

# Reflections on Building ‘Glocal’ Competence among Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers

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# Reflections on Building 'Glocal' Competence among Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to critically reflect on two graduate international comparative education courses I taught at a mid-sized public university. Using a variety of readings and multimedia focusing on voices of international educators telling their own stories of struggle for a democratic education, these courses represent my effort to raise a 'glocal' consciousness among pre-service and in-service educators. In this paper, I describe how my educational and life experiences, which include living in parts of the 'global south' and 'global north,' influenced the global issues selected for discussion in these classes. Although there is clear evidence that the experiences I describe in these courses helped to develop a more "glocal" and critical consciousness among students, I conclude that there are always more questions to ask, stories to tell, and complexities to explore when comparing different educational approaches.

## **Keywords**

Democratic Education, Glocal, Global, Teacher Education, Critical Consciousness

# **REFLECTION ON BUILDING ‘GLOCAL’ COMPETENCE AMONG PRE-SERVICE AND IN SERVICE TEACHERS**

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*“The act of becoming a critical scholar is a complex one... this is a project, [that] is never finished, always becoming.”*

~Michael W. Apple

## **Introduction**

As the quote by Michael Apple above implies, my main objective in writing this essay is to critically reflect on my educational practices to continually compare theory and practice in my teaching of international and comparative education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, 2009). Teaching an international and comparative education course has been one of my goals for many years. While attending graduate school, I was introduced to the concept of critical democratic education. This concept has helped me to make meaning and connections among my current educational experiences and the rich experiences I had while growing up and working as a young social studies teacher in my home country of Kenya. These experiences inspired the conceptual lens that I used to teach the graduate course titled EDF 528: International and comparative education taught in the fall of 2012 and the fall of 2013.

While designing these courses, I was informed by my own experiences addressing various social issues and by my reading of research literature related to “on the ground” struggles for democratic education across diverse contexts. In choosing a textbook for the courses I consider in this essay, I drew largely from an edited book titled *International Struggles for Critical Democratic Education* (Knoester, 2012a). My primary aim was to integrate local and global dynamics to enhance my pedagogy and practice to best reach the educational needs of my students, both pre-service and in-service teachers, for professional and life opportunities increasingly influenced by global forces. In addition, I wanted students to critically engage in the material (Marchel, 2007; Kuhn, 1999) as they worked towards raising a ‘glocal’ consciousness such that they not only began to see themselves in the ‘glocal’ narrative by internationalizing their conception of teaching and learning, but that they also develop the capacity to be change agents in struggles for a global democratic education. But what is ‘glocalization’?

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In their book, *Promoting Global Competence and Social Justice in Teacher Education*, Schwarzer and Bridglall (2015) cite Kumaradivelu to explain the origins of the term 'glocalization' that it is based on *dochakuka*, a Japanese word roughly meaning global localization. The Japanese business community uses the term to refer to marketing issues as in the popular slogan, "think globally, act locally." Schwarzer and Bridglall further explain that even though the world today is very interdependent, "our schooling systems are still very parochial and complex to navigate even when moving in the United States from one state to another" (p. 11). They posit that glocalization is therefore an important construct to better understand teacher education as an interconnected process. Thus, the term 'glocalization' is the effort of creating teacher educators who are world-minded, and thus who are able to think globally and act locally during teaching and learning in different contexts they find themselves in. It is a fusion of local and global concerns.

Even though I recognize that a growing literature in teacher education focuses on issues of globalization and globally-competent teaching (Apple, 2010; Brooks & Normore 2010; Collinson et al., 2009; Knoester 2012b, 2013; Kubow & Fosum, 2007; Robertson 1995; Zhao 2010), in this paper, I further recognize the critical need for additional research and understanding on using international and comparative education studies to inform long-term local educational practices in teacher preparation programs.

In the sections that follow, I describe the conceptual perspective that guided the course theme and the readings involved. I then offer a brief personal background to demonstrate how my experiences were instrumental in focusing my courses on "critical educational democratic struggles." I then offer a detailed description of the processes of these courses, evaluating their successes and challenges, and argue for why teaching international and comparative education is important for pre-service or in-service teachers.

### **Methodology: Self-Study Research**

In my desire to become a more reflective practitioner, and in order to teach in ways that are commensurate with the learning expectations that I have for my international and comparative education students (Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Loughran, 2004; Korthagen, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zeichner, 2008) in this paper, I examined my practice to develop a deeper understanding of my pedagogy as well as to enhance learning for my students while teaching the graduate course titled EDF 528: International and Comparative Education. I used *self-study* to focus on what I could learn about how I taught the course so as to improve my practice by inferring from what the students learned (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004). LaBoskey (2004) conceptualized self-study as a methodology for teacher educators to study different aspects of their professional practice in a systematic manner in a particular setting. LaBoskey further highlights that self-study has the following characteristics: it is self-initiated and focused; it is improvement-oriented; it is interactive; it includes multiple qualitative methods; and it defines validity as a validation process based on trustworthiness.

