
Research Article

Internationalizing Education: A Personal and Professional Journey

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Abstract: We all have a personal history of social studies, history, and geography, learning it in schools, applying it in society; regardless, a rethinking of how we approach this is necessary for the 21st century. What we do to ensure meaningful local to global civic education and engagement is vital today. Allowing for voice, critique, controversy, and debate are vital to enhancing sustained global civic engagement; thus a Global / International Education/ Internationalizing framing. This article discusses a personal journal and analyzes the need to address local to global contexts in internationalizing, hopefully leading to critical consciousness and agency.

Keywords:

Introduction

My personal social studies history has been quite a journey. Yes, it really is about the journey and not the destination. It began for me many years ago; sure, school and all that, but perhaps more so with the presidential election of 1964 and church during my “formative” years. I fondly remember my third grade teacher, Mrs. Barnes, who allowed me to explore and question, even at the age of 9. But it was the experience of handing out LBJ literature that sticks with me to this day; that, and standing up in church and asking “why?” and “are you sure?” questions.

I have loved history, politics, and current events since I can remember. I knew from an early age I wanted to do something in the “social sciences.” I generally had cool history teachers in high school and excellent history and political science professors in college. I was pushed toward law school but education won out – thank goodness.

I think I have pretty much always been one to question the status quo, especially with respect to school and politics. Fortunately, it hasn’t gotten me into too much trouble. I did my share of protesting in high school and college – but I always kept it safe. I did the same as a teacher – never really one for rules that kept kids from being kids or from allowing anyone to ask questions. Again, as a teacher I seemed blessed by administrators who allowed me to do my own thing. I didn’t have management problems and my kids did well on tests, despite my always resisting teaching to those tests.

I taught social studies for 15 years, proud that often students left my class smiling. I tried always to make it all about them. What in geography or American history connects with you I would ask at every opportunity. They told me, too. They wanted to **do** history and geography. They didn’t want to sit and have it “done to them.” So, that’s what we did. We debated, we questioned, we made movies, we marched the halls, and we learned the neighborhood. They taught me more than I could ever teach them!

Life experience leads us in my Global / International Education journey. Learning to play the school game, vacations to state capitals and civil war battle sites, reading,

volunteering, then trips abroad... all contributed to my Global / International Education story. But perhaps as important formatively as any other was the 1972 presidential campaign. I was 16 and seven of my friends and I spent hours campaigning in Houston for George McGovern. When he lost I remember driving the endless freeways of Houston until the early hours of the morning screaming out the window that all was lost. I really think that pushed my cynicism to the edge. It has been a constant struggle ever since – and the Global / International Education journey has provided the balance. I often tip over the edge and shout out about injustice, fascism, or the like – but I do come back.

The seeds were sown... but it took the freedom of the academy to allow for further development. Beginning with traditional social studies education and bridging from there with collaborations with prospective teachers, graduate students, other professors, schools, teachers, and the community, allowed additional critical investigation. The social studies program area morphed into Global / International Education with courses focused on critical pedagogy, popular culture, and social issues. Projects took hold focusing on global education, international experiences, and rethinking American history. Students graduated carrying a torch for something called Global / International Education – something that has no “true” definition, that is always evolving and always questioning, but nevertheless is comprised of some general themes.

Given the ongoing debate and struggle with “defining” Global / International Education a graduate student provided a working definition to encourage dialog... The following was placed on our bulletin board outside the Global / International Education lab and can now be founding program syllabi, on our brochures and web site: “While we resist “defining” Global / International Education, we believe that Global / International Education emphasizes three areas of study: critical pedagogy, cultural/media studies, and social studies education. We also stress that education, interpreted broadly, has the potential to advance social justice.”

Thus emerged Global / International Education... a lifelong journey for me – to question, to challenge, to do, and to create. And through the years, especially as a professor, the dominoes started to fall... at least regarding the possibilities... social justice, activism, cultural studies, popular culture, critical pedagogy... and yes, the foundation – social studies... Through a lifetime along the journey, many have come along for the ride. Connecting present and past, merging current issues with traditional curriculum, integrating alternative texts and perspectives, empowering and emancipating kids and educators, transforming schools and society – the transgressions of Global / International Education scream out.

