

Using as many other sources as you can find, write a 2,500-word essay on the following question: *What do you believe are the major implications of culture diversity for global education? How might cultural sensitivity be maintained in your work place?*

## **Introduction**

Before one can discuss the major implications of cultural diversity for global education, it is important first to detail precisely what constitutes 'global education'. Although the lay definition often focuses on such superficial elements as the national composition of the student and teaching bodies or the physical location of the learning place, this paper considers global education as that which prepares students to integrate with, and contribute to, the emerging global environment (Zsebik 2000). By adopting this wider-ranging definition, global education becomes truly global as it can occur, theoretically, in international *and* national settings.

A second important consideration is to understand what is meant by cultural diversity. Cultural diversity involves more than just the static representation of multiple cultures in a single place. In addition to the simple *recognition* of different cultures, cultural diversity requires *interaction* between these cultures; this interaction rarely, if ever, occurs by chance, but instead occurs only with careful and deliberate planning (Hayden & Thompson 2000). In addition, although it may sound a truism, cultural diversity must be diverse. In many instances, in an attempt to achieve 'equality', recognising diversity has involved "flattening out the depth of difference" in cultural practices (Kalantzis 2004).

Another point worthy of note is the relationship between global

education and globalisation. Most current literature on globalisation focuses only on the economic aspects of the process. Indeed, most occurrences of the term *globalisation* in the mass media focus on the global expansion of neoliberal economic thinking and practices (Rizvi 2000). However, some commentators have looked beyond these economic aspects and instead concentrated on the role of social, political, and cultural (including educational) factors in globalisation (Waters 1995; Wiseman 1998; Walker 2000). Regardless of one's point of view concerning the process of globalisation, one thing is certain: globalisation and global education have become inextricably linked. While one is almost certainly the by-product of the other, it is difficult to determine which is the catalyst and which is the product. For this reason, this paper will not attempt the difficult task of separating global education from globalisation; instead, global education will be framed within the process of globalisation.

Finally, it is important to note that the implications of cultural diversity for global education will vary depending on the level at which that education takes place. That is to say, the implications of cultural diversity at an elementary school level will differ from those at a high school level, which in turn will differ from those implications at a post secondary level. As it is well beyond the scope of this paper to focus on any one of these areas in detail, this paper will attempt to explore the effects of cultural diversity for global education as a whole.

## **1. Quality in Global Education**

### **1.1 Assessment**

Of the many implications of cultural diversity for global education, the issue of quality is of paramount importance. With such a diverse range of cultures represented and interacting in the global education environment, how can quality be ensured? Answering this question will require some discussion of the concept of quality.

Traditionally, quality has been considered a universal concept, something that is stable and objective (Hayden & Thompson 2000). As such, quality can be easily measured and controlled. It is this traditional view of quality that prevails in national education. Especially in terms of assessment, of both institutions and of students, traditional national education has attempted to banish, or at the very least ignore diversity through its use of standardised tests such as the Scholastic Assessment Tests (Lowe 2000). An alternative approach that is often employed in global education is assessment that centres on performance standards, manifested in a series of achievement statements. This approach fosters cultural diversity because it allows for the use of a wide range of assessment techniques that can be tailored to meet the needs of individuals within a particular group of learners. Compare this with traditional assessment that measures the achievement of an individual with reference to one particular mode of assessment, namely the standardised test (Ibid.).

Current discussions of quality have focused on its subjective, value-based, and dynamic nature (Dahlberg et al. 1999). This

modern approach to quality makes allowances for the cornerstones of global education that the traditional view of quality does not, namely diversity, subjectivity, and multiple values. In this manner, the measurement and control of quality, indeed its very definition, become problematised. What emerges as an alternative is what Dahlberg et al. (1999) call 'meaning making' (cited in Hayden & Thompson 2000: 6). And while this type of assessment is geared more towards evaluating institutions, the tenets underlying its application are, nevertheless, worthy of mention here. As opposed to traditional views of quality, which measure the degree of conformity to predetermined criteria, meaning making is concerned with fostering a profound understanding of "what is going on" (Moss 1999; cited in Hayden & Thompson 2000: 6). This more descriptivist approach (as opposed to traditional prescriptive approaches) permits the contextual flexibility that is required to quantify quality in a culturally diverse global education environment appropriately and effectively.

## **1.2 Curricula**

The task of devising a quality global education curriculum can be especially daunting because curricula, by their very nature, are less flexible than the modes of assessment used to measure their effectiveness. While instructors can, in principle, alter the types of evaluative devices they use 'on the fly' to meet the needs of their students, curricula must be decided upon well in advance of their implementation. As such,

curricula cannot be customised to meet individual learner's needs as easily as assessment can. In short, while assessment allows instructors to build the plane as it flies, curricula do not.

Having said this however, some commentators do point to ways that instructors can tailor classroom content to meet the diverse needs of a culturally diverse student body. In particular, Anderson and Moore (1998) suggest establishing a type of emancipatory course reading list to achieve this. In discussing this technique, they foreground the particular biases and/or narrowly focused cultural perspectives that often result from an autocratically determined reading list. To combat this bias, Anderson and Moore (1998) suggest having students actively involved in establishing reading lists by obtaining and sharing material from their country of origin, either in the language of instruction of the class or in translation. Doing so exposes both the instructor and the other students to numerous alternative points of view. A secondary benefit resulting from this process is that students are exposed firsthand to the difficulties that can occur when working with translated materials as well as to the ways in which language both reflects and perpetuates ideology.

