

CHAPTER I

A RATIONALE FOR GLOBAL COMPETENCE

Twentieth-century assumptions about the world are rapidly becoming obsolete. Globalization, the digital revolution, mass migration, and the prospect of climate instability are triggering new concerns and demanding a new kind of graduate. At the dawn of the 21st century we are recasting our understanding of economics, communication, security, cultural identity, citizenship, and the environment. Indeed, a growing number of reports document the new demands and opportunities these changes present our youth. They call for more powerful, relevant, and self-directed learning that will prepare the young to live, compete, and collaborate in a new global scenario.¹

This chapter reviews three forces shaping lives on the planet: the flattened global economy and changing demands of work; unprecedented global migration and the changing nature of neighborhoods, identities, and citizenship; and climate instability and the growing need for global environmental stewardship. These three areas of transformation illustrate a world in transition—and illuminate the new educational demands that world presents. The following sections examine these selected transformations and explain how the proposed definition of global competence helps educators respond to the challenges they present.

The flattened global economy and changing demands of work

Consider the changing face of the business world. A company in one country employs workers in another one. Consumers in a third country buy the goods produced. Transactions are aided by high-speed internet communication, the lowering of import tariffs, and government incentives for foreign investment. The result of these ordinary interconnections is a process of globalization—one of unprecedented reach and breathtaking speed and consequence. Globalization, the accelerating traffic of goods, ideas, people, and capital around the world, has leveled the playing field for workers all over.² And increasingly, employers are looking for competent, reliable individuals who will work at an attractive cost—regardless of location.

A new distribution of labor is in the making. Jobs that involve routinized tasks or scripted responses are being done by computers or workers in the developing world—with little training and at a very low cost. Yet jobs that demand expert thinking and complex communication will remain in growing demand the world over. At the beginning of the 20th century only 5 percent of the jobs in America required specialized knowledge and skill. By the year 2009 at least 70 percent did so. Commentators such as Daniel Pink have pointed to the emergence of a “conceptual age”

that requires more than specialized skills and basic information. Our age demands workers able to synthesize different types of information creatively.³ In fact, the top 10 in-demand jobs projected for 2010 did not exist six years ago. Here, too, international competition will prevail.⁴

In the United States, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce articulates the challenge of global labor competition in striking terms: “Today, Indian engineers make \$7,500 a year against \$45,000 for an American engineer with the same qualifications. Even if we were matched with Indian engineers in high levels of mastery of mathematics and science, why would the world’s employers pay us more than they have to pay Indian engineers to do their work?” The commission postulates that the key to successful participation in the new global labor market is a “deep vein of creativity that is constantly renewing itself.” It calls for a new generation of workers who “imagine how people can use things that have been never available before, create ingenious marketing and sales campaigns, build furniture, write books, make movies, and imagine new kinds of software that will capture people’s imagination and become indispensable to millions.” In their view, a high level of preparation in reading, writing, mathematics, science, literature, history, and the arts will be essential.⁵

What competences will students need to fare well in a flattened global economy?

Multiple skill sets have been put forth as essential to prepare our future workforce.⁶ They range from learning, thinking, and innovation skills, such as thinking creatively and using systems thinking, to skills associated with life and careers, such as designing, evaluating, and managing one’s own work for ongoing improvement and adapting to change. Collectively they offer a dynamic portrait of learning. Surprisingly absent in public discourse about work readiness is the lack of deep understanding by students of issues of global significance—how global markets operate, the promise and perils of transnational production, how social entrepreneurs contribute to human development while also meeting their bottom line, demands of economic and cultural development, and the dilemmas of inequality—to name a few.

The definition of global competence developed by the CCSSO/Asia Society task force complements the work readiness skills proposed by focusing educators’ attention on students’ deep understanding of and effective participation in the world in which we live. These capacities are not generic work, digital, social, or information processing skills. Rather, in this framework, competence is recast in global terms. It refers to students’ dynamic learning *about*,

with, *in*, and *for* a complex and interconnected world. To be competitive, ethical, and effective workers, today’s students must understand key topics of global significance in areas like engineering, business, science, history, ecology, and other domains that may constitute their future work. They must learn to think and work like an expert,

[In my opinion] both teachers and students internalize the value behind a globally-focused learning adventure. It allows teachers to be passionate about their own practice, it equips students with the skills necessary to confront the many challenges of our ever flattening world.