Rethinking Social Studies for Global / International Education

What really are the purposes of schooling and education in our society? What are the roles of other institutions in society within the context of teaching and learning? Are socialization, assimilation and passivity all we desire of our institutions? Are we so uncomfortable and wary of our “way of life” that we can’t even trust ourselves? What good is a society that won’t question itself? These and others are the questions that aren’t being asked. What of higher goals such as transforming and transgression? Is the nature of humanity such that comfort is the ultimate...and given the current state of society, perhaps comfortably numb? Why does it seem that reaction is the method rather than proactive engagement? Why does it take extreme events to lull us awake as to possibilities?

Loewen (2009) states that promoting socialization and allegiance to “American ideals” are the primary goals for social studies and schooling. So, what is wrong with thinking globally and acting locally? Is blind patriotism and jingoistic verbage keeping us from meeting basic human needs? What has happened to the concept of community? Are we held captive by our desire for complacency?

Social studies should be about emancipation; it should be about controversy; it should be about dissonance; it should be about allowing for and asking the hard questions... and ultimately having the courage to seek... An opportunity awaits... social studies can be a tool for engaging, and it should be a tool for challenging – ourselves, others and our world. Allowing for differing visions and enhancing a variety of stories encourages the transcendental – encourages progress beyond some market driven media defined conception of growth and justice. All education should be focused on efficacy and empowerment of both students and teachers (Freire, 2002).

Social studies should be more than co-opting democracy in favor of capitalism, a market mentality, or the glories of globalization. We often tell the stories of the white males heroes of history and provide lip service to the other in the form of celebratory months. Many stories are missing. We need schooling and social studies that encourages participation, critical analysis, and action (Kincheloe, 2005).

Rationale

Demographics in the U.S. are changing dramatically with the reality that we are more multicultural and diverse than ever before. A social studies and history education that is more

culturally responsive is vital in that deeper investigation of multiple perspectives allow for a broader understanding of the human endeavor. History by its very nature is about perspective and interpretation – of the time and about the time – and should be about linking past and present.

An ongoing issue in social studies teaching and learning is connecting with our students so as to ensure meaning and relevance in their lives. Unfortunately, there is some truth to the old statement that many students find social studies and history education boring (Mintz, 2011). Much of what is happening in the name of social studies remains as it has been for years – textbook based, teacher centered, stressing coverage rather than depth, and focused on low level “facts.”

A rethinking of social studies and history education focusing on culturally responsive pedagogy and also linking present to past are important ways to provide context and connections for all students. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and student interest and learning styles to make teaching and learning more learning and effective. According to Ladson-Billings (1994) culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning.

Zinn (1980) and Loewen (1995) both suggest that social studies and history education should by their very nature focus on culturally responsive approaches. They go on to state that denying voice, perspective and culture in both content and pedagogy are antithetical to democratic ideals. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching is validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory for the students of so many cultures in our schools.

Global / International Education for Social Justice

Global / International Education need be about social justice for social efficacy, empowerment, and emancipation. What is the role of schools in promoting social justice? How do the current practices in education and the teaching and learning process impact social justice? The overt goal of our schools is to enhance knowledge, skills, and dispositions development for our children. Unfortunately these goals are more often than not centered around very basic components that decision-makers have perceived as “essential” for being productive citizens in this country. These goals therefore seem to be driven by the ultimate goal of preparing our youth for the world of work. Social studies traditionally has not been about questioning or inquiry. Corporate America desires good obedient workers and our schools serve them up on a platter.

Ultimately, we must prepare children for active participation as global citizens; and this means that we have a responsibility to teach for social justice and a more critical teaching and learning. This critical pedagogy is aware and unafraid of childhood desire, often connecting it to children’s efforts to understand the world and themselves. Childhood desire is a natural phenomenon that is unfortunately often driven and dictated by the dominant culture. The idea is to critically analyze these issues and also provide the critical efficacy

children need so as to facilitate this natural desire and wonder for learning about and coping with their world.