Another method to ensure quality and diversity in the curricula of global education is to focus on empowering students to see themselves as an integral part of a global society and on preparing them for life in an increasingly interconnected world

(Mackenzie 2000). To achieve this, Mackenzie suggests developing in students a combination of the awareness of different aspects of knowledge and intellectual and/or ethical attitudes. To this end, Mackenzie suggests following the International Baccalaureate's Theory of Knowledge programme as a way of "bind[ing] together the different curricular areas of the IB Diploma's hexagon" (Mackenzie 2000: 46).

Adopting a curriculum that strives to impart students with self-awareness rather than with propositional knowledge avoids the pitfalls of trying to determine exactly what type of content – or more accurately which culture's content – should be included in the curriculum. This very same dilemma arises when trying to determine which language should be the 'official' language of international organisations. Interestingly, when English is chosen as this 'official' language, the next hurdle then becomes which *variety* of English. The presence of both spellings, *globalisation* and *globalization* in current literature is proof positive that the process – regardless of how you spell it – has not yet created a homogenous world culture; diversity remains, both linguistically and culturally.

## **2. Equality in Global Education: The role of technology**

Another major implication of cultural diversity for global education revolves around issues relating to access to education. In turn, many of these issues centre on the use of technology in global education.

Technology, and especially new communications technology, is often heralded as a way of uniting the world. Invariably then, this euphoria spills over into education with discussions of how technology will redress the world's educational shortcomings. Regardless of one's belief in technology's ability to achieve this ambitious goal, a critical observer must ask, If indeed technology *can* achieve this lofty goal, then at what cost? More specifically, what are the implicit consequences of using the same teaching tool the world over?

To the casual observer, the answer may be that there is no danger in using the same teaching tool the world over as this is exactly what has been done since the advent of moveable typeset printing provided textbooks for use in teaching. However, the more critical observer will see today's technology as something different. Bowers (2000: 10) may overstate the matter when he calls the globalization of computer-based culture "an even more destructive form of colonialism than was experienced in the nineteenth century", but his statement does raise an interesting point; namely, that current discussions surrounding the role of computers and technology in society are made with such unqualified optimism and in such authoritative tones, that any critical analysis seems not only unnecessary, but counterproductive. Computers and technology are perceived to be beyond reproach, and must therefore be accepted uncritically into society.

Releasing new technology upon a culture very often benefits

the group introducing the technology more than it benefits the group to which the technology is introduced. This is equally true if the introduced technology is an extension of an existing technology or if the introduced technology is something foreign to those to whom it is introduced. Think of the North American Indians and the consequences resulting from the introduction of rifles (an extension of existing technology) or alcohol (a foreign technology).

Despite the historical evidence, the world as a whole still seems convinced that it can introduce new technology to developing countries and cultures and that it can do so innocuously. In the futuristic environments of Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*, explorers were aware of the outcomes, both positive and negative, of releasing new technology upon new cultures. As such, they created something called 'the prime directive'. This directive stated that:

As the right of each sentient species to live in accordance with its normal cultural evolution is considered sacred, no Star Fleet personnel may interfere with the healthy development of alien life and culture. Such interference includes the introduction of superior knowledge, strength, or technology to a world whose society is incapable of handling such advantages wisely. Star Fleet personnel may not violate this Prime Directive, even to save their lives and/or their ship unless they are acting to right an earlier violation or an accidental contamination of said culture. This directive takes precedence over any and all other considerations, and carries with it the highest moral obligation (Prime Directive).

Allowing cultures to develop without external interference is an

ideal that should not be found only in the world of popular science fiction; today's international organisations would be well served to undertake such a noble endeavour.

### **3. Maintaining Cultural Sensitivity in the Workplace or *Establishing Cultural Sensitivity in the World-place***

The alternative heading for this third and final section is intended to do two things. First, it is meant to suggest that cultural sensitivity may not yet exist, and therefore must be established before it can be maintained. Second, it implies that cultural sensitivity is important in not only the workplace, but indeed the world over.

Although it counters the position put forth by the author in previous papers, establishing and maintaining cultural sensitivity – in the workplace or around the world – involves acknowledging differences between people. This must be done, however, only after having located one's own identity within the context of one's current environment:

The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. That is to say, we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves (Berger 1972: 8-9)

Once individuals can identify and interact with their own "consciousness of individuality" as social actors (Ibid: 10), they can then become actively participating agents with other individuals, regardless of culture.

This idea can be expanded in the continuing discussion of what Kristeva (1991) calls "strangers to ourselves". According to Kristeva, all individuals are somehow different from each other and yet we do not call or treat each other as "aliens", "strangers", or "foreigners":

To discover our disturbing otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that "demon," that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid "us." By recognizing our uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners (p. 192).

This shared perception and understanding of each other will enable individuals to engage in social interaction actively and equally and therefore will ensure the establishment and maintenance of cultural sensitivity. In short, by locating our sense of self within our context, then and only then can we begin to look at, and interact with, others, secure in the knowledge that even within ourselves, we are all different.

In the global education context, this sentiment is echoed by former Director General of the International Baccalaureate Organisation, Robert Peel who wrote: "Ideally, at the end of the IB experience, students should know themselves better than when they started, while acknowledging that others can be right in being different" (Peel

1997; cited in Walker 2000: 203).

## Conclusion

Clearly, as globalisation progresses, so too will global education. As global education progresses, it will be important to ensure quality in all areas, but especially in the areas of assessment and curricula. However, quality must not be thought of as something fixed and non-transferable. Because of the cultural diversity in global education, quality must be contextually specific. That is, quality, and the measurement of quality must be flexible enough to match "what is going on" in global education rather than the reverse. Whenever possible, curricula too must strive to obtain this same level of flexibility and context specificity. And at all times, global education must empower students to recognise and realise their role in an interconnected world by teaching them how to identify their sense of self *within* the global context. If global education can meet these objectives, then a greater appreciation and diffusion of both cultural diversity and sensitivity will result.

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