

Assessing global competence - Editorial Comment

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I have been reading with interest the OECD publication *Global Competency for an inclusive world* (OECD, 2016) with its vision for some tests of global competency that may be added to the current PISA tests of reading, mathematics and science (and optional problem solving and financial literacy) in 2018. This document defines global competency as:

Global competence is the capacity to analyse global and intercultural issues critically and from multiple perspectives, to understand how differences affect perceptions, judgments, and ideas of self and others, and to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with others from different backgrounds on the basis of a shared respect for human dignity (p. 4).

It is proposed that tests be prepared to assess knowledge and understanding of global issues; intercultural knowledge and understanding; and analytical and critical thinking. Some guidance for the development of test items will be drawn from international tests of civics and citizenship, of which we have a good knowledge particularly due to the fantastic annotated bibliography recently developed by Knowles and Stefano and published in the last edition of this journal (Volume 5, No. 2). As well as cognitive skills self-reported skills and attitudes will be elicited around aspects like interacting appropriately with others and having respect.

As much as I am wary of the notion of high stakes standardised testing regimes, the fact that certain disciplines, such a science, are subjected to them constantly as an indicator that they are “important” makes me yearn for a test to measure something I think is important – such as intercultural competence. Thus the whole idea that global competency has become a “real” area of study and assessment is a wonder to me. If we read some of the work of our colleagues in previous issues of this journal we can see how hard they have worked to build global competency and global awareness in Social Studies, and other interdisciplinary studies of many shapes and sizes, because they believed in it. Yet they have seem to have had less success and support than their work would warrant, with global competency often positioned as a nice but not necessary skill in education.

In a blog by Saga Briggs (*12 Facets of Education That Will Be Obsolete By 2025*) the fact that standardised tests as we know will be different; multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning will be much more common; and learning itself will be much more accessible to a wider group of people bodes well for recognition of the work of those who continue to build global competency. At least we are going to have a conversation about the importance of this area and all those social studies teachers and researchers who have been working on this for years and decades may at least be better acknowledged and recognised for their efforts and their forward thinking.

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In this edition following the theme of intercultural competency we have a number of articles that addressed this theme particularly in addressing instructional techniques for using multicultural literature. Nganga asked preservice teachers, who were involved in an overseas immersion program, about the instructional practices they found most useful in developing intercultural competence. The students found technology of great value for reflection amongst participants and its ability to provide a wide variety of world views while preparing to use diverse children's literature challenged their views on how to use such literature to counter stereotyping and personal biases. Morgan and Forest also investigated the value of children's literature but using it with a different focus. They looked for examples of children's literature which portrayed a biased view with regard to gender race or religion and pointed out how this could be used to teach older children to better understand and have empathy from an historical and contemporary perspective. Casey interrogated a range of instructional techniques using multicultural literature. Students studied texts, engaged in narrative through student response journals, and debriefed by participation in discussion groups where students discussed their answers to questions in a group format, thus considering additional perspectives from their classmates. On the other hand Osborne provided a broader perspective by deconstructing recent intercultural education research to help discern key teaching techniques to address prejudice, discrimination and hate, a valuable oversight for those who are interested in seeing what has been tried and what seems to work well.

Social studies teachers working to mediate border tensions were also focused upon in this volume. Miyazaki, Cashman and Madokoro's study investigated the success of a series of lessons taught in a Japanese classroom to address ongoing tensions between Japan and China over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu (China)/Senkaku (Japan) islands. Although not totally successful in building increased sensitivity the theoretical perspective of border pedagogy and transformative education (Garza, 2007; Giroux, 1991, 2005; Romo & Chavez, 2006) was found to be useful in understanding how border studies can be interpreted and implemented. Authors found that post-test results indicated that student understandings of Japanese and Chinese relationships increased and they learned to evaluate and collect data from multiple sources. Hung's study of how history teachers in Taiwan address the relationship between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China pointed to the complexity evident in each and every classroom due to the teacher's own imaginative worldview, sense of personal and professional identity and their classroom teaching practices. He argued for greater consideration of the personal history of the teachers who teach controversial issues. Rubin likewise identified the power of individual teachers with her scrutiny of how Indigenous teachers in Guatemala reinterpreted policy and created curricula to educate their students about the historical and contemporary injustices they felt were neglected within the curriculum. She argued that these social studies teachers recast educational policies aimed at post-conflict civic reconstruction by shifting the focus from democratic citizenship education to issues of structural and historical injustice.

We also have articles in this volume that address both new and ongoing issues of interest to social studies teachers and researchers. In the area of civics education Broom investigated youth civic

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engagement finding that youth behaviors are complex, influenced by individuals' cultural and family backgrounds and lived experiences. Supporting and adding to the literature in the field, correlations were found between youth civic attitudes and behaviors (Finlay et al., 2010), community engagement and experience (Magen & Aharoni, 1991), family and civic participation (Lenzi, 2014), and culture and civic views (Andersen & Siim, 2004; Moeller, 2013). Walker, Langan, Kemp, Pagnotti and Russell investigated critical thinking skills in social studies classrooms finding that through their intervention to build critical thinking skills pre-service teachers developed a new appreciation and understanding of the components of critical thinking. They also made a commitment to help their future students develop their own critical thinking skills. Schlein used case studies of children with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), often linked to transnational adopted children, to make the case for the need for further work for social studies teachers in building their skills in competently guiding students around issues of culture and identity while ensuring that social studies classrooms serve as models for embracing multiple cultures and multiple identities. I hope you find these of value in your professional and community life.

Ruth

References

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