What then is meant by teaching for social justice? Social justice education moves beyond traditional essentialist practice by suggesting the inclusion of student and issues centered approaches to teaching and learning. Advocates for social justice education suggest that our schools are often demeaning and disempowering places where children are either bored into submission or where the transmission and socialization techniques destroy any hope for critical thinking and problem solving development. The opportunity for teaching social justice in schools is great but we must discard the traditional transmission model of social studies in favor of a transformational model. Social studies must allow for investigating controversy and issues in history rather than memorizing bland facts. Strategies such as debates, simulations, role-playing, cooperative projects, and what if inquiry investigations facilitate a transformational model. Social studies should be a transformational process for both the individual and society (Hope, 1996).

Many suggest that social justice be a major focus of social studies curriculum and instruction in our schools. The contention is that traditional social studies education may very well be the bad guy in this debate; for the history of social studies traditionally has been to perpetuate the status quo and often only allows one viewpoint regarding history. With the focus on essential knowledge and skills and the growing accountability movement, social studies education remains reactionary so as to placate critics. Debate within social studies rarely centers around social justice or issues-oriented curriculum. The debate has been on what content should be taught and how that content should be "covered." American History for example is chronological moving from war to war and hero to hero with any context or connections to our kids' lives sorely missing. A curriculum is needed that encourages participation, critical analysis, and action.

Directly tied to teaching for social justice as stated previously is the concept of social efficacy. If one looks at the traditional goals of social studies, one can interpret these goals are at least somewhat implying some form of social efficacy. The critique here is that both social studies and efficacy mean much more than we have traditionally applied them in the teaching and learning process. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on one's point of view, the truly meaningful and lifelong connections in social efficacy have been provided outside of the classroom, especially outside of the social studies classroom... And this is the real issue. Social studies should be about allowing kids and teachers opportunities for choice, investigation, creativity, questioning, and debate. These are skills vital for a sense of self-efficacy and for promoting a progressive democracy. These ideas suggest the development of responsible citizenship for the propensity for thinking, valuing, and acting, rather than for the promotion of particular thoughts, actions, or values (Stanley, 1992).

These citizens go along with the crowd, pleased as punch to be living in the greatest country in the world. It is time to really

address power, domination, and issues with the lack of democracy in our schools (Berliner, 1995). Teaching for social justice suggests that story and controversy be returned to social studies. It suggests that life and learning is full of controversy and that we owe it to our kids to allow for investigating of social issues, past, present, and future. The premise is that a society not open and comfortable enough to allow for critique cannot progress and is a society in decline. Where is the democracy is this? School should be for cultivating the human spirit, nourishing the imagination, and promoting self-expression (Purpel and Shapiro, 1995).

Social studies has traditionally occupied a unique place in the education system. This is an area where the goal is for our youth to become well-informed active participants in a democracy. Students who participate actively in their education are better able to make sense of their world and in turn are better able to engage in problem solving and decision-making, and to engage in peace making. Social studies should give students the opportunity to gain experience in debate, public speaking, research and decision-making by investigating controversy. Students who are given an opportunity engage in critical analysis of issues and voice their opinion gain confidence and with confidence they are more likely to continue to participate in society's decisions after graduation. When citizenship education becomes purely socialization, many fundamental issues for facilitating democracy arise (Gutman, 1990).

There are many questions that we all will most likely have to think about in our lifetime. What is your view on abortion? What do you think of the death penalty? How do we address violence in society? What is your political preference? What do these four questions have in common? They are also divisive issues that people are likely to be very opinionated about. These are difficult topics to talk about for many people. Discussion on controversial issues like these can lead to questioning the status quo. Many people decide to just not talk about these issues. Unfortunately many of these people include teachers, and our education system reinforces this practice. The history of the world includes many controversial issues, but unfortunately schooling has taken the controversy out of history and social studies. This must change.

A major rationale for schooling is to prepare students for their future. Schools should therefore allow controversy into their classrooms because students will have to encounter controversy and social issues throughout their lives. Instead of resorting to complete withdrawal or violent rage, students would be encouraged to develop peace-making and conflict resolution strategies. But many students will not have exposure to controversy and social issues in their classes. Social studies without controversy cannot really be social studies. It is more like social studies light. This is a disservice to students, teachers, and society.

