

Global Competency Education

COLLEGE BOARD RESEARCH

Research Brief 2013-1

Introduction

Every year in the United States, millions of students graduate with some type of postsecondary credential—certificate, associate, or bachelor's degree—and discover they are not, or are identified as not being, adequately prepared to compete in the increasingly global economy. A recent McKinsey & Company study, *Education to Employment*, reported that less than half of U.S. student respondents believe their postsecondary studies improved their employment opportunities and half of U.S. employer respondents say a skills shortage is a leading reason for entry-level vacancies—and this trend is worldwide.¹

By 2018, the United States will need approximately 22 million new Associate's degrees or greater to fill new and replacement job projections, but will have three million fewer postsecondary degrees than needed.² This reality brings forward the question: How do we ensure that those with a postsecondary credential are prepared for a rapidly changing and globalized economy?

A first and necessary step is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which, at this time, have been adopted by forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense. As is well-documented, CCSS raises college and career readiness expectations for all students in the United States. Curricula, assessments, and teaching, however, will need to include and integrate global competency skills to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in the workforce. Toward that end, this brief is intended to support educators in preparing the next generation of students for college and career in an interconnected and hyper changing world by highlighting key, relevant concepts germane to comparative education.³

Defining the Problem

Globalization has dramatically changed the way we live and work in our now knowledge-based society and, with this change, an urgent need for an increasingly skilled workforce demands that the United States re-imagine its approach to education. To be competitive in a global economy, students in the United States need to become flexible, lifelong learners who adapt to the new challenges that will emerge in college and career.

The United States historically benefited as a first-mover in educational attainment.⁴ Studies show, however, that American students are increasingly ill-prepared for postsecondary education and are rapidly surpassed by their global peers in educational attainment. Results from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a nationally representative assessment, indicate that just 38% of U.S. 12th-graders performed at or above proficient in reading, and only 26% performed at or above proficient in mathematics.⁵

Furthermore, although the postsecondary graduation rate increased in the United States from 42% in 2000 to 49% in 2009, the pace of educational attainment has been more rapid in many other countries.⁶ The United States is now the only country where educational attainment levels among those just entering the workforce (25-34 year-olds) do not exceed those who will retire and leave the workforce (55-64 year-olds).⁷ In 2011, the U.S. currently ranked 15th among 34 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in postsecondary educational attainment among 25-34 year-olds.⁸ Scholars indicate that the countries that have benefited most significantly from globalization are those that invested in education.^{9,10}

The Importance of a Global Competency Education

More than ever, it is critical that U.S. students develop the knowledge, skills, and understanding of a global competency education that allows them to be competitive, collaborative citizens, and active participants in the economy.

Coupled with the fact that students in many countries around the world are outperforming U.S. students in postsecondary educational attainment, changes in labor market needs, resulting from changes in the globalized economy, demand that U.S. students develop global competencies.¹¹ The 2008 report by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills explained how "...the industrial economy based on manufacturing has shifted to a service economy driven by information, knowledge and innovation."¹² Furthermore, as of 2008, 86% of jobs in the U.S. were in the service sector and showed high growth rates.¹³ This economic shift calls for the U.S. to provide its students with the skills to compete and excel in this new knowledge economy.

In addition to competing in a global economy, U.S. students may need to be prepared to collaborate on international issues to be citizens of a more global community. Global competency skills provide a path for discovering and leveraging the benefits and impacts of globalization and enable students to develop an understanding of, work collaboratively with, and form effective relationships with citizens all over the world. Global education is imperative to develop civic-minded students as well as to provide them with the knowledge and skills to make a meaningful, positive impact.

Although global competency is defined in various ways, the sweeping changes of globalization—new information and technologies, increasing economic integration, and the emergence of global environmental, economic, social and political challenges—demand an urgent and thoughtful re-examination of what is learned in the classroom for both economic and civic reasons. The Asia Society and the Council of Chief State School Officers joined together to define the globally competent student. In 2012, the following definition of a globally competent student was adopted by the U.S. Department of Education:

- *Investigate the World*, that is, to be aware of and interested in the world and its workings. This ability involves formulating and exploring globally significant questions and creating a coherent response that considers multiple perspectives and draws useful and defensible conclusions.
- *Weigh Perspectives*. Students recognize that they have a particular perspective and that others may or may not share it. They can then articulate and explain the perspectives of other people and can compare their perspective with others and construct a new point of view.
- Global competence entails *effective communication*—both verbal and non-verbal—with diverse audiences. Globally competent students are proficient in English and at least one other language. They are also skilled users of media and technology.
- *Take Action*. Globally competent students are able to weigh options based on evidence and insight, assess potential for impact, consider possible consequences, and act and reflect on those actions. Underlying all of this is disciplinary and interdisciplinary study—or to put it simply, content knowledge. Global competence is not an add-on class but a necessary piece of every curriculum area.¹⁴

A Global Education Framework

Global education advocates call for a student curriculum that, while addressing current globalization issues and basic knowledge, also prepares students to problem solve and innovate for a global future that is yet to be defined.¹⁵ Since no one, static curriculum will fill the growing needs of the changing global education field, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are taught will need to be adaptable and respond to innovation as well as critical reflection.