### **Conceptual Perspectives: Course Theme and Readings.**

My predecessors have offered this graduate course in international and comparative education for over a decade at the university in which I teach. However, after I was informed that I would be teaching this course, I was allowed freedom to create a syllabus of my choice. My own past experiences of participation in the democratic movement in Kenya influenced my decision to adopt a critical democratic education lens for this course (Knoester & Gichiru, 2014). To adopt this lens, I concurred with Paulo Freire's (1974, 1998) basic assumption that as teachers we must

raise the critical consciousness of our students to enable them to critically analyze or become critical analysts to the educational and social issues around them. In his book entitled *Philosophical Scaffolding for the Construction of Critical Democratic Education*, Richard Brosio (2000) defined democracy as a means where “every citizen can govern [and where] educational experiences are widely available in order to develop necessary critical skills and meaningful empowerment” (pp. 36-37). An education that is empowering is “a critical democratic pedagogy for self and social change...[because] the goals of this kind of pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality and change” (Shor, 1992, p. 15). This kind of education also seeks to “expose how relations of power and inequality, (social, cultural, economic), in their myriad of forms, combinations, and complexities, are manifest and are challenged in the formal and informal education of children and adults” (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009, p. 3).

Using this lens, I selected social issues around the world for analysis. The social issues included displacement of people by war, equality of men and women, quality education for everyone, poverty, and discrimination. I then looked for relevant texts and multimedia that addressed those issues. Thus, my central purposes of the graduate course entitled EDF 528: International and Comparative Education that are under focus here were numerous. First, my goal was to help my students conceptualize that what they see in front of them is not inevitable—that there are many models available of thoughtful educational struggles and practice and that it is sometimes necessary to see and think about social issues in new ways because as a human race we are all directly or indirectly affected by such issues. These courses were also to encourage students to think critically and divergently by providing them with comparative research, multimedia material, speakers, topical papers, and other publications related to international and comparative education. In critically analyzing texts and multimedia, I wanted to help students to develop a capacity to “point to contradictions and to spaces [outside of our current contexts] of possible ... counter-hegemonic actions” (Apple, 2012, p. xi). I did this so as to sensitize and create a general awareness of different social issues around the world in which schools became the social sites to contest inequalities and educational injustices. In addition, I wanted to sensitize students towards a ‘glocal’ mindset by encouraging them to better understand and address global issues in the local contexts in which they live because, as teachers, we are confronted with the ever-changing population dynamics in our classrooms (e.g., the case of refugees and immigrants) and other forms of cultural and experiential diversity found in schools. Lastly, I wanted to let students start conceptualizing themselves as global citizens who have the power to act on global social issues, perhaps interrupting forms of social inequality, albeit perhaps from a local context, by asking what lessons can be learned from these global issues that can be applied to their local schooling contexts.

As already mentioned, the majority of the readings for these courses were drawn from an edited book titled *International Struggles for Critical Democratic Education* (Knoester, 2012a). These readings served as an excellent jumping-off point for further inquiry and discussion in this international and comparative education course. This book appealed to me because it allowed readers to reposition themselves and see the world through the eyes of the dispossessed. In addition, it gave my students and me an opportunity to link our work to the complex issues surrounding society’s moral compass, its means, and ends (Apple, 2012).

The book itself is an award-winning collection of research-based stories and arguments focusing on educators in six different countries committed to educating in ways that interrupt the reproduction of inequalities from one generation to the next. On reviewing the book, I noticed the authors embrace the Freirian tradition of education for critical consciousness, or teaching for

understanding and for the purpose of interrupting social forces of inequality in various settings. The chapters exemplify many examples of the democratic struggle in various parts of the world, although not all are completely successful. Yet, these examples, detailing the struggle, as opposed to the more common narrative of outstanding educational success, demonstrate that the powerful forces of globalization include social inequalities based upon race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, and they are not easily interrupted.

