Global Education and School Reform in the United States and Russia
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GLOBAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA

Contributors
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Howard D. Mehlinger
Margaret Sutton
Paul Haakenson, Galina Savukova, Terrence C. Mason
Svetlana Somova
Karen Grady

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TECHNOLOGY-BASED GLOBAL EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

JOHN E. McENEaney
JACOB M. KOLKER
HELEN S. USTINOVA

Although the scholarship on the subject of global education extends back more than twenty years, recent events (the interdependence of Asian and Western economies) and technological developments (particularly on the Internet) are now promoting widespread awareness of the transnational character of the world for which we are preparing students. Educational leaders and teacher educators are also becoming aware of the role of global and international studies in preparing teachers for the demands of classrooms and communities in the twenty-first century. Many colleges of education are developing programs in global education and are promoting opportunities for international student teaching and faculty exchange. It is unlikely, however, that given the expenses involved, the traditional "travel model" in support of global experiences can be provided to more than a small proportion of students and teachers.

Recent developments in communication technologies, however, offer a means for genuine participation by students and teachers in a larger global community without the costs incurred by the traditional travel model. There is now a substantial and growing body of literature on the applications of technology both to address global issues and to create genuinely global communities of learners. Moreover, although travel remains an important element in the globalization of economies, cultures, and individuals, it now seems quite clear that the day-to-day life of the global community depends far more on the transmission of information than it does on the movement of people. If, however, globalization is increasingly tied to communication technologies, it is important to ask how this technology model differs from the traditional travel model and how it alters the larger framework within which global education must operate.

Travel, Technology, and the Scope of Global Education

Traditionally, global education has adhered to what we call a "travel model." In the travel model there is a need for students and teachers to be transported, physically or vicariously, from one culture to another so that
students can develop the broader awareness and perspectives that are central to global education. Even the most basic levels of awareness, those, for instance, that Hanvey grounds in tourism, textbooks, and popular photojournalism, rely on travel either explicitly or through indirect means.3

What we wish to propose is that the traditional travel model for global education does not recognize the changing nature of the modern global community and must be augmented if it is to be consistent with the realities of this community. In our view, the traditional travel model falls short of what is needed in at least three different ways. First, it is unrealistic and exclusionary, since only a lucky few can actually engage in tourism, much less “live the culture,” given the personal and financial costs involved in extended stays abroad.6 Second, recognizing that most people will not be able to travel in support of their study, an exclusive reliance on vicarious experience (through print and other media) is less than we should hope for because the abstract and typically “passive” character of vicarious experience has the danger of reinforcing existing stereotypes or creating new ones because there is no genuine need for participation or interaction, two elements we view as central to global education. Third, and perhaps most importantly, we believe that the travel model may actually prevent educators from understanding the most fundamental core of global education, by leading them to believe that their primary objective is to understand, appreciate, and fascinate students with cultural oddities and exotica. In our view, global education has less to do with differences than it does with what is universal in our experiences and, as a result, the study of other nations and cultures are means rather than ends.

We suggest that the core of global education resides in skills and dispositions that can and should be applied in even the most “local” of circumstances. There is no meaningful distinction between education as we believe it should be generally practiced and global education as we would recommend this term be understood. For instance, Hanvey’s widely cited work on the foundations of global education identifies five essential “dimensions” of global education: perspective consciousness, state-of-the-planet awareness, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge about global dynamics, and awareness of human choice.7 Although Hanvey makes repeated reference to the global scope of these dimensions, from a philosophical perspective, the scope of these dimensions is incidental with respect to definition. Each of these dimensions can and should be interpreted and applied on “local” levels, and there should be a gradual broadening of students’ applications of these dimensions as their experiences and capacities for understanding expand. Ultimately, a global perspective in the sense that Hanvey intends is appropriate and a worthwhile objective, but it is not the scope of the dimension that makes it meaningful.
Perspective consciousness, for example, may be “global” in scope, involving national or cultural views, or it may simply involve a capacity to see things from a neighbor’s point of view. The scope of the task does not alter the fact that in each case perspective consciousness is involved. Moreover, although it might be argued that a “global” (i.e. international) scope is required if we are to go beyond the “trivial,” in some respects, it seems to us easier to achieve perspective consciousness at the international level because this brings differences into such high relief, while understanding a neighbor’s perspective requires attention to very subtle but crucial differences. Students’ understanding of the “perspective consciousness” dimension might, for instance, benefit more from a simulation activity about two neighbors arguing where a property line belongs than from assuming roles as nations in a border dispute. All of these dimensions scale up and down very naturally: “state-of-the-planet awareness” scales easily into “national-” and “neighborhood-awareness,” cross-cultural awareness scales seamlessly into sub-cultural awareness, “global” dynamics becomes local dynamics, and the dimension of human choice comes very naturally to rest at the personal level.

