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Critical Cosmopolitanism: Engaging Students in Global Citizenship Competencies



Abstract

How are global citizens nurtured in local classrooms? The purpose of this article is to examine that question and describe and report on a series of classroom innovations for nurturing global citizenship competencies among students of any age or grade level. The article introduces and examines the Asia Society's (2011) global competency matrix as a practical rubric for nurturing global citizenship. The global competency matrix includes four types of competencies: (1) investigate the world, which means an investigation of the world beyond the immediate environment; (2) recognize perspectives, which includes a recognition of multiple perspectives; (3) communicate ideas, which is the ability to communicate with diverse audiences; and (4) take action, which is centered on improving conditions. Utilizing these four competencies, the author shares example strategies for further developing each competency. Additionally, the author blends the global competency matrix with Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of critical consciousness in order to argue a deeper conceptual framework for the value of critical cosmopolitanism, which means being a critical citizen of the world.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, Freire, critical consciousness, global citizenship, global competencies

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Critical Cosmopolitanism: Engaging Students in Global Citizenship Competencies

This issue of *English in Texas* examines a paramount theme in this current digital age: How are global citizens nurtured in local classrooms? The theme speaks to the interconnectedness of citizenship, globalization, and localized teaching and learning practices. As a teacher educator and former elementary school teacher, this theme is near and dear to my conceptions of what it means "to teach." Teaching is more than just skill and knowledge training to pass a standardized test. Indeed, teaching is so much richer and more robust; teaching is about life preparation. It is about equipping students to navigate the adventures of a complex world and to make a difference. In short, teaching is about preparing global citizens to critically engage in the many ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which they dwell. Yet, what does it mean to be a global citizen? What competencies make for a strong global citizen? And for educators, what are practical ways and strategies for preparing students for global citizenship?

The purpose of this article is to describe and report on a series of classroom innovations for nurturing global citizenship competencies among students of any age or grade level. I introduce and examine the Asia Society's (2011) global competency matrix as a practical rubric for nurturing global citizenship and link the competency matrix with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English Language Arts and Reading. I blend the global competency matrix with Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of critical consciousness in order to argue for a deeper conceptual framework for the value of critical citizenship. To meet these purposes, I have organized the article into three sections. First, I introduce a conceptual framework for understanding the importance of global citizenship. Second, I describe several

practical strategies and innovations for developing critical global competencies. Third, I conclude with a brief discussion of the relationships between these innovations and the development of a critical consciousness of the world.

Background Knowledge

Although the term “global citizenship” seems to be quite contemporary, the concept of being a “global citizen” is rather ancient. Global citizenship finds its etymological roots in the Greek word *kosmopolitês*, or cosmopolitan, which means “citizen of the world.” The word “cosmopolitan” was first thought to be used by Diogenes the Cynic in the fourth century BCE (Kleingeld & Brown, 2013). What Diogenes actually meant by being cosmopolitan is still disputed among philosophers (Appiah, 2010; Kleingeld & Brown, 2013). Yet, the idea of being a “citizen of the world” remains intriguing and some connect it to the concept of cosmopolitanism. For some, cosmopolitan conjures images of high-society city life, something akin to the lifestyle depicted in the *Great Gatsby*. For others cosmopolitan may illicit memories of giggling over articles and provocative surveys in a magazine by the same name. Kwame Appiah, a cultural theorist, has made it his mission to redeem the word “cosmopolitan.” Appiah (2010) argues that cosmopolitanism is the essence of what it means to be a global citizen. He describes cosmopolitanism as being intertwined with two ideas: “One idea is that as humans we have obligations to one another....The other idea is that we take value in human lives, which means taking an interest in practices and beliefs that give our lives significance” (p. xv). Throughout this article, I use the terms “global citizenship” and “cosmopolitan” interchangeably. When I use “cosmopolitan,” the meaning follows closely to Appiah’s definition, which is to say that I define cosmopolitan as the understanding that humanity is deeply intertwined and connected.