A transformative social justice framework need be the focus of social studies. Only through such a framework can we hope to counter hegemony and other social issues exacerbated by capitalist and corporate dominance. It is high time to rethink social studies for social justice. A society not open and

comfortable enough to allow for critique cannot progress and is a society in decline (Loewen, 2009). Critical teaching and learning for social justice sees the true purpose of education as the democratization of society, the highest good, not the protection of the interests of the establishment and unethical minority which dominates American political, economic, and social culture (Apple and Beane, 1995).

Culture and Linking Present to Past

Much of our social studies and history education focuses on a heroes and events covered in a chronological framework. We often go from one war to the next and one hero to the next in approaching the first or second half of American history in the grade level it is respectively taught. It is even exacerbated with all of world history being taught in a year. Educators must therefore pick and choose “important” topics or increasingly they are chosen for teachers in the guise of standards. The issue remains that these often only lead to breadth rather than depth and increasingly teaching to the test (given the emphasis now placed on test scores). If our goals remain the promotion of democracy, active citizenship and to develop rights and responsibilities as human beings contributing to society, then other methods warrant increased implementation. Shouldn’t a goal be civic engagement leading to equity and social justice?

A culturally responsive curriculum and instruction that links present to past while always thinking about the future perhaps best addresses the achievement of these goals. (Gay, 2010). Contextualizing pedagogy by connecting it locally and to our students lives and culture is a necessary first step. Media, popular culture and others texts / tools should be integrated to enhance such learning. It is one thing to develop a culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, but educators need also to develop those skills within themselves. Teachers must constantly be aware and act on equity and social justice issues dealing with race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, and culture. Championing a diverse community is vital for both student and teacher efficacy. Banks and Banks, (2015) and Nieto (2014) suggest the following:

1. Acknowledge students’ differences as well as their commonalities.
2. Validate student cultural identity in all curriculum and instruction.
3. Provide opportunities to engage in to global connections.
4. Promote equity, respect, rights, and responsibilities among students.
5. Develop an interrelationship between students, families, and the community.
6. Encourage student to become active participants in all aspects of their lives – socially and politically.
7. Focus on life skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution, collaboration, and negotiation.

Citizenship and Civic Engagement

UNESCO defines citizenship education as “educating all, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society” (<http://www.unesco.org>). A particular controversy is

that many nations see citizenship education as socialization into almost a blind patriotism toward their own country. Citizenship education can definitely be placed on a continuum, but if a society espouses democratic principles then citizenship education must challenge issues such as ethnocentrism, blind patriotism, and exceptionalism (Brown, 2011). Citizenship education in a democracy really should enhance individual and community responsibility, mutual respect, understanding of diversity and perspectives, critical thinking and active involvement in a society.

Our state and society in general are in crisis when it comes to citizenship education. Many will claim that that is the role of social studies, and that’s true, but social studies often remains about transmission of information, narrow conceptions of history and social studies, and is often ignored because of high stakes testing (Loewen, 2005). Often little effort is provided toward developing skills and dispositions regarding the social studies (and definitely citizenship education). Citizenship is often relegated to that lowest level of engagement, voting, and the U.S. is even very low on that scale, when compared to other nations.

Citizenship education must become a priority in the 21st century, and not one that perpetuates the status quo. Citizenship education must facilitate life skills and dispositions, along with knowledge necessary for addressing issues of this century, both locally and globally. According to the *Citizenship Foundation* (citizenshipfoundation.org), democracies need active, informed, and responsible citizen; citizens who are willing to take responsibility for themselves and their communities, and contribute to the political and social / cultural process. Genuine involvement in public life is an ultimate goal, and that must be facilitated in schools, but also in society as a whole. An excellent synthesis that provides a brief history, status, and ideas for teaching of citizenship education in the U.S. is “Citizenship Education in the U. S. ” by Walter Parker (2014.)

Civic Engagement – Local to Global Contexts

Parker (2014) suggests three primary questions that must be addressed regarding citizenship education today:

- Question 1 – Do we want a liberal or illiberal democracy?
- Question 2 – Who has legitimate educational authority?
- Question 3 – Should schools teach toleration and critical thinking?

A society interested in democracy must address these questions according to Parker and he suggests that the pedagogical suggestions tied to addressing these questions stem from Dewey (1985). While social studies and history remain dominated by traditional textbooks, lecture, and multiple choice tests, there is hope as new technologies, demographic changes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions needs for this century, and global crises necessitate a rethinking and redoing.