The idea for using this book came from my realization that although I was focusing on different educational contexts around the world, I noticed many shared commitments to liberatory and justice-oriented pedagogy and educational work, and often opposed to the same or similar global forces of neoliberalism, racism, and/or gender discrimination. I felt the chapters complemented each other in interesting and unexpected ways. After doing some further background research on the book, I found that many of the book's readers responded positively, including the committee that awarded the Critics' Choice Book Award from the American Educational Studies Association, as well as the Jackie Kirk Outstanding Book Award committee of the Comparative and International Education Society, which named the book a finalist for their award.

The book edited by Knoester (2012a) contains eight chapters. I discuss a few of these chapters and how I used them in the section titled 'The Teaching Process' below. I realize there are many ways to go about teaching international and comparative education. For example, one approach might be to compare the educational systems of just two countries in depth. Another might be to focus on what appears to be the "top performing" nations worldwide, according to international tests, and to argue for a "one best" way to educate all students. By choosing this book as the primary textbook for EDF 528: International and comparative education taught in the fall of 2012 and the fall of 2013, I decided to focus on a myriad of socio-political complexities involved with educating children in these six countries which included, Kenya, India, Israel, United States, Brazil, and China and in particular their educational and social contexts. Some chapters in the book focus on countries that are honored for their high achievement on indicators such as international tests, while other countries under focus are not. This approach prevents simple comparisons and requires careful thought about specific social contexts of teaching and learning.

I made a conscious effort to avoid reductionism or over-generalizations about the issues and topics under consideration in the course. This is because such an approach can lead to stereotyping and overly simplistic understandings. Instead, in choosing Knoester's edited book for use in my classes, I felt the chapters were grounded in intensive research, drawing on empirical qualitative methods and theoretical frameworks that helped to explain complex phenomena related to educational and social processes. In addition, it appeared that scholars with deep understanding of the country under focus wrote the chapters. I used this book because it does not look only to wealthy countries as the source of knowledge about education, or to a particular educational system or approach that claims to be effective in all situations. Rather, several chapters of the book look to the "global south" for enlightening struggles for more critical democratic—inclusive and responsive—education for effective democratic citizenship.

In the sections that follow, I further reflect on and discuss how I used this volume in my classes. In the tradition of Practitioner Inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, 2009), I describe the setting and participants. In addition, I describe the teaching processes in my courses, the goals and understandings that were the focus of my teaching, the approach to teaching that I took, and how I assessed my students' learning and development over the course of the class. First, allow me to share personal experiences that shaped how I thought about this course.

### **Researcher Background.**

In this section, I offer a brief background of my experiences and how these experiences shape my understanding of how educational settings can be the sites of a democratic struggle in which various social issues are contested and role we as citizens and as education professionals play in it. I was born and raised just outside Nairobi, Kenya. I attended the University of Nairobi between 1990 and 1995 when the majority of students, if not all of us, were participants in the student movement for a democratic nation. At that time, I was working toward a major and licensure in Education. Upon graduation, I worked as a young high school teacher and volunteered as a social worker serving destitute families, some of whom included refugees from various countries in eastern Africa. It was while being involved in these activities, as well as keeping up with the news about these countries' woes, that I became interested in the plight of people who have been displaced. The struggles of refugees and other immigrants in my country inspired me to seek an understanding of what the term 'refugee' meant and all the labels that came along with the term (e.g., 'risk', 'underprivileged', 'stateless'). I later came to understand that the reasons that led people to flee their own countries were in many ways about one group of people consciously or unconsciously being in a 'position of privilege,' while others who perceived themselves as not belonging to that group felt that they were not benefiting in the same way as the group of people in the 'privileged position.'

After teaching for five years in Kenya, I immigrated to the United States in 2002. I noticed many things about the U.S. that also helped me to better understand my experiences in my home country. For example, upon arriving in the U.S., I admit that I had not fully conceptualized what it meant to be 'the other' while living in Kenya. Let me explain what I mean. Looking back, I now understand that, for one, being an African from Africa, the concept of being a minority, and the issues that go along with being a minority, did not fully occur to me. As black Africans, we are the majority in terms of numbers on the continent. Secondly, being a Kenyan, which until recently has enjoyed relative peace and stability, as well as belonging to the Kikuyu which is one of the largest ethnic groups in the country, meant that I might have had only a superficial understanding of what refugees who came into my country called 'marginalization.' In my naiveté then, I did not fully understand that there might have been some systemic forces that enabled some people to acquire certain privileges, while at the same time making it more difficult for others to do the same. I thought, "if we all work hard, we can all be what we want to be in life." I also noticed the segregation of race and class in the U.S. and wide disparities between the richest and poorest, but this also helped me to better understand my own country. Kenya was not a utopian mix of races and classes; divisions and disparities existed, even as the narrative of a unified and perfectly harmonious country continued.