Humanity’s connectedness also means that the decisions made by an individual and a community impact the lives of other human beings (Herrera, 2012). This “big idea” is related to global citizenship and being cosmopolitan, but how can this essential understanding be organized in meaningful ways to teaching and learning literacy? What are ways to help teachers and students become what Zhao (2010) calls globally competent? The Asia Society took up these questions and organized global citizenship into four global competencies. According to their website (www.asiasociety.org), the Asia Society is the leading educational organization dedicated to fostering a global understanding and partnership across international boundaries. Founded in 1956 in New York City, the Asia Society was one of the first institutions to discuss the contours of global competency. Through its Partnership for Global Learning, the Asia Society works with schools and educators around the globe to help prepare students for global citizenship.

The Asia Society defines global competency as “the capacity to understand and act on issues of global significance” (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011, p. 2). The organization further parses global competency into the following four types: (1) investigate the world, which is an investigation of the world beyond the immediate environment; (2) recognize perspectives, which includes the recognition of multiple perspectives; (3) communicate ideas, which is the ability to communicate with diverse audiences; and (4) take action, which is centered on improving conditions. To examine these competencies, I recommend the Asia Society’s book *Educating for Global Competence* (<http://asiasociety.org/files/book-globalcompetence.pdf>).

Conceptual Framework: Paulo Freire

Before describing classroom innovations that connect to these competencies, I provide a larger conceptual framework for understanding why the competencies are important. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist, centered much of his writings on the importance of literacy. For Freire, literacy is more than just the act of reading and writing; literacy is empowering and emancipatory (Freire, 1970). Freire used the term *conscientizacao* or “critical consciousness” to identify the possibilities of literacy in helping individuals “read the world” in order to free them from societal injustices. In his powerful book *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, Freire (1998) describes reading the world as a creative endeavor that leads to a deeper comprehension of one’s presence in the world. Students, no matter what age or school level, need to be encouraged to have their “eyes opened” to the world through literacy activities, including reading, writing, and engaging with emerging literacies that the Internet affords. Eyes opened to the world include what Freire (1994) calls *denunciations* and *annunciations*. By denunciations, Freire means the development of a critical consciousness when an individual is aware of and denounces the world’s injustices. Annunciations encompass an awareness and announcement of a person’s humanity, dignity, and future possibilities. Denunciations and annunciations are necessary parts of building consciousness in pursuit of a better world. When eyes are opened, Freire (1994) says that students are ready to “rewrite the world” through action. Figure 1 shows how Freire’s concepts map on to the Asia Society’s global competencies.

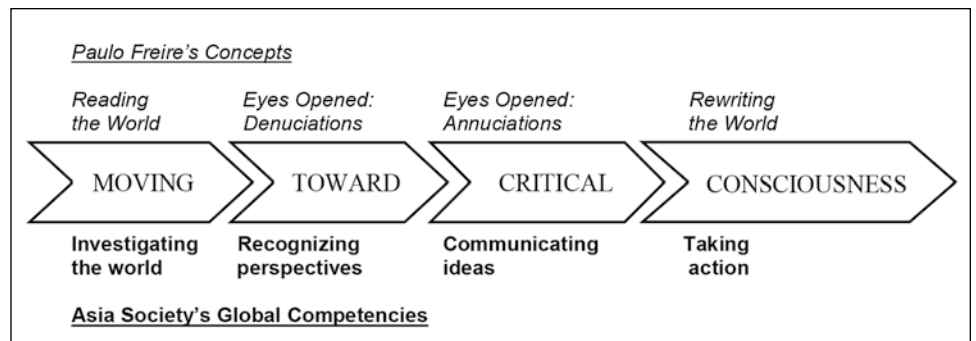


Figure 1. Relationship between Freire’s concepts and the Asia Society’s global competencies. Figure 1 shows a somewhat linear relationship towards the development of social consciousness, but the congruence of global competencies with Freire’s concepts can happen in non-linear ways.

It would be limiting to dichotomize the competencies and concepts into a series of categorical steps; rather, each competency blends into the other. Indeed, the Asia Society's global competencies are meant to be descriptive rather than hierarchical; the four competencies have a progression towards action. The final capacity, "take action," represents the maturation of all four global competencies as a person is compelled to begin rewriting the world. The understanding here is that to "take action" means that a person is ready and knows how to make a difference.