A gedankenexperiment provides what is perhaps our best argument for the irrelevance of scope in defining global education. Suppose we discovered life on another planet. Would we make the claim that global education must be abandoned in favor of galactic education? Most of us would find the suggestion absurd. Global education is only incidentally limited to a planetary scope and the discovery of life elsewhere, rather than making global education irrelevant, would expand its importance enormously.

What of the argument that suggests a teaching unit on neighborhoods cannot be global education if it does not touch upon other cultures or nations? No one should be swayed by this argument, since it suggests a view of global education that has been distracted by incidental trappings. Global education is not defined by its scope but rather by those skills and dispositions that we attempt to develop in students. These skills and dispositions scale up and down across many levels, and insisting on a global or planetary scope misses what is most important.

But if the travel model is misleading in this respect and global education is not necessarily about nations and cultures, what is it about? It is about human interaction with one another and with the environment, at whatever level we happen to be operating. There is a need for global education to address matters of national, cultural, and planetary significance, but that is not its defining core. The scope of a global lesson, for instance, is essentially a contingent matter defined according to the needs and objectives of instruction. It may be both pointless and counterproductive to insist on an international or cross-cultural perspective if the instruction is intended to focus on an issue better suited to local content.
Although we acknowledge that, ultimately, there is a need to organize and interpret local understanding within a broader context, the global or planetary context is one terminus on a continuum of perspectives that global education should pursue, and in order to maintain balance there is a need for both a local terminus at the other end of the continuum and a capacity for movement back and forth. The impulse to unduly emphasize global scope over local scope, apart from the life experiences of students (and teachers) and objectives of instruction, invites misunderstanding and undermines the process approach that is central to global education. What sets global education apart from other approaches to teaching and learning is the emphasis it places on connectedness across the scope of human experience and the belief that—unless educators prepare students to operate across many scales of human experience—stereotypes, narrow world views, and short-sighted efforts to solve problems are more likely to exacerbate those problems as modern technologies push us into ever closer proximity.

The rapid pace of technological development in this century, and the fact that these technologies now operate on a genuinely planetary scale have created both our need and our opportunity to live in a global community. Modern transportation technologies have made world-wide travel possible, for example, and even more importantly, electronic technologies have redefined our capacity for communication such that travel itself almost becomes superfluous. Indeed, if our global economy required personal travel as a basis for decision making there is not a single major economy that could sustain the wait required for the even the Concorde to make its watery jumps. What would happen quickly is that economies would fail, waiting for decision makers to arrive on distant shores. People will continue to travel, but the currency of human communication in the global community is electronic, and that is the reason that global education not only cannot avoid, but should hasten to embrace, a technology-based model.

Potential and Limits of the Technology Model

The single most important element in the technology model is the Internet. Although, at first, much of the information exchanged on the Internet was of a technical or scientific nature, that has changed rather dramatically over the last few years with the widespread use of e-mail and the protocols associated with the World Wide Web (web), which support a wide range of multimedia features.

E-mail and the web support many of the ideas advocated in the traditional travel model. These technologies can deliver information and provide vicarious experiences for students. Moreover, the vicarious experiences they can provide have the potential to go far beyond that of traditional print through the use of multimedia experiences and programming
that supports interactive learning. These technologies can introduce an immediate person-to-person interactivity—e-mail through written communication and the web through a variety of print and multimedia formats.

