

The Importance of Teaching Global Education in the Classroom

The United States' Need for More Multicultural and Geographical Understanding

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Surveys recently conducted by the National Geographic Society and the Asia Society shed light on a growing concern: the decline of multicultural awareness. Their studies show that U.S. students lack an understanding and knowledge of different people, places, and cultures around the world. The need has grown for the public to demand more rounded, higher-quality education for today's youth, and for teachers to understand the value and necessity of developing lessons based on global education.

The United States government tried to introduce and incorporate multiculturalism and global education into the system repeatedly since the 1980s but was met with hostility and protests by many of its citizens. Many conservatives feel that global education introduces anti-Americanism, and that multiculturalism introduces and encourages "separatism and disunity" (Ho 1-2). Informing and introducing the general public to the benefits of global education, or cultural education in general, seems necessary in order to begin the process of raising better-informed and knowledgeable youth. If people's fears rest on the idea that learning about others' cultures will bring the downfall of the U.S., then it is of utmost importance to stress the true goal of global education: to raise a more knowledgeable generation that is better equipped to deal, communicate, understand, and help the rest of the world.

Ashley G. Lucas, in an article distinguishing and teaching multicultural education and global education, remarks that many teachers have surprising ideas of what the purpose of multicultural education and global education is. Lucas states that many teachers who oversee primarily students of the ethnic majority do not see the need for cultural education because they view that type of education as primarily benefiting the minorities in a classroom-as a way to let them relate to or gain a sort of "hero" (Lucas 2). Lucas and many other scholars are extremely surprised by this line of thinking from educators and push for the concept that all races and cultures benefit from learning about less familiar ones. The mode of thinking that relates cultural education with only benefiting minorities draws attention to the misconception of minorities not "fitting in" to the mainstream, U.S. schools, and only being able to associate with someone just like them. When we stop both methods of ignoring and treating minorities differently with teaching, and start teaching every student with the same standard of global education, we will produce a more unified and accepting society.

Peter Stearn discusses U.S. students and how they, whether behind the world standard in cultural and geographic understanding or not, will need to be increasingly aware and knowledgeable of up and coming world super powers within the next several years. He comments on the need for U.S. citizens to get used to the idea that their country will not be the only world economic superpower anymore, and that a better understanding of other countries, especially those on the rise, will lead to a more prosperous economy and financial stability (Stearn 1). It is important to stress the importance though, of not only learning about the cultures or countries that could benefit you directly or financially. When teaching students global education, they should understand that the best motivation should come from learning and knowledge itself, not just personal gain.

One very important tool to be utilized in global education is through reading. [Literature](#) has the capacity for playing a large role in global education. While the classic or "canon" literature that is

already read in school should stay, it should be put into separate units of teaching, allowing for an expansion of literature that incorporates books that teach about different cultures through the eyes and voices of those belonging to a different culture.

Linda Milanese Kerschner describes in her work, "Teaching World Literature: Preparing Global Citizens," how teaching "world literature" will play a vital tool in this specific process of education. Kerschner informs us of a high school where a world culture & history class is taught in ninth grade alongside a world literature class; the two courses coincide with each other and reinforce the principles and information learned in the other class. The students are then required in their literature class to reflect and write about their reactions and cultural connections (76-77). I believe that their success in incorporating global learning is largely due to the fact that they have set these requirements at a young age. However, I think it is important to clarify that global literature and the principles of cultural acceptance is a long process that should be incorporated and taught in classrooms throughout all ages and grades. The middle school/early [secondary school grades](#), the eighth and ninth grades, are an excellent time in a child's development to start incorporating larger courses and requirements for global learning and literature.

To sum up what Kerschner's observations were of the school applying global education, she says when we allow "native authors to speak for their cultures" we are allowing a credible voice to depict for us the messages and values that their culture emits, as opposed to, however scholarly or valuable, a mind very similar to ours observing as an outsider to another culture (78). To illustrate this point, I call attention to the classic example of reading *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad in a unit that teaches about the continent of Africa. Both the author and the novel are a classic, and one of the best descriptions and accounts of [colonized Africa](#); however, it should be taught concurrently with a novel from the perspective and account of a local or native, such as *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe.

Using literature written by a culture's local authors, such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, opens new doors for students to experience memorable and new information - information that will help their generation grow into a more accepting, more financially viable, more communicative, and more helpful and understanding nation.

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