I describe this example to provide insights I gained from a better understanding of incongruent cultural contexts. However, I do not believe learning about various cultural contexts has to include traveling or immigrating. They can also take place within one's own country. But, I do believe a concerted effort must take place to look beyond one's own assumptions and viewpoints. Viewing cultural environments outside of one's own, whether through travel or multimedia-based studies and discussion, can allow rigorous new thinking about one's own cultural context. In addition, it can allow us to see and describe the existing phenomena that surround us with new eyes, thereby developing the capacity to come up with novel solutions to existing issues. In the following sections, I focus on how I attempted to carry out this work.

### **The Setting, Study Participants, and Data Collection**

I teach at a mid-sized, regional, comprehensive public university in the northeast region of the U.S. The school has an enrollment of approximately 11,000 students with 9,000 undergraduate and 2,000 graduate-level students. Two percent of the total student population is international. A majority of the students are drawn from the state itself.

My international and comparative education course is a graduate elective course taught once every year either in the fall or spring semesters. At the time of this writing, I have taught this course twice, in the fall of 2012 and the fall of 2013. Currently, a colleague is teaching this course. During the two times that I taught the course, both were small classes with an enrollment of six students in 2012 and nine students in 2013. Out of the 15 students, only two were male. The class was taught one evening a week for two hours and 50 minutes. All students in both sections were White except two, one was Chinese, and the other was Black. All students currently had an education-focused career or were planning to enter the teaching profession. One was a lawyer looking to found a new school, another worked for the state's bilingual program, yet another was a school principal, and the rest were classroom teachers at various grade levels. The methods of instruction that I used in my classes included: discussions, films, readings from *International Struggles for Critical Democratic Education* as well as from other selected readings, the United Nations website, student presentations, guest speakers, and a final written assignment.

My course syllabus included the following goals, namely that by the end of the course, students would be able to: a) identify and discuss the nature and major objectives of international and comparative education as a field of study in general terms; b) demonstrate understanding of the complex nexus of ideology, political economy, and formal and informal educational institutions in different societies; c) articulate the role and importance of ethics (and especially professional ethics) in different educational traditions; d) explain the overall structure and objectives of public schooling in the U.S.; and e) articulate the role of cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity in the educational process of various societies. Data that I used in this article is also drawn from my personal journal. I made journal entry notes every week, reflecting on each class period. At the end of each class, I stepped back, reflected and took notes on various aspects of my teaching in order to improve my practice going forward. These journal entries are also helpful as I describe and evaluate my international and comparative education course here.

### **The Teaching Process**

For each class period, I created an audio-visual aspect for most readings, such as providing or showing a film demonstrating a similar issue, sometimes in a different context to accompany a particular chapter. For example, while teaching about how religious and cultural values influence the education of girls in India, I coupled that a documentary about similar challenges faced by girls in Zimbabwe. Topics for the course included, but were not limited to: examining education inequality through the eyes of the dispossessed: refugees and internal displacements; examining the dilemma of education in developing nations: gender and displacement issues; investigating the challenges of the American educational system; and probing the educational struggles within grassroots movements. I then assigned a reading, mainly one chapter from *International Struggles for Critical Democratic Education* for each week, using six of the eight readings from the book. For some weeks, I supplemented the readings with a guest speaker. I also organized two formal debates and regularly facilitated roundtable discussions. I required students to be responsible for part of the class facilitation starting from the 4<sup>th</sup> week. I spent the first three weeks helping students understand how to facilitate discussion by modeling facilitation skills and informing students that



each one of them would take a turn in facilitating part of the class at least twice during the semester. When it was a student's turn to facilitate discussion, each one sent me the main points of the reading as well as questions that they would use to facilitate the discussion. In addition, I made sure that the facilitator would include a question on how the lessons in the reading could in some ways be applied to local contexts. In addition, I made sure that the facilitator was able to come up with a similar issue in the local context to be used for comparative purposes.

On the first day of class, I asked the students to think, reflect, and write down on a piece of paper: a) one reason why they chose to take the class; b) what they thought the role of education was in society; and c) what they hoped to learn from the course by the end of the semester. I then asked them to share their responses with the rest of the class. For the first question, in both sections of this course, some replied that they wanted to learn what education was like in other countries. One wanted to learn about different "forms of education." A few others replied that they needed three credits before their Master's thesis projects, or that the class looked interesting from the course catalogue. For the second question on the role of education in society, almost half of the students in both sections talked about educating students to prepare them for the workforce and others described education's role as helping people integrate into the society. For the third question, most students wanted to know what education was like in other countries and a few of them named specific world regions, mostly related to family ancestry. What was interesting was that none of the students wrote that they saw themselves, or their native country, the United States as part of the global narrative. Rather, they seemed to not only see themselves as a "we" versus "them out there" but also appeared to view themselves or the United States as the ones who could help other nations to make their education better. In addition, none of the students saw the role of education in society as being that of creating transformative intellectuals who can interact and change the environments in which they live.