But there is an important difference in the way we communicate in the technology model that is particularly important for global education. Whereas in the traditional travel model there is a “visitor” and a “host” (and there is a distinct asymmetry in these roles), in the technology model there are simply partners whose goal is communication and who share a common set of technological tools. The local context for the interaction remains familiar for both parties, which has some obvious advantages, but it can also lead participants to believe the task is much simpler than it really is.

As many users of technology have noted, there is more to effective communication than technical tools. Difficulties interpreting e-mail communications, for instance, are routinely reported among even experienced technology users, who presumably share a common (sub-)culture. Part of the difficulty seems related to the novelty of the on-line communication environment where conventions (technical and conversational) are still being worked out. Another problem is that e-mail seems to operate at a level somewhere between the formality of traditional written discourse and the informality of water-cooler conversation. The immediacy of the electronic environment promotes an immediacy of response, but this immediacy cannot rely on many communicative strategies employed in informal conversation to promote clarity. One response to these difficulties has been to employ iconic devices (i.e., emoticons such as :-)), verbal asides (i.e., <grin>), and short hand codes (i.e., LOL = laughing out loud) to clarify intended meanings.

Almost no attention, however, has been directed toward considering the difficulties that will certainly be encountered when the new on-line conventions and vocabularies are expected to function across national and cultural boundaries among people who are, for the most part, still fairly new to the use of these technologies. Or to restate the point a bit more directly, simply solving the technical (i.e., electronic) problems related to communication in a global community may not bring us any closer to genuine communication than we were before solving the technical problems—unless we also consider the cognitive and affective requirements of effective cross-cultural communication. Another commonly cited weakness of technology is the difficulty people have navigating and using large complex networks of information (like the World Wide Web), which adopt radically different organizational structures and user models than traditional printed materials. It appears that on-line environments, while affording a greater degree of reader control, also pose special problems, either by increasing overall cognitive demands or by requiring a more
strategic, active approach to reading. Finally, it is also relevant to consider whether the new technologies of communication, many of which have been developed in the United States, impose subtle, or not-so-subtle, linguistic and sociocultural biases. Specifically, to what extent are the technologies themselves expressions of a cultural perspective that may exclude or disadvantage alternative perspectives?

With the technology model, there is also a danger that an increased emphasis on the specific technologies involved will result in a corresponding de-emphasis on the more subtle cultural and pedagogical foundations of global education. This result is not very surprising given that the mechanics of application often dominate early efforts to apply technology in new ways. Technologies tend to start out fairly "opaque" because initial efforts to apply them require expertise few users have, and this opacity tends to hide the "content" that the technology is itself intended to deliver. Rather than serving as a lens on an area of inquiry, new technologies often require an investment of effort and attention that can distract and overwhelm novice users, preventing them from being critical consumers of the information they have gathered at such great effort.

While recognizing that there may be a need to focus "on" as well as "through" communication technologies in the early stages of their application in global education, it is the purpose of this paper to argue that successful implementation of the technology model in global education in the coming years will require special attention to the cognitive and affective aspects of global education we have noted. Although communication technologies provide the technical wherewithal to create (electronically mediated) global communities, cognitive, affective, and participatory skills and dispositions are needed if we are to create the human conditions required to go beyond electronics. In other words, genuinely global communication will depend as much on the way people think and use these new technologies as it will on the technical feasibility itself.

Three aspects of global education are particularly important in considering whether the technology model provides a suitable framework for global education:

• the capacity to entertain multiple perspectives,
• cultural awareness, and
• the democratization of the global community.

Multiple perspectives and cultural awareness are closely related requirements necessary for communication to succeed on a global scale. We use the term "multiple perspectives" similarly to Hanvey's use of the phrase "perspectival consciousness," but we also believe that there is a need to emphasize an affective component similar to Case's "perceptual dimension." Multiple perspectives must denote not only the capacity to
comprehend that one group’s view of the world is not universally shared, but also that the individual who adopts this orientation also has the disposition to use this capacity in her or his interactions with others. We, therefore, presume both cognitive and affective elements in this dimension. Cultural awareness also has an affective component, at least when an individual is beginning to “live the culture,” but achieving this level seems highly unlikely based on a technology model for globalization. Although the affective component may be a crucial aspect of the traditional travel model, it seems to us that the technology model relies far more heavily on the cognitive aspects of cultural awareness. For us, therefore, cultural awareness is viewed from a specifically cognitive perspective.