Practical Strategies to Build Global Competencies

In the graduate and undergraduate courses I teach, I have included a number of practical strategies to help teacher candidates and practicing teachers develop and reflect on global competencies. Often I create activities using a class wiki so my students can easily access and document their development. I organize the rest of this section with subheadings that align to Asia Society's four global competencies. Under each global competency, I share high-impact activities and strategies that mesh well with the competency. I also briefly touch on how the strategies align to the TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading and ways that teachers can differentiate the activities across grade levels.

Investigate the World

Asia Society's global competency matrix starts with investigating the world. To investigate the world, students must engage in an exploration of the larger world beyond their immediate environment. At the elementary school levels, students can begin investigating the world through pictures, maps, globes, and diverse children's literature. At the middle and high school level, students can investigate the world by reading multicultural themed books. There are also a number of resources online such as Google Maps and Google Earth, which include pictures of different places around the world. At the middle and high school level, I also recommend having students complete short self-assessment quizzes like ones on the U.S. Department of State International Education website. Here are three example quizzes for investigating the world:

1. Continent Quiz (<http://iew.state.gov/quiz/continents/index.cfm>)
2. Cultural Geography Quiz (<http://iew.state.gov/quiz/cultural/index.cfm>)
3. Physical Geography IQ Quiz (<http://iew.state.gov/quiz/geography/index.cfm>).

As a global competency, investigating the world aligns to the reading strands in the TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading. The Literary Theme and Media Literacy strands across grade levels specifically call for students to comprehend and

explore the historical and cultural contexts of text as a way of investigating the world.

Recognize Perspectives

To help students recognize multiple perspectives, online simulation games can be fruitful. I found two free simulation games to be especially powerful. First, Garbage Dreams (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/garbage-dreams/game.html>) is both an interactive game and a film about the Zabaleen (Arabic for "garbage people") people of Cairo, Egypt. This game shows how the Zabaleen make a living by recycling over 80% of Cairo's garbage. In the interactive portion of Garbage Dreams, participants take on the role of a Zabeleen person and set up a garbage sorting and recycling program. The game includes a "recycling" challenge where participants sort landfill garbage into different recycling bins within two minutes. The Garbage Dreams film and interactive game are a powerful way to help students recognize the perspectives of the Zabeleen people and develop a "critical consciousness."

Second, the Cost of Life (<http://ayiti.globalkids.org/game/>) is an interactive game that helps students recognize the perspective of living in a village in Haiti. The game gives students options (and different perspectives) when starting the game about whether they want their success in life to be based on happiness, health, education, or money. The game also gives students a window into the perspectives of the economic concept of "opportunity cost" as they decide on economic choices related to school, work, family farm, home, and healthcare costs. The game helps the students consider and recognize the perspective of making difficult choices on a tight budget.

While both of these games are designed for students who are at the middle school level or older, teachers can differentiate how they utilize these simulation games according to their grade level. At the elementary school level, both games can be played more as whole class or in small groups so that students can collaborate in the decision making. As a global competency, recognizing perspectives aligns closely with the Listening and Speaking strands in the TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading. For example, both games help students, across grade levels, to meet the Listening and Teamwork standards, as they begin to recognize the diverse perspectives of text, including multimodal texts like simulation games.

Communicate Ideas

The ability to communicate with diverse audiences is an evolving global competency. Texting, tweeting, and social media all provide ways to communicate through short writing activities or "sound bites." However, it is also important for students to be able to practice communicating their ideas through other mediums. Letter writing, debates, and speeches are more traditional ways of communicating ideas. To help students understand what is involved with communicating ideas, it can be helpful for them to