In selecting *International Struggles* as the course text, as well as the film and speakers for the class, I made certain that not only different regions of the world were represented, but that there was a combination of social issues to consider, like displacement, religious issues, poverty, contested areas, gender issues and other aspects that affect the education of children. In addition, I made sure to include discussions about different kinds of education, including formal and non-formal, religious education, indigenous education and mainstream education, all of which were represented in the various course activities, readings, and discussions. Because the chosen text did not adequately address various important types of education listed above, such as indigenous education, I added relevant readings and films concerning these topics. For example, while examining religious education, I used two chapters from the book, *Non-Western Educational Traditions: Indigenous Approaches to Educational Thought and Practice* (Reagan, 2008). This means I selected readings and films based on the region, the type of education, and the social issue in question. As such, I did not cover all readings in the class text so that I could make room for the additional selected readings. For example, when examining the topic, 'Educational quality/inequality: looking at education through the eyes of the dispossessed,' I assigned the two book chapters from *International Struggles for Critical Democratic Education* that focus on this issue, namely, "History, Struggle and the Social Influence of Migrant Children Schools in Contemporary China" and "Challenges and Prospects of Providing Critical Educational Opportunities for Somali Refugees in the United States." Two films also accompanied these readings, namely, *Making the Grade: Beijing Migrant Schools* (BON, 2011) and *God Grew Tired of Us* (Quinn, 2006), which focused on the resettlement process in the U.S., of three young boys uprooted from the Sudan by civil war.

Similarly, when examining the topic 'gender and education in developing nations,' I assigned the chapter titled "Gendering Muslim Girls into Religious and Cultural Values" and the film *Educating Lucia* (Richards & Metcalf, 2000), which focused on the plight of girls in three regions of Africa. One example from the U.S. focused on the work of one particular school, the Mission Hill School in Boston, Massachusetts, to educate a racially and culturally diverse student body within a deeply segregated city. In this chapter, the author describes 15 specific approaches used by the school to build trust and foster an integrated, welcoming and democratic school setting. Examples of those approaches included placing issues of race and diversity at the center of the curriculum at various points, conducting whole-school forums for discussing difficult issues around race and class, celebrating families of all colors, shapes, sizes, and traditions through the curriculum and the various forms of messaging used in the school, and hosting regular "family nights" that focused on student work but included food, music and other ways of educating and celebrating diversity. I also showed clips from the film series "A Year at Mission Hill" (Valens & Valens, 2013). My classes watched several of these short films together, which raised many questions for students as to how to create a trusting and integrated multicultural school environment when these types of schools are rare in Boston and in the U.S.

At the beginning of each class, I led a discussion about the assigned film and either showed the movie's trailer or short snippets of the film. I then asked students questions such as: what was the most striking thing that you noticed in the reading and film? What similarities and differences do you notice about the reading and the film? For the most part, as the course progressed, students were increasingly able to deconstruct complexities surrounding the various kinds of educational struggles and the tenacity that these children and their teachers put forth just to receive a basic education. One student commented after watching a film about Chinese migrant worker schools: "These children are working harder than anything I have ever witnessed... even despite the social and political predicament they face."

At the beginning of the semester, before I assigned chapters from the *International Struggles* book, I first introduced students to the Millennium Development Goals, which are eight international development goals put forth by the member nations of United Nations following the Millennium summit of the United Nations in the year 2000 (United Nations, n.d.). I did this in order to provide students with a global viewpoint from which to understand various educational issues around the world. All students said that they had never heard about the Millennium Development Goals. These goals are: 1) to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; 2) to achieve universal access to primary education; 3) to promote gender equality and to empower women; 4) to reduce child mortality; 5) to improve maternal health; 6) to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7) to ensure environmental sustainability; and 8) to develop a global partnership for development. One student remarked, "I did not realize that there was actually a blueprint that almost every nation in the world followed in an effort to make things better for everyone." During many of the class discussions, I asked the question, "In this topic, what kinds of effort or plans of action are required, if any, to accelerate the commitment some of the millennium development goals target in order to eradicate this issue?" This question generated responses that progressed from outright frustration with the enormity of the struggle for education worldwide, despite it being commonly viewed as a basic human right, to the increased desire to start where they were and to take positive action.