The third element we have identified as particularly important in the technology model for global education is democratization. In the broader context of global education, the term democratization is intended to communicate the openness we hope to achieve in a larger global community. This term takes on a more concrete interpretation in the technology model, however, since one of the consequences of the new communication technologies is to introduce remarkable levels of accessibility and communicative power to all, regardless of social status, wealth, or political influence. There are, of course, limitations to this “democratization” both in terms of national legislative bodies that might actively seek to control the growing global discourse and the more subtle social factors that influence who has access to technology. These countervailing forces notwithstanding, it seems very clear even now that the new communication technologies have a powerful democratizing influence.

The relationship linking global education and communication technologies is more complex and interdependent than has generally been recognized. Although most educators recognize the crucial role technology will have in promoting and supporting efforts in global education, few seem aware of the critical need for a prior global perspective if communication technologies are to be successfully applied. Typically, technology is characterized as the “tool” of the global educator. Mastery of technology tools is presumed to be required in order to successfully implement programs in global education that adopt a technology model (as opposed to the traditional travel-and-residence model.) But in the absence of a more global way of thinking, electronic tools may inadvertently reinforce shallow stereotypes since, as noted before, this kind of communication typically provides less context, requiring users to provide more context that is inevitably based on their background and experiences. As long as users of technology are cognitively and affectively equipped there is good reason to expect that the contexts they provide will be appropriate, or at least openminded, but if the contexts provided by users are narrow, ethnocentric, or biased, it is unlikely that technology will do more than reinforce pre-existing biases and stereotypes.
Implications for School-University Relationships

We have pointed out above why we believe the technology model will have a profound influence on global education in a general sense. We also believe that it is likely to alter the way global education initiatives are undertaken in school-university relationships. Perhaps most importantly, communication technologies are beginning to level the field on which these relationships are played out. Traditionally, universities have provided the initiative and resources to support collaboration as these efforts have tended to involve substantial investments. In the technology model, resource requirements are dramatically reduced with the result that the effort needed to initiate and support an ongoing collaborative relationship more realistically matches the resources typically available in K–12 schools. In addition, the egalitarian character of electronic communication helps reduce the social barriers (largely based on social or intellectual status) that have often divided university and K–12 colleagues. Previously it was noted that the technology model avoids the traditional "visitor" and "host" roles that tend to result in undesirable asymmetries. Hosts are advantaged by their cultural knowledge and visitors are concomitantly disadvantaged by unfamiliar cultural terrain. In a more local context matters of prestige and social status may create boundaries every bit as insurmountable as those of language and culture. What technology can provide is a form of communication that operates with greater independence from existing social constraints, at least in part because of its novelty. We have found, for instance, that our students, both undergraduate and graduate seem more likely to communicate in non-deferential ways (indeed, with sometimes painful honesty) when they are using e-mail than when they speak with us face to face or in formal written work. There are probably a variety of reasons for this openness but, in this case, it seems to us that e-mail promotes a more open and less formal environment. On the web the leveling influence of technology is even more apparent where it is not unusual to find sophisticated, highly trafficked web sites that have been created by students. Publication to a world-wide audience no longer requires the kind of resources that once limited this kind of "speech" to only a select few.

A corollary to the reduction in status barriers dividing schools and universities will be a more active role for K–12 schools in defining these relationships. Our K–12 colleagues with whom we work in global education projects will increasingly be in positions to define how they relate to one another (locally and globally) without a need for university mediation. It is likely that as K–12 schools begin to exercise their independence, there is good reason to believe they will begin to identify views and perspectives that are distinct from those of university students and faculty.

