

Global Educators in the Classroom

By Lloyd Kornelsen

*Dialogical theory requires that the world be unveiled.
No one can, however, unveil the world for another.
Although one Subject may initiate the unveiling . . . the
others must become subjects of this act.*

— Paulo Friere

One of the biggest challenges in teaching high school social studies is helping students to see and understand one another in the context of a classroom brimming with differing world views, identities, and opinions. This is often hard work that requires shaking off stereotypes, ignorant paternalism, prejudiced chauvinism, and fear of the other. However, if students are able to succeed at this in the classroom and see each other as fellow human beings amidst diversity and difference, it will have implications for their overall world outlook. They will become more empowered and open to diversity, and they will ultimately gain a sense of common global purpose and responsibility.

After 25 years of teaching, I have come to believe that students do not acquire these qualities through didactic teaching. In his 2006 book *Educating the Global Citizen*, George Walker, head of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), spoke on educating for world citizenship and stated, “the success of every educational endeavour depends upon a teacher . . . school buildings are important and the number of books in the library matter, but without the right teachers the whole lot comes crashing down.” Yet, after this singular endorsement, Walker offers little in the way of clear answers about what teachers do or could do to keep the whole lot from “crashing down.”

Walker is not alone. There is a long history of silence with regard to the teacher’s role in teaching. One can look back to Socrates’ assertion that teaching anything is impossible

(since all learning is recollection) or, more recently, to Heidegger’s claim that teachers should just let learners learn. Even John Dewey, the pre-eminent education philosopher of the 20th century, maintained that while teachers may play an indispensable role in facilitating learning, they can never teach anything directly.

So, if teachers cannot teach anything directly and yet their role is indispensable, what is the task of the global educator? Based on my teaching experience, I think one of the teacher’s most affecting roles arises in the myriad situations and circumstances—central to the shared lives of students and teachers—that call for thoughtful interpretation and critical response. Often, these situations are unanticipated and more complicated than previously conceived; they never arrive neatly presented or packaged, and they call for making discriminating judgments in the moment. If so, several truisms apply:

First, since global educators use their personal convictions about global ethics and about education’s moral purpose as the ground from which they are able to guide and engage students, they need to reflect personally at deep and sophisticated levels so that they have the wherewithal to respond with insight and integrity, and to help these students who have called them teachers to make sense of their world.

Second, global educators need to know and care for their students. Teachers who care about their students, who have a nuanced sense of their capacities and limitations, and who trust and are trusted will have a clearer sense of when and whether to intervene, and when and whether students should be free to interpret their experience and unveil their own worlds. Studies show that exemplary educators have an instinctive sensibility for knowing when to do what and how. It is rooted in an abiding understanding of, and care for, students.

Third, since global educators—wittingly or not—mediate student experience, they need to be mindful of their “presence.” Educators’ whole beings—including their enthusiasms, cares, convictions, and attitudes toward students—are seen and felt, and affect how students see themselves and their relationship to the world. For example, as Peggy McIntosh (2005) concludes in her 2005 article “Gender Perspectives on Educating for Global Citizenship”:

In school, sometimes it is the heartfelt trust of a teacher in the worth of a student in a completely local situation that produces a faith within the student that he or she is connected to the world in a way that matters, and that the world is worth caring about. . . . The global sense for belonging and making spaces for all to belong can be developed close to home by teachers bringing the wholeness of their emotions and capacities into classrooms.

As my career shifts from teaching high school social studies to (re)searching practice, this is a question I have of my teaching colleagues: what do they say about their role as social studies teachers—those teachers who have been charged with educating for global awareness and engagement? Do they align with the conclusions above? What has been their experience? What do their interpretations unveil, their reflections reveal, and their stories illumine? And how ultimately do their offerings broaden our horizons of teaching practice and of social studies education?

Profile **Lloyd Kornelsen**

For the past many years, Lloyd Kornelsen has worked at the University of Winnipeg’s Collegiate and Global College. In various roles— instructor, administrator, and program consultant—Lloyd has focused on global citizenship education: teaching courses, developing curricula, facilitating practical work, and overseeing internships. Lloyd recently completed his Ph.D. in Education and works in the Faculty of Education, University of Winnipeg.