### **Assessment: Written Research Component**

In terms of a written research component, I encouraged students to think widely in terms of their term papers, which were required to be 8 to 10 pages in length, so that they could choose educational issues that held their interest and cut across national boundaries (i.e., international in character). Even though I encouraged them to explore educational issues in at least two countries, this was not a requirement. I emphasized that whatever issue was chosen, it should not merely be reported in descriptive fashion. I encouraged students to critically analyze the issue or topic from a combination of historical, contemporary, social, cultural, political, and/or economic perspectives.

An analysis of the papers that were written by students revealed that they addressed a wide range of topics. For example, two students wrote a paper on indigenous education for the Ainu people in Japan, in comparison with aspects of Native American education in the U.S. One student completed a comparative study of elementary education in India and the U.S. and what lessons the U.S. could learn from India's elementary education, and another wrote on lessons that teachers could learn from African refugees' motivation to learn in the U.S. One student focused on the TIMSS and PISA tests, and another asked what lessons the U.S. could borrow from the education system of Finland.

I also scaffolded the major paper assignment by helping students to write their papers in successive stages, so that the entire process would be less overwhelming and allow for greater support from the instructor. I got this idea after researching the resources provided in the comparative education instructional materials archive. Of particular interest to me was Patricia Kubow's fall 2008 graduate course syllabus in comparative education (CEIMA, n.d.). I listed the stages just as Kubow lists them in her own syllabus: a) identify an educational topic in international context; b) conduct a thorough literature search via computer databases, library research, and World Wide Web; c) create a working bibliography, citing the works you found from your literature search that you are likely to use for your paper; d) obtain actual articles, book chapters, and other materials to read; e) share your research themes and some preliminary findings via an informal class presentation; f) write your final comparative education paper organized via these themes; and g) present your final comparative education paper via a formal class presentation. I helped each student brainstorm various topics depending on their interests. After every student had a tentative topic, I brought in a library expert who conducted a seminar on how to conduct searches and come up with a working bibliography, and start the process of retrieving articles using the libraries' search engines.

Even though writing the paper assignment in this way was laborious for the instructor because of the many successive stages involved, it was also advantageous because the students were able to expand on their knowledge of writing as the class progressed. In the end, each student was able to produce a very good paper that fulfilled the objectives of the course. As one student commented in the final evaluation, "The final paper was given and presented to students appropriately and gradually. Step by step, the teacher led the students toward our goals."

### **Did I Achieve my Objectives? A Discussion of Course Evaluations, Analysis and Limitations**

Upon teaching this course twice, I found that through these activities, there was evidence of rich learning, discussion, thinking, and challenging of basic assumptions students might have had about students and teachers in other countries. Course evaluations suggested that students felt they were challenged to rethink their roles as educators in light of various social issues happening both locally and globally.

Overall, the students clearly seemed to appreciate the videos that accompanied the readings. Students insisted that every topic was eye opening. As mentioned before, none of the

students had heard of the UN's Millennium Development Goals before this class, let alone how to use it as a yardstick when discussing various issues in different contexts. On many occasions, the classes were in a somber mood after the continual realization of the struggles that many people have to go through in search of an education globally. The students also marveled as to just how complex and intertwined the political and social issues were as they played out in different educational contexts around the world. All students appeared to be refreshed and very motivated by the different ways I presented material to them. They marveled at the realization that after being teachers for several years (e.g., two of them each had teaching experience of over 15 years), they had neglected to take advantage of instructional resources such as those presented in this course, which could enhance the quality and relevance of their students' educational experiences through raising their students' critical awareness of various world conditions (Freire, 1974). As one student who was a fifth grade teacher said towards the end of the semester, "I will teach my students about these issues and, as a class, we will figure out strategies on how we can contribute to this struggle."

As students seemed to gain confidence, some of the students clearly loved the opportunities to challenge opinions and viewpoints of authors, and of each other. One student was especially strong in her critique of the Millennium Development Goals as a yardstick to measure all nations' progress. "Given the unique complexity of each nation's educational struggle, these goals are difficult for me to interpret," she said. Students also appreciated the numerous opportunities to improve on their work in progress as they continued to gain more insight through class discussions.