After an extensive review of the literature, the College Board published a global education framework, congruous with CCSS—synthesizing major themes on the topic—that identifies three tiers of knowledge and skills as a guide. Scholar Fernando Reimers¹⁶ presents a definition of global competency education that captures the underlying essence of the College Board's framework:

"Global competency [is] the knowledge and skills that help people understand the flat world in which they live and the skills to integrate across disciplinary domains to comprehend global affairs and events and to create possibilities to address them. Global competencies are also the attitudinal and ethical dispositions that make it possible to interact peacefully, respectfully and productively with fellow human beings from diverse geographies."¹⁶

The three global competency tiers, interdependent and overlapping, form a suite of knowledge and skills that will better prepare students for a global, competitive future.

Tier One: Empirically Based Knowledge and Skills

These are the skills and sets of knowledge that comprise school subjects within the traditional disciplines. Competencies in this tier are empirical and practical, and include native language literacy, as well as literacy in a second world language; numeracy and quantitative skills; science; geography, history and government; social studies; economics; and digital literacy. Mastery of the knowledge and skills in this tier is essential for global competence for a few reasons. First, core subjects such as algebra, English language arts, and history are foundational to other types of knowledge.¹⁷ Additionally, the knowledge and skills included in this tier provide a springboard for teaching and learning about global issues. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills Framework asserted that global themes such as the environment, health, and the economy should be interwoven with curricula focused on traditional school subjects so that students are acquiring baseline knowledge of disciplinary fields while also applying that knowledge to practical global issues in an interdisciplinary way.¹⁸

Furthermore, many scholars indicate that second language literacy and digital literacy are intrinsically tied to global competency. Education researcher Michael Levine advocated for all learners, even native English speakers, to step out of their linguistic comfort zone and engage thoroughly and thoughtfully in second language acquisition, as developing second language literacy is vital to

America's economic, security, and social interests.¹⁹ Moreover, digital literacy is seen as a cornerstone of global competency and is included in nearly every major global education framework.²⁰ As stated in the original College Board report, digital literacy competency in its use is emerging as a basic skill complementary to other competencies such as reading, writing, mathematics and reasoning.²¹

Tier Two: Higher-Order Cognitive, Meta-cognitive, and Interpersonal Skills

This tier emphasizes the skills that allow students to access, manage, interpret, and apply knowledge, and includes certain interpersonal skills that are necessary for contemporary workplaces marked by connectivity and collaboration. These skills comprise higher-order cognitive and meta-cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, information literacy, communication, collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, as well as lifelong, self-driven learning. The skills are not thought of as discrete subjects; rather, they are interrelated and overlapping.

The global "knowledge economy" is transforming the demands of the labor market throughout the world and placing new demands on citizens to know more skills and knowledge to deal with new demands.²² These demands have led educators to reassert the importance of higher-order cognitive skills. According to economists Frank Levy and Richard Murnane, to mitigate the outward push of jobs through outsourcing and computerized work, the U.S. workforce needs to be equipped with more workers capable of "expert thinking, or solving problems for which there are no rule-based solutions."²³

Moreover, information literacy can be defined as the combined abilities to locate, critically examine, evaluate, interpret, synthesize, prioritize, and apply information. Students are now being confronted with an ever-expanding multitude of information that they must learn to navigate effectively. Howard Gardner claimed: "...in the 21st century, the most valued mind will be the synthesizing mind—the mind that can survey a wide range of sources; decide what is important and worth paying attention to; and then put this information together in ways that make sense to oneself and, ultimately, to other persons as well."²⁴ Additionally, innovation and creativity are at the core of the American experience. For example, according to Friedman, "The *only* way we are going to keep our standard of living rising is to build a society that produces people who can keep inventing the future."²⁵ The ability and motivation to drive one's own learning throughout a lifetime are other essential components of global competency. Students may benefit from basic fundamental knowledge upon which they continue building for a lifetime.

Tier Three: Global Dispositions, Perspectives, and Attitudes

These competencies are not simply skills or specific sets of knowledge; they are behaviors, mindsets, values, and sensibilities. This tier includes competencies such as: curiosity and knowledge about the world and its people; tolerance across racial, linguistic, national, and cultural boundaries; awareness of one's own cultural, political, geographical, or socioeconomic perspectives, assumptions, and traditions, as well as those of others; appreciation of nuance and complexity; sense of responsibility others; and concern for fairness, justice, and progress on a global scale. Although these dispositions cannot come from schooling alone, education is an influential space for shaping such attitudes. Like other skills in Tier Two, these concepts can be interwoven with lessons across disciplinary curricula. Developing this type of "global consciousness" may bolster students' ability to engage in the world as social, cultural, political, and economic agents who are confident in their own locally grounded perspectives, and also open to ongoing critical examination that takes into account values and multiple perspectives.²⁶

Overall, to prepare students for future challenges and an increasingly competitive, global economy, education must continue to provide the basic knowledge such as mathematics, science, literature, history, and language. However, skills and behaviors that help students think, communicate, collaborate, analyze, problem solve, and create in our global society should be incorporated into this core learning.

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Endnotes

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