Global Competence in Education: Preparing Teachers and Leaders in a Globalized World

This article explores how globalization continues to transform education, focusing on its impact on the knowledge and skills that educators need to acquire in order to maintain professional competence.

Introduction

Whatever the level, subject, or setting (urban, suburban, or rural), educators have one common goal: to prepare learners for the world as it is today and as it will be when they emerge from school. Students today are not just local learners. They are global citizens in formation. As a result, educators – whether primary, secondary, or tertiary – must expand their perspectives, rethink traditional practices, and develop forms of professional competence that reflect and enhance participation in today's globalized world.

Globalization is an aggregate term for (the effect of) recent and ongoing changes in technology, migration patterns, business practices, and means of communication that have significantly increased worldwide material and cultural interconnectedness. To keep pace with these developments, educators today must acquire competencies that enable them to prepare students to engage meaningfully in the global village of today and tomorrow. Helping students attain what scholars increasingly term "global competence" (Banks, 2016; OECD, 2018) is a responsibility that extends across the entire educational continuum.

Global competence may be defined as the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes necessary to understand and engage effectively with an interconnected world (Boix, Mansilla, & Jackson, 2011; OECD, 2018). Today, educational competence is no longer defined solely by content expertise or pedagogical skill. Indeed, being an educator or an education leader involves much more than was expected just a few decades ago, and the scope is continually expanding. For the moment, however, one can describe the new professional competencies in terms of four essential and interrelated dimensions: *cultural responsiveness, technological fluency, reflective practice,* and *global awareness*. Together, these dimensions help educators move from simply teaching content to preparing students for meaningful participation in a globalized society.

Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness is the ability to recognize, value, and meaningfully incorporate students' diverse cultural backgrounds into teaching and learning (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Cultural responsiveness means going beyond surface-level celebrations of diversity to engage deeply with students'

identities, languages, lived experiences, and ways of knowing (Hammond, 2015). While most twenty-first century educators acknowledge the importance of recognizing diverse cultures in *all* classrooms, this need is most readily apparent in contexts like New York City (NYC), which is home to the largest public school district in the United States. The NYC Department of Education serves more than 900,000 students across nearly 1,600 schools. Within this system, students and families communicate in over 180 languages and represent myriad cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Working in classrooms in NYC provides a stark reminder that globalization is not something that is happening "somewhere out there." Rather, it is already present in our communities and in our schools, shaping how we need to teach, communicate, and connect with learners every day.

For educators, ensuring cultural responsiveness entails asking critical questions, such as: *Do our students see themselves reflected in the curriculum? Are multiple perspectives included in classroom discussions? Do our teaching practices honor students' strengths rather than focusing solely on perceived deficits?* By asking and answering such questions, educators can create culturally responsive environments in which students feel seen, valued, and respected. When students feel that their identity matters, learning becomes more meaningful.

Technological Skill and Fluency

Technology has become an inextricable part of education in our globalized world (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). It provides educators with the ability to connect students to ideas, people, cultures, and resources that extend far beyond their classroom environment. Using digital technologies, students can collaborate with peers around the world, engage in virtual learning experiences, access global databases, and participate in a vast range of online communities. For educators, however, technological fluency means more than just knowing how to operate devices or use educational apps. It is about using technology intentionally, ethically, and critically.

Increased reliance on technology in education brings with it new challenges, as pointed out by the current rapid expansion in the availability and uses of so-called artificial intelligence (AI) applications. Today, AI is taking a prominent role in reshaping the educational landscape (Holmes et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2023), influencing both how students learn and how educators teach. AI tools can support differentiated instruction, assist with language translation, personalize learning experiences, provide immediate feedback, and help educators analyze student progress (Trust et al., 2023). AI can also help generate lesson ideas, create adaptive learning pathways, summarize complex information, and provide support for multilingual learners and for students with diverse learning needs. However, the integration of AI in education requires thoughtful reflection. Teachers must ask such questions as: *How do we use AI responsibly? How do we maintain ethical practices around privacy, bias, and*

academic integrity? And, perhaps most importantly: *How do we ensure that AI supports authentic learning rather than replacing human effort, understanding, and connection with robotically generated patches in our input/output?*

In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that AI is, in the main, being developed and controlled not by educators but by private, increasingly unregulated for-profit trans-national enterprises. Thus, it may be up to others to ensure that AI does not replace teachers but is used to enhance education by supporting creativity, efficiency, personalization, and accessibility. In a globalized world, after all, promoting technological fluency means helping students become not only consumers of technology but critical thinkers who understand – and may ultimately learn how to influence – how technology impacts knowledge, communication, society, and the accumulation and uses of wealth.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice in education involves the ongoing process of examining our beliefs, assumptions, instructional decisions, and professional behaviors (Schön, 1983; Brookfield, 2017). Reflective educators continually ask themselves such questions as: *What worked well? What barriers may exist for students? How can I improve equity and inclusion in my teaching? What assumptions am I bringing into my classroom, and how can I move beyond or make more critical use of these perspectives?*

Reflection is not a one-time activity. It is a professional habit. Global competence requires educators to learn, question themselves, and grow. Reflective practice helps these same educators to become more responsive, more intentional, and more aware of the wide range of impacts that they and the methods they choose can have on students.

Global Awareness

Global awareness is an understanding of global issues, perspectives, and interdependence (Banks, 2016; Deardorff, 2006). It involves recognizing that our local experiences are connected to larger global realities. Students benefit when educators help them to understand such topics as migration, climate change, economic inequality, human rights, cultural identity, global health, and international collaboration. Global awareness encourages empathy, curiosity, and informed citizenship. It helps students to recognize that what happens in one part of the world often affects people in another. Global awareness also teaches students to appreciate complexity: In a world that is increasingly interconnected, understanding multiple perspectives has become an essential life skill!

