arab cultures and the Muslim world (Said, 1997).

Edward Said's (1993) ideas on how Europeans constructed the "Orient" can help students recognize the exotic images of the Middle East in popular media, entertainment, and textbooks, and distinguish them from the materials that people of other countries have posted on the Internet and what local Egyptian, Lebanese, and Iranian students say about their lives back home. In developing an appreciation of the complexities within other cultures, students learn to challenge sweeping generalizations, misinformation, and stereotypes.

Explore Multiple Perspectives

Perhaps the most common strategy shared by global educators is their attention to students' learning about events and issues through multiple, usually conflicting, perspectives. By examining different points of view on a historical event, controversial issue, or story in the news, students develop the habit of looking for and considering other perspectives, especially those of people of minority cultures or from other continents—people whose voices rarely appear in mainstream U.S. textbooks or in the media (Gioseffi, 1993). Even when students all agree with one side of an issue, they come to appreciate points of view that they disagree with in order to fully understand the event or issue from a global perspective. This habit of seeking out diverse perspectives and primary sources from the culture under study is central to global education.

In an 8th grade U.S. history unit on explorers of North America, for example, students explore events from diverse points of view. Instead of approaching Columbus and other European explorers only as heroes to be admired, students read about Native American and other perspectives on Columbus's actions in *Rethinking Columbus* (Bigelow & Peterson, 1998).

Global educators help students explore other cultures through literature, history, news, and Web sites from other parts of the world. Students exchange e-mails with Puerto Rican students, for example, to learn their ideas on the effects of early explorers on North America and the Caribbean. By exploring multiple perspectives through these primary documents and direct contacts with other points of view, students learn to write about and understand a new, more comprehensive history that includes diverse perspectives and knowledge bases.

Examine How Power Shapes Worldviews

Global educators provide ways for students to understand power in a global context and the effects of discrimination and injustice on people's lives past and present (Blaut, 1993). They teach about injustice and how people have worked against oppression. In a 10th grade world history unit on the European colonization of Africa, for example, some teachers may gloss over topics related to colonial oppression or to the suffering of Africans in the slave trade and instead teach the colonial period as "a glorious era of Europeans bringing light to the Dark

Continent.”

Global educators, however, address issues of power from several points of view. When students read Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and other African literature, they see colonialization from Africans' experiences and knowledge (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989; Said, 1993).

Global educators also help students critically examine the perspectives, values, and worldviews that underlie mainstream academic knowledge, information from the popular media, and unstated assumptions of popular language use (Gilroy, 1993; Willinsky, 1998), and they increase students' awareness of how people with cultural capital or economic and political power shape knowledge and language.

For example, when students analyze colonial documents and travel writing for assumptions about race, power, and rights, they learn to recognize bias and underlying assumptions in language. Analysis of racist colonial language—such words as *bushman*, *pygmy*, *kaffir*, *witch doctors*, *huts*, and *primitive*—can help students understand the long-term effects of such language (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1993). Students then survey people in their community to examine to what degree current perceptions of Africa are related to imperialistic views of Africans. Students can also create a timeline of ways in which Africans have resisted European domination from the 1500s to the anti-apartheid era.

Experience Cross-Cultural Learning

Authentic learning occurs when students from diverse cultures meet and work together, especially when they have equal status and collaborative goals that have meaning in their lives (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). Global educators find ways to increase their students' experiences with people different from themselves through work with international students from local universities, immigrant organizations in the community, service learning projects, exchanges through e-mail or videos, and taking students overseas (Wilson, 1993).

In a 7th-grade world geography unit on East Asia, for example, students can work with international university students from China, Korea, and Japan for several days to prepare research reports on changes in family life in Asia 1945–2002. Students experience being in a linguistic or cultural context different from their own (Gochenour, 1993) by spending time with counterparts at a Chinese immersion school.

Students' cross-cultural experiences should be long-term or ongoing instead of merely superficial experiences that do not allow sufficient time to build relationships (Archer, 1991; Bennett, 1993; Warschauer, 1999). During a three-month period, for example, groups of students can discuss issues facing their communities with online pen pals in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Singapore, and regularly report back to their classmates on what they are learning. Such a cross-cultural experience gives students an equal role with other participants, unlike programs that involve contributing money or canned goods for a “feed the children” program, which places the givers in a superior or more powerful role.

Global Educators Lead the Way

The differences that global educators make in the lives of students include the development of open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, and resistance to stereotyping. Students acquire skills in cross-cultural communication and experiences in working with people of diverse cultures as equals. These students personalize their own connections to other countries and international organizations. They learn to view people around the world from both insider and outsider perspectives and understand global inequities and resistance to oppression (Case, 1993; Gioseffi, 1993; Wilson, 1993). Global educators are leading the way, not only in preparing their own students for a global age, but also in showing the rest of us that we can all prepare the next generation of citizens to embrace multiple loyalties to our communities, nations, and the planet.

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