In our experience working together we have found that the global school-university network we have tried to promote has largely been
mediated by the universities involved. Although there was a desire to promote a greater level of interaction among K–12 teachers and students across national and cultural boundaries, the interactions that tended to dominate our work were those that connected our universities, such as conferences, joint research, and faculty and graduate student exchanges. Contacts with K–12 teachers in our respective nations tended to be dominated by interactions on local university campuses where participating teachers (often our graduate students) were engaged in classes, workshops, and seminars. Predictably, these activities were coordinated and presented by university faculty. One notable exception to the dominance of the universities was a fairly ambitious but short-term K–12 student exchange that brought Russian and American students and teachers face-to-face. In addition, for a time it appeared that e-mail connections might promote a greater degree of independence for participating K–12 students and teachers, allowing them more direct access to one another, but problems related to maintenance of equipment in K–12 schools strapped for resources soon found the universities again serving in the role of mediator.

In effect, what we have created is a network with two distinct halves bridged by a university-to-university link. It seems to us however that this kind of network does not really succeed in achieving what global education seeks to promote, because this network results in the “filtering” of the experiences of K–12 students and teachers and because it introduces an unnecessary complexity. Moreover, as a more complete network of relationships becomes more realistic (with the spread of technology and declining costs), we believe that the university can begin to move away from the role of “gatekeeper” and develop a more positive role as a partner and as an intellectual and technical resource for joint efforts. When K–12 schools have the means to create and maintain their own global communities, students’ experiences of global education will have an immediacy that is difficult or impossible to achieve through mediating agents.

Ultimately, what we expect to happen is that the new technologies of communication will promote a more global perspective on local school-university relationships than has been typical in the past. In some respects, the more subtle “cultural” differences of schools and universities are more easily overlooked in global education projects that seek to promote international objectives. Although international objectives can and should be pursued, the real core of global education has to do with the capacity to understand and adopt new perspectives whether they span continents, nations, neighborhoods, or institutions.

The new technologies of communication provide opportunities for us to redefine our school-university relationships in ways that are not quite so burdened with the social roles that sometimes work against us in our collaborative efforts. One example particularly relevant in the present context are the roles of “producer” and “consumer” of knowledge often
imposed, respectively, on universities and schools. According to this world view, universities are where knowledge is produced and schools are where this knowledge is consumed. Moreover, these roles are heavily reinforced by a larger social community and especially so by a powerful and influential academic publishing industry. But new technologies of communication may alter the economics of academic publishing and become part of the reason schools and universities seek out new ways to define their relationships. Moreover, these new technologies offer us an opportunity to reconsider and redefine other “local” relationships (e.g., schools and communities) as well as build genuinely new relationships on much larger scales. In order for this to happen, however, there is a need to return to those most fundamental principles of awareness, perspective taking, and openness that are the core of global education.

Summary and Conclusions

We have had three main objectives in this paper. One objective has been to present our view that global education is primarily about developing skills and dispositions that can be applied on many different levels ranging from the “local” environment to the planet as a whole. We believe there is an unfortunate, but perhaps understandable, confusion about the “content” of global education since dramatic cultural differences are easily found and perhaps more easily taught than the subtle differences of perspective that are crucial for a “global” view on local events.

A second objective has been to consider the role of technology in creating a genuinely new global community and to explore the role of new technologies of communication in global education. We have noted a remarkable interdependence between the new technologies of communication and the skills and dispositions we view as the core of global education. New technologies have created a genuinely global community, but it seems clear that global education will be required if this community is ever to go beyond being merely a technical infrastructure.

Our third objective has been to consider how the technology model for global education might influence school-university partnerships. We believe there has been a tendency for the partnerships in global education projects to be mediated by universities for a variety of reasons. However, as communication technologies begin to take hold in K–12 schools, the need for universities to manage and coordinate the international and global efforts of K–12 students and teachers will begin to subside, and at that point K–12 schools will have an opportunity to reframe their global agendas.

In conclusion, it seems clear that the global community educators often speak of is, in fact, arrived and that the day-to-day operation of this community relies on technologies that will alter our views of global education as certainly as they have altered our view of the world.
Although educators cannot rely exclusively on a technology model for implementing global education, there seems to be compelling evidence that this model should (and inevitably will) occupy a central position in our thinking about the nature of global education and the means by which it is implemented in classrooms around the world.

NOTES


7. See Robert Hanvey, 85. Also in Willard M. Knip, ed., *Next Steps in Global Education*.