How Does Globalization Look in Practice across Educational Contexts?

Surrounded by the inexorable phenomena of globalization and social and technological change, it is incumbent on K–12 educators to create inclusive, culturally responsive classroom environments that celebrate their students' diversity. This task involves integrating global perspectives into everyday lesson planning and instruction while supporting multilingual/multicultural learners in efficient and meaningful ways. Doing so requires, at minimum, moving beyond a single cultural lens. Instead, teachers today are called to promote and encourage curiosity, empathy, and critical thinking from multiple perspectives.

A science lesson, for example, might examine environmental issues from both local and global perspectives. A social studies lesson, similarly, might encourage students to compare historical experiences across countries, while a math lesson could include global statistics alongside local data. Typical literacy lessons, moreover, are no longer only about reading comprehension. Rather, such lessons now often involve exploring diverse voices, discussing global themes, and helping students to make connections across cultures. Using such approaches, primary and secondary teachers can become more than content instructors: they become facilitators of understanding who help students to navigate a world that is both diverse and interconnected.

At the higher education level, the responsibility shifts, but it remains equally important. Tertiary education faculty and administrators are responsible for preparing the next generation of educators, leaders, and professionals (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Zeichner, 2010). This includes designing programs that foster and promote critical thinking, ethical leadership, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness.

Higher education serves as a bridge between school and the working world. Teacher training programs, in particular, need to connect theory to practice in order to ensure that global competence becomes a lived experience that is integrated into teachers' professional identity**.** Future educators need opportunities to engage in real-world experiences, observe diverse educational settings, and reflect on how theory and practice align. Programs must not only teach culturally responsive and globally aware practices, but they must also model them for their students. Teacher candidates must see these practices put into action by their own professors so that they can sense the urgency, value, and need for these competencies. Only then can they acquire and effectively use these global practices in their own classrooms.

Challenges in a Globalized Educational Landscape

While globalization creates opportunities, it also introduces important challenges. One significant challenge is inequity in access (Selwyn, 2016; Warschauer, 2004). Not all schools or institutions have equal access to technology, funding, professional development, or global learning opportunities.

These disparities can severely limit educators' ability to implement globally oriented practices.

In addition, balancing local and global priorities can also be a challenge. Educators often work within local and/or regional standards, assessment requirements, curriculum mandates, and institutional expectations. At the same time, they are asked to integrate global competencies and culturally responsive practices. Balancing these responsibilities can feel overwhelming to educators. Many educators, moreover, feel underprepared to teach in culturally diverse environments or to effectively integrate global perspectives and technology. This deficit highlights the importance of strong teacher preparation programs and of intentional and ongoing professional development.

How Do We Move Forward? Some Implications

Developing global competence in education may seem like a daunting task, both for individuals and at the institutional level. Progress in this regard can be aided, however, by emphasizing and to some extent refocusing strategies that have long been part of educator training and of ongoing professional and institutional development. These strategies include *continuous professional learning, mentorship and collaboration,* and *cross-institutional partnerships*.

1. Continuous Professional Learning

Today's educators need opportunities to deepen their understanding of cultural responsiveness, technology integration, and global awareness. Therefore, it is more important than ever that professional learning not be limited to isolated workshops. Rather, it should be ongoing, continuous, and embedded in professional culture. In this regard, perhaps the most powerful strategy is reflection. Reflective educators continuously ask: *Am I doing all I can to represent diverse voices in my curriculum? What perspectives might be missing? Are some perspectives eclipsing others, how, and why?* And, most crucially of all: *How can I better support all learners?*

Reflection keeps teachers aware and classrooms vital. It is what transforms professional development into *growth*.

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2. Mentorship and Collaboration

Teachers do not have to face the challenges of diversity, technology, and global change alone. Indeed, learning from colleagues has always been a critical way in which to strengthen practice, and it is more important than ever in today's complex world. No more can we work in silos, separating ourselves by subject, level, or approach of choice. Rather, when educators collaborate across grade levels, disciplines, and institutions – and when teachers accept the need to share information and understanding, as well as to employ diverse and cooperative

methods – students and society benefit from the broader perspectives they attain and from the shared solutions they implement.

3. Cross-Institutional Partnerships

As with individuals, moreover, so too with institutions: Partnerships between schools, universities, communities, and international organizations can create meaningful opportunities for shared learning. Universities can and should partner with regional schools to engage mutually in ongoing and sustained professional development. In many cases, grants may be co-authored by universities and local schools to access government or private funding for teacher participation in courses and completion of advanced certificates or degrees. Today, too, many institutions work with international partners to create courses and programs that provide students with cross-cultural perspectives. Such partnerships enable students and educators to experience different viewpoints and to engage in authentic collaboration, augmenting informed and meaningful participation in the global village for everyone involved.

Conclusion

Global competence is no longer optional. It is essential. It is essential for our students, who must navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected world. It is essential for our classrooms and schools, which are becoming more diverse and dynamic. And it is essential for our institutions, which must evolve to meet the demands of a global society.

Globalization challenges us, yet it also invites us to innovate, collaborate, and grow.

If we embrace global competence as an integral part of our professional identity, educators will be better positioned to prepare their students to engage thoughtfully, act ethically, and contribute meaningfully to the changing world around them. Ultimately, too, when schools of education prepare globally competent educators, they are not simply improving education. They are shaping a more connected, informed, and compassionate world.

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