In the beginning, many of the students seemed to be oblivious to "the way that local and global forces interact to shape the context of the lives of those responsible for delivering quality instruction for student learning and the school and communities in which they lead" (Brooks & Normore, 2010, p. 55). Upon reflection of the course discussions over time and after reading the final papers, I realize that I witnessed real transformation in my students' thinking. They slowly seemed to grasp the real effects of "power, influence, and authority in the allocation of scarce and valued resources at various levels of the education sectors" (Brooks & Normore, 2010, p.56). As already mentioned, this resulted in many of the students starting to seek out ideas on how they can act as empowered participants in their schools to influence international decisions on a local level. I marveled when students started thinking of these ideas while communicating clearly and quite specifically about the social issues involved. Some students were able to describe how they themselves were directly or indirectly embroiled in global educational struggles by way of the various immigrants and refugees that they taught in their own classrooms. They talked of how they can take action where they were in their own classrooms so that they can make a positive global impact. This is synonymous to what Freire, (1974), in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, referred to as '*problem-posing education*.' One student went out of her way to write an email to me that included this statement: "I can't be the same person I was after your course last semester in comparative and international education. I think I told you I don't know what I am going to do with that knowledge but I am forever changed by it." This former graduate student strongly desired to join me for a study abroad trip that I led to Tanzania in Summer 2015, but for various reasons was unable to join the trip.

In the course evaluations completed by students the students wrote that they were clearly happy to understand a new perspective of the world and education outside the U.S. Many students stated that class discussions were stimulating, eye opening, and enjoyable. Finally, as already mentioned, several students wrote that the amount of work was appropriate for a graduate course and the various steps of preparing the paper were appreciated. One student offered the following response in reaction to the guest speaker: "It was neat to engage in a discussion with someone who

taught there [at the Mission Hill School, the school under focus for the reading] when he spoke to us via Skype. He was able to clarify every question we had about the school,” an acknowledgment that it often helps to speak with people personally to better understand and to probe the issues under study.

There were certainly challenges that arose throughout the teaching of these courses. For example, students whose areas of interest were not well-represented in the course wanted more information about those areas. For example, one was interested in the education system in Ireland and another was interested in African indigenous education. How to present a balance so that all areas of interest are better represented remains an issue for this class. In addition, some students developed a sense of being overwhelmed upon realizing the complexity of the issues involved while at the same time feeling powerless to tackle such big problems. And lastly, save for the guest speaker, I had not planned any excursion to the surrounding community, which could have been helpful for the course. For example, attending a board meeting might have increased a sense of civic responsibility. Even though I did not have a study abroad component in my two classes, students over the two semesters suggested that an “excursion to bring some of these topics to life would be a great idea.”

One of the outcomes of self-study is the need to act immediately on new possibilities and to adjust one’s teaching in accord with these new possibilities (Loughran, 2004). To act on new possibilities, as a follow up, I decided to submit a study abroad proposal for Tanzania, East Africa. The first trip was officially approved, students were recruited, and in the summer of 2015, I, along with a faculty member from Anthropology, led a group of six students to Tanzania. The trip consisted of three phases. In phase I, my colleague and I held debriefing and orientation meetings before departure. Being an East African native, I was fortunate to be able to personally teach basic culture as well as Kiswahili to the students. Using a critical democratic lens, readings covered relevant glocalization and globalization themes that helped students to explore issues of power, discrimination, language diversity and how these aspects influence schooling in Tanzania today. In phase II, we created a robust itinerary that had us traverse the nation from Dar-es-salaam, to Bagamoyo, to Zanzibar, to Lushoto, to Tanga, and finally exiting the country from Arusha after a two-day safari. While there, we visited two secondary schools and two universities whose faculty gave us lectures on various topics. We also engaged in civic and community activities in children’s homes and women’s self-help groups. In addition, my colleague and I offered two free lectures to about 200 university students on topics of our expertise. The students collected artifacts, recorded personal stories, held lectures, mingled with fellow university students, and maintained field journals. Finally, Phase III, after the trip, my colleague and I met with the students to debrief and for students to submit a written reflection on the course. Students unanimously agreed that the trip was a life changing experience. One student said, “You have to experience it in order to really understand it.” Another student talked of changing her research to one where she would come up with engineering projects that have ‘sustainable outcomes’ across cultures.

### **Limitations**

Although I suggest that ‘transformation’ occurred as a result of teaching the comparative and international education course twice, I do recognize that researchers in the field of adult learning and cognitive psychology tell us that the critical dialogue process is difficult for students and changes to critical thinking come slowly (Marchel, 2007). It remains to be seen the extent to which my students were able to apply the concepts I taught them in their teaching contexts, especially because I am currently not there to supervise and support any opportunities that may

have come up for them to use and practice what was learned. In addition, for all of the chapters read, I do not know what techniques students used to learn the material in the classroom (Dunlosky, et. al., 2013).