Susanna Pierce
Teacher
International School of the Americas
San Antonio, Texas

whatever the area of the curriculum or personal interest. They must understand the very economic, technological, and social forces shaping their lives and their future work.

Globally competent students prepare for a global economy by learning how to *investigate* matters of global significance. Are social networking technologies developing in the same ways in countries like the U.S. and China? What are the economic, social, and environmental consequences of outsourcing to India and Mexico? What tools do governments have to promote economic development and eradicate extreme poverty? Engaging complex and pertinent questions of this kind can encourage students to *recognize their own and others' perspectives* and *communicate* their positions clearly—two additional capacities that are especially important to today's global work teams. Most importantly, preparing to work in a flattened global economy will require that students learn to *take action*. It requires that they learn to identify opportunities for productive action and develop and carry out informed plans. For example, students may learn to design and promote products to succeed in a digital world or develop an awareness campaign on the environmental consequences of their city's purchasing habits. Prepared students, this framework suggests, view themselves as informed, thoughtful, and effective workers in changing times.

Unprecedented global migration

International migration is happening on a larger scale than ever, changing the demographics of classrooms and neighborhoods alike. According to data from the United Nations Population Division, by the summer of 2010 the total number of migrants in the world will have been about 214 million. Fifty million were estimated to be living in the United States. If all migrants were considered one country, it would be the fourth largest in the world in population, after China (1.4 billion), India (1.2 billion), and the U.S. (317 million).⁷

Teaching for global competence is essential to lifelong learners. Too often educators minimize the wealth of knowledge received from our students, especially when teaching in a multi-national/cultural environment as I do. Teaching for global competence sets us up for infinite possibilities.

Mia Washington
Teacher
International Studies School at Garinger
Charlotte, NC

In 2008 this migrant population was responsible for \$338 billion in remittances back to their countries of origin—a growing percentage of these countries' GDP.⁸ Yet remittances are not economic alone. Migrants from the developing world bring with them and take home *social remittances*. They transport ideas, know-how, practices, and skills that influence their encounters with and integration into the societies that host them. Migrants also send back home such social remittances, which promote and impede development in their countries of origin.⁹ As a result, world migration is felt in the classrooms, neighborhoods, markets, and streets of both sending and receiving societies in cities from Bangalore and Buenos Aires to Boston and Brussels. Much like global markets of labor and goods, migration today demands new educational responses. How can we best prepare youth for a world in which diversity will be the norm? How can we nurture graduates who are able to manage cultural complexity and increasingly blurred markers of origin and ethnicity? How can we prepare citizens who understand multiple spheres of participation—local, national, and global?

Whether through the media or in person, contact with individuals whose identity, culture, values, languages, and lifestyles are different will force our youth to compare others to themselves. How youngsters make sense of this will depend on the degree to which they have been prepared to live in diverse societies. Students who have learned intercultural skills, understand multiple contexts and traditions, and have had multiple opportunities to reflect on their own worldviews in light of others' are less likely to experience difference as a threat requiring violent defense. Rather they are more likely to experience the cultural encounter as an opportunity for exchange and collaboration.¹⁰

A growing percentage of new immigrant learners are part of a generation of *transnational* migrants. Unlike migrants in previous generations—and thanks to the digital revolution—these individuals are likely to remain in close contact with their countries of origin. They participate in religious, economic, cultural, and often political activity in two places. For them, healthy adaptation involves the development of a hybrid identity and dual citizenship that resists having to choose one nation over another one.¹¹

Schools the world over bear a new fundamental responsibility: to prepare students for difference and complexity.¹² They will need to prepare all youth—migrant and hosting alike—for new contexts in which multiple cultures coexist. Managing this complexity—fostering kinship, communicating effectively, working together, valuing difference, benefitting from diversity—is essential to success in a global world.