An increasing struggle regarding citizenship is balancing one’s national citizenship and that of being a global citizen. Increasing global issues, the ease of global communication, cross-cultural exchanges, and global interdependence have all

contributed to a need for improved global citizenship education (Merryfield, 2014). Many of the same themes, ideas, and topics discussed earlier apply to global citizenship, only on an obviously broader scale (the *Butterfly Effect* has become much more appreciated the last half century). Additional ideas, again building on those mentioned earlier include issues of sustainability, multiculturalism, equity and social justice, recognizing perspectives, cross-cultural communication and exchanges, and global service. Citizenship education necessitates investigating and debating relevant issues and controversies, cooperative and collaborative engagement, active and interactive learning by getting out of the 4 walls of the classroom, and allowing for critique and questioning (Maitles, 2013).

Thus – Global / International Education

The idea of social studies brings all kinds of thoughts and memories to our minds. A rethinking and redoing need be engaged regarding the social studies as past and present applications of social studies often do much more harm than good. Social studies often entails teacher centered, passive, regurgitation of information – decontextualized to the point of meaninglessness except to ensure non-thinking, traditional and passive endeavors. The world demands so much more – humanity requires so much more – the future is so much more. As a result, in order to problematize and criticize the concept of social studies, a “new” concept for rethinking and redoing is posited - Global / International Education. Global / International Education is a much broader concept challenging us to move beyond compartmentalization and answers. Global / International Education encompasses many things – critical pedagogy, social studies, media / cultural studies, social justice... The idea, nevertheless, is to offer perspectives, rather than truths, questions, rather than answers, action, rather than passivity.

Global / International Education is a dynamic idea / concept calling for a working description rather than a definition and often starts with emphasizing three areas of study: critical pedagogy, cultural/media studies, and social studies education; stressing that education, interpreted broadly, has the potential to advance social justice. Thus emerges Global / International Education... a lifelong journey – to question, to challenge, to do, and to create. Connecting present and past, merging current issues with traditional curriculum, integrating alternative texts and perspectives, empowering and emancipating kids and educators, and transforming schools and society – the transgressions of Global / International Education scream out. Dewey, Freire, Kincheloe, Zinn, Greene, Giroux, Apple, hooks, McLaren, Kozol, Loewen, Gay, Chomsky... and critical qualitative research is the method for investigation and exploration of this world.

Global / International Education challenges at its very core, hopefully problematizing social studies and its world. Transformation and transcendence are the essence of Global / International Education – connecting all of humanity to the big picture of social justice. Global / International Education sees no walls, no “no’s” and promotes the idea of possibility for all

human endeavor. And calls for critical qualitative research. There are several possibilities to explore in considering the direction of Global / International Education. Global / International Education encompasses social studies education, cultural studies, critical theory / critical pedagogy, social justice / democracy education, and community connections such as partnerships and service learning.

Conclusion

We all have a personal history of social studies, learning it in schools, applying it in society. I suggest that a rethinking is necessary for the 21st century. Many, if not most educators would say that our students just don’t know about civics or engagement – there are reasons for that. Rather than blaming and calling out some conspiracy theory, we must be on the front lines in advocating for change. That is what civic engagement is all about –more than passive teaching, it’s about modeling, doing, acting in the world; especially given current questions about truth and alternative facts...

What we do to ensure meaningful local to global civic education and engagement is vital today; thus, the need to rethink just how we as educators teach this stuff. Again, we often do a pretty good job of preaching democracy, but modeling and allowing critical democracy through youth participatory politics should be our goal. Allowing for voice, critique, controversy, and debate are vital to enhancing sustained civic engagement; thus a Global / International Education framing.

A society that claims to be a democracy, but one that doesn’t do all it can to ensure equity and social justice through civic education and engagement is a democracy in peril. The same can be said for ignoring the need for high-level in-depth investigation of history and social studies. There is much knowledge, and many skills and dispositions that are unique to social studies and history education. Allowing our kids to act as engaged citizens is one such skill. This can ultimately lead to critical consciousness and agency... and progress as a society.

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