In my effort to model for my students by 'practicing what am preaching,' I recognize that teaching students using the methods and approaches that they themselves are encouraged to use in their teaching matters (Loughran, 2004). Modeling is performed in many ways, such as modeling of specific teaching practices, or the exploration of teacher thinking during talk, journal writing, and so on. The data used here reflects my own interpretation. This may have created a difficulty in challenging my own interpretations. Loughran (2004) writes, "being personally involved in experiences can limit one's ability to recognize oneself as a living contradiction" (p. 19). Other colleagues, for instance, may have framed an experience in ways I did not think of.

I recognize that there is considerable challenge in considering my own lived experiences as scientific data. I wish to recognize the subjective nature of the claims that I made in this analysis. I approached this analysis with a lot of caution because of potential biases in my data collection instruments, as well as biases that I, as a researcher studying her own practices, may have brought in. To try and minimize this limitation, I held discussions with a peer in the same field but from a different institution to provide me with an internal consistency check (Drapeau, 2002). In the future, however, I plan on triangulating this data with another similar study that I conduct to further address this issue.

Even though my International and Comparative Education students directly inspired this article, most of the students that signed up for the study abroad course were from other majors, such as Engineering, Anthropology, and Sociology. On the weeks preceding the trip, I provided a crash course on some of the themes of the course. However, now that I had additional students, that is, the original ones who took the actual course and the additional ones who went on the abroad trip, were they all able to implement the new changes they learned either in class or on the trip in their contexts afterwards? I also had taught the course with educators only, but then trip included students from other departments such as Engineering and Sociology. How would I be able support this more diverse group of students? This issue led me to rethink the course. I came up with an idea of incorporating international and comparative education in a different course entitled "field studies abroad." I figured that this way, this class would be open to anyone who wanted a study abroad experience from any department. I am now in the process of creating a curriculum. In addition, I have submitted a proposal that would take the students to Malawi, in Southern Africa in Summer 2017.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

The significance of this work has potentially enormous implications for the students involved. As stated above, I hope that students I work with, including those who take my comparative and international education courses are able to think in novel ways and realize that what they see in their local schools is not inevitable. I hope that they can see the connections among countries in terms of historical colonization, in terms of the global economy, and in terms of shared cultural knowledge and finding solutions to common problems. Since my education students are or will be teaching students who are themselves diverse in many respects, in fact, it is not a stretch to assume that many of these students will be immigrants from another country. I believe it is a teacher's responsibility to understand as much about their students as possible, in terms of their experiences in the world, their cultural understandings and assumptions, their languages and ways of being, and so much else. The knowledge can enable teachers to provide culturally relevant pedagogy and empowering educative experiences that value and build on the "funds of

knowledge” that all students bring with them to schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; González, Moll & Amanti, 2013).

In terms of students increasing their capacity to apply the concepts taught in their teaching contexts, it is my belief that teachers need some sort of support in the form of conversation groups with other like-minded teachers in order for them to continue in their reflection and praxis.

I hope my students are better able to view themselves as global citizens, as people who are intricately connected to people around the world and able to see common aspirations for our shared humanity and for one another, and to act politically on that knowledge. By learning about people in various contexts--and with an anti-reductionist and anti-inequality lens--it is possible to deepen our shared commitments to equality and to education for connected and responsive citizenship.

Finally, I believe this paper can be useful to other teacher educators who hope to teach their education students to recognize, think about, and solve current problems in teaching and education in new ways, and to learn from a broader spectrum of contexts and practitioners who share similar educational goals. It is also possible to sometimes understand our current context only by looking at the challenges faced by people living in other countries.

In conclusion, it is a powerful and important act to challenge pre-service and in-service teachers to compare their current educational and cultural understandings with the way education is conducted and understood in various countries and contexts around the world. In this article, I described how I sought to create a ‘glocal consciousness’ in our teacher preparation program at my university and bringing in “glocal” learning opportunities and viewpoints to U.S. education students. Drawing from my personal experiences, the book *International Struggles for Critical Democratic Education*, among other written and multimedia resources, the course described in this reflection demonstrates that it is possible to provide comparative and international educational exposure and challenging course material to graduate students in a way that does not simplify or provide stereotypical depictions of various countries and their educational systems. Rather, what I tried to do was to demonstrate that there are always more questions to ask, stories to tell, and complexities to explore when comparing different educational systems or approaches. The readings for students focused on hearing educators from various parts of the world tell their own stories and to focus critically on their situations, continually asking, how committed educators provide effective educational opportunities for all children.

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