What competences will students need to fare well in a world of unprecedented migration?

Preparing our youth to participate successfully in a world of increasing social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity will require teaching them about the qualities—the history, languages, geography, and cultural contributions—of peoples the world over. It requires inviting

In my subject matter, the core standards in English promote educating students to focus on point of view within literature. This is an important part of creating global competence, as globally competent students have the ability to look at a situation through multiple perspectives.

**Nicole Mohr
Teacher
Vaughn International Studies Academy
Los Angeles, CA**

them to revisit their own nation's qualities and contributions in a way that captures its multiple relations with other societies. Students should not be led to assess "how we measure up," but rather to engage in a comparative analysis that deepens understanding of a nation's historical and contemporary characteristics. Providing students multiple opportunities to examine what happens when cultures meet—whether in their neighborhood, classroom, or virtually—is of the essence. The task of nurturing intercultural

sophistication is not the responsibility of social studies teachers alone: it behooves art, mathematics, science, language, and second language teachers to renew their curricula as well.

The framework for global competence articulates two core capacities at the heart of intercultural sophistication: the capacity to recognize perspectives (others' and one's own) and the capacity to communicate ideas effectively across diverse audiences. It stipulates, for

example, that globally competent individuals can examine and explain their own worldviews and cultural traditions, recognizing how these influence their choices and interactions in everyday life. Competent individuals can also weigh other's perspectives, considering the factors—including culture, geography, religion, and others—that inform them. To be prepared for a world of growing cultural interaction and diversity, students will also need to understand what happens when cultures meet and influence one another. They will need to understand how differences in power, wealth, and access to knowledge affect opportunities for individuals and social groups. Thriving in a world of diversity involves communicating with diverse audiences—being able to recognize how different audiences may interpret information informed by their own perspectives. It demands that students listen and communicate carefully and respectfully, using appropriate languages and technologies to do so.

If recognizing perspectives and communicating with diverse audiences are at the heart of students' preparation for an interactive world, the two other competences put forth—investigating the world and taking action—are of no lesser value. Students who are able to pose their own questions and investigate cultural interactions are more likely to be reflective about the complexities they present. And students who are able to envision and carry out a plan of action—perhaps to aid cultural dialogue through community service or raise awareness about different perspectives through an art exhibit or blog—come to view themselves as active contributors in an increasingly diverse world.

We have a responsibility to our urban students who share classrooms and neighborhoods with people from all over the globe. They require the tools to understand and interact with people who have vastly different cultures in order to appreciate their many similarities.

Global competence isn't as much about knowledge of other nations as it is about the skill of relating to people of diverse backgrounds. These skills are missing in urban America.

Bryan Melnick
Teacher
Henry Street School for International Studies
New York, NY

Climate instability and environmental stewardship

Over the last few decades the earth has experienced a growing frequency of extreme weather conditions and overall rising temperatures. Scientists around the world predict the prospect of further climate change is high. If greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere continues to rise, the consequences will be alarming and adaptation difficult. Global warming is too narrow a term to describe a phenomenon that is shaping life on the planet—affecting the earth's climate, chemistry, and biology at once.¹³ Consider a few of the consequences: ocean levels are likely to rise due to thermal expansion and the melting of polar ice sheets, affecting coastal areas and their water supply. Climate and chemistry changes are likely to impact land and sea habitats, causing large-scale extinction. Infectious diseases like malaria have already spread as rising temperatures make new regions accessible to the mosquitoes that transmit it. Rising temperatures and shifting patterns of precipitation are also affecting agricultural productivity.¹⁴ An important job for the next generations will be that of managing the consequences of climate change and devising effective solutions for mitigation and adaptation. The challenge will be significant. A recent report on climate change in the U.S. puts forth,

Much of the nation’s experience to date in managing and protecting its people, resources, and infrastructure is based on the historic record of climate variability during a period of relatively stable climate. Adaptation to climate change calls for a new paradigm—one that considers a range of possible future climate conditions and associated impacts, some well outside the realm of past experience.¹⁵