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see how others use writing and public speaking to communicate ideas. Ted Talk (<http://www.ted.com/talks>) videos can be especially instructive. I use several Ted Talk videos in my face-to-face and online teaching, and I suggest three videos that are great for students of all ages. First, I recommend the video by Adora Svitak, who is child advocate and author (http://www.ted.com/talks/adora_svitak.html). At the time her video was filmed, Adora was only 12 years old, and she communicated a passionate talk about hearing the voices of children. Second, I recommend the video from 13-year-old Richard Turere (http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_turere_a_peace_treaty_with_the_lions.html), who won a Ted Prize for his invention that stopped lions from eating his family's cattle. Third, to show the power of writing and narrative, I recommend Chimamanda Adichie's Ted Talk (http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html). Chimamanda warns about the dangers of a single story and communicates the vitality of having multiple perspectives and different kinds of texts in teaching. Adichie Chimamanda's Ted Talk is a reminder of what Lo (2001) explains as the critical importance of "teaching students to consider the perspectives of others with the assumption that different is not synonymous with inferior" (p. 85).

All three Ted Talk videos are powerful examples of how people, including young people, use writing and public speaking to communicate their ideas to diverse audiences. Across most grade levels, the Ted Talk videos are texts that teachers, especially those in the language arts, can use to launch discussions and activities of how people communicate their ideas. Perhaps this may even lead some teachers to organize their own independent Ted Talk events, allowing students to write about and communicate their ideas and passions. This third global competency aligns with the oral and written conventions strands in the TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading as students develop the skills for using the language conventions for speaking and writing.

Take Action

Taking action can often happen in organic ways as students stand up for something they believe in. For example, in all the elementary schools that I taught in, the students took action to develop a school-wide recycling program in order to reduce the amount of paper and plastic waste. There are also ways to take action online. Freerice.com, for instance, is an interactive simulation game that is sponsored by the United Nations' World Foods Program. When students enter the site, they are prompted with trivia questions and four possible answers. For each answer one gets correct, ten grains of rice are donated to help end world hunger. This simple activity allows students to feel they personally are making a difference. Not only are students helping others, but the trivia questions can be relevant to learning as well. There are several subject categories, from math to science to social studies, even a "language learning" section, which further helps students feel a connection with other parts of the globe.

Another interesting "taking action" website is Avaaz, a website for creating online petitions. According to the Avaaz website (www.avaaz.org), *avaaz* means "voice" and the website's purpose is a simple democratic mission: "organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want" ("About Us," para. 1). Students can go to Avaaz, read samples of petitions created by others their age, and create their own online petition. Teachers can spur their students to take action simply by asking them what they care deeply about and what type of world they want for the future. These are just two examples of how students can "take action" by using the Internet. As a global competency, taking action aligns with both the writing and research strands in the TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading and exemplifies Freire's *conscientizacao* or "critical consciousness." Across grade levels, taking action reflects the research strands of Synthesizing Information and Organizing Ideas as students apply their literacy skills in order to make a difference. Similarly, the competency aligns with the persuasive writing standards as students take action and rewrite the world.

Conclusion

I presented several classroom innovations and strategies for connecting to the Asia Society's global competencies and Paulo Freire's concept of critical consciousness. Nurturing global citizens in local classrooms requires explicit instruction in helping students develop critical cosmopolitanism. Our students need to develop the competencies of investigating the world, recognizing perspectives, communicating ideas, and taking action in order to navigate a complex global society. They also need to know that they are not alone in this endeavor. Critical cosmopolitanism offers our students "lives of significance" as they work together towards making a difference.

So, how can we, as educators, help our students take the next steps towards "lives of significance" and global citizenship? One

place to start is with the Internet because it offers many practical applications for nurturing critical cosmopolitanism. Teachers can help students recognize the powerful uses for the Internet as a way to connect to the globe and make a difference. At the same time, teachers can help students recognize problematic issues with the Internet, like cyberbullying, digital stalking, and inequity of access to technological resources. The Internet is one tool, albeit multifunctional, for the construction of critical cosmopolitanism. For critical cosmopolitanism to nurture and flourish, though, it takes people who are passionate and dedicated to engaging in the world with a critical consciousness. Indeed, being consciously committed to a better world is the best place for educators to start and one of the most important lessons they can teach their students. Such a lesson provides the foundation for nurturing global citizens in local classrooms as these same citizens begin reading and, in all hopes, rewriting the world.

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