Because greenhouse gases do not respect national borders, the problem is essentially a global one. Climate change is affecting every region, country, city, and village on the planet in distinct ways and shaping living conditions, job opportunities, and civic participation for youth. In recent years, the search for increased energy efficiency has begun to trigger new industries and technologies—from green architecture to carbon sequestration tools. Political life the world over has seen a rise in environmental debates—in fact, the environment is reported to be a primary motivation for youth civic participation in industrialized countries.¹⁶ Yet despite such productive developments, a more concerted global effort will be needed to return atmospheric temperatures to sustainable levels and to adapt effectively to climate change. Mitigating and adapting to change will require furthering international climate agreements and enlisting all sectors of world societies in prudent resource use and sustainable innovation.¹⁷ A comparative advantage will go to those who, based on a deep understanding of the problem, can create novel solutions. However, progress in mitigating and adapting to climate change will not stem solely from the newest technology or the latest top-level multilateral agreement. Progress will pivot on the numberless private decisions of individuals who view themselves as agents of history—globally competent actors in today’s world.

What competences will students need to fare well in a world of climate instability?

Preparing our youth for a future of climate and environmental instability begins by helping them understand the workings of the earth, why and how climate change (past and present) takes place, and what consequences it is likely to have on various habitats and ecosystems, including their own. It will require that students understand how energy consumption in one place affects living conditions of people on the other side of the world and how we all depend on the same atmosphere for life. It will require that students understand current and future climate solutions and learn to weigh their potential against their risks.

[In] teaching for global competence as teachers integrate the pertinent themes across multiple disciplines into one meaningful task, students truly internalize the “big picture.” Their own learning is more meaningful and clarifies the real-world application of seemingly esoteric topics. As a teacher, I delight in seeing the outcomes

Susanna Pierce
Teacher
International School of the Americas
San Antonio, Texas

Efforts to understand climate change, its causes and consequences, will continue over the next generations, when today’s youth and their children are the decision makers. Well prepared individuals will be able to *investigate* climate change sources and impacts: framing local problems for study, collecting and interpreting data, building informed arguments. Most important, these individuals will need to understand that scientific claims and projections are empirically grounded interpretations of the problem.

They will need to understand that the knowledge of today may be legitimately revised when new and more compelling frameworks or evidence become available. These individuals will need to see that our understanding of climate is provisional and subject to critique—and view these qualities as markers of strength, not weakness.

The global nature of climate change, paired with the multiplicity of impacts expected in various parts of the world, will demand that students learn to *recognize perspectives* carefully. How does a rising ocean affect fishing populations in Alaska or in coastal tourist villages in Bangladesh and New England? How prepared is each community to face the challenge? What adaptation options do they have? Thinking about climate change in ways that consider multiple locations, perspectives, and concerns, and *communicating effectively* about these various conditions prepares students for effective transnational cooperation—the kind of global approach necessary to mitigate and adapt to climate change. At a premium will be individuals who understand environmental systems around the world well. Most importantly, such individuals will find opportunities to act now as global environmental stewards preparing for the work of their generation.

Conclusion: Why does an education for global competence matter today?

The consensus is clear. The world for which we are preparing our youth is qualitatively different from the industrial world in which our public school systems were created.¹⁸ Over the last decades numerous reports and policy statements have emphasized the need for new skills for the 21st century. This framework for global competence responds to the demands of a changing world differently, recognizing the central role that global interdependence will play in the lives of our youth. Increasingly, the work individuals in society carry out, civic participation, self-expression, social life, and health unfold in a global scenario. So while we welcome public commitment to teaching skills such as problem solving to all youth, we point out that the problems that students can learn about vary in significance, and we emphasize students' *substantive understanding of problems of global import*. Thus the approach here focuses squarely on nurturing students' substantive understanding of, and action in, the increasingly complex, diverse, and interdependent world in which they live. Globally competent youngsters will be prepared to further such understanding through inquiry, by recognizing perspectives, communicating with diverse audiences, and acting in competent ways.

After discussing and debating the riots and protests that have been occurring in Northern Africa (February 2011), one of my students asked if this will ever be in a textbook. I answered, "Yes...but probably not for another 5 years." We have to use what is happening in the world NOW to influence our students to make changes NOW.

Jeffrey Finelli
Teacher

Ogden International School of Chicago

To establish foundational expectations for student knowledge and skills, states created and adopted Common Core State Standards for what students should know and be able to do to be ready for college and careers in the United States.¹⁹ These standards have been articulated for mathematics and English language arts, which includes literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. The Common Core State Standards outline content and skills

deemed essential for students to meet the demands of college and the workplace. By focusing on foundational mathematics and literacy abilities, the Common Core State Standards offer ample flexibility for teachers to create learning experiences in which students examine topics of global significance to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected world.

We, in the United States, are certainly not alone in recognizing the importance of preparing students to cooperate and compete in the global scene.²⁰ In recent years countries around the world have seen the emergence of initiatives to infuse greater international understanding in their school curricula. For example, in a landmark document, the *Maastrich Global Education Declaration*, representatives of the European Council advanced a framework for global education designed to “open people’s eyes and minds to the realities of the world and awaken them to bring about a world of greater justice, equity, and

human rights for all.” In these leaders’ view, global education is thought to encompass—but is not limited to—education for human rights, sustainability, peace and conflict prevention, interculturality, and citizenship.²¹

We want each of our graduates at Ogden to be global citizens who feel comfortable in any situation they are presented with, regardless of where they may be. If we are doing our jobs correctly, our students will learn the skills they need to be successful in college and in their careers. We are trying to teach them to be lifelong learners who are respectful and caring of the people around them. By forming better global citizens, we are trying to create a ripple effect to benefit others outside of our school walls.

Jeffrey Finelli
Teacher
Ogden International School of Chicago

In Great Britain, the Department for International Development has sought to integrate global development issues into the formal curriculum through the Global Partnership Schools program, linking UK schools to schools in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.²² In Sweden, the Global Citizen Program prepares students,

teachers, and school leaders to understand countries with significant importance to Sweden’s future. Partnerships with schools in China and India are thought to prepare students for the real demands of the world, from studying abroad to engaging in sustainable development, corporate social responsibility, and economy and finances. In India, efforts toward international education build on ancient traditions of nonviolence and universal brotherhood. India’s *National Curriculum Framework for School Education* calls for a school curriculum that promotes national identity and unity but also strives to “raise awareness of the necessity to promote peace and understanding between nations for the prosperity of all mankind.” The framework expects international education to be embedded in existing subjects, although particular curricula focused on peace and human rights education have also been proposed.²³

As these examples illustrate, many countries are articulating their global education agendas in alignment with national priorities and traditions. Their initiatives tend to converge on a few fundamental orientations. Several view the world as one system—human life as shaped by a history of global interdependence. Others highlight a commitment to the idea that there are basic human rights, including social and economic equality as well as basic freedoms. Most emphasize a commitment to cultural diversity and the importance of intercultural understanding and acceptance of differences of opinion, and a few point to environmental awareness and planetary sustainability.²⁴

The definition of global competence here proposed echoes these initiative’s aspirations. It does so not by creating an extended list of skills and significant concepts to be mixed and matched through instruction, nor by prioritizing education for the workplace over education for cultural sensitivity. Rather it does so by inviting educators, writ large, to pose a more fundamental question: what matters most for students to understand about the world so they can participate fully in its future? The challenge of preparing our youth for the future includes, but is greater than, preparing them for work and ensuring their college readiness. Pressing issues such as protecting the environment, managing unprecedented human migration, and addressing the challenges of poverty, global health, and human rights will demand a generation of individuals with a strong capacity to cooperate across national borders—individuals able to solve global problems in the workplace, among many nations, through the internet, and in private decisions.

An invitation to ponder

This chapter reviewed key rationales for educating for global competence. Keeping these rationales in mind, consider the world in which your students live.

- I. From your perspective, in what ways are the societal and environmental transformations here described affecting your students’ lives today? How will they be affected in the future?
- II. In your opinion, what are the key reasons for educating for global competence? What are the barriers such an education might confront?
- III. In your current opinion, what distinguishes a high- from a low-quality education for global competence?